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Title	Ecological and related health crises as symptoms of “wrong life”: Disturbance, reflection and cognitive transformation
Authors	Skillington, Tracey
Publication date	2024-06-19
Original Citation	Skillington, T. (2024) 'Ecological and related health crises as symptoms of “wrong life”: Disturbance, reflection and cognitive transformation', in Kallhoff, A. and Liedauer, E. (eds) Greentopia: Utopian Thought in the Anthropocene. The International Library of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Ethics, vol 36, pp 89-104. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56802-2_6
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	10.1007/978-3-031-56802-2_6
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Download date	2026-11-05 21:08:18
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/16255



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Chapter 8
Ecological and Related Health Crises as Symptoms of "Wrong Life": Disturbance, Reflection and Cognitive Transformation[1]

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Abstract Beyond its distinct geological character, the Anthropocene is also a lived social reality, one whose properties are actively processed and internalized by its members in the form of "reflections from damaged life" (Adorno 2005). The more immediate its destructive tendencies become, the more anthropocentric climate change disturbs the process of equilibration, prompting a need for reassurance that our ontological security is not threatened by powerful, unstoppable forces. Dewey (1984: 105) draws attention to the importance of not neglecting the function of this need in "creating ends or consequences" that connect intimately with affectivities embedded deep in the subject and exert a powerful influence over cognitive reasoning. Ultimately, it is the "physical moment" of the experience of ecological collapse that "tells our knowledge that [this] suffering ought not to be, that things should be different" (Adorno 1973: 203), prompting a need to change age-old environmental practices and a desire to think beyond "the given" towards better potentialities. This chapter notes how emerging formulations of environmental and related health crises, as symptoms of 'wrong life', provoke new thinking about the moral and political promises of cosmopolitan Europe and the need to extend justice relations to non-human others. Even though this contribution does not deliver a clarification of *Greentopia*, it provides a context, a meta-narrative and political proposals for a real *Greentopia*.

8.1 Introduction

According to the findings of a scientific study commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2020, an estimated 142 million mammals, 180 million birds and 2.5 billion reptiles were killed or displaced by devastating bushfires in Australia between 2019 and 2020, making this the largest wildlife disaster in modern history until then. Scientists expect wildfires on this scale to emerge across the globe in the years ahead as global temperatures continue to climb (Union of Concerned Scientists 2020). Some of the primary victims of wildfires, including wildlife, insects, plants and microbes, are indispensable agents of ecological well-being; yet rarely is this nature formulated as a relevant subject of moral and political respect. The ongoing degradation of this nature is so basic to our thinking that its non-

[1] Parts of this contribution overlap with an article published in Social Sciences in September 2020: Skillington, Tracey. 2020. Democracy, Biodiversity and More than Human Justice Imperatives: Institutional Responses to Crisis. *Social Sciences 9(9),* 166; https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9090166

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normative status could not be more self-evident. It may even strike some as strange to formulate plants, bees, or forests as ‘“wronged”’ by human activity and thereby, deserving of justice. Broadly, the understanding until relatively recently has been that this nature lacks an independent status beyond its human use or property value. Seldom was this perspective subject to serious challenge, even if occasionally the necessity of constraint was recognized to protect the interests of those who come after (i.e., future human populations). However, as encounters with wildfires, melting ice, storm surges and pandemics become a regular feature of contemporary life, the suffering of this nature proves harder to deny. Critical scenarios force a reconsideration of the validity of many more traditional normative assumptions about a nature upon which we depend (e.g., close to 75% of the world’s food crops depend in part on animal pollinators such as birds, bats and bees for sustained production (see the FAO 2018), yet, globally, their populations have fallen by 60% in the last forty years alone (Irish Times 2018)). Ideas of distributive and territorial justice (e.g., sufficiency, occupancy, movement, constraint) are reassessed in terms of the relevance of a nature that enriches the Earth’s territories prior to invested human labor. Now forced to confront our dependency on this nature, the question is whether the latter has legitimate claims to freely occupy, roam and flourish in territories simultaneously claimed to be the property of humans.[2]

More recently, the life-transforming effects of Covid-19 have brought many of these issues into sharp focus, with several international agencies openly declaring humanity’s mistreatment of nature the real source of this virus (e.g., see Settele, Díaz, and Brondizio 2020). Experiences of Covid-19 induce an important diagnostic moment in critical reflections on relations with wider nature. The discussion below examines the conditions under which responses to Covid and evidence of an accelerated loss of biological diversity trigger institutional learning. The analysis will focus specifically on the EU and, to a lesser extent, the UN, and their respective efforts of late to work through various reasons why relations with non-human nature must change and principles of justice be considered more in terms of their relevance to multispecies communities. The discovery of nature’s demise is taken more seriously as evidence of serious deficiencies in normative commitments to principles of responsibility, cooperation, accountability and respect.

