Environmental virtue ethics and the plastic pollution crisis: finding the missing exemplars

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Abstract

Plastic pollution has reached a crisis point, with scientists estimating that, by 2050, there could be more plastic in the oceans than fish by weight. This presents a major issue in the subject of environmental ethics and shows that our relationship with plastic needs serious re-evaluation. The exemplar approach to virtue ethics offers a useful new perspective on the plastic pollution crisis and, through the identification of environmentally virtuous exemplars, gives us guidance on how to solve the problem. Despite its capacity to revolutionise our relationship with plastic being limited by the economic system in which we currently live, the exemplar approach has the potential to greatly improve the way we treat our environment. The first exemplar identified is the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, which has demonstrated its environmental virtue through its prioritisation of the environmental rights of its citizens. This prioritisation directly results from their community-based approach, inspired by the philosophies of Murray Bookchin and Abdullah Öcalan. From an individual perspective, we can gain guidance on how to improve our personal relationships with the environment by following examples set by indigenous populations, in particular Native Americans and aboriginal Australians. It is also important that businesses have exemplars they can emulate, as companies are largely responsible for the plastic pollution crisis. The Body Shop is an appropriate exemplar in this regard, as it has consistently shown a disposition towards protecting the environment and is making an effort to reduce the amount of plastic pollution. To a lesser extent Waitrose sets a good example of how supermarkets can begin to make progress towards environmental virtue. Environmental campaign groups also set a good example by holding the government to

account when it falls short of environmental virtue, and should therefore also be considered

environmental exemplars.

Introduction

Environmental virtue ethics is, according to Rosalind Hursthouse, 'concerned with articulating and defending the green belief in virtue ethics terms', that is, to use the approach and language of virtue ethics to articulate and defend the green belief. What she calls the 'green belief' is defined as the belief that 'a fairly radical change in the way we engage with nature is imperative' [Hursthouse, 2007, p.155]. Looking at the state of the world today and the climate catastrophe with which we are faced, it is clear to see that this belief is justified. An article published in the scientific journal *Bioscience* in January 2020, and endorsed by over eleven thousand scientists worldwide, declared unequivocally that 'planet Earth is facing a climate emergency'. Despite the fact that successive coalitions of world leaders and scientific communities have made increasingly grave declarations since the 1979 First World Climate Conference, the problem is still getting worse [Ripple *et al.*, pp.8-12]. Greenhouse gas emissions are rising, as are global temperatures, and the amount of plastic pollution in the environment is increasing. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has now warned that an immense increase in the scale of efforts to conserve our biosphere, the thing that keeps us all alive, is needed to avoid the untold suffering that the climate crisis will cause [IPCC, 2018]. In light of this overwhelming scientific consensus, it is undeniable that the green belief is correct, we have to radically change the way we engage with nature.

Plastic pollution is the accumulation of synthetic plastic products in the environment in a way that is harmful to wildlife and their habitats as well as for human populations. It is one of the leading contributors to the climate crisis and has been called 'one of the world's foremost environmental concerns, alongside climate change and ocean acidification'

[Vethaak & Leslie, 2016, p.6826]. This is also a problem that is only going to get worse, with estimates that there could be more plastic in the ocean than fish by weight by the year 2050 [Sutter, 2016]. It is clear from the scale of plastic pollution in the environment that the relationship humans currently have with plastic is unhealthy and needs evaluating.

The main aim of this research is to determine how we can employ environmental virtue ethics to improve our relationship with plastic. Environmental virtue ethics is a branch of virtue ethics, an agent-centred ethical theory that evaluates a person's moral value based on the virtuousness of their character. Character is defined, in this context, as a set of well-entrenched dispositions that necessarily leads to moral action [Hursthouse, 2013]. According to one interpretation of virtue ethics, called the exemplar approach, the best way in which we can develop a virtuous character is to identify a moral exemplar, that is, someone who has a virtuous character, and emulate how we imagine this person would act in our own situations. Through continually emulating the exemplar, the right actions become habitual, and we develop a disposition to act virtuously. However, in order for us to be able to carry out this process, we need to identify exemplars. This seems to be a problem in environmental virtue ethics, as Hursthouse points out: 'we have so few exemplars of the relevant virtues, real or fictional, if any' and even if we were able to identify them, there would be problems with applying their ways of life across contexts to help us deal with our problems [Hursthouse, 2007, p.168]. In order to achieve the main aim of this research, I will be evaluating possible candidates for environmentally virtuous individuals, communities and organisations in order to determine whether or not they are appropriate exemplars for environmental virtue ethics. Their appropriateness as environmental exemplars will be measured by whether or not they are sufficiently environmentally virtuous, and additionally the extent to which we can emulate them in the context of our own lives. The candidates

that this research will examine come from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances, and the relevance of their character is accordingly varied.

The methodology I will be employing in this evaluation will be based on Linda Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory, which posits that the key designator of a moral exemplar is that they are admirable. She argues that the purpose of a moral theory is 'not to give directions in decision-making' but nevertheless to 'help us in our practical lives' [Zagzebski, 2010, p.49]. This means that we should not expect the exemplars discussed in this research to tell us what we should do to resolve the crisis of plastic pollution, nor what our personal relationship with plastic should be, as these are more determined by our specific needs and contexts. However, by adopting their attitudes and developing dispositions based on their virtuous environmental values, we should be motivated to act virtuously.

Beginning with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, I will examine the theories of libertarian municipalism, as put forward by American philosopher Murray Bookchin, and democratic confederalism, as put forward by Kurdish political theorist Abdullah Öcalan. These philosophies grew out of a convergence of environmentalism, Marxism and anti-imperialism of the twentieth century. I will discuss how these theories lay the foundation for how an environmentally virtuous society could be run. These theories were built upon by the people of Rojava, who based their political system on Öcalan's philosophy, creating a society around the fundamental principles of feminism, equal representation and environmentalism. It will be argued that Rojava is an appropriate environmental exemplar due to the fact that its political process employs practical wisdom, and has well-entrenched dispositions that lead to positive environmental action. This

exemplar provides effective guidance for how to deal with the crisis of plastic pollution by showing us how a society can involve environmental values at the foundation of its political process.

The next chapter explores indigenous attitudes towards the environment in the hope of finding relevant environmental exemplars. It will be argued that, despite Hursthouse's doubts at the prospect, both Native American and Aboriginal communities are appropriate exemplars due to their deeply established holistic views of the environment, which have resulted in the development of environmentally virtuous characters. It will also be argued that, despite concerns that their lives are so radically different to ours that the example they set cannot be relevant, with the interpretation of the exemplar approach that I adopt, we can emulate aspects of their culture in our own and develop similar virtuous dispositions towards the environment.

The next set of candidates I will discuss are all examples of businesses that cultivate an image of environmental responsibility, and yet only one can justifiably be called an appropriate environmental exemplar. It will be argued that The Body Shop is an environmentally virtuous corporation due to the fact that environmental concerns are fundamental to the company's founding principles, and have not just been viewed as one-off extra projects. In this chapter I will also discuss what The Body Shop can teach other businesses about how to virtuously approach the crisis of plastic pollution. I will also analyse why the other candidates, Waitrose and The Coca-Cola Company, fail to be appropriate exemplars to varying degrees.

The final candidates for environmental exemplars that I will discuss as part of this research exist within the UK political system. I will examine the example that the UK

government sets through the creation and implementation of its environmental policies, and why these fail to give us adequate guidance for how to deal with the crisis of plastic pollution. It will also be argued that environmental campaign groups play a key role in holding the government to account and fostering efforts at community organising in response to the crisis. It will be argued that, for these reasons, campaign groups like Friends of the Earth and Surfers Against Sewage are appropriate exemplars of environmental virtue that can give us guidance on how to solve the plastic pollution crisis within our current political system.

Bringing all of the exemplars that I have discovered in this research together in the final chapter, I will analyse what traits they have in common, and how we can effectively emulate them in order to develop virtuous dispositions towards the environment.

Chapter 1: What is the issue with plastic pollution and why is it significant for Environmental Ethics?

The main aim of this thesis is to determine how we can employ environmental virtue ethics to improve our relationship with plastic. It is therefore necessary to examine our current relationship with plastic, the consequences of this relationship for the environment, and why it needs to change. The production and disposal of plastic products is having severe and wide-ranging effects on our environment. By looking at the statistics on levels of plastic pollution in the environment in this chapter, it will be shown that it is a problem that we are not currently dealing with effectively and is expected to get worse. It will also be shown that the effects are not limited to the non-human environment, as the more plastic waste products enter the ecosystem, the more serious the effects on humans become. This justifies plastic pollution's status as a major concern in Environmental Ethics. As the use and disposal of plastic is widespread, plastic pollution is also one of the more egalitarian problems in Environmental Ethics. This is a term that has been used in various ways by moral and political philosophers, in this context it is meant to mean that plastic pollution is a problem that everyone contributes to in at least some way, and the average person contributes more to the problem than they do to other environmental problems such as deforestation or ocean acidification. Plastic pollution is also one of the more egalitarian problems in Environmental Ethics because each person can make a change in their lives that can have a positive impact on the problem to a greater extent than with other environmental problems, increasing the extent to which each moral agent is responsible. It will be argued that plastic pollution is a timely current topic in Environmental Ethics due to the existing public enthusiasm for the issue, as is evidenced by grassroots campaigns for

reducing plastic waste and successful examples of groups pressuring governments. Finally, there will be a discussion of the reasons Virtue Ethics is an especially good way of looking at the issue of plastic pollution, given its benefits over Utilitarianism in its consideration of the needs of the current generation, and the interesting implications of Hursthouse's reformulation of *eudaimonia*.

The production and disposal of plastic products has resulted in a situation where there is an accumulation of plastic litter in virtually all habitats [Browne et al., 2011]. In our oceans, it is estimated that 'at least 5.25 trillion plastic particles weighing 268,940 tons are currently floating at sea' [Eriksen et al., 2014, p.7]; however, this estimate only accounts for '0.1% of the world annual plastic production' [p.11] so it can be assumed that the total figure is well above this estimate. The abundance of plastic pollutants has already reached worrying levels, with one study conducted between 2010 and 2012 finding that the mean larval densities of fish in the Danube, Europe's second largest river, was lower than the mean plastic densities, and the average biomass of drifting larval fish was lower than the plastic mass [Lechner et al., 2014, p. 179]. This shows that the level of plastic is having drastic effects on wildlife and this problem is expected to get even worse in the near future, with plastic predicted to be found in the digestive tracts of '99% of all seabird species by 2050' and '95% of the individuals within these species [to have ingested plastic] by the same year' [Wilcox et al., 2015, p.11901-11902]. Some researchers suggest that, by 2050, there could be more plastic in the oceans than fish by weight [Sutter, 2016], and it is easy to see where this suggestion has come from when looking at the studies already mentioned. This is clearly a problem that Environmental Ethics should be concerned with, since our current actions with regards to plastic production and disposal are having negative effects on us and our environment, and these effects are due to get worse. There have been attempts

through environmental ethics to prevent and even reverse the worst effects of plastic pollution. However, judging by the situation that we are still facing, it seems not to have worked. This suggests that a new approach is needed and, since it is more concerned with the formation of habits than other approaches in normative ethics, virtue ethics provides a more promising starting point.

The effects of plastic pollution are not limited to the environment or non-human wildlife; as plastic pollution gets worse, there is an increased risk to human health. In their 2016 paper in *Environmental Science and Technology*, Vethaak and Leslie observe that 'what started as a marine environmental contamination issue is in fact very much a human health issue as well' as 'humans are being exposed to both plastic particles and chemical additives being released from the plastic debris of consumer society' [Vethaak and Leslie, 2016, p. 6825]. The paper identifies three categories of plastic-related health issues, the first of which is 'particle toxicity' which occurs when plastic particles enter the body and cause injuries to the lungs or gut, with 'specially fine particles' able to 'cross cell membranes, the blood-brain barrier and the human placenta'. The resulting effects for humans include 'oxidative stress, cell damage, inflammation, and impairment of energy allocation functions' [Ibid.]. The second category of health issues caused by plastic is what the authors call 'chemical toxicity', where contaminants in plastic debris which are 'known endocrine disruptors' can affect human health when ingested or inhaled. It is not just the chemicals found in the plastic products themselves, but 'air and waterborne hydrophobic contaminants [that] sorb to plastic litter', meaning ingestion or inhalation of plastic contaminants increases the number of other contaminants that can be damaging to human health. As the authors say, 'exposure to plastic debris means exposure to these chemical substances' [Ibid.]. The third category of plastic-related health issues is 'pathogen and

parasite vectors' which describes how 'plastic debris can act as a distinct habitat and reservoir for pathogens'. Plastic pollutants can form a thin film on the surface of water which can act as 'a distinct habitat and reservoir for pathogens' or as a habitat for 'mosquito larvae that transmit parasites or viruses such as Zika or dengue' [p. 6826]. The multitudinous ways in which plastic pollution can be harmful to human health lead to the authors' conclusion that 'this issue [is] one of the world's foremost environmental concerns, alongside climate change and ocean acidification' [Ibid.]. It is clear from this evidence that plastic pollution is not a problem that just affects wildlife and environment, but one that has major negative consequences for human health. It is therefore an incredibly important issue for environmental ethics to address, and one with which a wide audience should be concerned.

Another reason I have chosen to focus on plastic specifically, rather than other forms of human-produced pollution, is to a certain extent because of the relatively egalitarian nature of plastic consumption and disposal. Everyone consumes products that contribute to pollution, but none of them are so directly linked to it as plastic is. Almost everyone uses electricity and fuel, but we have very little say about how these products are produced. In terms of energy, there are some companies we can choose to buy our energy from that use a higher proportion of renewable energy sources, but changing the infrastructure that produces the majority of energy in any country requires campaigning to convince companies or governments to change their policies. The level of choice consumers have is also limited to simply how much electricity we use; we cannot decide how the waste products are disposed of or whether they can be reused. In terms of fuel, we have even less choice, because most cars run on fossil-based fuels and the alternatives can be very expensive or inconvenient. That is not to say that plastic does not share some of these problems. Like the

other sources of pollution, the majority of the responsibility lies with the producers, the big companies that make plastic products for the average consumer to buy. However, in comparison to other polluting industries, plastics offer more freedom to the average consumer to have a positive impact. There are two main ways in which plastic use leads to pollution: (i) the chemical pollution released during its production; and (ii) the chemical and physical pollution resulting from its disposal. It is the second way that offers the average consumer the opportunity to reduce the level of plastic pollution they cause. As well as deciding how much they purchase and use like any other polluting product, they can also decide to reuse the plastic they have instead of disposing with it after one use, and when they decide to throw it away they can recycle to make sure it does not end up in landfill. Even if the consumer decided not to recycle, putting the plastic into the general waste disposal means less pollution than littering. This level of choice makes it easier for the average person to implement positive changes to their relationship with plastic, while also holding companies to account like they would with any other type of pollution; it is for these reasons that I believe it to be an egalitarian form of activism, one where everyone shares the responsibility and the power to make positive changes, and therefore a good focus for my research.

Another reason for choosing to focus on plastic pollution in this thesis is that there is already a general public enthusiasm for dealing with the problem. It is important that this general attitude is harnessed in the most effective way, which is why it needs to be assessed through an existing system of environmental ethics. This enthusiasm for reducing plastic pollution has been voiced by a wide range of organisations from the grassroots movements to the biggest corporations and governmental organisations. Examples of grassroots campaigns against plastic pollution include The Last Plastic Straw, which puts pressure on

the food service industry to make plastic drinking straws 'a relic of the past' [Plastic Pollution Coalition, 2019], and the Surfers Against Sewage, who suggested a ban on plastic straws as part of 'a five point plan to help create single-use plastic free towns and cities' [Laville, 2019a]. This goal received massive public support and led to the UK government announcing in May 2019 that it would introduce a ban on the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds in the following year [Binding, 2019]. While generally praised for being a step in the right direction, there was criticism suggesting that the scope of the legislation would not be wide enough, with national and grassroots campaigning organisation Friends of the Earth calling for 'legislation to cut back on pointless plastic across the board' [Friends of the Earth, 2019]. The goals of these movements are not limited to small tokens like plastic straws; as already mentioned, the Surfers Against Sewage want large-scale change to communities' relationship with plastic. The group has a long term goal to 'meaningfully shift the way individuals and businesses think about plastic pollution - and about our society's disposable culture on a larger scale' and they are already working in coalition with over one thousand organisations, businesses and thought leaders [Plastic Pollution Coalition, 2019]. The fact that these campaigns are so popular and are able to put pressure on governments and big businesses shows that there is an existing enthusiasm among the general public for positive action on plastic pollution. However, as previously discussed, our rate of plastic use and disposal is still increasing showing that not enough is being done; a majority of people in the UK want to do more to reduce their plastic use and believe that companies should be doing more to combat plastic pollution [Waldersee, 2019]. It is clear that we need to re-evaluate the problem of plastic pollution, and virtue ethics provides a promising starting point for doing so.

