



Virtues and the Climate Crisis: Perspectives on hope, courage and solidarity

Sarah Banks

This is an unpublished conference paper for the 13th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Thursday 9th – Saturday 11th January 2025.

These papers are works in progress and should not be cited without author's prior permission.

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4875

E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk

Character and Global Challenges Conference

Virtues and the Climate Crisis: Perspectives on hope, courage and solidarity

Sarah Banks, Durham University, UK, s.j.banks@durham.ac.uk

Preface

This paper explores aspects of virtue ethics in relation to the climate crisis. My interest in this topic has been stimulated by involvement in a local climate action group in the UK, Climate Action Durham, which works to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of the climate crisis and the public and personal policies and practices needed to mitigate its impact. I have recently facilitated several workshops, conversations and dialogues with members of the group and the broader public on themes such as: ‘What is climate change to me?’; ‘What is my responsibility in relation to the climate crisis?’; and ‘Having tricky climate conversations’. I do not report on these activities here, but inevitably the experiences inform my outlook and approach to this paper.

The topic is vast, complex and controversial. In the abstract submitted to fit the theme of this conference (character and global challenges) I raised several questions, which I felt at the time it would be interesting to explore further. This paper is a starting point towards considering some of these questions, with more of a focus on questions 1, 2 and 4.

1. What contribution can a virtue ethical approach make to conceptualising, tackling and living with climate change?
2. Are the contexts too hostile, and is the cultivation of virtue too long-term, to be effective in tackling climate change?
3. Do turbulent and challenging contexts provide fertile ground for character development?
4. How can we understand climate activism in terms of virtues such as hope, courage and solidarity?
5. How do climate activists mobilise hope, courage and solidarity in themselves and others amidst denial, fear, paralysis, ‘business as usual’ or indifference?

I also selected three virtues on which to focus. The choice was stimulated by themes arising in the climate dialogues and conversations in the Climate Action Durham group. *Hope* was raised as an important topic for further exploration by some members of Climate Action Durham. Hope seems particularly fragile, especially amongst people who regard the climate crisis as an urgent existential threat, but also very necessary to invoke in conversations with other people who may have a fatalistic view that the planet is doomed and there’s no point in taking action. The need for *courage* comes up a lot in discussions about how to have tricky climate conversations – whether with friends, family or strangers – and how to challenge climate sceptics or, more often, people’s indifference and unwillingness to give up current habits and expectations. Although *solidarity* is often not named as such, it seems like an invisible thread running through the experiences and activities of the group – as ties between members are strengthened by collective action, and the rationale for action is based on the inter-connections between people and planet, and inter-generational and global responsibilities for a sustainable future.

Introduction

If we are going to find a morally defensible path through the climate crisis we need to become better people, and that means cultivating the virtues ... (Williston, 2015, p. 7)

... a virtue-based approach is an ineffective way to deal with the imminent danger of climate change. (Galvagni, 2023, p. 16)

Stimulated by these two apparently contradictory assertions, this paper will consider what a virtue ethical approach to the climate crisis might comprise, and how helpful it might be theoretically and in practice. To set the scene, I will briefly outline what is meant by 'climate crisis' and what counts as 'virtue ethics'.

Climate crisis

The term 'climate crisis' is used to refer to the devastating consequences of climate change resulting largely from greenhouse gas emissions (including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases used for cooling), mainly caused by the use of fossil fuels. The terms 'climate crisis' and 'climate change' are often used interchangeably, and the literature consulted uses both terms. I tend to use 'climate crisis' as this emphasizes the urgency of the situation resulting from climate change. The effects include 'weather extremes and hazards, ocean acidification, food and water insecurity, health risks, economic disruption, displacement and even violent conflict' (United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

Weather extremes are being seen and felt in the UK (floods and heatwaves) and other countries of the global north, but much more so in many regions in the global south, which will also suffer further in future from rising sea levels, desertification and population displacement as temperatures rise. According to Oxfam, people in poor countries are at least four times more likely to be displaced by extreme weather than people in rich countries (Oxfam, n.d.). The target set by the international treaty known as the Paris Agreement in 2015 was to limit increasing temperature this century by well under two degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels (United Nations Climate Change, n.d). This requires significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, with countries agreeing nationally determined contributions. The wealthier countries of the global north have contributed significantly to the current climate crisis, while its effects are being, and will be, felt disproportionately by inhabitants of the global south, younger people and future generations.

Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics is an approach to ethics that has a primary focus on excellent qualities of character of moral agents, as opposed to the nature of actions or their consequences. Drawing on a broadly neo-Aristotelian view of virtue ethics, I regard a virtue as a good character trait, or moral quality, of a person that entails a disposition to feel, think and act to promote human and planetary flourishing, involving both the motivation to act well and, typically, the achievement of good ends (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1954; Banks and Gallagher, 2009). Virtues are generally regarded as stable and enduring dispositions, as distinct from one-off attitudes or emotions.

Within the broad field of environmental ethics, there is a small but growing literature on environmental virtue ethics (see Cafaro, 2015; Dzwonkowska, 2025; Hursthouse, 2007; Sandler and Cafaro, 2006). This includes identifying and elaborating virtues relevant to improving the relationship between humans and the natural world as a complement or alternative to ethical theories such as deontology, consequentialism, rights-based or care-based approaches. Although there is only a small literature focussing specifically on virtue ethics and climate crisis/change (e.g. Chappell, 2020;

Galvagni, 2023; Williston, 2015), the challenges of the climate crisis are obviously encompassed in the broader field of environmental virtue ethics. Hence I will draw on the generic environmental virtue ethics literature as well as more specialist coverage of virtues in relation to climate.

Virtues and the climate crisis

Ethical arguments for limiting global heating (entailing, for example, changing lifestyles away from reliance on fossil fuels, promoting green jobs and a circular economy) are often couched in terms of beneficial consequences for humanity and the rights of all people, and future generations, to a habitable planet and the rights of fauna and flora to a sustainable habitat. Yet, as several commentators point out, virtue language is also very prominent in discussions of the climate crisis, and, indeed, environmental/ecological¹ challenges more generally. In an exploration of ecological virtue ethics, van Wensveen (2000) discusses the emergence of 'ecological virtue language' in post-1970 environmental literature and produces a catalogue of 189 ecological virtues and 174 vices (op. cit., pp. 163-167). She points out that some of the virtues are old or traditional virtues, but are extended or reconfigured in the ecological context. For example, compassion is extended to non-human beings (op. cit., pp. 30-31). Some of the virtues are new – such as 'attunement', which entails 'harmonising with the dynamics of change in the natural world' (op. cit., p. 132). Hursthouse (2007), in her book chapter on environmental virtue ethics, makes a similar distinction between old virtues reconfigured to take account of the relationship between humans and nature such as humility (op. cit., p. 157-8) and new virtues such as wonder (op. cit., p. 161-2) and being rightly oriented to nature (op. cit., pp. 162-7).

As van Wensveen's (2000) list shows, there is no agreed set of virtues relevant to ecological living and environmental action. As in other spheres of life (e.g. being a doctor, parent, teacher or citizen), lists of virtue terms are legion, but meaningless unless given conceptual elaboration, distinguished from related emotions or attitudes, and discussed in terms of practical application by people in specific areas of life with specific purposes.