Crisis experiences induce a substantiated negation of traditional understandings of nature as ‘for us’ or notions that relations of harm are created by forces that are external to this society. Rather, the realization is that harm is internal to the basic operations of contemporary consumer society.

The question then is: what particular aspects of current crisis experiences can potentially induce institutional learning, and how might this learning manifest itself? Learning begins with a change in the perceptual responsiveness of publics to information emerging from their living environment that all is not well —in particular, the ‘“felt qualities”’ of ecological disturbance experiences such as those that arise when the air we breathe is construed as contaminated with a dangerous ‘“other”’ that potentially threatens our existence. The presence of this other disturbs the “spontaneous freedom” with which human subjects routinely project themselves onto the external natural world without limit (Levinas 1969: 51). When nature makes the power of its destructive potential known in this way, it impresses upon our being a heightened consciousness of human existence as a finite thing and that of a nature that surrounds us as more powerful. Previously unreflective assumptions

that this world belongs to humanity alone are drained of their authority as the suddenness of the Covid-19 pandemic brings sobering clarity to bear on matters of fundamental importance, including the illegitimacy of humanity's presumed right to use nature as it pleases. Coming face-to-face with a pandemic that started ''in nature'' and the suffering of ever-growing numbers of displaced wildlife can be an arresting experience. This chapter notes how the disruptive aspects of these experiences prove to be an important tool for change, especially in terms of their capacity to unravel the unity of many taken-for-granted assumptions, such as the constancy of nature's flourishing. Once the un-grounding effects of Covid-19 are rationalized as indicators of a more comprehensive breakdown in the "metabolic interaction[s] between [hu]man[s] and the earth" (Marx 1976: 637-8), opportunities are created for a more critical appraisal of humanity's destructive potential to emerge. Changes occurring in the background conditions that support reflective inquiry in this instance trigger new patterns of interpretive reasoning. By way of illustration, the discussion below examines how the felt qualities of Covid-19 disturbances feed into the policy thinking of collective actors, such as the EU and the UN, in their exploration of the interrelationship between institutional inertia and the growing risk of environmental disaster.

8.2 Exploring the Interconnection Between Institutional Inaction, COVID-19 and Ecological Crisis: The Position of the EU

Penned in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU's *Biodiversity Strategy for 2030* (European Commission 2020) reflects a significant change in the position of the EU on the question of responsibility. From the very first pages of this report, it is clear how the experience of COVID-19 has forced the EU to confront some basic truths regarding relations with nature and the 'reasons for' this pandemic:

> The EU has legal frameworks, strategies and action plans to protect nature and restore habitats and species. But protection has been incomplete, restoration has been small-scale, and the implementation and enforcement of legislation has been insufficient. […] Global efforts are needed and the EU itself needs to do more […]. (European Commission 2020: 3).

Responsibility for inaction, it is thought, must be borne collectively by states, business communities, generations, and the EU itself. All are thought to have participated with intentionality in harmful actions, thereby implicating them in collective guilt for ecological wrongdoing.[2] Sentiments of collective responsibility for ecological wrongdoing are thereby extended across space and time and used as an opportunity to reconsider the normative status of a nature upon which we depend for "the food we eat", "the water we drink" and "the air we breathe" (European Commission 2020)—a nature, it adds, which is as important to our mental and physical wellbeing

[2] See the *European Union Biodiversity Strategy for 2030*, which states: "The recent COVID-19 pandemic makes the need to protect and restore nature all the more urgent. The pandemic is raising awareness of the links between our own health and the health of ecosystems. It is demonstrating the need for sustainable supply chains and consumption patterns that do not exceed planetary boundaries" (European Commission 2020: 1).