One of the main sources of opposition to environmental action is the belief that the sacrifices needed to tackle the climate crisis are too great, with some even having argued that environmentalism is radical and "anti-human" [Baggini, 2012]. Although a view this extreme is not held by the majority, the reluctance to give up short-term convenience or happiness should not be disregarded. If our goal were to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and reverse the trend of rising global temperatures, the quickest way to do so would be to completely halt all carbon emissions and begin massive programs of carbon capture, which would have a huge, bordering on catastrophic, negative impact on our current way of life. As a species we emitted just over thirty-seven billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2018, mostly as a result of burning fossil fuels [Harvey, 2018]. Halting this immediately would leave us with no fuel for the majority of vehicles on the roads, no source of energy for most of the power stations that produce our electricity and would negatively impact countless manufacturing processes. When looked at through the lens of Utilitarianism, in which the goal of any ethical maxim is to maximise utility according to the felicific calculus [Lazari-Radek and Singer, 2017], this may be the recommended course of action. This is because, while the utility of the current generation would be greatly minimised by the kind of action described, to not take this action would mean minimising the utility of all future generations on Earth to the extent of risking their very survival.

Since the capacity for utility of all future generations outweighs that of the current generation, it is possible that the utilitarian environmental ethicist could decide that it is worth sacrificing the current generation by making them bear the costs of an immediate transition to a carbon-neutral economy, confirming the worst fears of the anti-environmentalist. In terms of plastic pollution, the utilitarian may find that the felicific

calculus tells us to completely stop using plastic, since a lack of plastic pollution for future generations provides more utility overall. Whether or not this kind of action does turn out to be more effective overall, having this theory as the basis for action gives too little consideration to the living individual and is therefore less likely to be acted upon by the majority of agents. I therefore think that the way we deal with plastic pollution in environmental ethics needs to be based on Environmental Virtue Ethics, as its ethical requirements are less extreme and therefore more likely to be effective.

Another reason for this thesis's focus on plastic pollution and Environmental Virtue Ethics is that it allows for focus on new and interesting aspects of Virtue Ethics that take the priority off of the human agents by defining the ultimate moral good in a more holistic way that incorporates the needs of the environment. Rosalind Hursthouse discusses the issue of *eudaimonia* or human flourishing being the primary goal of Virtue Ethics in her 2007 paper "Environmental Virtue Ethics". There is a possible problem with the theory in that efforts towards the primary goal of *eudaimonia* can sometimes be contrary to the needs of the environment, leading to a contradiction between Environmental Ethics and Virtue Ethics, making the two theories incompatible. Hursthouse highlights that economic growth is not what many environmental ethicists want as it is antithetical to conservation. However, to those in poorer countries for whom economic growth means an improvement to their and their children's lives, this would not be just. This prompts a question for virtue ethics, namely, if *eudaimonia* or human wellbeing is the top value, then how can we justify making people's lives worse for the sake of the environment? Hursthouse addresses this issue by arguing that specifically human flourishing is not the 'top value' in virtue ethics and that it was never actually supposed to be within our grasp; instead she claims that the top value should be 'acting virtuously' [Hursthouse, 2007, p.170]. This incorporates all of the virtues

because they are bound by each other, we cannot be environmentally conscious to the extent that we are unjust because we would not be acting virtuously. This allows a reformulation of *eudaimonia* in order to focus on the flourishing of the environment instead of just human society, leading to virtuous attitudes towards plastic are ones that benefit the community as a whole including the nonhuman members of the environment. Hursthouse also takes away the moral justification for profit motives because, while they may benefit humans, the environment has no use for money and does not benefit from human profit. As well as being useful for Environmental Ethics, the issue of plastic pollution therefore allows an interesting discussion to be had about Virtue Ethics in general.

It is clear that plastic pollution is a rich topic in the subject of Environmental Ethics. The scale of the problem means that this type of discussion is essential, especially given our current inability or unwillingness to deal with it. It is also a problem that effects every person, but one that everyone can have a positive impact on in a number of ways. Given the widespread nature of plastic use and disposal, there is a good chance that the problem can be addressed through cultivating virtuous dispositions that lead to more environmentally friendly actions. The focus on cultivation of virtuous dispositions instead of unmoving requirements of action based on abstract equations means that Environmental Virtue Ethics is likely to be more effective in getting people to make positive changes to their relationships with plastics. Finally, it is clear that the issue of plastic pollution gives us the opportunity to discuss the priorities of Virtue Ethics, since a focus on the flourishing of the community that only takes into account the human members of that community, and only in the short-term, is too narrow a focus for environmental virtue ethics. Now that we know the scale of the plastic pollution crisis, we can move on to talking about how we can solve it.

In the next chapter I will discuss the exemplar approach to virtue ethics and why it is the most appropriate approach to solving the crisis.

Chapter 2: Foundation of the Exemplar Approach to Virtue Ethics

In the previous chapter we saw how necessary a new approach to environmental ethics is if we want to solve the plastic pollution crisis. In this chapter I will examine the approach that this thesis will take to achieve this goal in the form of the exemplar approach. In order to do so I will attempt to answer two important questions: (i) how do we determine which dispositions are virtuous?; and (ii) how do we develop a virtuous character? One of the most important considerations in the subject of environmental virtue ethics is how we know what virtues are. Traditional Virtue Ethics defines virtue as more than just the performance of an action, but as a character trait, a well-entrenched disposition of an agent that necessarily leads to moral action [Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2018]. This is an important specification that means virtue ethics is agent-centred rather than action-centred because the focus of the theory is on helping agents develop their character rather than simply acting in certain ways. This makes virtue ethics practical because the development of a virtuous character and the insistence on the fecundity of virtue, in that it always leads to some form of action, means that a person with a virtuous character will necessarily act virtuously. While this distinction answers the questions of what a virtue is and what a virtue does, it does not get us any closer to being virtuous when we read it. If I wanted to know how to be morally good and I asked a divine command theorist, they might say that I must not do anything that is contrary to God's commands [Pojman and Rea, 2008, pp.561-562]. I would then know exactly what was forbidden and what was permitted. However, with the Virtue Ethics definition of virtue, I cannot be moral unless my actions come organically from a virtuous disposition, so I do not know how to act, and the only guidance for how to develop a virtuous disposition is to discover the virtues. These virtues are not simple commands that

apply to everyone as in divine command theory, but apply specifically to my own situation and therefore I must work them out for myself. Therefore, the pressing questions for Virtue Ethics are how we determine which dispositions are virtuous and how we develop a virtuous character. This takes away from one of the main selling-points of Virtue Ethics – that it is practical. A system of ethics that does not give us a guide for action is much less appealing than one that does, even if it has stronger theoretical foundations. There are many interpretations within virtue ethics of the criteria of good action, but perhaps the most useful in terms of answering this question by giving us a guide for action is the exemplarist approach. Agent-based virtue ethicists such as Zagzebski argue that the moral value of an action is based upon whether it is the kind of action that a virtuously motivated person would do. From this, Zagzebski asserts that we can look to exemplars of moral virtue in order to determine which dispositions are virtuous, and therefore we can develop a virtuous character by imitating these dispositions. There have been many criticisms of virtue ethics in general and the exemplar approach in particular. The most significant and relevant of these will be discussed in this chapter, with the aim being to determine whether an examination of possible exemplars is worthwhile and what issues need to be taken into account when doing so.

The exemplarist approach is an approach to Virtue Ethics put forward by Linda Zagzebski as a methodology of learning what the virtues are by looking at the behaviour of other people, which she justifies by the fact that it is consistent with the way in which people learn naturally, arguing that 'moral learning, like most other learning, is principally done by imitation' [2013, p.200]. She therefore defines exemplars as 'those persons who are most imitable', in the sense that we can clearly see from studying their character how we should be. They are most imitable because they are 'most admirable', in the sense that the

moral value of their character traits is clearly identifiable [ibid.]. She argues that the

function of admiration is essential to the theory because it 'can be used to give us both a

way of understanding significant moral concepts and a way of using those concepts to make

ourselves and our lives to conform to the admirable' [p.201]. Imitation can help us

understand moral concepts by familiarising us with moral dilemmas and habituating the

appropriate responses to these dilemmas. In this way, Zagzebski is proposing her conception

of the exemplar approach to Virtue Ethics as a direct answer to the questions with which

this chapter is concerned.

We can see that Zagzebski's answer to the first question would be to follow our

natural feelings of admiration for others and find a person that we admire; their character

will therefore be, by virtue of being admirable, a virtuous character. Zagzebski's proposed

answer to the second question is that we should attempt to imitate their actions and

dispositions, to ask ourselves 'what would they do if they were in my situation' until we

reach a point where the answer comes naturally to us without us having to ask. It should be

said that Zagzebski's conception of what the imitation of admirable people entails is not

necessarily one that entails simply copying their actions, but instead involves considering

their approach to situations and the ethical values that they hold. This is an especially

important distinction in the context of my research because, when looking at possible

exemplars for plastic use, it is likely to be much more difficult to copy their behaviour than it

would be to adopt their attitude when applying it to society in general. For example, we

cannot all have exactly the same relationship with the environment as indigenous tribes or

historical societies who had not discovered a way of mass-producing plastic, since there are

some plastic products (e.g. medical equipment) that we would deem essential. However, we

may be able to imitate the underlying attitude to the natural environment and approach our

own circumstances from the context of those attitudes, deciding for ourselves how they can be applied or adapted to our own situations.

One problem people tend to have with Virtue Ethics in general is that it does not fulfil their expectations of what an ethical theory should do, namely, that it should give us a decision-making framework for determining the most moral thing to do in any situation. This means that when a person hears the tenets of the theory they should immediately know what is moral and what is not. The exemplar approach does not provide this framework, it instead asks us to imagine for ourselves what a virtuous person would do were they to find themselves in our situation. This is not a flaw in the theory, but a benefit, as theories that provide decision-making frameworks do not necessarily help in every situation. When making common ethical decisions, it is not always practical to be act-centred in my approach. When I am in the shop trying to choose whether to get regular coffee or pay more for fair-trade coffee, it would be impractical for me to apply the Kantian categorical imperative or the utilitarian felicific calculus. Instead my decision to choose the fair-trade coffee comes from the fact that I usually choose fair-trade coffee, making the process simpler. If I were I to reflect on the reason why I usually choose it, it would be because that is what a virtuous person, someone who is disposed to act virtuously, would choose. In other words, the motivation for choosing the coffee is dispositional, but the intention behind my choice was to be virtuous. Under Kantian ethics I would have not done something morally good because my motivation was dispositional, rather than determined by knowledge of my duty [Kant, 1993, 213-214]. At the other end of the scale, there are situations that are so morally complex that the guidance given by other theories is not enough, and the agent – be they a surgeon, an emergency worker, a politician or a judge – are forced to use the judgement they have developed from their experience in making

similar decisions. This judgement is what Aristotle called phronesis [Aristotle and Bekker, 2019, 1106b35], in order to make a decision. It is therefore not necessarily the case that the decision-making framework other theories provide is better or more effective than Virtue Ethics, but the theory does acknowledge the need for a practical wisdom and, as Ronald L. Sandler says, 'no ethical theory can eliminate the need for good situational judgment, regardless of how 'mechanical' or 'codifiable' its rules and principles' [Sandler, 2007, p.99]. In terms of being a good guide for someone who is not morally good and has not yet begun to develop or adhere to a moral theory, whom I will refer to as the neutral agent, the exemplar approach does not rely exclusively on acting like the exemplars. Aristotle says that virtue is a mean between two extremes [1103b-1104b] and the neutral agent can aim for the opposite extreme to the one at which they find themselves as a starting point for finding the mean, which is the ultimate goal. In doing so, by the time that they discover what the virtuous mean is, they will already have begun to move towards it. Zagzebski says that the exemplar approach must occur in stages in many cases. She says that the neutral agent should start by 'focusing first on acquiring the traits of exemplars' before moving on to 'direct imitation of the exemplar' [Zagzebski, 2013, p.203]. This staged model of the development of virtues is a way for the neutral agent to begin applying the theory immediately, just not necessarily in its full form. This is consistent in Virtue Ethics because of the holistic focus on developing a moral character over time, but it still does not entirely fulfil the expectation that ethical theories should tell us exactly what to do in any given situation, but as already discussed, trying to get such guidance from theories like utilitarianism or Kantian ethics is also (if not more) impractical. Overall this shows that virtue ethics is the approach to be adopted when looking at the issue of plastic pollution, since it is

not just our actions in limited situations that have to change but our whole attitude towards the environment.

Another objection to the exemplar approach to Virtue Ethics is the charge of cultural relativism, a charge that the exemplar approach exacerbates. The problem is that defining virtue is relative to your role in society or, as environmental virtue ethicists want to do, in the ecosystem. Alasdair MacIntyre acknowledges that different cultures embody different virtues [MacIntyre, 1985], and so what is morally good depends on what culture you are part of. This is a major problem if one wants to prescribe a policy, let alone reorganise society based on the theory, since the virtues that are relevant to one culture are different to those in all the others, and therefore it is not fair to impose rules on another because there is no way of adjudicating what the rules should be. It also presents an issue in the sense that adopting an exemplar approach will not change anything, since our exemplars, if taken from our culture, will embody our culture and so our culture will not change; and any exemplar from a different culture cannot be adopted by our culture because it is not relevant. Perhaps the best response to these charges is that cultural relativity is less of a problem for virtue ethics than it is for other ethical theories. This is because in virtue ethics the differences between cultures tend to be explained as a difference in the application and prioritisation of virtues, rather than the actual core virtues being different [Nussbaum, 1993]. Whereas other theories take the requirements of moral action as necessary, and therefore impose the same requirements on everyone regardless of culture. This is different to virtue ethics, in which the underlying values (e.g. justice, empathy, humility) are the same but can be instantiated in different ways according to different circumstances and still be called virtuous. This idea that there is an underlying set of virtues that are shared between cultures is consistent with traditional views of Virtue Ethics because debates about what

each virtue is tend to be about different but close points on the same scale between the same extremes [Peterson and Seligman, 2004]. For example, virtue ethicists have debated the importance of the virtue of courage and exactly how much courage is virtuous, but all the different positions are on a scale between the excesses of rashness and the deficiency of cowardice. We can also look to the way we determine what the virtues are in order to prove that we can change our values within a Virtue Ethics system. Taking admiration and imitation as the basis for virtue we can adopt the virtues of other cultures, since we can admire those outside our culture, and therefore by imitating them we can cultivate virtues that are new to our culture. This of course requires that we properly understand that which we admire in other cultures and the cultures themselves in order to ensure that we are not just adopting an inaccurate simulacrum of another culture. Assuming that this is possible, it means that virtue ethics is not limited by cultural relativism except in the way that our culture influences who we are likely to admire, so the effect that culture has on virtue is equalled by the effect that virtue has on culture. In the wider context of this research, it is clear that cultural relativism is an important consideration. However, it is possible for one culture to have an effect on another in Virtue Ethics, a characteristic that makes virtue ethics an appropriate approach to be adopted when studying environmental ethics. It is therefore worthwhile assessing possible exemplars in other cultures, both contemporary and historical, and it is also likely that the conclusions drawn on who the best exemplars of virtuous plastic consumption will be applicable across cultures. The most important impact the issue of cultural relativity needs to have on research is that environmental exemplars must be taken from a wide range of cultures in order to avoid one or more cultures being impacted disproportionately by the adoption of virtues from other cultures.

We have seen that the definition of virtue given by traditional virtue ethics means that one cannot be virtuous just by performing virtuous acts, since Virtue Ethics is not act-based but agent-based. Instead the moral value comes from a virtuous character. One therefore needs to cultivate a virtuous character, which some virtue ethicists say can be achieved by imitating those who already have virtuous characters – virtuous exemplars. One objection to this approach is that it does not give us a decision-making framework to deal with every ethical quandary, but as we have seen there is no ethical theory that can do this adequately, and only Virtue Ethics has an account of the practical wisdom necessary to make the most difficult decisions. It is also criticised for not being immediately applicable to the neutral agent, the person who has not yet begun to develop a moral theory. However, Zagzebski's account of a staged exemplar approach show an effective way around the problem. The other major objection to Virtue Ethics is that it is limited by cultural relativism, but as we have seen, the culturally relative aspects of Virtue Ethics is actually a strength rather than a weakness as it allows for a more all-encompassing and applicable ethical framework. It also highlights the need for a culturally diverse Environmental Virtue Ethics with a wide range of exemplars, taking them from a small group of cultures will suffer from all the negative aspects of cultural relativism. Overall, once these issues are taken into account, it will be worthwhile to examine the crisis of plastic pollution from an exemplar approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics. In the next chapter I will examine another of the main contributors to the plastic pollution crisis, capitalism, in an attempt to show the limitations of what the exemplar approach can achieve.

Chapter 3: To what extent does the economic system of capitalism contribute to the problem of plastic pollution?