Several of the theorists writing in the field see it as important to do this job of elaboration of environmental/ecological virtues, whether these be old virtues in new contexts or new virtues for new contexts. This is necessary to facilitate the task of role modelling and educating for environmental virtues. Van Wensveen (2005) identifies four categories of cardinal virtues in the broad field of environmental/ecological ethics (virtues of position, care, attunement and endurance). In relation to climate change, Hulme (2014) focuses on wisdom, humility, integrity, faith, hope and love, while Galvagni (2023) elaborates on several virtues including benevolence, gratitude, humility, temperance, orientedness (towards nature) and appreciative-wonder) drawn from a review of the literature. It is less important precisely which virtues or virtue terms are chosen, but more important that conceptual and practical work is done to think through their meanings and application in contexts of environmental or specifically climate-related challenges. It is also helpful to consider for whom these virtues are being recommended (global citizens, activists, politicians and policy makers, corporate leaders, people in rich or poorer countries) and in relation to what purpose (changing individual or national lifestyles, making policy/law and/or conducting business, for example).

¹ 'Environmental' and 'ecological' are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably when referring to the earth systems of which humans are a part. Strictly speaking 'ecological' has a more specialist meaning relating to the interaction of living organisms. In this paper I will use the terms as deployed in the literature to which I refer.

Advantages of a virtue-based approach to the climate crisis

In a useful recent overview of the topic, Galvagni (2023) summarises two arguments suggesting that a virtue-based approach is a good fit, to which I have added a third:

1. Virtue ethics captures our moral phenomenology and aligns with our everyday experience. This builds on van Wensveen's (2000) identification of a significant virtue discourse in the environmental literature as well as in ordinary life.
2. Virtue ethics provides a tool against the problem of inconsequentialism, that is, the fact that individuals' actions taken in isolation have no material impact on the climate crisis. For example, the impact of me not taking a long-haul flight or replacing my gas boiler with an air source heat pump is negligible in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. It is tempting (and may be regarded as 'rational' by some people) for me to take the flight and retain the gas boiler as both are more convenient and less costly for me than the alternatives, and the cost to the environment will be born by the collective. However, according to Williston (2015) virtue discourse is more compelling than the calculative rationality that assumes the negligible impact of my carbon footprint and/or assesses whether a significant number of other people will change their behaviour. People do tend to be moved by evaluations of their character, for example being conceived of as greedy, disrespectful or arrogant.
3. Virtue ethics is more relevant to understanding and tackling the climate crisis than the scientific and technological fixes that are obviously not working. The Anthropocene era creates new issues linked to ethics and human culture and the important questions are not scientific, but rather relate to what kind of lives humans want to lead and what kind of people we should be. As Hulme (2014, pp. 308-9) comments: 'When we talk about climate change we should not start with the latest predictions from the climate models, nor whether we have passed some catastrophic tipping point; nor whether or not the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should be trusted. We should start by thinking about what it means to be human. What is the good life and what therefore is an adequate response to climate change?'

All these points can, perhaps, be seen in much of the climate activism literature and are closely inter-related. The exhortations and general language of climate activists exemplify this. For example, introductory sections by climate activist Greta Thunberg in *The Climate Book* are entitled 'Honesty, solidarity, integrity and climate justice' (p. 386) and 'Hope is something you have to earn' (Thunberg 2022, p. 421). In some of the recent popular literature on the climate crisis there are debates framed in virtue language, such as climate scientist Kate Marvel's (2018) piece: 'We need courage, not hope, to face climate change' or Jonathan Watts' (2024) article entitled: 'Would abandoning false hope help us to tackle the climate crisis?' Both these pieces interrogate the nature and role of hope, highlighting its complexity and the need to analyse critically its role in relation to the climate crisis. The campaigning group, *Just Stop Oil* (2024), in a recent communication to those on its mailing list, particularly highlights the need for courage and solidarity at a time when a number of people who were present at recent peaceful protests have been given prison sentences: 'With our supporters in jail over Christmas, we will step out in solidarity with them, to allow their resolve and courage to fill our hearts as we aim to be the spark'.

Virtues for whom and in what context?