as it is to our "society's ability to cope with global change, health threats and disasters" (ibid.). By engaging with the more-than-human implications of ongoing ecological destruction, the EU finds itself unable to escape certain decolonial imperatives. For centuries, Europe has been a central agent in the formation of "multi-species entanglements" (Wright 2014) marred by extreme brutality, exploitation and destruction. Now it is forced to confront the negative effects of these legacies and the various ways they continue to be renewed through the everyday workings of the Anthropocene present (e.g., human exceptionalism, hierarchy, ethnocentrism, inequality). Unlike an earlier perspective that formulated nature's value to Europe in terms of the "ecosystem *services* that underpin *our* economy [emphasis added]" (European Commission 2011: 1), implying that nature has no independent normative significance, what is proposed here instead is a perspective that focuses on the interrelationship between "companion species" who encounter one another in spaces that, moving forward, must be marked by respect rather than more characteristic relations of coercion, exploitation and neglect. The aim is to "bring [this] nature back into our lives" (European Commission 2020) as an "ally" (ibid.: 2), but not in a manner that fetishizes it as untouchable. Respect for nature must not compete with efforts to meet basic human rights, for instance. To be effective, respect for nature and human persons must remain mutually supportive. Amongst other things, persons with human rights are better positioned to practice respect for nature when these rights empower them politically, economically, and socially to insist on a greater level of environmental protection and ensure new sustainable development measures are implemented. Only when obligatory actions in the protection of nature are specified in these terms can the hope of interrupting relations of domination with relations of respect seem plausible.

Political attention moves to the importance of "contact zones" (Haraway 2008: 219) where relations between animals (including humans), plants, microbes, fungi and other species are continuously explored. As the transformative elements of planetary life have always occurred in inter-species contact zones, the understanding is that any truly effective sustainable development programme must begin here:

> Earth is home to countless species of fauna and flora—too many to even attempt counting. Historically, we have depended on the constant interplay and inter-linkages between all elements of the biosphere for all our needs: the air we breathe, the food we eat, the energy we use, and the materials we need for all purposes. However, unsustainable human activities and overexploitation of the species and natural resources are imperiling the world's biodiversity. Nearly a quarter of all species are presently at risk of going extinct in the coming decades (United Nations 2020d).

Experiences of COVID-19 and species endangerment offer valuable insights in to why the normative horizons of the common good must be extended to include significant components of non-human nature. However, acting on these insights requires the EU to confront some difficult truths. Continuing certain practices which have been central to the economic project of Europe for centuries (deforestation, clearing vast land areas for intense agricultural and commercial development, etc.) make meeting basic needs increasingly difficult for much of planetary life. Historically, great efforts have been made to hide from public view the face of suffering that transpires in these spaces of development, including factory farms, slaughterhouses, animal laboratories and wildlife trade. With COVID-19, however, the violent underbelly of this modern production order is dangerously exposed. The need to unearth "the reasons for" this pandemic draws unwanted attention to the stark

violence of capitalism's asymmetrical meetings with non-human nature. Society cannot pass quickly over this violence, as traditionally has been the case, but must attend to the effects of these atrocities against nature. However, in doing so, many critical silences are exposed. Sundberg (2014: 38) explains how, in the past, this violence was sustained through a planetary imaginary that successfully limited or displaced expressions of moral outrage at the extent of the pervasiveness of this violence. With COVID-19 and greater attention being accorded to the negative aspects of industrial development, the dire consequences of this regime are harder to hide. Even if unintended, COVID-19 provokes a new imaginary on the scale of nature's destruction, one that seriously questions the long-term viability of traditional ways of thinking and relating to nature. The realization is that contact zones where human and non-human nature meet have become increasingly fraught with danger and violent oppression. As these insights move more to the fore public consciousness, pressure on government mounts to ensure a more responsible regulation of the spaces of species contact.

Progress in this regard is partly a matter of doing greater justice to already established commitments to principles of right, truth and respect, and partly a matter of acknowledging the importance of new contexts of discovery of nature's demise as a stimulus to policy change. Experiences of devastating loss of life draw attention to the limitations of a blindly human-focused approach to environmental issues. What were previously separate EU policy discourses on disease control, biodiversity, climate change and territorial borders are now brought together and considered in terms of their relevance to the management of areas where the lives of humans and other species regularly intersect. Connecting what were previously "disconnected" aspects of institutional thinking proves to be one of the most important learning outcomes of COVID-19 for the EU. The latter commits to establishing a range of new trans-European policy measures, including a nature network that will oversee the protection of "ecological corridors" (European Commission 2020: 5) that cross over state territorial borders (covering land and sea) and enable species migration in the interests of preventing genetic isolation or food insecurity amongst members of vital eco-systems. It calls for the establishment of a series of biodiversity partnerships that will address issues relating to the health, migration and future flourishing of all climate-affected communities, including those of a non-human kind. This change in policy orientation is significant, especially in the way it opens up policy on migration and border control to a broader range of concerns beyond anthropocentric ones and the priorities of specific geopolitical borders (e.g., to enable wildlife mobility). However, it is also significant in terms of the way it formulates the protection of the life journey of non-human species as a "bare liberty" (Stilz 2013: 353), one that warrants claims of occupancy and freedom of movement against human others (European Commission 2020: 5).