We have seen some of the strengths and weaknesses of the exemplar approach to virtue ethics, but there are also external factors that will influence the effectiveness of the approach. In this chapter I will examine the extent to which free-market capitalism contributes to the plastic pollution crisis and its consequences for this research. The problem of plastic pollution is inherently linked to the issue of consumption. Plastic products are produced by companies in order to meet the demands of consumers, who then decide when and, to an extent, how to dispose of them. The primary factor in the rate of plastic production, and consequently pollution, is the market. If our aim is to discover a solution to the problem of plastic pollution, then it is important to know which factors are fixed and which are vulnerable to change. In this chapter I will use aspects of the social sciences to examine how the system of capitalism contributes to the problem of plastic pollution through the manipulation of demand, the myth of the free market, and the prioritisation of profit over the social good. In examining these things in detail, I intend to show that our economic system in its current form[1] is, for the most part, incompatible with a virtue ethics approach to environmental ethics, and therefore such an approach cannot be implemented in the most effective way while capitalism is still the dominant ideology. That is not to say that it would not be better than it currently is were we to implement environmental virtue ethics within capitalism, but to make clear that a lot of what I discuss

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[1] There are a variety of economic systems in the world that can be broadly described as capitalist. For the purposes of this chapter the term will be used to refer to economic systems in which private companies control the means of production in trade and industry and compete in the nominally free market.

in this paper in terms of what needs to happen are in the context of capitalism's continued existence, and would not be necessary if the system were to change.

Karl Marx's notion of 'cultural deception' argues that capitalist ideology deceives us by leading us to believe that there is a free market, that the worker and consumer are free, and that any problem can be solved through consumption [Marx, 2009]. This cultural deception prevents us from dealing with a problem that is necessarily related to plastic pollution. Under capitalism, the so-called "free market" is said to be the most efficient way of distributing resources and producing products [Popper, 1994]. In order for this to be the case there need to be free associations between individuals at every stage of the market process. Consumers must be able to make free decisions about what they buy in order to influence what producers produce. However, the consumers are not free to make informed choices because the production process is hidden from them in many cases. For example, when buying electrical goods, consumers are not informed about the use of slave labour to mine precious metals like coltan and cobalt for use in the production of those goods that they are buying [UN, 2001]. If consumers are not informed about the products that they buy then the decision to buy them is not a free one and so the market is not free. Consumers also have their purchasing freedom limited by a lack of money. Many people cannot afford to buy the products that would be their first choice because they are out of their price range, and therefore they have to buy the cheaper, inferior product. They therefore cannot freely influence the market by indicating which products are best, and so the market is not free. Consumers are also affected by the fact that companies do not necessarily have to provide an ethical option. When a company operates a monopoly on a product, or two or more companies produce similar products through similarly unethical processes, then the only free ethical choice the consumer can make is not to consume. However, when these

products are essential, as Beckman, DeAngelo and Smith point out, the consumer can be presented with a 'pay or die choice' [Beckman, DeAngelo and Smith, 2015, p.6462]. Consumers are therefore denied even this small amount of freedom in interactions with what they call 'dictator monopolies', and so the market is not free.

Workers are unable to make free associations with those that employ them because they do not compete on the same footing as the company for which they work and therefore cannot sell their labour for what it is actually worth. The choice that they are forced to make is between taking a wage that is necessarily lower than the value of their labour, or trying to find a job with a different employer that is willing to pay what your labour is worth. The second option is not particularly realistic since almost all employers exclusively employ waged workers, and in order to avoid starving, they are almost always forced to take the first option. Since workers do not have a share in the means of production, they cannot have free associations with those that do, and those that do have no incentive to increase the power of the workers, or to sacrifice their profit margins by paying the workers what their labour is actually worth [Bivens and Mishel, 2015].

Perhaps the issue most relevant to environmental ethics is also the most pertinent issue with the capitalist free market: the profit incentive. The mechanics of the free market mean that "efficiency" is measured by how profitable a company is, and nothing else. This means that producers will always be rewarded for prioritising their own financial good over the social or environmental good. This is a problem that also exacerbates the other problems that have already been discussed. A producer can make their products more appealing to consumers by making their production process more socially environmentally responsible, but even if it leads to them selling more units or being more in-demand, they

will only measure the success of the move in terms of financial gain, and as soon as that gain goes away, they will go back to normal to protect it. Ethical producers (in as far as they exist outside of the purely theoretical realm) cannot therefore compete freely with unethical producers, since profit is the only incentive in the free market, so the market is not free.

It is important to note that the existence of any one of these problems with the free market would mean that it was not truly free and therefore could not be interacted with in a virtuous way. It just so happens that no interaction that occurs under capitalism is truly free, and the founding principle of capitalism is completely contradictory to those of virtue ethics. If we expect companies to act in an environmentally sustainable way while still operating in a system where profit is the primary goal then we are always going to be disappointed. Using plastic to make their products is cheaper and easier than sustainable alternatives, meaning they can produce more products more quickly. The wider costs of this decision must be given more weight because, as it currently stands, the only factors that dictate what is produced and how are the economic factors. This narrow view of the costs of plastic production contributes hugely to the plastic pollution crisis.

Another way in which the capitalist system exacerbates the problem of plastic pollution is through what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno referred to as 'cultural deception' [Scannell, 2007, p.37-44]. According to this theory, there is a difference between 'authentic culture', which makes up everything we use to live and understand the world, and the so-called 'culture industry', which produces standardised cultural goods that meet the needs it has artificially created 'for the purpose of pacifying society' [Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.107]. The effect of this culture industry on plastic pollution can be seen through its proliferation of unnecessary plastic products. According to Adorno and

Horkheimer's theory, the culture industry sells its products by creating an artificial need for them that goes beyond the true psychological needs demarcated by Herbert Marcuse [Marcuse, 1996, p.136]. This can clearly be seen when it comes to single-use plastic packaging, like for bottled water, as humans need water to live, but that need can be met without the extensive use of plastic that we have now. We have clean water plumbed into every home in the UK, there are reusable and sustainable options for carrying that water with us in the form of water bottles. We are sold bottled water under the pretence that it is more convenient, purer and healthier than tap water despite the fact that more than half of all bottled water comes from a tap and that it costs almost two thousand times more and has a massive negative effect on the environment [Food & Water Watch, 2020]. In this way the culture industry creates demand where there is none, and in turn contributes to the ongoing climate disaster. Using this framework, we can identify the plastic products that are completely unnecessary and should be banned; which products are only needed in very small quantities and should therefore be produced as such; and which we actually need. This is only possible if we are able to move away from a system where profit is the only motive, as capitalists make no attempt to distinguish between necessity and excess. Any attempt to reform the current system, such as by demanding that companies be made to produce biodegradable or recycled products, or that governments make water fountains more widely accessible, or provide plastic recycling bins in public spaces will not go far enough, quickly enough to solve the problem because retaining the core capitalist principle of the profit motive means there will always be a temptation for companies to put profit first. This is not to say that a capitalist system that implements these reforms would not be better than what we have now, but without at least acknowledging the influence that cultural deception has on our demand for plastic, we cannot fully solve the crisis. The

problem that essentially boils down to too much consumption can only be solved by reducing consumption, not by continuing to consume but in a slightly different way. Small adjustments might improve the situation, or put off the worst effects, but a large-scale systemic change is needed to solve the underlying problem.

The problem of plastic pollution is inarguably caused and exacerbated by the capitalist economic system under which we live. As has been shown, the myth of the free market deceives us into thinking that only the best products and services, as well as the companies that produce them, will survive. It also leads us to believe that we can meaningfully affect the world by consuming in an ethical way - i.e. by buying the most sustainable products that are available. On the contrary, the market is not free in any meaningful sense of the word, and continued participation in it, even through seemingly ethical consumption, will only reinforce an inherently unsustainable and environmentally damaging system. We have seen that the primary reason the capitalist system is so damaging to the environment is that it prioritises profit over the social good. The free market system only cares about financial gain at the cost to workers, customers, society and environment. This makes it completely incompatible with a system of ethics that values the benefit of society through virtuous dispositions in accordance with moderation over the individualistic pursuit of financial gain. This incompatibility means that neither theory can properly be put into practise at the same time as the other, one must be discarded, and after looking at all of the ways that the free market negatively affects society and the environment, it is difficult to see how any person that claims to value those things could choose capitalism. Lastly, it has been shown how capitalists use cultural deception to create

demand, increase plastic pollution, and damage the environment, where it is otherwise completely unnecessary. This is a process that will always happen as long as profit is the only reason companies make products. We therefore cannot escape from the environmental disaster that capitalism caused by continuing to prop up the free market. We cannot consume our way out of a problem that is, at its heart, excessive consumption caused by the pursuit of profit.

In terms of the wider scope of this research, the conclusions drawn from this chapter must be taken into consideration in any subsequent discussion of environmental virtue, for capitalism casts a long shadow, one which affects any discussion of how we order society. This means that any recommendation for how we change our relationship with plastic will be bound up with our relationship with consumption in general, and therefore the results of any such change will depend on what influence the free market continues to have. The candidates for environmentally virtuous exemplars may or may not exist in a capitalist system. For those that do, their potential to be exemplary will be affected by the relative virtue of that system and so they will likely be unable to attain the same level of virtue as those who do not. For those that do not exist in a capitalist system, their potential to be exemplary may be higher, but this is somewhat weakened by the possibility that it would be more difficult to emulate them in a capitalist system. This is because the more differences there are between the circumstances of the exemplar and the agent, the harder it is for the latter to find moral guidance that applies to their situation. There are factors that need to be considered when living in a capitalist system that may not under another system, meaning it is not always obvious what the exemplar would do in the agent's situation. We may have to accept that no one person can fully live up to the standard of virtue set in a non-capitalist system while they exist in a capitalist one.

Chapter 4: How do we identify environmental exemplars?

Now that we have seen some of the limitations imposed on the exemplar approach by capitalism, we can move on to discussing how best to identify exemplars of environmental virtue. There seems to be a certain circularity to the process of identifying exemplars in virtue ethics. Any formal attempt to identify an appropriate exemplar would likely need to start with some criteria for what makes a person virtuous so that we know what we are looking for. However, in the exemplar approach to virtue ethics, we can only learn what the virtuous character is with reference to a virtuous agent. It therefore seems that we need the virtues to identify the virtuous, and the virtuous to identify the virtues. There are a few possible ways around this problem. The first way is to look at the Aristotelean idea of the golden mean and which of the character traits Aristotle described are relevant to environmental ethics. The second is to look, as we have briefly already done, at Zagzebski's idea of admiration as the main signifier of the virtuous character.

Aristotle's starting points for moral considerations in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, and their development into criteria of virtue, could give us a starting point or a framework for identifying exemplars. His belief in practical reason and building on our inherent wisdom and experience of everyday virtuous actions [Burnyeat, 1980, pp.71-72] fits together with Zagzebski's concept of exemplars as 'admirable' moral agents [Zagzebski, 2010, p.41], and could therefore be combined with it in order to solve the circular problem of identifying exemplars. Aristotle's theory is also particularly appropriate for the conversation about environmental exemplarism because it has a foundational concern for humans' natural function as a part of their environment. Keeping this founding principle in mind throughout

our discussion of environmental virtue will be vital to finding the right criteria for an environmental exemplar.

Aristotle's theories, and their phylogenetic foundations have always had a close association with environmental ethics. Aristotle's early taxonomy defined a species by what they can do that no other living organism can, in other words their ecological niche [Aristotle, 1888, 1098b22-1098a15]. For humans, Aristotle saw this as the ability to reason. Although the defining feature of humanity in this view is what sets it apart from nature, it at the same time ensures that the relationship with the natural world is equally defining. This makes Aristotle's taxonomy an excellent foundational theory for environmental ethics.

One criticism of Aristotle's phylogenetic reasoning is that it suffers from the is-ought problem. This is a problem that was most famously described (though not in reference to Aristotle) by David Hume, who in his 1739 work *A Treatise on Human Nature* observed that many authors justified their ethical beliefs by writing about the way things are and are not, before switching to talking about how things ought and ought not to be. He writes that it is 'necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it' [Hume and Selby-Bigge, 1888]. Aristotle, in his founding of Virtue Ethics, could be accused of committing this fallacy by asserting that human reason is what sets us apart from the rest of nature, and therefore human beings are right to use reason, i.e. that reason is morally good. This view, however, mistakes the moral assertion that Virtue Ethics is making, confusing the method for the goal, as if Aristotle had come across a hammer and decided that it must be the best tool for every job by virtue of it being the only tool he had. The moral choice does not come as a result of

Aristotle's discovery of our ability to use reason but putting that moral choice into action does require the use of reason, which is a subtle but important difference. In the case of environmental virtue ethics, the moral choice is to act in accordance with environmental virtue in order to preserve the environment and the survival of humanity; our ability to reason only comes into use because it will help us to achieve these goals. The argument being made by Virtue Ethics is not 'we can use reason, therefore we ought to use reason'; it is instead: 'it is good to be virtuous, reason can help us discover what the virtues are, so we ought to use reason'. It is saying that if you want to be virtuous, you need to use your natural ability to reason so that you can discover what the virtues are, just as if you want to knock in a nail, you are going to need a hammer.

Aristotle saw the ability to reason as the main tool for discovering the 'golden mean' between the extremes of human behaviour and character. For example, the golden mean of courage lies somewhere between the vices of cowardice and foolhardiness, and we can use reason to find where exactly it does lie. The golden mean is not fixed for any of the virtues, since Aristotle says 'to feel these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner, is to feel the best amount of them' [Aristotle, 1888, 1106b11]. The virtuous disposition for one person will be different to that of another, as it is based on their role in the community. The virtue of courage will be closer to foolhardiness for a soldier than it will for a shopkeeper, for whom it will lean more towards cowardice. However, it is not the same in every situation. A soldier on leave will not need the same level of courage as when he is at war, a shopkeeper will need more courage when confronting a shoplifter than dealing with a customer. The virtues are not dependent

on the person and their role in society, but also on the situations that they find themselves in.

When it comes to environmental virtues, the golden mean might fall between ascetism – the avoidance of all kinds of indulgence – and overconsumption – the use of more resources than the ecosystem can sustainably support. The golden mean on this scale could be referred to as sustainable consumption. Where this golden mean lies would, as previously shown, be different for different individuals or groups; one person may have to be closer to ascetic in their disposition than a company that serves the needs of many. Someone whose livelihood relies on them travelling a lot will consume more than someone who works from home; a country that relies on fossil fuels to support its population will find their golden mean leans more towards overconsumption than a country that has renewable energy infrastructure. The golden mean for environmental virtue also changes based on the situation people find themselves in. Someone who often gets the opportunity to indulge will need to be more disposed to ascetism than one who rarely does, since their indulgence over time will be more damaging to the environment. For example, someone that gets to go on a foreign holiday every year should consider ways to make the environmental impact of their holiday as low as possible much more than the person who only gets to go on a foreign holiday once in their lifetime.

In terms of production there is an excess of productivity and unproductiveness, with the golden mean between the two being efficiency. An example is the production of bottled water, which as previously discussed leads to a huge amount of plastic pollution. It would be more virtuous for producers to be closer to unproductiveness because there are better alternatives in most situations. However, they cannot go too far because there are

situations where bottled water is necessary, such as ensuring that people have access to clean water, so there cannot be no production. Therefore, the virtuous level of bottled water production is in between the two, but closer to unproductiveness than productivity.

Aristotle's concept of the golden mean gives us an idea of the kind of characteristics we need in order to be virtuous, or at least the kind of characteristics we should be avoiding, but it does not go far enough in telling us exactly what the virtues are for us, nor does it give us the tools to work it out for ourselves. It is all very well saying that the perfect amount of courage or empathy is different for each person in each situation, but how do I know how much courage and empathy I need specifically? It is also difficult to separate individual aspects of our character – single virtues – and try to determine them in isolation. By their very nature as dispositional characteristics, the virtues are intertwined with and affect each other, and therefore are best viewed and interacted with holistically as a whole character. This is where the exemplar approach comes in and can be used to guide our reasoning, as by identifying exemplars whose characters we can emulate, we can determine the golden means for our situations by referring to theirs, eventually becoming disposed to act in the most virtuous way.

Linda Zagzebski approaches Virtue Ethics from a completely different angle to Aristotle, but there are similarities and developments in the reasoning behind her arguments that mean a synthesis between the two is possible and could make both approaches more effective. Zagzebski argues that the main purpose of a moral theory is 'not to give directions in decision making' [Zagzebski, 2010, p.49], so we cannot expect the exemplarist approach to tell us what actions are right and wrong; however she does argue that 'it is an advantage if a theory can help us in our practical lives' and through the

exemplarist approach she aims to do this by giving us a method for working it out for ourselves. This is a classic Virtue Ethics approach, which has always been concerned with practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and the development of one's moral character than the morality of any single situation [Aristotle, 1888, 1105b25-26]. We already have a practical wisdom, which Zagzebski and Aristotle agree comes most crucially from education and the everyday moral interactions, stories and socialisation that it shapes. This established practical wisdom helps us to determine approximately where the golden mean lies, but as we have seen, it is not enough to develop a moral disposition.