Much of the literature speaks in the language of the first-person plural, using 'we' and 'us', referring by implication to the general population as global and or national citizens. But 'we' have many roles as members of families, neighbourhoods or interest communities; holders of jobs and positions of leadership; activists and changemakers. How virtues are conceptualised and deployed obviously varies according to context. Being courageous in a family gathering may entail challenging the climate change denial of a close relative. Being courageous as an activist in the Just Stop Oil campaign may entail being prepared to be arrested and imprisoned.

I will now briefly explore three of the many virtues that are highlighted in academic and popular literature and climate activist communications as relevant to understanding and tackling the climate crisis: hope, courage and solidarity. I will consider the generic concepts, attitudes and emotions underlying each virtue and then offer a brief encapsulation of the virtue in the specific context of climate change.

Hope

Hope is a much-touted quality in the climate activism movement - both as a virtue for activists campaigning for change, and for the general public in making lifestyle changes. It is regarded as an antidote to despair, which can so easily engulf those who take seriously the scientific evidence on the consequences of increasing global temperatures. But what does it mean to be hopeful in relation to the climate crisis, and why are some critics sceptical of its value? In an article focussing on the virtue of hope in a turbulent world, Mason (2022) categorises hope as a structural virtue, that is, it plays an important role in organising and structuring our lives in a positive way. She argues that hope is called for in situations in which our goals or projects are vulnerable. In Aristotelian terms, hope can be seen as a mean between the vices of despair (giving up on goals, despite some possibilities remaining open) and fantasy (overemphasising control over situations, ignoring the possibility that the desired outcome may not be realised). According to Mason (2022, p. 305):

Hope functions as a counter to these temptations, enabling us to have a clear-eyed assessment of the value and likelihood of a goal or project whilst remaining invested in it. It thus allows us to recognise our own vulnerability whilst remaining committed to those vulnerable goals that we ought to care about.

Yet hope is not always viewed in such positive terms. Watts (2024) offers a searing critique of calls for hope in the context of tackling the climate crisis, starting his article with this provocation: 'If despair is the most unforgivable sin, then hope is surely the most abused virtue'. He suggests that people in distress are more likely to take collective action. This may be true for some people, as there are many motivators to action. However, this suggestion may also be a misunderstanding of the virtue of hope, at least as characterised by Mason (2022) as a structural rather than motivational virtue. It is the specific goal, such as a sustainable future for the planet, that motivates, while hope enables us to have a clear assessment of the value of our goal or project. What Watts is criticising, arguably, is not the virtue of hope, but the vice of false hope, otherwise known as fantasy. I would suggest that the implications of his critique are that we need to be very clear about what constitutes the virtue of hope in order to avoid false hope or unthinking optimism. Because the goal of enabling a sustainable future for the planet and future generations is so vulnerable and uncertain, it is easy to slip into despair or cynicism, from which viewpoint any hope appears like wishful thinking.

Indeed, the kind of hope needed in relation to the climate crisis may be more akin to Lear's (2008) concept of 'radical hope', which he developed in his analysis of the response of Native American

Chief of the Crow Nation, Plenty Coups, when facing cultural collapse of his tribe: 'radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it' (op. cit., p.103). We can debate the philosophical and psychological coherence of the concept of radical hope and certainly acknowledge that as a virtue this may not be available to many people and indeed may often be indistinguishable from 'false hope' or 'blind hope'. However, in relation to the climate crisis, it seems relevant and valuable.

At the other end of the spectrum from radical hope lies what might be called 'realistic hope', which grounds the hope in scientific evidence of the possibilities for a low carbon future and sustainable planet. This is exemplified, although not named as such, in Richie's (2024) book entitled *Not the end of the world: Surprising facts, dangerous myths and hopeful solutions for our future on planet earth*. As a data scientist, she carefully examines evidence on the current state of the global climate and ecosystem, assessing the potential for delivering a sustainable future. She states: 'We have the opportunity to be the first generation that leaves the environment in a better state than we found it' (p. 11). This kind of hope is on the boundaries of what is usually regarded as hope. For if we have a reasonable expectation that something will occur, then strictly speaking this would not call for the virtue of hope - as hope is only applicable in situations of uncertainty. However, in the case of tackling the climate crisis, Richie aims to show that it is within the power of humanity to transition to a low carbon future, not that it will actually happen.