In this way, connections are forged between justice claims that span territories, species and issues whose overlap has remained largely institutionally latent until now. There is an attempt to purposively reimagine categories of ecological agents and concede to the relevance of questions of justice to multispecies living (in terms of a more just distribution of essential resources, freedom of movement and, in some instances, the rights status of non-human nature). New developments occurring in EU policy on biodiversity or that of sustainable development reflect many changes occurring in wider legal and political discourse on natural resource protection and public health priorities (e.g., 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; European

Union Habitats Directive Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)). Two assumptions can be made about the relevance of more-than-human justice relations to this change in policy orientation. First, the realization is that humans are inescapably "entangled" (Wright 2014) with non-human agents and, therefore, any policy for the future must reflect more fully the implications of these entanglements. Natural resource protection must be pursued in the interests of the "original community of the land" (Kant 19129~~6~~: 352) or the idea that before any particular human acquisition of property, the earth is the dwelling place of many species. Whilst this perspective has enjoyed the support of various carrier groups over the years, the implications of ignoring the needs of the earth's "original community" are now better understood. This comprehension encourages a broader conceptualization of the '~~"~~who'~~"~~ and '~~"~~what'~~"~~ of justice as questions of occupancy, sufficiency, freedom of movement, etc., which gradually come to be considered in terms of their relevance also to non-human nature. As environmental conditions decline further, justice ideals are extended into domains previously thought to be "unthinkable" (Skillington 2019a: 68-72; Skillington 2019b: 622-24). For instance, moves to formulate forests and rivers as legitimate subjects of rights protection signal an important change in social as much as legal expectations that the well-being of this nature will be prioritized, and further, that this prioritization will constrain future harmful practices.[3] The second and related assumption we can make about the application of more-than-human justice relations to new policy thinking is that ongoing deteriorations in local conditions and specific geo-historical contexts of environmental destruction will be explored more in terms of their interconnections with larger, multi-scalar contexts of change moving forward (e.g., their reflection of further evidence of global warming, wider patterns of dislocation of human *and* non-human populations, etc.).

Whilst these developments in policy thinking are likely to have a significant impact, a major force of change has been the COVID-19 global pandemic, in particular, the reflections the pandemic has triggered on those background conditions that enable ongoing practices of eco-brutality. Dare we suggest then that the Corona virus has induced some emancipatory effects (Beck 2015: 75-88) brought to light by the meaning-making practices evoked by institutional translations of its societal significance? Underlining these changes is the realization that the communities of risk created by COVID-19 and related ecological problems are inherently cosmopolitan. They extend across territories, species and generations. Justice, therefore, cannot be specified in terms of the interests of a few (e.g., intra-human justice),

[3] In the spirit of such change, a number of courts have recently taken measures to grant a rights status to rivers, forests and mountain ranges. For instance, in 2016, the Constitutional Court of Colombia declared the Rio Atrato a legal person and, therefore, not merely an object of legal representation. Similarly, in March 2017, the High Court of Uttarakhand in northern India declared the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers as well as their tributaries legal persons, while in New Zealand, new legislation has been introduced granting legal status to Te Urewera (comprising Lake Waikaremoana and surrounding land and forests) and Te Awa Tupua (consisting of the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea). Whil~~e~~st these developments have raised some concerns as to whether granting an independent legal status to a river or forest (e.g., the right to sue or be sued) means effectively the wider community abdicates its responsibilities to look after this nature.~~2~~ Also, how will the rights of this nature differ from "human" rights in legal frameworks moving forward? Nonetheless, on the whole, they have been viewed as a positive development, offering new insights into the political and legal life of rights.