Zagzebski also indirectly contributes to the debate around the is/ought problem by basing her theory on the Putnam-Kripke theory of direct reference [p.49-50]. She says that, in saying that someone is good, we are pointing to something in the world and saying that they are "like that", fixing 'the term "good person" without the use of descriptive concepts' [p.51]. The effect that this has is to make the definition of a good person contingent on the way the world is, without committing to an *a priori* claim. The person is picked out only because we admire them in some way, and in saying that they are good we refer only to this fact. Zagzebski says that the exemplarist theory 'is compatible with the possibility that paradigmatically good individuals are only contingently good' [p.52]. This means that claims about oughts are not absolute claims, as they do not apply outside of the system in which the definitions were fixed, they are therefore relative to that system of definitions. It is therefore the stages of identifying a morally virtuous exemplar are to say 'that person is admirable, therefore that person is good, therefore we ought to emulate them if we want to be good', since the definition of 'good' is contingent on its pointing to 'admirable', and the definition of admirable 'carries with it the impetus to imitate' [p.54]. Zagzebski proposes

that 'the process of creating a highly abstract structure to simplify and justify our moral practices is rooted in ... the practice of identifying exemplars [and in] the experience of admiration, shaped by the narratives of the human condition'. Put simply she is claiming that those we admire are morally virtuous, and in emulating their admirable behaviour we can develop a virtuous character. There is a potential problem here, because we do not necessarily always admire the right people, and so saying that people are should be emulated because they are admired is a bit of a leap. However, as we shall see, this is where knowledge of the virtues and our education can help us to admire the right people and to separate those that we should emulate from those that we should not.

One criticism of the exemplarist theory of Virtue Ethics is that it assumes that moral beliefs are sufficient to motivate one to perform morally good actions, in the sense that Zazebski claims that admiration leads to a desire to emulate. If this is not true, and people are not sufficiently motivated to act by their admiration of others and the moral beliefs that admiration implies, then the exemplarist theory fails. Although the purpose of virtue ethics is to develop dispositions in agents so that moral motivation is not necessary, Zagzebski's exemplarist approach introduces the need for motivation in order to emulate the exemplars, and therefore it must be justified. Natasza Szutta points this out and argues that 'one can point to vast empirical data (e.g. neuroscientific studies) that strongly suggest that this assumption [that moral beliefs lead to moral actions] is false' [Szutta, 2019, pp. 281]. Szutta puts forward the example of Phineas Gage, a construction worker who surprisingly survived when an explosion sent a tamping rod shooting through his head, causing brain damage to the extent that his friends described him as 'no longer Gage' [Harlow, 1868, p.327-47]. The argument for this is unnecessarily weak. Referring to cases of people with

brain damage may prove that it does not necessarily follow that moral beliefs cause moral action; it does not disprove that under normal circumstances (i.e. in the vast majority of cases), those who have strong moral beliefs are committed to moral actions. In searching for a way to disprove the claim that Zagzebski makes, one needs only to look at all the times that someone has acted in direct contradiction to their moral principles. People that are perfectly capable of making and carrying out decisions and have no external obstacle to doing so outside of their own motivation, often act in a way that they know and freely admit is in some way morally wrong. So, if these people were to see someone admirable, although they might agree that they are admirable and that they should be emulated, this does not mean that they will definitely emulate them. For an example of this phenomenon we can look at littering. In a study conducted in Bahrain on attitudes to public littering, ninety-three percent of respondents said they believed that the public hold at least some responsibility for cleanliness, and evidence showed that littering is widely recognised as an irresponsible behaviour in the country. Yet less than seventy-five percent of respondents to the study said that they never litter, and forty-six percent gave no reason for doing so [Freije, Naser & Abdulla, 2019, pp.357-358, Fig. 2]. This means that there are at least eighteen percent of the respondents who know that they have a responsibility not to litter, and yet do it anyway, and more people have no reason for their behaviour (that they know or want to admit) than do it for any reason in particular. This shows that perfectly reasonable people, with surprising frequency, are not sufficiently motivated by their moral beliefs to act in accordance with them.

Szutta points out that Zagzebski's assertion, that admiration leads to a desire to emulate, is corroborated by experiments such as those by Jonathan Haidt. Haidt found that

reactions to witnessing disinterested helping behaviour, heroic actions or acts of

compassion include a stronger desire to become a better person [Haidt, 2003] and the

motivation to do good things for other people [Algoe & Haidt, 2009]. This supports the idea

that exemplars are an effective model for inspiring moral behaviour. However, as Kristjan

Kristjansson points out, the path from admiration to behaviour may not be direct; we might

instead admire the exemplar and identify the moral virtue they are exemplifying and then

aim to emulate them in those aspects [Kristjansson, 2017, pp.20-37]. This is not to say that

designating someone as a good person worthy of emulation is dependent on descriptive

concepts, as the identification of the concepts comes after the attribution of moral value.

The things that we admire about a person make them good, not the fact that they embody

an abstract concept of the good. This does not contradict Zagzebski's model, as Kristjansson

says, but instead shows the value of a knowledge of the Aristotelian virtues, so that agents

can identify what it is that they are admiring in the exemplar. This can lead to stronger

emulation of the exemplified virtues, since we can better understand what we are trying to

emulate and this will likely lead to fewer moral errors. This point, then, shows that a

synthesis between Aristotle's theory of the golden mean and Zagzebski's exemplarist moral

theory is not just possible but useful to both theories.

Kristjansson's argument for a wider exemplarist theory also protects the theory

against another criticism: that not everything an exemplar does is admirable. There are

people who do great things, things that it would be good for others to emulate, but who

occasionally do things that it would be better not to emulate. For example, Mahatma

Gandhi was a hero of civil rights movements across the world and was one of the key figures

in securing self-rule in India [Burton, 2010, p.289]. These are parts of his character that it

would be good for others to emulate, since they instantiate the virtues of justice and compassion. However, Gandhi also acted out "experiments of faith" where he would sleep naked with young female members of his own family in order to test his commitment to abstinence [Parekh, 1999, pp.210-221]. This is probably something that it would not be right to emulate, since it does not correspond well with the virtues. Under the narrow interpretation of exemplarist theory one might be able to argue that everything that an admirable person does, including the more questionable things, is exemplary by virtue of their overall character being admirable. There are also those people who generally do not live an admirable life but are influential in a virtuous cause. For example, Madison Grant was an American eugenicist who wrote perhaps the 'most influential work of scientific racism in history', in *The Passing of The Great Race*, a book that Nazi leader Adolf Hitler would later describe as his 'bible' [Arnold, 2011, p.227]. Grant was also one of the founders of the American conservationist movement, pioneering wildlife management and co-founding the Save the Redwoods League [Save the Redwoods League, 2020]. Grant was by no means a hero, nor was his character as a whole admirable, but some of his actions are worthy of admiration and emulation. Using the templates of the golden means that Aristotle provided, we can untangle the virtuous characteristics of exemplars from their not so virtuous characteristics, and in doing so we can discern what it is that makes us virtuous. Without this aspect of Virtue Ethics, the task of cultivating a virtuous character by emulating an admirable exemplar becomes much harder.

These exemplars do not necessarily have to be emulated in their actions, but if the process by which they choose to act is virtuous and fruitful then they could be considered a good exemplar. For example, an organisation might have an effective system of determining

how to efficiently use plastic so that they minimise waste and pollution, and they may still

use a lot of plastic because their needs dictate that they do. The amount of plastic they use

in isolation is not worthy of emulation, since the agent wanting to emulate them will have

different needs no matter how subtle, but, as long as they emulate the process, then they

are acting in accordance with virtue. It is not using practical wisdom to look at someone who

is virtuous, see how much plastic they use, and to copy them, using the same amount of

plastic as them. The practically wise choice is to see how the person evaluated how much

plastic they need and how best to use it, and to apply that process to their own situation.

Though the final results will be different and one may use more plastic than the other, both

the exemplar and the agent would be equally environmentally virtuous. This is important

because it heads off any misunderstanding about what following an exemplar actually

entails. Some of the exemplars that I will be discussing may have relationships with the

environment in general or plastic in particular that seem extreme. However, with the wider

interpretation of exemplarist theory, we are not committed to copying their actions, but

emulating, where appropriate, the process of reasoning that led to those actions.

Another reason this distinction is so important is that it is more likely to lead to a

virtuous disposition. Virtue Ethics has a focus on the character of agents, rather than the

morality of their actions taken individually. This means that in order to be virtuous one must

have a virtuous character, a disposition to act in accordance with virtue. A person who only

copies the action of an exemplar might develop a disposition to act in accordance with

virtue in the specific situations that they have seen the exemplar in, but they are unlikely to

be able to properly apply that to any foreign situations. Copying the exemplar's actions will

teach the agent how to appear virtuous, but understanding how the exemplar comes to

choose those actions and emulating that process will lead to them developing a virtuous disposition more easily, and therefore will more effectively guide them to become virtuous.

Using the wider interpretation of Zagzebski's exemplarist virtue theory, incorporating a knowledge of the Aristotelian virtues and the concept of the golden mean, we can conclude that when searching for environmental exemplars we are searching for admirable individuals, communities and organisations who instantiate some form of environmental virtue that agents could practically emulate. This solves the problem of circularity in identifying exemplars in virtue ethics because it lays out a step-by-step process for applying criteria to potential candidates. We identify the possible exemplars without reference to the virtues, only by the fact that they are admirable, as a starting point for determining who is environmentally virtuous. Then we reflect on what makes them admirable and what parts of their character we should try to emulate using practical wisdom and the Aristotelean concept of the golden mean. In this, Aristotle's and Zagzebski's theories combine into an effective framework for identifying environmentally virtuous exemplars. Now that we have this framework, we can begin to apply it to possible exemplars, beginning in the next chapter with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

Chapter 5: Is Rojava an appropriate environmental exemplar?

So far we have looked at the problems posed by plastic pollution and the potential that the exemplar approach has to contribute to solving them. In order to fulfil this potential, we of course need to identify exemplars of environmental virtue. This chapter will discuss the first candidate for this status, the founding principles behind it and what makes it an appropriate exemplar. "Rojava" is the Kurdish word for "the West" and is the commonly accepted name for the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, an autonomous region in north-eastern Syria [Lister, 2015, p.154]. It has existed since the Assad regime withdrew its military forces from the area in 2012. Faced with the sudden lack of a governing power, Rojava's diverse population [Allsop & van Wilgenburg, 2019, pp.156-163] set themselves the goal of building a new society based on the principles of feminism, democratic confederalism and environmentalism [Evans, 2020]. The accomplishments of the people of Rojava in striving towards this goal mean that Rojava and its people could serve as an exemplar for environmental virtue ethics, as it sets an example of a society that connects people to their environment and gives them power to preserve it in a way that suits their needs. The origins for the Rojavan project can be traced back to American philosopher Murray Bookchin, whose communalist philosophy and concept of libertarian municipalism was highly influential to Abdullah Öcalan [Saed, 2015, pp.1-15], whose political philosophy would be the driving force behind the Rojavan constitution.

5.1 Libertarian Municipalism

The core belief that drives Murray Bookchin's theory of libertarian municipalism is that the way that societies are currently structured keeps people from power, and that our response to this should be to try and reorder society 'so that people gain power' [Vanek, 2001, 6]. The ways that people are distanced from power and the effects that these have are numerous and varied, but the most important to Bookchin, and most relevant to this research, are the environmental effects. In his interview with David Vanek, Bookchin describes the problem with trying to protect the environment in the current political system. He says that those in power listen to lobbyists and make promises to protect the environment only insofar as it will win them enough votes to get elected. Once they are elected, they only act in the interests of the ruling class, and that often means going back on their promises to the people. He admits that occasionally they do grant concessions, but it is only a drop in the ocean in comparison to the damage they do, saying 'they'll give you ten acres of "wilderness" but then they'll cut down the rest of the forest' [Vanek, 2001, 5]. People are distanced from the power they should have over their own environment because all of the decisions about how it is treated are being made by people who are only accountable on the rare occasion that they are up for re-election, and who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. The only other checks on the state's power that are put in place are not guaranteed to be in the interests of the people either. For example, in 2019 Labour MP Mary Creagh voiced concerns about the UK government's proposed environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), that it would be 'funded by government, monitoring targets set by government and with a chair appointed by

government' [Hodgson, 2019]. This shows that the state cannot always be trusted to hold itself to account, and that the people should play this role as much as possible.

Even in cases where there is oversight of the actions of governments, the structures that are responsible for it are not accountable to the people, and as a result, are not incentivised to represent the people, so the people are distanced from power. It is important to note that Bookchin does not think that this can be changed by changing which party is in government, he sees it as an inherent problem with representative democracy, as it does not allow enough accountability of those in charge to the people that they represent. Some parties will give the people more concessions than others, but the system of representative democracy and its inherent lack of accountability incentivises those in power to act in their own interest.

Bookchin argues that the best way for people to gain power is to move from a representative democracy to a direct democracy, making decisions on the level of 'the municipality – the city, town and village – where we have the opportunity to create a face-to-face democracy' [Vanek, 2001, 6]. This would mean that decisions affecting the local population would be made by the local population in the form of public assemblies [Bookchin, 2015, p.96], and eventually replacing the state in its current form with a government made up of a confederation of free municipalities [Bookchin, 1991, 12]. While there would still need to be a certain amount of representative democracy within this system, since a government made up of every individual citizen would not be practical, this system would empower the individual citizen and local community to a much greater extent than the current system. Through this change, we could massively reduce the amount of corruption and individualism in politics and, Bookchin believes, direct society towards

'meeting human needs, responding to ecological imperatives, and developing a new ethics based on sharing and cooperation' [Bookchin, 1991, 4]. Bookchin also believed that this would have a necessary knock-on effect on the environment, because the way that we as humans treat the environment as something that exists only for our convenience is a result of our hierarchical view of society [Light, 1998, p.6]. When people take more responsibility for the decisions being made in their society and have an equal opportunity to contribute, they recognise each other's right to an equal share in the environment, and the importance of respect for its preservation. One could even argue that they are more likely to view themselves as a part of nature rather than above it, which evokes the Aristotelean idea of the unique human function as part of nature, because they no longer define themselves in a hierarchical relationship to other humans but see humanity as a whole, as those that represent their communities and make decisions on their behalf only have more power than those that they represent in as far as they are the ones who communicate the views of the community, their opinions and desires have no more influence than any other member of the community.

Overall, Bookchin proposes libertarian municipalism as a way of empowering people practically and politically to take control of protecting their environment, their rights and their interests. Bookchin's goals are admirable because at the core he wants to protect the environment from unnecessary harm. He is also doing this in a way that benefits as many people as possible and empowers them in ways that are not just to do with the environment. These ideas are admirable because they instantiate the virtues of justice and empathy, in recognising people's rights to self-determination and to live in a healthy environment. Whether Bookchin can be considered an environmental exemplar will depend

on how his ideas are put into practice, since one of the key characteristics of a virtuous

disposition is that it leads to action, and whether one can practically emulate those who

practice them. His theory has influenced many thinkers and movements across the world,

perhaps most significantly in the work of Abdullah Öcalan, the key thinker behind the

foundation of Rojava.

5.2 Democratic Confederalism

Abdullah Öcalan is a Kurdish political theorist and founding member of the militant

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an organisation that was designated as terrorist by the

United States government in 2001 [Powell, 2001]. The group carried out attacks against

Turkish government forces as well as civilians throughout the nineteen eighties and

nineteen nineties in an attempt to create an independent Kurdish State, following the 1980

Turkish coup d'état. From the early 1990s onwards Öcalan made efforts to pivot the group's

strategy from militancy to diplomacy, even declaring unilateral ceasefires in 1993, 1995 and

1998 [van Bruinessen, 1999, p.5]. From his cell on Imrali, a Turkish island prison, he has

written several books, primarily focusing on the concept of democratic confederalism,

which strongly influenced the political structures of Rojava.

Inspired in part by Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, Öcalan developed his own

theory, which he called democratic confederalism, in order to oppose and address the

problems he saw as inherent in nation-states, which he calls 'an enemy of the peoples'

[Öcalan, 2011, p.13]. He argues that the nation-state is not concerned, as it should be, with

the fate of the common people, but instead that it is concerned with the interests of

capitalists, calling it 'a colony of capital'. This belief is likely one of the reasons he abandoned the cause of Kurdish nationalism in its traditional form, arguing that the creation of a Kurdish nation-state would feed into the capitalist structure and leave 'no place for the liberation of the peoples' [Ibid., p.19]. In the identification of the problem with nation-states, we can see how Öcalan was influenced by Bookchin, who saw governments as only acting in the interest of capital. Öcalan is attempting to practically apply the principles of libertarian municipalism to the problem of Kurdish independence and follow them to their natural end.