Indeed, although what I term 'realistic hope' is an important version of hope, arguably some of the psychological and political ingredients required for the cultural and lifestyle shifts in transitioning quickly from fossil fuels and ensuring justice in the impacts of this shift are underexplored in Richie's work. The short termism of politicians and temporal myopia of humans in general (a narrow focus on the present and immediate future, see van der Waal et al., 2018) are a key sticking point. This is probably why for many people the kind of hope linked to the climate crisis is actually more akin to radical hope than what I have called realistic hope.

Many discussions of hope refer to Rebecca Solnit (2004), whose writings encapsulate the importance and value of hope, while showing its complexity and the effort that must be expended to maintain genuine hope as opposed to conflating it with fantasy or ungrounded optimism. Solnit (2004, p. 110) explicitly links hope with action and speaks of hope as 'the foundation for an ongoing series of acts of defiance'. Thunberg's (2022, p. 421) statement that 'hope is something you have to earn' encapsulates the effort and struggle we must expend to be hopeful in a considered way, as she adds:

To me, hope is not something that is given to you, it is something you have to earn, to create. It cannot be gained passively, through standing by and waiting for someone else to do something. Hope is taking action. It is stepping outside your comfort zone. And if a bunch of weird school kids were able to get millions of people to start changing their lives, just imagine what we could all do together if we really tried.

Climate scientist Kate Marvel (2018) argues, on the other hand, that in the context of climate change we need courage not hope. For her courage is the resolve to do well without the assurance of a happy ending. Marvel has no hope that the human-created changes to the climate can be reversed. This is a somewhat different stance to that of Richie, who is not necessarily imagining reversal but rather mitigation of the most serious impacts and adoption of radically new ways of living. This suggests that to judge whether hope is helpful or relevant we need to consider what is being hoped for. If we regard hope as a structural rather than motivational or substantive virtue, then whether hope is the relevant virtue and whether it is a virtue or vice in the form of 'false hope' will very much depend on the object of hope.

In summary, the virtue of climate hope (shorthand for hope in the context of the climate crisis) is the disposition to anticipate a positive future and a commitment to work towards this future, which is vulnerable to failure and may be very different from the present in ways we cannot comprehend.

Courage

Arguably both hope and courage are necessary to face and respond to the uncertainties and seriousness of the climate crisis and are interlinked and can work together. Indeed, according to Lear (2008, p. 121) radical hope can be a necessary constituent of courage. Both are about facing uncertainty. Fredericks (2014) explores courage specifically as an environmental virtue, with a focus on moral courage as opposed to physical courage, although the latter is also relevant. For her, environmental moral courage is about facing disagreements and working towards solving our environmental problems without undermining our relationships with others (op. cit., p. 8). She follows Pianalto's (2017, p. 167) account of moral courage: 'moral courage involves facing the particular fears and dangers arising from the possibility that one will be punished (broadly speaking) for taking a moral stand'.

In this sense, moral courage can be regarded as a mean between moral cowardice (fear of facing other people) and moral fanaticism (being fearless in taking a morally motivated stand and seeing others as obstacles or objects) (Fredericks, 2014, pp. 9-10). The Just Stop Oil communication quoted earlier specifically refers to the courage of protesters who blocked a road outside the UK Houses of Parliament in 2024. They risked public disapproval and punishment, including arrest and imprisonment. They might be seen as moral fanatics in some quarters, but also as courageous citizens in others. At a less dangerous end of the spectrum of climate activism is the commitment of the many groups who march, demonstrate, staff information stalls, organise talks and workshops to educate and raise awareness. One example local to me is Grandparent Climate Action Durham, members of which stand in the market place in the City of Durham, UK, every Friday with banners and placards, approaching passers-by to hand out leaflets and engage in climate conversations. Some members of the group report that this requires 'steeling' themselves to approach people - risking rejection, insults or indifference. The support and strength gained through being part of a group obviously bolsters courage, and is related to solidarity, which is covered in the next section.