especially as problems of disease control, wildfires, crop failure, food and water shortages reverberate across multiple contexts, actively shaping the material circumstances of many. From new scenarios of ecological crises come clear shifts in understandings of environmental bads as necessitating far-reaching institutional reform. Moral perception in this instance is not, as Jaeggi (2018) notes, "an unmediated gestalt switch" that transports us from one evaluative position (e.g., that certain environmental practices are a necessary part of the modern development process) to another (that these same practices are seriously problematic). Rather, changes occurring in moral perceptions of deepening ecological problems are attributable to a series of steady transformations occurring in the background conditions that support critical reflective inquiry on these issues. In terms of their "disrupting particularity" (Schick 2009: 138), events such as major oil spills at sea, wild-fires and storm surges stimulate ethical subjectivity on the more-than-just–human status of their victims and a critical re-engagement with the question of suffering. Attention to particular suffering provides an important counterweight to the abstractive logic of much of contemporary climate change discourse, encircling the real element of its trauma and sourcing its origins in wider social relations of wrongdoing (see Skillington 2020).

Similarly, understandings of the origins of COVID-19 (i.e., as sourced ''in nature'') prompt a critical re-evaluation of human relations with non-human nature as relations of wrongdoing (see Skillington 2020)**.** To understand how COVID-19 disturbance experiences impact upon moral reasoning in this way, it is necessary to look at developments occurring in what Dewey refers to as the qualitative context of thought inquiry (Garrison 1996: 392). Routine interactions with the environment usually occur in a manner that does not provoke deep reflection. However, when the ''normal'' course of these interactions is disturbed, a state of uncertainty emerges. The starting point of this disturbance is the experience of some disruption in the material components of human-environment exchanges. Some kind of obstacle in the situation makes the flow of everyday interactions more difficult, for instance, the spread of a deadly virus or an episode of severe flooding or prolonged drought. Noted deteriorations in everyday conditions act as an impelling force, creating ends or consequences that connect intimately with affectivities and desires embedded deep in the subject, inspiring a need to investigate further those conditions that give rise to obstacles in the situation and find solutions to the same. During this reflection process, there is a conjuring of feelings, intuitions and impressions to facilitate an inductive testing of established beliefs against empirical evidence of their validity or, indeed, limitations. The context of reflection is refined by means of discriminations that prioritize some incoming data to which a priori concepts and knowledge categories of normal and abnormal, good and bad are applied, thereby allowing identified problems in the living environment (e.g., higher-than-normal levels of disease contagion, air pollution, poor crop yields, etc.) to move from being mere impressions to being consciously formulated as statable concerns. As disturbance experiences grow more frequent and intense, they provoke a questioning of the validity of established knowledge and modes of engaging with nature. Expressions of anger or dismay at mounting evidence of irreversible eco-destruction induce a change in moral position. The failure to control rising rates of resource depletion and wildlife destruction is formulated as the product of relations of wrongdoing, a blatant violation of bare liberties and minimum standards of environmental care (Skillington 2020).

When used to direct moral reflection towards transformative action and draw attention to issues of responsibility and duties of care towards wider nature, feelings of anger or shame can perform positive, pro-social motivational functions (Hobbs 2020: 63-4). Both shame and anger are essential preconditions for the shattering of a humanist sense of entitlement to use nature as we please and, in that, play an important role in enabling a wider process of critical reflection and ethical transformation to occur. Anger and shame for ecological wrongdoing can evoke new thinking on the actions needed to rectify environmental wrongs, especially when the "kinetic dimensions" (Chakravarti 2014: 152) of these emotions spark the energies needed to secure a more stable commitment to long-term behavioral and value change. If denunciations of the human destruction of nature are to be directed towards more collective strategic ends, then moral outrage must be channeled into goals serving normative ends: for example, when anger reinvigorates ideals of responsibility, freedom, rights, or duties of care in ways that speak to the immediacy of problems to hand and to a wider order of normative expectations. In this way, emotional reactions to evidence of escalating environmental problems translate elements of what might begin as "ineffably vague qualitative situations" (Dewey 1984) into signals of larger, observable problems. The qualitative unity of local scenes of environmental destruction and those that are more territorially dispersed are now cognitively understood in terms of a common foundation in stable patterns of human wrongdoing.