Öcalan argues that in order to ensure a continuous democratic process [p.22], there needs to be 'a type of political self-administration' where the will of the people can be expressed 'in local meetings, general conventions and councils'. The effects of this, he says, will be to allow for the formation of 'different and diverse political groups' and in turn the advancement of 'political integration of society as a whole' [p.26]. Öcalan puts forward five principles of democratic confederalism which include that it is based on 'grass-roots participation' and that its 'decision-making processes lie with the communities', as 'it is the only approach that can cope with diverse ethnic groups, religions, and class differences', and that 'democratic confederalism in Kurdistan is an anti-nationalist movement' [p,33-34]. Through these principles, Öcalan lays out and justifies a decision-making process that will lead to virtuous actions in the society that implements them. By using the system that he describes, communities have a rational process by which they can work out what resources they need, how these resources should be acquired and distributed. While it is not yet clear how effective this will be in practice, as there are questions about how community participation will happen in reality or be implemented at a government level; in theory

democratic confederalism is an effective process for deciding how to act on a community level, and one that is more likely to lead to a virtuous community. This is because having this process and knowing how to apply it allows the community to develop a disposition towards acting in the right way. Following a process means that the society may not have guidance on how to act in every individual situation (Öcalan does not propose any specific policies, he leaves that up to the councils) but, as long as the process is led by the community and remains equal across society, they are able to work out for themselves the virtuous course of action.

This theory is admirable because it is in accordance with the virtues of justice since it gives everyone an equal say in how their society is run. Obviously there are a number of other factors that make society unequal, such as education, gender and social background, which may still factor into whose voices get heard most often; but Öcalan's model does increase equality in theory by increasing the opportunities for everyone in society to have their interests reflected in policy. The theory is also admirable because it accords with the virtue of responsibility by making everyone responsible for the decisions they make when they become their own representatives, rather than handing the responsibility to someone else. Consideration for the environment because protections for the environment and people's rights to access it and responsibility to care for it are an integral part of the process. However, the theory on its own is not enough to qualify democratic confederalism as an environmental exemplar even if it is admirable, it needs to effectively lead to action and in doing so become dispositional to those implementing it.

5.3 The Rojavan Example

In order to see whether the culmination of Murray Bookchin's and Abdullah Öcalan's

theories can effectively lead to action and become dispositional we can look at the system

of government in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. A place that the

locals call 'Rojava', whose politics are now explicitly that of democratic confederalism

[Simcock, 2018]. Rojava's political system is comprised of communes made up of between

seven and one hundred households which come together to form councils of different

levels, rising all the way to city level, who make decisions based on a blend of consensus and

voting [Knapp & Jongerden, 2016, p.98]. The communes have public spaces where the

public can meet to discuss and resolve issues [Ibid., p.100]. In the village of Jinwar, a name

that combines the Kurdish words meaning "woman" and "place" to describe a village

exclusively inhabited by women, the residents take turns to be the representative to the

other towns in the area and the media [Evans, 2020]. This helps the women to develop their

political voice and applies Öcalan's theory that a free society would be one where everyone

takes equal part in the political process.

There are a few details of how Rojavan politics operates that indicate that it would

make a good exemplar of environmental virtue. The first being its prioritisation of

environmental conservation and disposition to protect the environment as much as

possible. This is exemplified in the fact that, at the same time as fighting both the Islamic

State in Syria (ISIS), on one side, and having their existence threatened by Turkey, on the

other, they are building their villages using eco-friendly construction methods with the

intention that 'one day [...] villages like this will help reduce the influence, size and

ecological toll of overcrowded cities' [Evans, 2020, 41:00-42:00]. This prioritisation of

environmental virtue, even in the face of a struggle for survival, shows how deeply ingrained the desire to protect the environment is for the people of Rojava. This kind of character is necessary for all communities to have if we are to achieve radical change on environmental issues. This is another reason why Rojava would make a good environmental exemplar, because it is a great example of a society with a disposition to protect the environment as much as possible.

Another factor that makes Rojava an appropriate exemplar of environmental virtue is the fact that the people seem disposed to act in the way that they do, rather than acting because they are being commanded. These dispositions could of course still originate from the internalisation of direct commands, but there is evidence to suggest that in Rojava they arise from a genuine belief in the values that Öcalan's theory reflects. The emphasis of the political process having been based on Abdullah Öcalan's ideas have raised some concerns about ideologization, especially since he is so vocally anti-capitalist and anti-nationalist, with some scholars arguing that it could 'obscure whether the people are really acting based on democratic values or if they are just following the orders of their leader' [Barkhoda, 2016, p.86]. There is evidence, however, that this is not the case, as Evans observes in The Women's War that 'a number of the women [in] Jinwar don't express a great depth of knowledge about Abdullah Öcalan's ideas', which he sees as a 'clear statement about the relative lack of brainwashing that occurs here' [Evans, 2020, 40:00-41:00]. This is important because, as well as suggesting that Rojava is more than an ideological project based solely on carrying out the commands of Abdullah Öcalan, it shows that the way the society runs is not by following the tenets of democratic confederalism by rote but according to an ingrained sense of the ideas behind it. Evans says that 'the ideological underpinnings of

[Jinwar] are important...but no woman is denied a place to live because they haven't read enough political theory' [Ibid.]. The people are acting out of a disposition to share power and responsibility, make society fair and equal, and protect the environment. This makes Rojava a good example of a virtuous society because the people and, by extension, the society itself have developed a virtuous character that leads them to act virtuously. This strongly suggests that Rojava should be seen as an environmental exemplar. However, while it seems that ideologization may not be happening at this moment, it is an important factor to consider and protect against in any society that attempts to emulate the Rojavan example.

In an assessment of the relative environmental virtues of Rojava it is important to discuss the ways in which it is not environmentally friendly. In doing so I hope to show why these less admirable characteristics should not be given too much weight in evaluating the region's suitability as an exemplar. One way in which Rojava is not environmentally friendly is that one of its main industries is the production of oil, of which it produces fifteen thousand barrels per day [Enzinna, 2015]. It uses this oil for two main purposes: to provide electrical power to its people and in its fight against ISIS [Colella, 2016]. Everything that the region does not use it exports, mainly to Syria, for a substantial source of its revenue. This practice somewhat contradicts Rojava's foundational commitment to ecological sustainability [van Wilgenburg, 2016]. The environmental crisis that we are facing means that, now more than ever, we should be turning away from fossil fuels as sources of power and income and towards more sustainable methods. Applying Hursthouse's principle of right action that Sandler claims is the standard for 'contemporary virtue-oriented principles of right action' [Sandler, 2007] this action would not seem right because it is not 'what a

virtuous agent would do in the circumstances' [Hursthouse, 1991, p.225]. The virtuous

agent being the person who has a completely virtuous character, rather than an exemplar,

who exemplifies an aspect of virtue but not necessarily all of the virtues. It could therefore

be argued that Rojava is not an appropriate environmental exemplar.

However, the circumstances are important and do factor into the standard

Hursthouse sets for a reason, and one of the circumstances in this case is that Rojava is

currently at war with ISIS. Fighting this war takes a huge amount of money and resources. In

2014, the autonomous administration spent fifty percent of its annual revenue, almost

three million US dollars, on 'self-defence and protection' [Rashid, 2018]. Rojava has chosen

to prioritise its continued existence over converting their infrastructure and economy to run

on renewable energy under these specific circumstances. There is also the fact that the

main importer of their oil is Syria, a key ally in the fight against ISIS and therefore a country

with which the autonomous administration needs to maintain a positive relationship.

Considering these factors, it seems that their decision to produce, use and sell oil is actually

what a virtuous person would do under the circumstances, or at the very least it should not

count against them when measuring their suitability as an environmental exemplar.

Another factor to consider when assessing Rojava's use of oil and other fossil fuels is

that it is not necessarily the actions that we are suggesting people emulate when we

designate them as an environmental exemplar. As previously explained, it is not the

outcomes of an exemplar's reasoning process that should be admirable or exemplary, but

the reasoning process itself. This is because learning how to apply the process is more in

accordance with the dispositional aspects of virtue ethics than simply copying their actions

uncritically. In this case Rojava produces, uses and exports oil, which is bad for the

environment. However, they have applied a process of deliberation in councils at the community level where everyone has equal representation in accordance with the constitution, taking into account the environment and the rights of peoples in order to work out that they need to use that oil. Another society that applies a similar process under different circumstances, perhaps one that is not fighting a war for its very survival or is able to easily sustain itself on renewable energy, will end up using less oil. It is the reasoning process that the exemplars employ, which results naturally from their core beliefs, that should be emulated, meaning it is not necessarily true that Rojava's use of oil and other fossil fuels should disqualify it from being considered an environmental exemplar.

5.4 Conclusion

It can be concluded from this discussion that the application of Murray Bookchin's green philosophy and Abdullah Öcalan's political theory in Rojava make the region and its people an appropriate exemplar of environmental virtue ethics. Bookchin accurately describes the ways in which people are distanced from power and the negative effects this has on them and the environment. His solution to the problem in the form of libertarian municipalism would ensure, in theory, that the people share responsibility and have direct access to power through a system of councils and public assemblies. This system is admirable because, as we have seen, it allows communities to maintain their environment and ensures that no one person is given the power to act in their own interests against the interests of the community with regards to the environment. The admirable aspects of libertarian municipalism are also in accordance with virtue as they instantiate the Aristotelean golden means of justice, environmental responsibility and empathy among others. Libertarian

municipalism is therefore virtuous in theory, but in order to justify its status as an appropriate environmental exemplar it needs to be effectively put into practice.

Abdullah Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism describes the problems inherent in nation-states and how vested interests work against the cause of environmentalism. He argues how a system of self-administration in the form of local meetings and councils is the best way to ensure that everyone is engaged in politics. Öcalan lays out a set of principles that define how such a system could work were anyone to get the chance to implement it, as we have seen in Rojava. Like libertarian municipalism, democratic confederalism is admirable because it is in accordance with the virtues of justice, environmental responsibility and empathy; and it is also admirable because of the specific circumstances of its creator. Öcalan's endorsement of and involvement in what have been called terrorist activities for the cause of Kurdish nationalism cannot be ignored; however, his subsequent condemnation of nationalist violence is also important to consider. What makes his theory admirable in these circumstances is that he writes into the very principles of democratic confederalism that people of all nationalities, races and religions be actively included in all aspects of the political process. Unlike nation-states, to be a part of a society that follows democratic confederalism one does not need to define oneself by a national identity (to take part in British politics in even the most basic sense of voting for your MP you have to be a British citizen). This is admirable because it breaks down the barriers that prevent people from taking part in politics, if you exist in Rojava, you have as much of a right to political participation as anyone else. It also ensures that there is no justification for any administration claiming to be inspired by Öcalan to ignore the rights of any person no matter who they are.

The culmination of Bookchin's and Öcalan's work successfully leads to virtuous

action in to form of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Through its

system of councils and public assemblies, Rojava restores power to its people by engaging

them in direct face-to-face democracy. This achieves Bookchin's goal of ensuring that

people gain power, and the people of Rojava use that power to empower women, fight the

threat of ISIS and, most relevantly to this research, act in accordance with environmental

virtue. While there are valid concerns about their reliance on fossil fuels, the process that

they use to decide what actions they should take is what is important in our approach

because, as previously discussed, we are following the wider interpretation of Zagzebski's

exemplarist virtue theory. The process that is used in Rojava is one that is in accordance

with Aristotle's virtue ethics as it employs practical wisdom in order to arrive at their golden

mean of environmental virtue. It can therefore be concluded that Rojava is an appropriate

exemplar of environmental virtue ethics.

Chapter 6: Indigenous Populations as Exemplars

We have seen in the previous chapter that there are exemplars of how a political system can achieve environmental virtue, but if we are to solve the plastic pollution crisis, we also need to be virtuous on the level of the individual and the community. It therefore makes sense to assess the suitability of communities who have a long-established reputation of environmental responsibility – indigenous people. Native Americans and aboriginal people have many things in common by virtue of the fact that both had their established way of life threatened by colonisation and exploitation by European settlers, resulting in the continued sustainable use and preservation of land being well-established critical issues. In this chapter it will be shown that both Native American communities and aboriginal people are appropriate environmental exemplars, due to the fact that they both have deeply established holistic attitudes towards the environment that result in them having developed virtuous characters. This character motivates them to treat sustainability as the most important goal in interactions with the land. It will also be argued that, despite some valid concerns, we can emulate aspects of their characters in order to cultivate our own virtuous dispositions towards the environment. In the first chapter I will discuss Native American attitudes to the environment, what makes them admirable, and to what extent we can emulate them, including the land ethic and a functional view of ecosystems. I will then go on in the second section to look at the ways in which Australian aboriginal people interact with the environment, including sustainable development and a dynamic relationship with natural resources. I will discuss the characteristics that make aboriginal people appropriate exemplars of environmental virtue and refute some of the arguments that they are more environmentally destructive than conservationist. Finally, I will look at some suggestions of

how we can best emulate aboriginal attitudes to the environment through cultural and ecological education.

6.1 Native American Communities

Native American communities are often seen as being 'close to nature' or 'at one with the land', a view that is shared by members of the communities and non-members alike [Booth, 2003, pp. 330-331]. In light of this view, it is useful to look at what Native American communities' attitudes towards the environment are, what is admirable about them and whether they are environmentally virtuous. Through answering these questions, it will be shown that Native American communities would make appropriate exemplars in environmental virtue ethics. This is due to the land ethic that they have developed over successive generations, based on a functional view of environments. Despite some objections based on the extent to which Native American culture can be emulated and the occasional mistreatment of Native American land, it will be argued that the dispositional attitudes towards the environment can be effectively emulated and would result in the cultivation of an environmentally virtuous character.

A study of Native American attitudes towards the environment can help to broaden our own view and, in doing so, change our dispositions towards the environment in a positive way. In her 2014 book *Native American Environmentalism*, Joy Porter puts forward a view that our current dispositions towards the environment are flawed in that they ignore the way that we have historically abused the environment and alienated certain people from their rights to access nature, arguing that our modern society frames our relationship

in a way that 'denies colonialism, separates man as a species from nature, and reiterates all the tropes [of] the early American 19th century' [Porter, 2014, p.133]. This highlights the need for a study of Native American environmentalism in order to counter such uncritical understandings [Hamilton, 2014, p.713] and particularly to show how different understandings of our relationship to the environment arise and what can be learned from them. Engaging with environmentalism in a way that takes colonialism and our place in the ecosystem into account is key to changing how we treat the environment. This is a change that will hopefully help us to resolve the climate crisis that we are currently experiencing.

There are however a few issues with studying Native American attitudes towards the environment, some of which are external and some of which are internal. Firstly, there is the stereotypical perception of 'Native Americans as "natural" environmentalists and adherents to a simple nature-based spirituality' [Hamilton, 2014, p.712]. This is a very simplistic view of Native American culture which works against the goal of designating them as environmental exemplars, since it pins all of their attitudes to their identity as Native Americans alone and excludes everyone else because this identity is not available to non-Indians. It also somewhat dismisses the philosophy and history that actually supports their beliefs as something that naturally occurs from the fact that they are Native American, and not from a complex and justified philosophy of environment. By examining this philosophy and history, and understanding more fully their attitudes and dispositions towards the environment, we can determine whether Native American communities are appropriate environmental exemplars.

Secondly, a more internal issue that needs to be considered while studying Native American attitudes to the environment is that there is knowledge about their culture that is

not available to non-Indians. Porter illustrates this point by quoting Cherokee sculptor and writer Jimmie Durham, who said in an interview 'what I want them to know is that they can't know that' [Porter, 2014, p.82]. The problem that this presents to our investigation into possible environmental exemplars is that a limit to the knowledge we can gain about an exemplar results in a limit to how well they can be emulated, which will in turn make them a less appropriate exemplar. However, this may not be too significant an issue if it is cultural knowledge that is protected, since this is personal to agents of every culture, and anyone emulating an exemplar will need to take their own culture into account in any case. By examining the knowledge that we have access to and why we cannot have access to that which we do not, we can determine the extent to which Native American communities can be emulated and how this affects their suitability as exemplars in environmental virtue ethics.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the climate crisis currently presents the biggest issue humanity has to solve, and the problem of plastic pollution is arguably the biggest component of the crisis. Although this fact may be new to most modern societies, for Native American communities it has long been the case that the treatment of land, its sustainable use, loss and exploitation are defining issues [Lewis, 1995, p.424]. Native American communities have tended to take a functional view of ecosystems that, in contrast to more capitalistic societies, views sustainability as the ultimate objective. In "Native Americans and the Environment", David Rich Lewis opposes the stereotypical views that he says 'depicted Indians as beings without action or agency, who left no marks on the land, who lived within the strictest of natural constraints' [p.439]. He argues that these stereotypes were harmful because they 'denied Native Americans their humanity, culture, history and most importantly, their modernity' [Cornell, 1985, pp.104-117]. This stereotype also works

against their perceived appropriateness as environmental exemplars because it sets too strong a standard of environmental virtue. Presenting an example of a society that has absolutely no environmental impact and expecting everyone to emulate it is completely unrealistic, especially when even the exemplars are not living up to the stereotype, and it would result in people's moral motivation reducing massively. Having a realistic view of Native American environmentalism, as Lewis advocates, will have the effect of showing that our attitudes towards the environment are actually more compatible with theirs than the stereotypes would have one believe. Lewis argues that 'Indians were never properly "ecologists" [but] careful students of their functional environments, bound by material and cultural needs and constraints, striving for maximum sustained yield rather than maximum production' [p.439]. This is different enough to our current attitude to the environment, one where we exploit its resources to get as much out of it as we can, that emulating it can have a positive effect on the environment. However, it is not too radically different as to be seen as unattainable. In this way, Lewis's view of Native American environmentalism, as being based around functional environments, supports their appropriateness as exemplars in environmental virtue ethics.