In conclusion, we may describe climate courage, taken as moral courage in relation to the climate crisis, as the disposition to stand firm and/or to take action on climate issues in the face of risk of disapproval, ostracism or punishment by others.

Solidarity

Another quality that features heavily in climate action discourse, in common with all other social movements, is solidarity in the sense of standing together with or among others for a common cause. This applies both in the context of the within-movement solidarity called for by Just Stop Oil ('we will act in solidarity with them [our supporters in jail]') and the solidarity with people across the globe experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis, future generations and other non-human members/constituents of the biosphere. Sangiovanni and Vichoff (2024, pp. 2-7) in their book on the generic virtue of solidarity, remark on both the paucity of sophisticated accounts of solidarity as a virtue and on the complexity of the concept. Solidarity can be organic or mechanical; social, civic or political; with or among others. Bazzini (2023) specifically focuses on climate solidarity, commenting that:

this new form of solidarity is ... closer to altruism because the expected benefits of climate change mitigation will mainly be appreciated by future generations and some developing countries, while emissions have to be reduced primarily in wealthy countries. (op. cit., p. 17)

In the same way that Lear (2008) construes hope in relation to a future good we do not have the conceptual apparatus to understand as 'radical hope', we may perhaps view climate solidarity as 'radical solidarity' insofar as the global and temporal enmeshment of people, future generations and planet are hard to grasp, at least within western detached scientific and philosophical paradigms. Such radical solidarity is far more in tune with the knowledge systems and practices of Indigenous peoples, which will be vital in mitigating the climate crisis (UNDP, 2024).

The virtue of climate solidarity is the disposition to see and feel a common cause with or among others, including people distant in place and time and nonhuman inhabitants of the planet. This is not necessarily reciprocal.

Cultivating climate virtues: A step too far?

All virtues require hard work and practice to develop and put into action. In the case of environmental, and specifically climate virtues the effort seems greater in that their scope is broader - taking into consideration future generations and planetary flourishing. The cognitive and emotional effort of challenging the anthropocentrism and temporal myopia prevailing in human thinking and cultures, and of exercising moral imagination to envision an uncertain and indistinct future for which we can hope, are considerable. This is why Galvagni (2023), having illustrated and argued for the relevance of a virtue-based approach to understanding and evaluating the ethics of climate change, nevertheless concludes that this is not the solution to tackling the crisis. As quoted at the start of this paper, Galvagni (2023, p. 16) claims that a virtue-based approach is an ineffective way to deal with the imminent danger of climate change. He suggests that although virtues may help in the long term,

the constraint of time remains. Such a reconceptualization, development and inculcation of the green virtues will likely take a few generations to be effective on a large scale and climate change seems to be happening at a faster pace. Political and legal action, rather than virtue and character, are taken to be the only possible solutions to a very imminent danger. (Galvagni, 2023, pp. 16-17)

He concludes that for the imminent floods and droughts, virtue may not be enough. This is certainly true, but does this mean there is no role for cultivation of virtues? Galvagni sometimes uses the term 'cultivate' and sometimes 'inculcate' when talking about the virtues. 'Cultivate', with its connotations of preparation of the ground, taking care and nurturing growth is preferable to 'inculcate', which may also have connotations of forcing or pushing ideas onto people. If we think in terms of cultivating the seeds of what is already there, the virtue-based approach to understanding and tackling the climate crisis may not be such a Herculean task, and would arguably contribute to people's receptivity to actions needed to mitigate the climate crisis. At the very least, the existing climate activists, who already have the motivation to take action, are honing their practices of the structural virtues discussed here (hope, courage and solidarity) in the context of the climate crisis. As generic virtues these are deployed in many contexts in life, some of which are in relation to mundane everyday challenges (the courage to complain in a restaurant), while others are in bigger more serious contexts (the courage to blow the whistle on one's employer to the press, for example). Both these examples entail overcoming or facing feelings of fear or nervousness, although the risks are much higher in blowing the whistle on one's employer.