The COVID-19 pandemic proves deeply disturbing in terms of what it reveals about the limits of human progress. However, in that, new moral and political insights are also generated, especially on questions of responsibility, institutional failure and wrongdoing. Underlying the seemingly "sudden" nature of these perspective changes are a series of more gradual transformations. The social dynamic involved here arises from the culmination of forces of destruction that have finally overpowered the validity of harmful modes of relating to nature as a disposable component of mass production. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres noted, COVID-19 is a tragedy "but it has also created a generational opportunity to build back a more equal and sustainable world" (United Nations 2020b). Changes occurring in moral perspectives on nature, such as those observed above, are largely attributable to changes occurring in the background conditions of reflective inquiry. When those background conditions reach a point of crisis, relations with nature can appear in a different light. For Piaget, attention to developments occurring in background conditions is essential as these developments represent the most important experientially grounded mechanism for progressing from older to newer conditions of understanding a given reality (i.e., nature's well-being) (Mallon 1976). We may note the significance of greater reflective attention being accorded to the background conditions contributing to the recent COVID-19 pandemic and, further, how in "shining a spotlight on injustice" (UN Secretary-General Guterres, United Nations 2020b), this reflection process has enabled the formation of new conditions for understanding the dire consequences of long histories of domination, inequality and imperial contact with nature. In terms of their capacity to lay "bare risks we have ignored for decades: inadequate health systems, gaps in social protection, structural inequalities, environmental degradation, the climate crisis" (ibid), reflections on COVID-19 certainly have encouraged more kaleidoscopic thinking on various, interrelated sources of injustices.

8.3 Actualizing More-Than-Human Justice Relations as a Component of a Cosmopolitan Programme of Action Moving Forward

As experiences of ecological and related public health crises become more pronounced, relations with non-human nature are articulated in distinctly political terms. In particular, the idea is that respect for nature cannot be defined solely as a personal ethical choice but must be actualized also in a collectively coordinated manner, on the basis of moral-political duties to impose principled limitations on the human exploitation of nature. Individuals and, indeed, states acting alone cannot hope to challenge large-scale structural forces that accelerate rates of environmental destruction and threaten planetary well-being (United Nations 2020a). Rather, a coordinated programme of political action is required if major change is to occur. Implementing change, however, is likely to encounter significant resistance, economically, politically and culturally, from those who benefit enormously from existing exploitative relations. That said, moves towards more respectful relations are gaining some momentum, politically and legally. The basic liberal idea motivating change in this regard is the notion that the power of individuals and groups should never be unlimited but rather should be legitimately constrained by the need to protect the well-being of others. Respect for nature asks us to bring a more discriminating sensibility to bear on the pursuit of our own well-being and combine this with a greater responsiveness to the well-being of non-human others.

Allocating stronger legal and political recognition to the status of non-human nature means acknowledging that the potential of this nature unfolds in a manner that exceeds the purpose of humans. When not subject to excessive human interference, non-human nature, as a self-constituting entity, is the author of its own life (Raz 1986: 375). Respect for nature demands that we acknowledge this fact in some minimum way and accept that its existence is governed by a telos (Krause 2020: 4) that is not, in any fundamental way, for anything else. Acknowledging nature's 'more-than-human' status is an important step in the development of a stronger, institutional endorsement of its independent normative status. However, the question remains as to how new proposals will fit with existing policy arrangements.[2] As it is currently conceived, Europe's liberal democratic project accords respect for persons as one of the most important principles governing its union (e.g., Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 3; European Union 2016. Collective commitment to this, and to related principles of freedom, justice, solidarity and rights, provide an essential justification for the structural limitation of power through mechanisms such as political representation and rights protections. According to this model, political power is legitimate only when it protects the well-being of those subject to it and answers to their concerns. As a shared political ethos, respect for persons also orients citizens in their relations with others. If political respect for persons is supplemented with institutional mechanisms that formally constrain how human power is exercised over non-human others, liberal principles of respect, responsiveness and non-domination may offer some potential for a greater institutional endorsement of nature's political and legal standing (e.g., the Consolidated Version of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Article 13 (European Union 2012) refers to obligations to "pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals", while Article 36 underlines the importance of

protecting the "health and life of humans, animals or plants"). As much as respect for persons protects against the abuse of power over other humans, so too a political ethos of respect for nature could be drawn upon more strategically as a legitimate constraint on ecological wrongdoing and the abuse of power over nature.

Not only is respect an essential component of the political framework of an integrated cosmopolitan Europe, it is also one enshrined in the constitutions of individual member states. Its extension to non-human entities requires a more imaginative formulation of ethical political relations with nature and, accompanying that, a principle of solidarity (e.g., see Article 222 of the TFEU; EU 2012) that imposes obligations on the Union to give greater legal effect to duties to protect nature when legislating on border control, migration (ibid., Article 67), natural resource conservation, urban planning, biodiversity (ibid., Article 3), etc.[4] Given the clear presence of legal obligations to protect nature, it is not beyond the boundaries of Europe's current political imagination to formulate violations of these obligations as acts of unacceptable wrongdoing.[5] To do so, however, requires a stronger acknowledgement on the part of Europe that nature is a legitimate bearer of political respect and legal entitlement. If one can neither wrong nor harm a nature consistently instrumentalized to serve human interests, there can be no obligations of justice owed to it. However, if it can be shown that this nature is a legitimate subject of legal protection whose welfare has been systematically undermined by certain activities, the situation changes considerably.