Native American attitudes towards the environment are admirable because they instantiate the Aristotelean concept of *eudaimonia* and because their society has cultivated environmentally virtuous characters in its members. Lewis observes that Native American communities developed a 'land ethic based on long-term experience' [Lewis, 1995, p.439], which suggests that their actions are character-driven, based on a social disposition that has developed over successive generations. This means that their ethic is already compatible with environmental virtue ethics, which is concerned with the cultivation of a virtuous character above all else. Lewis says that this land ethic grew out of a view of the world with

all of its inhabitants 'as an interrelated whole' and the fact that 'they were part of creation' [Ibid.]. The Native American view that Lewis observes is therefore in accordance with environmental virtue. This also makes Native American communities admirable because they are not driven by the personal gain that comes from exploiting the environment for its maximum yield, and instead prioritise conserving the ecosystem for its other members and for future generations. These aspects of their land ethic make a good case for viewing Native American communities as exemplars of environmental virtue.

One argument against Native American communities being appropriate environmental exemplars comes from a lack of access to knowledge about how the communities work. Rosalind Hursthouse argues that they may not make appropriate exemplars because we only have 'glimpses' of what life may have been like for them, and that even if we knew everything about them and knew that they were virtuous, it does not necessarily mean that we should strive to be like them [Husthouse, 2007, p.155-171]. It may be true that there is no way a non-Indian can get a full picture of what it is like to live as a Native American, but there are ways in which we can build a sufficient picture of what Native American life is like to be able to emulate them. It is also true that Native American communities are too varied for there to be a singular comprehensive account of their culture distilled into one character, however, we have seen that there are shared characteristics that can inform environmental virtue ethics in a significant way. The criticism that we should not necessarily adopt their way of life has already been accounted for by our focus on Kristjánsson's wider interpretation of Zagzebski's exemplarist virtue theory [Kristjánsson, 2017, p.20-37]. This interpretation allows us to focus on the character of the exemplar and the process that leads them to environmentally virtuous action, in order that we can emulate the exemplar in a way that is appropriate to the needs of our own

situations. This means the examples set by Native American communities can inspire virtuous actions in other communities, by applying the same reasoning processes and cultivating a virtuous character.

Perhaps a better reason why Native American communities may not be appropriate environmental exemplars is that there are examples of communities acting in ways that are not environmentally responsible. There are many reservations that have sold the rights to extract fossil fuels and dump toxic waste on their land to private companies and United States authorities, resulting in 'an estimated 1200 hazardous waste sites [being] located on or adjacent to reservations nationally' [Lewis, 1995, p. 433]. These situations seem to suggest that Native American communities do not always act in accordance with the land ethic that we have seen is virtuous. However, this is not a black and white issue, there is a long history of the United States government exploiting Native American land for natural resources and perceived emptiness. Although their rights are now, in theory, more protected than they were in the nineteenth century, the pressure from outside forces still exists and has a huge effect [Suagee, 1982, p. 1-49]. This external exploitation from the fossil fuel industry and others accounts for much of the environmental damage that occurs on Native American reservations. This links back to the discussion in chapter 3, where it was argued that the capitalist system is inherently damaging to the environment because of its prioritisation of profit over the social good. Native American land ethics' rejection of this principle in favour of targeting a sustainable yield shows a rejection of the free market economics that led to environmental destruction in the first place. There are examples of Native American communities acting in ways that are antithetical to environmental virtue. The mitigating circumstances of ongoing exploitation exacerbated by a need to interact with a capitalist system suggests that these actions do not result from the dispositional land ethic

that most communities embody. The exploitation of Native American land by external agents actually highlights the contrast in ethics between the environmentally virtuous Native American communities and the exploitative free market capitalist system. This shows how important it is that we try to emulate the attitudes that many Native American communities have towards the environment.

While much of the blame for the environmental destruction that occurs on Native American land can be placed on external forces, it is also important to highlight the ways in which the inhabitants of those reservations are also complicit. The Navajo nation in Utah, for example, received at least sixty million US dollars from oil companies in the years up to 1995 [Lewis, 1995, p.431], meaning that Native Americans have profited at least slightly off of the destruction of the environment. However, the relative poverty that the majority of Utah Navajo members live in and the fact that 'little has trickled down' to the average resident suggests that it is not the majority of Native Americans that have benefited. There is a certain amount of corruption amongst the leaders of communities that allow fossil fuel extraction on their reservations. This inference is supported by the fact that the majority of members of the Utah Navajo nation are against allowing companies to drill for oil on their land and are attempting to stop it [Trimble, 2005, pp.162, 182-183]. The majority position among the Navajo seems to be in line with the environmentally virtuous character that has developed over generations. For these reasons, the environmental destruction that is perpetrated by or with the knowledge of Native American people on reservations should be acknowledged when assessing their environmental virtue, but does not make Native American communities inappropriate environmental exemplars as it does not reflect the wider attitude towards the environment that is shared by most communities and members.

The Native American attitude towards the environment has been shown to be an appropriate exemplar of environmental virtue. A holistic view of ecosystems that acknowledges our place as just one part of an interconnected system invokes the Aristotelean view of virtue and human flourishing, and leads members of the Native American community to develop dispositions to treat the environment with respect. The land ethic shows the contrast between Native American and capitalistic attitudes, and offers a more virtuous way of interacting with the land. The access that we have to knowledge about Native American culture is enough for us to know that a society that emulates their attitudes to the environment would be more environmentally virtuous for it. It is for these reasons that we can conclude that Native American communities are an appropriate exemplar in environmental virtue ethics.

6.2 Aboriginal People

Like Native American communities, there are a number of stereotypes that surround Aboriginal attitudes to and relationships with the environment, including the idea that they are more a part of nature than, and therefore inferior to, non-aboriginals. This perhaps stems from a misunderstanding of the fact that aboriginal people 'largely resist the western categorical distinction between "human", on the one hand, and "non-human" on the other' [Ryan, 2015]. For many years the accepted view that many non-aboriginals held could be summed up by naturalist Robert Pulleine's description of them as 'an unchanging people, living in an unchanging environment' [Pulleine, 1928, p.310]. Over the last century however, this view has been challenged many times by those who put forward more dynamic accounts of aboriginal history. One such account is put forward by Rhys Jones, whose "Fire

Stick Farming" hypothesis argues that Aboriginal populations are not environmentally sustainable, and damaged the environment through their liberal use of fire as a tool for farming, clearing land and recreation [Jones, 2012, p.4-7]. He describes the continent as being 'colonised, exploited, and moulded' by Australian Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years [p.3]. This view is supported by Timothy Flannery, who argues that aboriginal burning practices were used to make the land more productive after most of Australia's large herbivores had been hunted to extinction [Flannery, 1994]. According to this view, Aboriginal people cannot provide guidance for how we should treat the environment because they have a history of exploiting it in similar ways to those we have seen throughout European history. This would in turn mean that they are not appropriate exemplars for environmental virtue ethics, as emulating their practices would not improve the way that we treat the environment or help us solve the climate crisis.

However, there are those who disagree with Jones's view of aboriginal history, and with good reason. James L. Kohen puts forward a more comprehensive view in his 1995 book *Aboriginal Environmental Impacts*, which falls somewhere between the two previously discussed ideas that Aboriginal people have had no effect on the environment and that they have had a huge negative effect. He instead asserts that 'there was a dynamic relationship between aboriginal people, their technology, the flora and the fauna' and that this resulted in them impacting the Australian environment 'in a number of ways, but without causing any of the large-scale land degradation which typifies more recent European land-management practices' [Kohen, 2003, p.ix]. Kohen argues that aboriginal people's method of supporting their population 'was based on the concept of sustainable development, the ability to regenerate resources so they would be available for future generations', and that this was a method that grew out of, and is therefore consistent with, 'their spiritual and

religious beliefs' [p.ix].]. If this view is true then aboriginal people's attitudes towards the environment are admirable, because they are more sustainable and result in less environmental damage than most non-aboriginal attitudes. Kohen criticises the theories put forward by Jones and Flannery for being too narrow in the time period on which they focus, arguing that 'aboriginal technology was not static over the fifty thousand years of occupation' and that 'the technology changed, particularly during the last five thousand years' [p.viii]. The idea that their view of the world is reinforced by their spiritual and religious belief suggests that this attitude is dispositional, and that those who hold this attitude have cultivated an environmentally virtuous character. This would, in turn, make aboriginal people good exemplars for environmental virtue ethics, because by emulating their approach to environmental issues we could cultivate an environmentally virtuous character.

Kohen uses historical evidence to support his theory that aboriginal people have and have had a dynamic relationship with the environment, first by suggesting that when they originally colonised Australia from neighbouring islands, the flora and fauna would have been similar enough to that to which they were accustomed that 'there may have been few problems in simply transposing their culture' [p.25]. This contradicts Jones's view that aboriginal people began moulding the environment to their needs from the moment they arrived, but as it is based on some assumptions about what the ecosystem would have been like at the time, we cannot say that it disproves it. He points to evidence found on Tasmania of populations present within the last twelve thousand years that 'provides some insight into the strategies which were adopted on the mainland to cope with changing climate – abandonment of some areas during difficult times, and reoccupation and technological specialisation during favourable periods' [p.29]. While the main reason for these strategies

was likely basic survival, it also shows how the dynamic view of aboriginal people developed into a disposition to change how the population interacts with the land based on how sustainably it can be exploited.

In response to accusations by Jones that successive generations of aboriginal people used fire liberally to exploit and mould the land as they saw fit, Kohen argues that 'what aboriginal people were trying to achieve was a balance between the need to burn some areas to promote certain resources, and the need to protect other areas where particular plants grew' and therefore maximising the productivity of an area [p.40]. This is consistent with the evidence that Jones cites, which is mostly based on eye-witness accounts from the eighteenth century onwards [Jones, 2012], but not with his conclusion that this practice stretches back all the way through their fifty-thousand-year history. Kohen argues that aboriginal people contributed little to the process of burning land until the late Holocene period, and that even then it was on a local scale in a way that promotes the diversity of the ecosystems [Kohen, 2003, p.40]. This is supported by research by Bird *et. al.* which finds that 'anthropogenic burning increases biodiversity and prevents habitat loss at the local scale [...] but the benefits of burning decline as habitat diversity increases' [Bird, *et. al.*, 2008, p.14799]. Looking at evidence of fires that have occurred in Australia, they found that the kind of burning associated with aboriginal people 'does not eliminate mature habitat, but rather prevents its localised extinction from large-scale fires' [Ibid.]. This suggests that the burning carried out by aboriginal people actually helps the environment rather than destroys it, meaning they do have a sustainable relationship with the environment. The researchers concluded that their results 'cast doubt on [Jones's] hypothesis but support the notion that the maintenance of biodiversity in the Western Desert relies on [aboriginal] hunting [using burning]' [p.14800]. The fact that aboriginal people have an acknowledged

symbiotic relationship with their environment contributes to their virtuous character because it reflects the Aristotelean concept of *eudaimonia* being achieved by flourishing in one's role in the ecosystem. This makes them a good candidate for the status of environmental exemplars because, by emulating their attitudes to the environment, we have a better chance of achieving *eudaimonia*.

As we have seen, it is not just the fact that they are environmentally virtuous that makes exemplars appropriate, we have to be able to emulate their characters by applying their decision-making processes to our own situations. It is therefore necessary that there is scenario in which their circumstances are applicable to our own so that it makes sense for us to ask ourselves "what would an aboriginal person do in my situation?". Philosopher Mary Graham puts forward some strategies for emulating what she calls the 'collective spiritual identity' that is found in aboriginal communities in her 2008 article "Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews". The first of these is including programmes within the education system that cultivate this identity by repeated positive interactions with nature and the environment [Graham, 2008]. This can be combined with another suggested strategy of teaching children how to think in terms of the collective and 'how we as a group act and experience events' to develop these attitudes from an early age with the intended result that 'the process becomes habitual'. These strategies are a good example of how the aboriginal attitude to environment can be emulated in ways that ensure agents develop environmentally virtuous characters through cultivating dispositions to act as the exemplars do.

In conclusion, Aboriginal people can be said to be appropriate exemplars for environmental virtue ethics because of the dynamic attitude they have towards the

environment, underpinned by a fundamental acknowledgement of their place within nature as opposed to above it. We have seen that this attitude results in the sustainable treatment of the ecosystems they occupy in a way that promotes biodiversity and approaches human flourishing as being dependent on the flourishing of the ecosystem as a whole.

6.3 Conclusion

It is clear that, when we move past simplistic stereotypes about indigenous people and how they interact with the environment, there are common themes between Native American and Aboriginal peoples' attitudes towards environmental issues. These themes include an acknowledgement that humans make up only one small part of a vast ecological web that includes all living and non-living things in the environment, an idea that is passed down through generations and forms a fundamental part of the character of both cultures. They also both include a functional view of the environment, where sustainability is prioritised over the exploitation of resources for the benefit of individual humans alone. We have also seen those views in other cultures, and would likely result in the development of an environmentally virtuous character in those who emulate them. It is therefore safe to conclude that both Native American communities and Aboriginal people are appropriate exemplars of environmental virtue.

Chapter 7: Corporate Virtue, can businesses be considered environmentally virtuous exemplars?

We have so far looked at an exemplar of how an environmentally virtuous political system might be organised in the form of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, and an exemplar of how personal relationships with the environment can be virtuous in the form of Native American and aboriginal communities. In this chapter I will examine another of the key ways in which humans interact with the environment, through businesses. Looking at the way that we interact with the environment from the perspective of businesses is important considering the extent to which companies negatively affect the environment. A 2017 report into the responsibility of corporations for industrial carbon dioxide and methane emissions highlighted that 'over half of global industrial emissions since human-induced climate change was officially recognised can be traced to just twenty-five corporate and state producing entities', eleven of which are privately owned companies [Griffin, 2017, p.8]. This is evidence that businesses are largely responsible for the environmental crisis, and therefore need to address the ways in which they treat the environment. While political and individual environmental virtues do affect businesses in some ways, it is necessary to look at possible environmental exemplars in the business world to gain some insight into what an environmentally virtuous business is like. In assessing these possible exemplars, the questions of what is admirable about them and what about the way that they assess their relationship with the environment should be emulated by other businesses that want to develop a virtuous character, should be answered.

7.1 The Body Shop

The Body Shop is a British cosmetics company that was founded in 1976 by the businesswoman and environmentalist Anita Roddick. Since its founding the company has tried to cultivate an environmentally friendly image. Early customers were encouraged to recycle the packaging of their products and the company emphasised that their products were naturally sourced at every opportunity [Chesters, 2011]. In subsequent years The Body Shop has been involved in several campaigns directed towards environmental issues, the latest of which is a partnership with Plastics For Change, a for-profit organisation that proposes business-based solutions to plastic pollution and global poverty. It will be argued that The Body Shop sets a good example of an environmentally virtuous company due to the fact that its campaigns are admirable and its approach to business has seen it develop a virtuous character.

The Body Shop's Community Trade Programme was its first attempt to engage in fair trade directly with the communities that produce its products. It also answers a common dilemma that businesses are faced with, which is that of how to balance environmental sustainability while still making a profit. Many businesses are reluctant to commit to being more environmentally virtuous due to a number of reasons, the most significant of which is that it does not fit neatly into the way that most businesses currently view investment. Most projects that businesses undertake work on short-term returns on investments, and the payback period for sustainability investments often exceeds that required to approve projects [Laughland and Bansal, 2011]. This means that environmentally virtuous actions are often viewed as one-off actions rather than a recurring characteristic of the business model [Ibid.]. Therefore, even if the businesses that think in this way do act sustainably on

occasion it will not result in them developing a virtuous character, because their sustainable actions are one-off and will not be repeated often enough to form a disposition towards environmental virtue. The Body Shop's Community Trade Programme provides an example of how environmental sustainability projects can be incorporated into more longer-term investments by connecting them to their everyday business, and thus build a disposition to act environmentally virtuously.

As previously mentioned, the latest iteration of The Body Shop's Community Trade Programme comes in the form of a partnership with Plastics for Change. It aims to tackle the twin problems of poverty and plastic pollution in coastal India by employing local 'waste-pickers' to collect plastic waste before it gets into the sea and causes devastation in marine ecosystems [Plastics for change | Packaging | The Body Shop, 2020]. This campaign is an attempt to help the 1.5 million Indian people who clean up almost a third of the uncollected waste in India [TerraGreen, 2019, p.41]. The plastic that is collected by the waste-pickers that The Body Shop employs is then used in the manufacturing of their packaging. This project solves the dilemma of choosing between sustainability and profitability, because they would have had to pay for the plastic that they need for packaging anyway. This switch to recycled plastic has meant that they can get what plastic they need and be sustainable at the same time without having to commit to a long-term investment or a one-off project with no long-term future.