The situationist critique of virtues as stable character traits (Doris 2002; Merritt, Doris and Harman, 2010) makes much of the fact that, for example, while someone may be courageous in complaining in a restaurant, they may not be courageous enough to blow the whistle at work. However, the implication of this need not be that the concept of virtues as stable character traits is a myth, but rather that practising courage is hard when the stakes are high and the context is hostile. It also requires wisdom to work out when courage might tip over into foolhardiness. But having the experience of 'plucking up' the courage to complain in a restaurant (facing fear of being put down or thought to be negative) gives practice in facing fears and feeling the accompanying emotions and bodily sensations that are relevant in other contexts. Having experience of complaining about food in a restaurant may make it easier to comment on the single use plastics in the local takeaway restaurant. It may also make it easier to consider whether the strengths of one's views on the climate crisis merit joining the protest about excess packaging outside a supermarket or, indeed, a protest on the government's failure to phase out fossil fuel fast enough by occupying a road bridge. As Williston (2015) argues, it is important to develop a stable disposition so we can hold firm to our virtues in changing and challenging contexts. He endorses Snow's (2010, p.7) comment: 'We need to cultivate our inner states as indemnity against the day when our social sustenance is taken from us'.

Concluding comments

Galvagni (2023, p. 17) in his dismissal of a significant role for virtues in tackling the climate crisis, comments:

It remains unclear ... why the large and difficult cultivation of virtues ... should be necessary to tackle the emergency of climate change. Environmental regulation can be achieved with green votes, which in turn can be obtained through educational campaigns which are much more feasible and quicker than the process of inculcating virtues.

This begs the question of what makes a good educational campaign and what makes voters sympathetic to certain policies. Traditionally political parties tap into voters' short-term self-interest. Social movements and campaigns are important in raising awareness of broader injustices and in changing social and cultural norms and expectations (Bailey, 2024). Whether we think virtues are essential to activists and members of the public in changing opinions, expectations and emotions will depend on how we see the dynamics of the cycle of social change. But dismissing cultivation of virtues as a project that is too long-term seems too accepting of the temporal myopia that is at the very heart of the politics of the climate crisis and needs to be challenged. The language of virtues is very much in use in the activist literature, and at the very least we must look to the growth and strengthening of social movements that build on the virtues of hope, courage and solidarity. The language is also common in everyday life and these structural virtues are qualities that are in use across all contexts and are not tied to any specific conceptions of the good. Hence it is not such a large step to invoke virtues in relation to the climate crisis, and to encourage people to commit to the cognitive and emotional effort of challenging existing ethical paradigms with the same amount of vigour as some scientists are applying to the development of green energy, transport and economic systems.