The fact that farm animals, rivers and woodlands cannot protest their mistreatment as violations of legitimate expectations of justice at the hands of human agents does not take away from the need to formulate this wrongdoing as deserving of legal attention and corrective action, in the form of prosecution and more responsible human guardianship (Habermas 1978: 248). Responsible action does not set humanity apart in terms of the superiority of its cognitive capacities but, rather, its ability to creatively rethink relations with nature in a manner that potentially moves all planetary life towards better ecological outcomes. When considering these issues, Europe explores how "a solid legislative framework" that accounts for the interests of biologically diverse communities (European Commission 2020: 15) might best be aligned with existing cosmopolitan commitments to freedom (e.g., to accommodate the freedoms of migrating species, ibid.: 5), cooperation (e.g., embracing "nature as an ally", ibid.:.2), respect ("healthy and resilient societies depend on giving nature the space it needs", ibid.:2) and the rule of law (ibid.: 11). It notes how the implementation and enforcement of existing legislation, including the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)

[4] A principle of solidarity appears repeatedly throughout EU legislation. For instance, the Solidarity Clause in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (EU 2012) requires the Union and its member states "to act jointly in a spirit of solidarity" when confronted with terrorist attacks, environmental and health emergencies. In the preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, solidarity is listed among the "indivisible and universal values" on which the Union is founded. The EU continues to defend solidarity as an essential component for maintaining a Europe "without internal frontiers" (Küçük 2016: 973).

[5] I am following Kumar's (2003: 107) definition of wrongdoing here, which he describes as a situation where "the wrongdoer has, without adequate excuse or justification, violated certain legitimate expectations with which the wronged party was entitled, in virtue of her value".

are all currently "lagging behind" (ibid.: 12), leading to dramatic and dire consequences for biodiversity. In response, the Commission proposes a series of legally binding nature restoration targets to protect degraded ecosystems. However, if member states are to commit to these proposals, they must first be willing to accept a stronger specification of their role as obligation bearers and comply with rules forcing them to act on legal duties to protect nature. If the rights of nature are to mature into something more consequential than just "manifesto rights" (Feinberg 1970: 248), legal responsibilities must be taken seriously. This, however, requires something more than law. It also requires more explicit and societally consequential varieties of moral, political and cultural respect for nature.

Culturally, respect for nature is affirmed from a variety of perspectives clarifying what the 'more than merely instrumental' standing of nature is. For some, nature's value is best defined by ideas of creation; the notion that nature embodies divine meaning and purpose. For others, it is nature's aesthetic qualities, its beauty and sublimity, that command respect. As the line between biotic and abiotic nature is permeable, respecting nature requires that moral consideration be extended to both aspects of its being. Still others document how planetary life exceeds its being-for-us in rational, scientific terms, noting how what are conventionally seen as inanimate aspects of nature (e.g., mountains and lakes) are in fact composed of multiple complex communities of living and interacting matter. While the logic of this reasoning makes good practical sense from a rational scientific point of view, it also makes sense from the perspective of many indigenous cultural representations of nature. The traditional worldview of the Sami people in the Arctic, for instance, is that all elements of this world are connected. All living things and natural phenomena, including rocks, mountains and rivers, have a connection to one another. Human norms and values must therefore take into consideration these connections and the interests of a multitude of beings, including animals, plants and, importantly, the spirit of natural objects (Harari 2015). According to Aboriginal creation stories, water, land and people are inseparable (an idea that runs contrary to government efforts to legally separate water from land to create a market-based water management regime). Water, especially, underpins Aboriginal kinship connection in birth, life and death. It possesses a spiritual quality and evokes a series of cultural responsibilities (McAvoy 2006). In Australia, indigenous communities believe their rights and interests in the Gunanurang River's waters and neighboring land were created in the Ngarangani, or Dreaming (Barber and Rumley 2003). In New Zealand, the Maori people view themselves as one with the natural world. The people, sea, lands, forests and all living creatures are part of the same family. Any prospering from the fruits of the sea, land, or rivers must therefore be reciprocated with respect and care. Karakia (blessings) are spoken before fish are taken from the sea or wood from the forests. According to Salmon (2000: 1327), indigenous cultural models of nature share many common elements, especially a view of nature and humanity as part of one extended ecological family. Kin or relatives include all natural components of the ecosystem and all are affected by those that surround them (a 'kincentric ecology' perspective). Responsibilities to protect nature thus derive from humanity's belonging together with multiple species and aspects of nature in a system of interdependent living.