The Body Shop's Community Trade Programme is admirable because it is an effective way of causing real change, both environmentally by reducing the amount of plastic pollution that gets into the planet's oceans, and socially by bettering the lives of the urban poor in India, who are one of the communities more likely than others to feel the worst

effects of the climate crisis [Smith et al, 2007, p.791]. The Body Shop is virtuous because it is applying practical reasoning to the problem of plastic pollution in examining its role in society and working out what its needs are in terms of sustainable plastic use. Any company that emulates The Body Shop's approach to sustainability is more likely to develop a virtuous character due to the fact that its commitment to environmental virtue manifests, not just in a series of individual projects, but as a driving principle of their business model; and as such it affects everything they do. This is a compelling argument for The Body Shop's being an appropriate exemplar in Environmental Virtue Ethics.

Another factor that makes The Body Shop an appropriate exemplar is its commitment to reducing its environmental footprint by giving its products a score based on their biodegradability. One of the biggest problems that consumers are faced with when trying to be environmentally virtuous is that they do not have access to the information required to decide which products are the most environmentally friendly, and so cannot answer the question of "what would an environmentally virtuous person buy in this situation". The Body Shop helps to solve this problem to a certain extent, but to properly do so requires other businesses to follow its example. The Body Shop's environmental score indicates how easily the products break down enough to be safely assimilated into the natural process - their biodegradability. This is determined by measuring the amount of organic material degraded by microorganisms in 28 days for each individual ingredient and combining all of these ingredients to give a final score for each product [Environmental Footprint | Reduce Impact | The Body Shop®, 2020]. This is an efficient way of internally measuring the environmental sustainability of a business, since it sets a goal of improving all of its product scores as much as possible. This is admirable because it goes beyond what

many companies do when they make vague claims about sustainability without showing how they achieve it or committing to improving themselves in a measurable way.

The problem with The Body Shop's environmental scoring system is that it is the only company that uses it, so there is no way of comparing within the market. The consumer can see, for example, that 'in 2017, the total environmental score of all [The Body Shop's] products increased by more than 5%' [Ibid.], and this is positive because it shows the company's commitment to reducing its environmental footprint and allows its customers to hold it to account. Despite this, the consumer cannot see whether or not The Body Shop's products are more environmentally sustainable than Lush, another British cosmetics company that is committed to environmental sustainability and using recycled materials in its packaging [Our environmental policy, 2020], because they measure their sustainability in different ways. This is a problem for consumers who want to buy the most environmentally friendly products, as there is no industry-wide standard measurement of how environmentally friendly companies are. However, this is more of a problem with the cosmetics industry as a whole rather than The Body Shop in particular. This is an example of the impact that an exemplar approach to environmental virtue ethics can have on businesses. If we take The Body Shop to be an exemplar of environmental virtue then one of the things other businesses could emulate would be the way that they score the biodegradability of their products. Having an industry-wide standard measurement would encourage businesses to compete to be the most sustainable, instil a disposition to act in the most environmentally friendly way, and therefore develop a virtuous character. It would also have the effect of helping consumers to make the most environmentally virtuous

choices because having access to the information would habituate them to consider the sustainability of the products that they buy.

Overall, The Body Shop is an appropriate exemplar of environmental virtue because of its continued commitment to environmental causes including reducing plastic pollution. What makes this commitment virtuous is the fact that it goes deeper than one-off projects or publicity stunts, and is embedded within the core ethos of the business. Its partnership with Plastics for Change shows that this ethos leads to effective action to reduce plastic pollution, showing that The Body Shop has cultivated an environmentally virtuous disposition. Finally, its biodegradability scoring system provides a great example to companies who ask "what would a virtuous business do in response to the crisis of plastic pollution?", a question that all businesses should currently be asking. All of these factors contribute to the conclusion that The Body Shop is an exemplar to other businesses of what an environmentally virtuous business is like.

7.2 UK Supermarkets

When looking at businesses' relationship with plastic pollution, it is impossible to ignore the responsibility that supermarkets have for contributing to the plastic pollution crisis in the first place. It is therefore necessary that we assess what UK supermarkets are doing to combat the crisis, and see if any of them are doing enough to be considered an exemplar in environmental virtue ethics. It will be argued that no UK supermarket is an appropriate environmental exemplar due to the lack of meaningful action on plastic pollution. Certain companies are trying and may prove to be exemplary in the future, of which Waitrose has

the most promise. Nevertheless, at this time no one company is doing enough to serve as an example that other supermarkets could emulate in order to cultivate an environmentally virtuous disposition.

Supermarkets have significant responsibility for the current plastic pollution crisis, as we now pick up a third of the plastic that we use in our lifetimes from supermarket shelves [Fearnley-Wittingstall, 2019] and according to Greenpeace UK and the Environmental Investigation Agency they are now putting nine-hundred-thousand tonnes of plastic packaging on their shelves every year [Lewis, 2019]. The amount of plastic that they use has earned UK supermarkets a lot of criticism as the plastic pollution crisis has worsened. In response, many have attempted to reduce the amount of plastic they use in a number of different ways, some more successfully than others. Greenpeace UK published its league table ranking UK supermarkets from best to worst according to their plastic footprint for 2019. Among the best performers were Waitrose and Morrisons, scoring fifty-two and fifty-one percent respectively, while no other brands got over fifty percent, and the worst performing were Asda with thirty-nine percent and Aldi with thirty-eight [Lewis, 2019]. These scores were allocated according to five categories: 'promises made on reduction and reuse', 'future plans on reduction and reuse', 'recycleability and recycled content', 'influencing suppliers' and 'transparency'. While none of the supermarkets are doing enough to combat plastic pollution to be considered exemplars for the wider business world, the ones that are doing better could be seen as an example to the supermarkets that are doing worse.

One thing that it is important to remember when considering whether supermarkets are environmentally virtuous is the role that they play in the economy. As discussed in a

previous chapter, it is not the amount of plastic an exemplar uses that is worthy of emulation, but the process by which they assess and respond to their needs in the most efficient and sustainable way. Supermarkets have a different role to most businesses in the private sector in the sense that most of the goods that they sell are essential. To compare this to a previously discussed exemplar, very few of the products that The Body Shop sells could be considered essential because we could live without them quite easily. Supermarkets, on the other hand, are the main source of food products in our economy, with the so-called 'big four' (Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons) having a combined share of almost seventy percent of the UK grocery market as of 2018 [Supermarket market shares, 2020]. Supermarkets sell essential goods, and often use plastic packaging as a way of reducing the price of these goods. This means that any assessment of their plastic use must take into account the effects that changing their packaging will have on these essential goods and the consumers that need to buy them. Moving towards environmental sustainability can incur costs which, in order to protect the companies' profits, would be passed on to the consumer. That being said, this does not mean that they should not be trying to reduce plastic waste wherever they can, as they still have a responsibility to use what plastic they need as responsibly as they possibly can. The process by which they decide how much plastic to use, the core principles that form their ethos and how they interact with environmental issues are what need to be evaluated. Not just how much plastic they use, as these are the elements that define the relative environmental virtue of their character.

One much publicised way in which supermarkets are attempting to reduce their plastic use is by changing how they use plastic bags. Since the UK government introduced a

mandatory five pence charge on all single-use plastic bags sold by large retailers in England, a ninety percent reduction in consumer use has been reported [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2020]. This could be said to be a positive step, as in the short term it disincentivises us to use single-use plastic bags, and in the long term it confronts the way that we, as consumers, think about the plastic we use. However, as Lewis reports, 'it's just shifted the problem' [Lewis 2019]. Supermarkets sold over one and a half billion new reusable bags in 2018, which equates to fifty-four per household. As these bags are designed to last longer and be used more than single-use bags, their manufacture is more environmentally damaging and they take a lot longer to biodegrade. The positive impact of the ninety percent decrease in sales of single-use plastic bags is offset by the negative impact of the twenty-six percent increase in the sales of reusable bags [Laville, 2019b]. Gary Mortimer explains this phenomenon by observing that 'shoppers slowly return to old habits, governments and retailers stop educating consumers and reusable bags soon make their way into waterways and landfill' [Mortimer, 2017]. It is clear from this that UK supermarkets are far from exemplary in their use of plastic bags, and the fact that the real action on this issue came more from government than from supermarkets themselves shows that they do not have a disposition that drives them to reduce plastic pollution wherever possible. Despite the fact that Waitrose and Morrisons scored highest in the category of 'progress made on reduction and reuse' in Greenpeace's league table suggesting that they are doing better than others, no UK supermarkets seem to be appropriate exemplars of environmental virtue when it comes to plastic bags.

Another way in which UK supermarkets have attempted to reduce plastic waste is by reducing the amount of plastic packaging that goes on their products. Waitrose may be the

best example of this, with its 2019 test of a package-free shopping experience in its Oxford

Botley Road shop [Fearnley-Wittingstall, 2019]. This scheme, which Waitrose calls

'Unpacked', allows customers to fill their own containers and use reusable and returnable

containers that the shop provides to package all of their products. After receiving a positive

response from customers, the company has extended the scheme to three more locations

around the country [Waitrose and Partners, 2020]. This scheme is one way in which

Waitrose hopes to achieve its ultimate aim to 'eliminate unnecessary plastic and make all

own-brand packaging reusable or made out of widely recyclable or home-compostable

material by 2023' [Ibid.]. This goal is admirable because it addresses the issue of plastic

pollution in a timeframe that is much more appropriate than that to which many others,

including the British government [BBC News, 2018], have committed. The fact that they are

already testing out such radical ideas as the Unpacked scheme reinforces that they are

committed to achieving this goal, which is a further reason why they are admirable. Iceland

is another example of a UK supermarket that has set a goal of being plastic-free by 2023,

and have already reduced the plastic packaging on a number of their products. It is also

admirable because they provide regular updates on their progress towards this target on

their website [Plastics Pledge Progress – About Iceland, 2020]. This is admirable because it

allows Iceland's customers to hold the company to its word and can put pressure on them if

they feel it is not trying hard enough. In pursuit of this goal, Iceland claims to have so far

saved 850 tonnes of plastic [Plastic-free by 2023 – About Iceland, 2020], which is a good

start, but the company needs to go much further if it wants to cause real change. While

both Waitrose's and Iceland's goals are admirable and they seem to be making some

progress towards them, there is not enough evidence to conclude that they have virtuous

characters, but they could provide some guidance to other supermarkets in terms of

progressing towards virtue. The projects that these companies are undertaking are admirable, and are the kind of thing that fit what we would imagine an environmentally virtuous supermarket would do. Neither Waitrose nor Iceland has yet proven themselves enough for us to say that, when a supermarket is wondering what the most environmentally virtuous action is, they should ask "What would Waitrose or Iceland do?". However, it may be enough to provide some guidance of how they can improve in some ways. For this reason, we do not have enough evidence to say that, when it comes to plastic packaging, any UK supermarket is a perfect exemplar of environmental virtue ethics, but Waitrose and Iceland certainly come close and could be seen as exemplars of progress towards virtue.

Overall, it can be concluded that Waitrose is the best exemplar of progress towards environmental virtue among UK supermarkets, although it has not yet done enough for us to say that they have achieved environmental virtue. In the case of many other supermarkets the intention to do something about plastic pollution is evident, but what action it has led to has not caused a meaningful positive impact outside of being admirable for its good intentions. While Waitrose is by far the most promising candidate for the status of environmental exemplar, due to its high score in Greenpeace's league table and its commitment to plastic-free packaging, it has not yet shown that it has formed a virtuous disposition towards the environment, and therefore its status should carry a caveat.

7.3 The Coca-Cola Company

Another example of a business that has cultivated an environmentally friendly image is The Coca-Cola Company, manufacturer of the soft drink Coca-Cola, among other products. Its

recently established 'World Without Waste' campaign sets out what it calls its fundamental goals in the fight against plastic packaging waste. However, Coca-Cola was the worst plastic polluter in the world in both 2018 and 2019 [Petter, 2019], the first two years of the campaign, and in October 2019 the company's global chief executive stated that they have no plans to reduce their use of plastic bottles [Simon, 2019]. As one of the most recognisable brands in the world, and one that is trying to advertise itself as environmentally conscious, it is important that we look at why Coca-Cola is not an appropriate environmental exemplar. It will be argued that, while some aspects of the company's stated environmental goals are admirable, it fails to follow up on its commitment to action on plastic pollution and sets a bad example for other businesses.

Coca-Cola launched its environmental campaign 'World Without Waste' in 2018 with a stated purpose to 'make the world's packaging waste problem a thing of the past' [The Coca-Cola Company, 2019]. In order to achieve this, they set out three fundamental goals, the first of which was aimed at reducing the environmental impact of their products' packaging, with a goal to 'make 100% of our packaging recyclable globally by 2025 – and use at least 50% recycled material in our packaging by 2030'. The second was an attempt to offset the negative impact of the products that they plan to sell in the future, with the goal to 'collect and recycle a bottle or can for each one we sell by 2030'. The third was a commitment to join other organisations in carrying out environmental programmes with the goal to 'work together to support a healthy, debris-free environment' [The Coca-Cola Company, 2019, p.4]. These goals are admirable in some ways and disappointing in others.

The first goal is admirable because it represents an attempt to create a closed loop system of production so that no new plastic products are going into landfill and damaging

the environment. However, the goal of using fifty percent recycled material in their packaging means that they still need to produce virgin plastic for up to fifty percent of every new bottle they make. While claiming to want to help the environment, Coca-Cola still intends to produce an astronomical amount of plastic well into the future. Far from creating a closed loop, if a hundred percent of the materials in the packaging is recyclable and they are only using fifty percent recycled material in new packaging, then fifty percent of the recyclable material in every bottle is going to waste, increasing the amount of plastic pollution in the environment. In a time when all businesses should be committing to producing less plastic, Coca-Cola has committed to producing more and framed it as an environmentally virtuous action, when in fact it is the opposite.

The second goal is admirable because it is an acknowledgement of Coca-Cola's responsibility for contributing to the plastic pollution crisis. By collecting and recycling a bottle or can for every one it sells it will be hoping to cancel out the negative environmental impact of the physical packaging waste of their future products. However, the physical packaging is not the only environmentally harmful plastic waste that is caused by the production of their plastic bottles and cans, and the recycling process is not completely efficient, so even if they achieve this goal they will not be completely offsetting the damage they are doing by continuing to produce plastic bottles. Additionally, this goal does nothing to remedy the crisis that we are already in because it is entirely based on cancelling out the bad effects of future products. There are already too many unrecycled plastic bottles in the environment. In the UK alone we incinerate around three billion per year and put a further two and a half billion in landfill [House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2019, p.8], and the latest figures estimate that 234 million plastic bottles are littered in the UK

every year [p.9]. The goal that Coca-Cola have set themselves makes no commitment to reduce the number of plastic bottles that are already out there, which would help to solve the problem, only to try and stop the problem getting worse. The issue is that the amount of plastic in the environment right now is unsustainable and needs to be reduced urgently, not just kept the same as it will be in 2030, when it is estimated that there will be 300 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans [WWF & Dalberg Advisors, 2019, p.9]. The Coca-Cola Company's second fundamental goal is not admirable as it does not go far enough to solve the crisis of plastic pollution, and conservative efforts like this will only make the crisis worse.

The third goal is admirable because it acknowledges the need for global cooperation on the crisis, with Coca-Cola aiming 'to build a global network of competitors, consumers, elected leaders, environmentalists, regulators, retailers and stakeholders of every kind' [The Coca-Cola Company, 2019, p.30]. This network is directed towards investment in 'the circular economy' where the waste materials from products re-enter the manufacturing process so that there is as little waste as possible. This, again, is admirable insofar as it means the company is committing to not making the crisis worse. However, as with the previous goal, any progress towards achieving it has no impact on the waste that is already out there in the environment, waste that Coca-Cola is largely responsible for. Despite this, the company should get at least some credit for recognising the need for cooperation and that its role as a leader in the beverage industry means it is well placed to engage others to achieve this goal.

One problem that affects all of Coco-Cola's fundamental goals is the timeframe that the company sets for achieving them. Aiming to offset the environmental impact of

packaging waste by the year 2030 is unambitious for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that, even taking into account waste-reduction initiatives like Coca-Cola's, 'the plastic system is expected to double the amount of plastic pollution on the planet' and 'carbon dioxide emissions from plastic waste management could triple by the year 2030' [WWF & Dalberg Advisors, p.9]. Every year that passes that we have not reduced the amount of plastic pollution in the environment, the task becomes harder and so setting a target for a decade in the future is not good enough. This also prevents Coca-Cola from developing a disposition to act environmentally virtuously, because it is consistently avoiding its responsibility for the plastic pollution crisis and refusing to act in an effective way to solve the problem.