References

- Aristotle (350 BCE/1954). *The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle, translated by Sir David Ross*. London, Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, D. (2024). Environmental protest outcomes in austerity-era neoliberalism: perseverance and politics. *Social Movement Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2024.2407291>
- Banks, S. and Gallagher, A. (2009) *Ethics in Professional Life: Virtues for Health and Social Care*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bazzini, G. (2023). Climate Solidarity: A Framework and Research Agenda for Low Carbon Behavior. *Sociological Forum* 38(2), 352-374. doi:DOI: 10.1111/socf.12885
- Cafaro, P. (2015). Environmental Virtue Ethics. In L. Besser-Jones & M. Slote (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics* (pp. 427-444). London: Routledge.
- Chappell, S. (2020). Virtue ethics and climate change. In D. Miller & B. Eggleston (Eds.), *Moral Theory and Climate Change* (pp. 177-192). London: Routledge.
- Doris, J. (2002). *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour*. Cambridge Cambridge University Press
- Dzwonkowska, D. (2025). *Virtue Ethics and the Environment*. London: Routledge.
- Fredericks, R. (2014). Courage as an environmental virtue. *Environmental Ethics*, 36(3), 339-355. Page references are to the pre-print version found at: <https://philarchive.org/rec/FRECAA>
- Galvagni, E. (2023) 'Climate change and virtue ethics' in Pellegrino, G. and Di Paola, M. (eds) *Handbook of Philosophy of Climate Change* (pp. 587-600). Cham: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07002-0> Page references are to the pre-print version found at: <https://philarchive.org/archive/GALCCA-6#>
- Hulme, M. (2014). Climate Change and Virtue: An Apologetic. *Humanities* 2014, 3(3), 299-312; <https://doi.org/10.3390/h3030299>
- Hursthouse, R. (2007). Environmental Virtue Ethics. In R. Walker & P. Ivanhoe (Eds.), *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (pp. 155-171). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Just Stop Oil (2024). *Join us to reclaim parliament*, email to supporters, 14.12.24.
- Lear, J. (2008). *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Marvel, K. (2018). We Need Courage, Not Hope, to Face Climate Change. *On being*, <https://onbeing.org/blog/kate-marvel-we-need-courage-not-hope-to-face-climate-change/>.
- Mason, C. (2022) 'The virtue of hope in a turbulent world', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 92: 293-306. doi:10.1017/S1358246122000194
- Merritt, M., Doris, J., & Harman, G. (2010). Character. In J. Doris & The Moral Psychology Research Group (Eds.), *The Moral Psychology Handbook* (pp. 355-401). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oxfam. (n.d.). *5 natural disasters that beg for climate action*. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-natural-disasters-beg-climate-action>
- Pianalto, M. (2012). Moral courage and facing others. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 61, 165-184.
- Richie, H. (2024). *Not the end of the world: Surprising facts, dangerous myths and hopeful solutions for our future on planet earth*. London: Vintage.
- Sandler, R., & Cafaro, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Environmental Virtue Ethics*. Lanham Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sangiovanni, A., & Viehoff, J. (2024). Introduction. In A. Sangiovanni & J. Viehoff (Eds.), *The Virtue of Solidarity* (pp. 1-34). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Snow, N. (2010). *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Solnit, R. (2004). *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* New York: Nation Books.
- Thunberg, G. (Ed.) (2022). *The Climate Book*. London: Allen Lane.
- United Nations Climate Change. (n.d.). *The Paris Agreement. What is the Paris Agreement?* Retrieved from <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

- United Nations Development Programme (2023). *The Climate Dictionary: An everyday guide to climate change* Retrieved from <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-dictionary-everyday-guide-climate-change>
- United Nations Development Programme (2024). Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here’s why. Retrieved from <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/indigenous-knowledge-crucial-fight-against-climate-change-heres-why>
- Watts, J. (2024). Would abandoning false hope help us to tackle the climate crisis? *The Guardian*, 24.10.24. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/24/we-need-a-dash-of-hope-but-is-too-much-diverting-our-gaze-from-the-perils-of-the-climate-crisis>
- Williston, B. (2015). *The Anthropocene Project: Virtue in the Age of Climate Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- van der Wal, A., van Horan, F. and Grinstein, A. (2018). Temporal myopia in sustainable behaviour under uncertainty. *International Journal of Research and Marketing*, 35(3): 378-393.
- van Wensveen, L. (2000). *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* New York: Humanity Books.
- van Wensveen, L. (2005). Cardinal Environmental Virtues: A Neurobiological Perspective. In R. Sandler & P. Cafaro (Eds.), *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (pp. 173-194). Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.