The more the necessity of a connections approach to environmental problems is recognized politically (e.g., European Commission 2020), the more apparent the value of these cultural representations of nature become. But how might they be

harnessed as a mobilization resource across wider communities where respect for nature is less apparent? This chapter notes the value of crisis experiences as a stimulus to action and as a trigger of institutional learning. Just as the moral--practical necessity of protecting universal human rights was especially driven home by the trauma experiences of World War II, so too the necessity of adopting a fundamentally different approach to environmental matters has been highlighted by more recent encounters with ecological and related health crises. By drawing on lived experiences of adversity, '"the reasons for'" a new universal charter of respect for nature become politically conceivable, as do the possibilities of a new platform for deliberation on these issues. The latter would help to clarify what demands members of the international community could legitimately place on one another in terms of meeting biodiversity and sustainable development targets and further, would allow for an exchange of ideas on how best to address the mounting challenges posed by more frequent wildfires, storm surges, drought, and the containment of future pandemics.

Arguably, such instruments are essential if imperialist tendencies (in terms of the abuse of nature) are to be effectively controlled and sufficient space is to be created for communities to cooperatively work through substantive questions of justice and cultural difference. A deliberatively supported programme of respect for nature, such as that proposed here, would draw strength from the **"**full blooded morality" (Walzer 1994: 19) of grounded cultural representations of nature and traditions of living sustainably, viewing these knowledge perspectives as a valuable resource that can be called upon strategically to inform more transnationally organized proposals aimed at "bringing nature back into our lives" (European Commission 2020). Though differing parties have distinct histories and cultural representations of nature's value, they also have common experiences of climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, infectious diseases, etc., as well as a shared understanding of those basic security needs that are beyond reasonable normative disagreement. From these commonalities, a minimal, internationally relevant respect for nature can potentially be forged, one that "leaves room for thickness elsewhere" (Walzer 1994: 19), but in this setting, offers the crucibles out of which a stronger commitment to collective cooperative action can be secured.

8.4 Conclusion

There is no doubt that this world is undergoing fundamental ecological changes at present but, equally, one could argue these changes are beginning to inspire a notable shift in institutional reasoning. Traditional liberal democratic and cosmopolitan models of belonging come under increasing pressure to accommodate new imperatives (a change in understanding of relevant subjects of justice, legal personhood, and those entitled to political representation and respect). This chapter assessed the importance of the felt qualities of increasing ecological destruction to this process of institutional change, noting a growing support on the part of the EU for a more-than-human justice framework;, one that acknowledges the importance of assigning stronger political and legal recognition to a suffering nature and orientates political normative discourse on environmental issues towards a new range of concerns (e.g., cultivating biodiversity partnerships across borders and regions, and establishing

legally regulated biodiversity targets). Motivating these changes is the idea that the Earth's non-human components are entitled to moral consideration independently of any instrumental value they may have for humans. Whilst these changes are tremendously challenging and are not likely to occur without some element of resistance, this chapter notes certain potentials in existing political and legal traditions that could be used to solidify commitments to their realization (e.g., legally grounded principles of respect, solidarity, and openness to change).[6] There is no denying the destructive impact of capitalism's ongoing representations of nature as "raw capital", or that of the "existing contradiction" (author's translation of Hegel 1975: 424) of capitalism and democracy's union which seems to grow more pronounced with time. Yet still, modernity's democratic potentials embrace the possibility of something better than what currently prevails. Reaching towards these potentials (in terms of a less anthropocentric perspective) still offers hope for a more sustainable future. There is a long-standing debate about the political nature of utopia. This contribution sides with the insight that utopia has to be political and simultaneously cannot provide more than true hope by also proposing realistic steps into a better future. Ultimately, paying tribute to the value and legal standing of nature would be the first step to a real *Greentopia*.

Biography

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[6] For a further discussion of the institutional potential of democratic principles, see Skillington 2017 (246-7).

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