As with previously discussed businesses, it is important to remember the role that Coca-Cola has and to proportion its need to use plastic accordingly. The main product that the company produces is the eponymous soft drink, but it also produces a number of other products, and its subsidiaries include British coffee house chain Costa Coffee [BBC News, 2018]. The nature of the company's products means that it has a huge need for plastic packaging, and the extent to which it is an exemplar is not based on how much plastic it uses, but on how it decides what its needs are and how it responds to the crisis. Concluding that Coca-Cola is not an appropriate exemplar of environmental virtue purely based on the fact that it uses a lot of plastic would be to misunderstand how we are supposed to emulate exemplars according to environmental virtue ethics. As previously highlighted, by emulating the exemplars' processes of deciding how to interact with the environment, not just the interactions themselves, moral agents are more likely to develop an environmentally virtuous character.

That being said, Coca-Cola have shown that their process for deciding how much plastic it needs to use does not fully take into account the pressing need to reduce overall plastic use and only use as much as is absolutely necessary. The company's global chief executive has admitted that they have no plans to reduce its use of plastic bottles [Simon, 2019], and the company has been accused of fighting efforts to reduce the amount of plastic waste it creates [Lerner, 2019]. The company has cited customer demand as the reason for sticking to plastic packaging, despite surveys showing that two thirds of people in Britain think that companies should be required to use eco-friendly packaging even if this means prices rising [Waldersee, 2019]. This shows that the company is not serious about addressing plastic pollution, nor is it basing its use of plastic on its needs. The process by which it decides how to interact with the environment is not environmentally virtuous, and therefore should not be emulated.

Overall, it can be concluded that The Coca-Cola Company is not an appropriate exemplar for environmental virtue ethics. While it cultivates an image of an environmentally conscious business with its World Without Waste campaign, the goals that it sets for itself are not bold enough and will not result in enough real change. This is due to the fact that they do not address the damage that has already been done and that their targets are too far in the future to be effective or to result in the development of a virtuous disposition. In terms of its efforts to achieve its stated goals, Coca-Cola has not acted in good faith, nor has it taken actions that one would expect from an environmentally virtuous company. It could even be said that they are responsible for creating more environmental damage because, by giving everyone the impression that they are doing something about the environment, they reduce the pressure that they are under to act responsibly. For these reasons, it can be

concluded that The Coca-Cola Company is not an appropriate exemplar for environmental virtue ethics.

7.4 Conclusion

We have seen that there are already many examples of businesses that are attempting to address the crisis of plastic pollution, but of the ones that have been discussed in this chapter, only The Body Shop can be said to be environmentally virtuous. When looking for appropriate exemplars of how businesses can develop environmentally virtuous characters, the aim is to find one about which businesses can ask "what would x do?" where x is the exemplar business. As previously stated, this does not necessarily mean how much plastic they use, although this is taken into consideration relative to their needs, but the processes and dispositions that influence how they interact with the environment in general.

If a business were to assess its use of plastic and, in trying to act environmentally virtuously, asked themselves "what would Coca-Cola do?", then this would not result in virtuous action. In this case the company would keep using plastic at an increasingly unsustainable rate, not make any effort to actively reduce the amount of plastic in the environment, and at the same time claim to be environmentally friendly by engaging in projects meant to do the bare minimum in response to the crisis. For this reason it cannot be said that The Coca-Cola company is an appropriate exemplar for environmental virtue ethics, and businesses should not look to emulate them if they want to develop an environmentally virtuous character.

If someone running a supermarket were to ask themselves how they should be responding to the crisis of plastic pollution, they might ask themselves "what would Waitrose do?". In this case the supermarket would most likely commit to going plastic-free by 2023, a good target with a short enough timeframe to be effective in comparison to both Coca-Cola's and the British Government's. Although it provides more effective guidance than Coca-Cola, we cannot be sure that the dispositions that result from emulating Waitrose's way of approaching plastic would be environmentally virtuous. Therefore, it can only be concluded that Waitrose is an appropriate exemplar for progress towards environmental virtue, and not that it is itself environmentally virtuous.

If a business were to ask itself "what would The Body Shop do?", then the result would be that they would integrate environmental projects into its fundamental principles to ensure that those projects are not one-off or dismissed because they do not have short terms returns. It would also commit to making its products environmentally sustainable and track its progress towards this goal using the biodegradability scoring system, which would improve the accountability of businesses as a whole. Additionally, it would look for opportunities, like the partnership with Plastics For Change, to actively reduce the unsustainable amount of plastic in the environment rather than simply promising to keep it the same or even increase it. For these reasons, a business that emulates The Body Shop is most likely to develop a virtuous disposition out of the businesses discussed in this chapter. This means that The Body Shop can be considered an appropriate exemplar for how businesses can be environmentally virtuous.

Chapter 8: Do we have environmental exemplars within the UK political system?

So far we have identified a few exemplars of environmental virtue that we can emulate if we want to improve our relationship with plastic. However, in order to see how far society has to change in order to achieve real progress, it would be useful to examine the examples being set in our current political system. The political system in the UK extends further than the people that currently form the government. It includes representatives from different parties across the political spectrum, the various branches of the civil service that interpret and implement the government's policies, the non-governmental organisations that lobby the government on certain issues, and the local authorities that implement policies on a local level. This chapter will examine the roles that some of these branches of the UK political system play in responding to the crisis of plastic pollution and the climate emergency, and whether any of them can give us guidance on how we can develop an environmentally virtuous character.

8.1 The Government's Plastic Policies

In the UK, the Conservative Party has been in government since 2010, at which point an estimated 1.2 million tonnes of plastic waste were reported per year according to official figures, and by 2016 that figure had risen to 1.53 million tonnes [Smith, 2020, p.5]. However, these statistics have been questioned by some organisations such as the WWF, who reported that the total plastic waste generation in the UK in 2014 was 4.9 million tonnes [WWF, 2018, p.2]. It is clear that there is a problem with plastic pollution that the government needs to deal with, and it is only getting worse. Much of the UK's current

legislation that deals with plastic waste is derived from legislation from the European Union (EU), which generally sets adequate baselines in terms of environmental action. However, the UK has not taken the opportunity to build on these baselines with more progressive policies that address the scale of the problem, nor has it been particularly successful so far in implementing the policies that it has inherited from the European Union. For these reasons, the UK government is not an appropriate exemplar for environmental virtue ethics.

The current aim of the UK government is to move towards a circular economy, where the waste products of plastic production are fed back into the production process in order to cause as little pollution as possible. To this end, it is implementing the waste management hierarchy required by the European Union Waste Framework Directive, which provides a process for deciding how to deal with plastic products [Smith, 2020, pp.13-14]. At the top of the hierarchy is preventing the need to waste plastic by using less material, keeping the product for longer and using less hazardous materials. After this is 'preparing for reuse', which means making an effort to reuse the product by cleaning, repairing or replacing parts of it. If this is not possible then as much of the product should be recycled as possible, and any parts that cannot be should then be processed to recover any energy from them that is possible. Only when all of these options have been exhausted should plastic waste go into landfill [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2011, p.3]. The intention behind applying this hierarchy is that less plastic ends up at each successive stage, and therefore less ends up entering the environment in harmful forms. This is a good framework, but on its own is not enough to be an effective response. For the government to be an appropriate environmental exemplar it has to consistently and effectively apply this hierarchy, as well as taking similar measures to all forms of waste and promoting targets for

reducing our reliance on plastic, and collecting and recycling the plastic that is already polluting the environment.

In an attempt to make packaging producers take more responsibility for the end recycling of their products the EU gives the UK a target in the form of the EU Packaging Directive. This means that UK businesses are tasked with recycling at least seventy percent of the packaging waste they produce by weight by the year 2030 [Smith, 2020, pp14-15]. This target is positive as a minimum requirement to fight the build up of plastic waste in the environment, but it does not go far enough, fast enough to effectively address the problem or to be seen as an example for others. The main problem with this directive, however, is not in the directive itself, but in the way that it has been implemented in the UK. The government is responsible for implementing this directive, which it does by placing a legal obligation on businesses over a certain size that make or use plastic packaging, to ensure that a proportion of the packaging they place on the market is recovered and recycled. The obligated businesses collect evidence of waste packaging recycling and recovery equivalent to the weight of their obligations from accredited exporters. The problem with this system, as highlighted by a National Audit Office report, was that there were no checks to ensure that exported material was actually recycled. It also observed that 'the government has no evidence that the system has encouraged companies to minimise packaging or made it easy to recycle' [National Audit Office, 2018]. This means that the government has failed in both of the aims of the EU's directive, as it has failed the most important task of reducing the amount of packaging that is produced, and the second most important task of making sure that what packaging does get produced and used either gets reused or recycled. In failing to implement even the most basic measures to address the plastic pollution crisis, the UK government shows that it is not an appropriate environmental exemplar.

The Environmental Audit Committee also investigated the scheme and found that taxpayers were covering around ninety percent of the costs of packaging waste disposal rather than the obligated businesses, concluding from this that 'the producer responsibility scheme is not working as it should' [House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2017, para.47]. The committee also called for the Environment Agency to be given greater regulatory control and for waste processors to be held accountable to the Environment Agency for how they spend packaging revenue [para. 48]. This again highlights the government's failure to implement measures designed to reduce the future damage to the environment caused by plastic, and supports the conclusion that it is not an appropriate exemplar for environmental virtue ethics.

The government has acknowledged the problems with its policy as highlighted by these reports [HM Government, 2018, pp.34-35] and set out its response in a number of publications, culminating in the Environment Bill 2019-20. This bill contains provisions designed to increase corporate responsibility and improve enforcement of the scheme in line with the criticism the previous policy received [Smith, 2020, p.19]. While this element of the Environment Bill is positive, it has also drawn a lot of criticism for not going far enough [Harrabin, 2019]. The policies that the bill proposes will go further towards addressing the crisis than the government is currently going, but they are a long way from being good enough to solve it. Greenpeace UK have pointed out that, in response to the proposed charges on more kinds of single-use plastics, companies are likely to switch to using other materials in their products that are just as, if not more environmentally harmful than plastic. They also argue that by 'bringing the UK in line with the EU's single-use plastics directive', the government is doing the bare minimum when it comes to reducing plastic pollution [Chetan-Welsh, 2019]. It can therefore be said that the Environment Bill 2019-20 does not

provide adequate guidance on how to respond to the plastic pollution crisis, as it is not setting a high enough standard of moral virtue, on the contrary, the government is not living up to the standards that those it means to govern expect of it.

In conclusion, the UK Government is not dealing with the plastic pollution crisis in an effective way. By going no further than the obligations it has to enact EU directives, the government has consistently shown that it does not have a disposition to reduce the causes of plastic pollution wherever possible, and therefore that it cannot be said to have an environmentally virtuous character. Despite acknowledging where it has failed to properly implement policies intended to reduce plastic pollution, its continued unwillingness to enact legislation that will cause real change means it does not embody what one would expect from an environmentally virtuous government. It can therefore be concluded that the UK government is not an effective exemplar for environmental virtue ethics.

8.2 Political Pressure Groups

As it seems the government cannot be relied upon to set the right example on plastic pollution, it falls to the British public to hold them to account and pressure them to do more to solve the problem. One way in which this is currently done is through environmental campaign groups like Friends of the Earth and Surfers against Sewage, which attempt to influence government policy making, legislation and public opinion by applying pressure to elected officials on behalf of their members. As representatives for public interest on specialist issues, with a combined membership in the hundreds of thousands, these campaign groups form a key part of the political system in the UK. These organisations set a

good example of how to put pressure on the government to do more on environmental issues, as well as how to empower local communities to take action into their own hands and fight pollution on a local scale. The example that these groups set, combined with their foundational commitments to environmental principles, mean that they should be considered appropriate exemplars of environmental virtue within the context of our current political system.

Friends of the Earth was founded in the United States of America in 1969 and has been active in the UK since 1971, when its first campaign promoted reuse of environmentally harmful materials by dumping thousands of glass bottles outside the London headquarters of Cadbury Schweppes [Friends of the Earth, 2020a]. Since then it has successfully lobbied the UK government on a number of issues such as fossil fuels, including persuading the Welsh Assembly Pension Scheme to divest from fossil fuel companies [Friends of the Earth, 2020b]; aviation, including helping to prevent a third runway at London Heathrow Airport [Friends of the Earth, 2020c]; and plastic pollution, including making the town of Caerphilly in South Wales a 'plastic free community' [Bello, 2019]. The success of these campaigns shows that the organisation is effective in achieving real progress on environmental issues, an admirable attribute which contributes to its environmentally virtuous character.

Friends of the Earth have also criticised the government's Environment Bill 2019-20 for failing to make 'legally binding commitments to immediate and long-term action to achieve near-zero plastic pollution'. It has also criticised the government's general approach for focusing too much on recycling which cannot 'keep up with the growth of plastic production' and 'energy-from-waste' solutions, instead calling for a focus on 'reduction of

the use of plastic' [Kirby, 2020]. Campaigning for these kinds of policies is admirable

because it accepts that more drastic measures are necessary and puts pressure on those in

power to implement these measures. Within a political system where business interests are

often prioritised above the people's, Friends of the Earth sets a good example of how we

can fight back and make our voices heard. This makes Friends of the Earth an appropriate

environmental exemplar, as by emulating its actions and motivations, we can develop a

virtuous disposition to not automatically accept environmental legislation as sufficient and

instead analyse it and demand that it goes further when it needs to.

Another environmental campaign group that sets a good example of environmental

virtue is Surfers Against Sewage, a British charity that advocates for marine conservation

and protection. While the name reflects the original purpose for which they were originally

founded, the charity also leads campaigns on a number of environmental issues including

plastic pollution [About us, Surfers Against Sewage, 2020]. In its Plastic Free Communities

campaign, Surfers Against Sewage hopes to achieve two main aims: the first is to reduce the

amount of plastic that ends up in the environment, and the second is to take plastic out of

the environment by cleaning beaches [Plastic Pollution, Surfers Against Sewage, 2020]. This

approach is admirable because it tries to empower communities to take responsibility for

solving the problem as best they can, and to a lesser extent because of the pressure that it

puts on the government. One problem with the first aim, however, is that it does not go far

enough to address the cause of plastic pollution in the first place, which Friends of the Earth

highlighted as the most important priority. It could also be argued that its advocacy for a

deposit return scheme, where consumers pay a deposit for the plastic products they buy

and then receive it back when the product is recycled or returned, unfairly punishes the

average consumer. It is estimated that households contribute just eight percent of the

plastic waste produced in the UK every year [Smith, 2020, p.5], so there needs to be more pressure on politicians to target the waste generated by other producers, such as the service sector, which contributed fifty three percent. While its goals may not necessarily go far enough on a national political scale, the effectiveness of its grassroots campaigning and the processes by which it decides the most effective ways to combat plastic pollution make Surfers Against Sewage an appropriate exemplar of how to organise communities to take action against plastic pollution.

In an ideal political system that was based on environmental virtue, there would be no need for these environmental pressure groups to exist in their current form, as the power would already be in the hands of the communities that they represent, and environmental policy would be decided through a system of direct democracy of the kinds discussed in Chapter 5. However, in absence of large-scale political change, we should aim to emulate these environmental campaign groups so that we can exercise the power that we have in the current system to make as much change as possible. Friends of the Earth and Surfers Against Sewage are appropriate exemplars for environmental virtue ethics, especially when considering how communities can take action to help reduce the amount of plastic pollution in their local environments. Additionally, Friends of the Earth have shown throughout their history to be effective campaigners for environmental justice and to have an environmentally virtuous character which, by emulating, we can develop in ourselves.

Chapter 9: What would an environmentally virtuous person look like?

In the preceding chapters we have seen that there are a number of admirable individuals, communities and organisations who instantiate various forms of environmental virtue. While we have seen that these exemplars can be emulated, they cannot simply be copied by those that want to cultivate a virtuous character, as their circumstances will never be exactly the same. Also, because agents are less likely to develop a virtuous character by copying the actions of the exemplars, we have seen that they should instead be emulating their attitudes towards the environment. Throughout this research it has been clear that the role of exemplars in environmental virtue ethics is to provide guidance on how to approach environmental issues, rather than to give concrete rules on how to treat the environment. With this in mind, it would be contradictory to give an account of what an environmentally virtuous person who emulated these exemplars must be like. Instead, this chapter will identify the traits that exemplars have in common, and discuss what guidance they can provide with regards to how we should approach the crisis of plastic pollution.

From the Rojava exemplar we can emulate the values described in the work of the two philosophers that inspired it, Murray Bookchin and Abdullah Öcalan. These philosophers value the empowerment of average person in society above all else, as all the other virtuous aspects of Rojava's political system stem from it. Even if the political structures in this country remain as they are, the values that define Rojava can still be emulated by cultivating a social disposition to organise within communities and advocate for common interests. Perhaps the most important criticism of our society that libertarian municipalism makes is that governments should be more accountable to the people, and by taking this criticism to heart and acting on it, we can develop a disposition to respond to the

plastic pollution crisis in appropriate and effective ways. In a way this is the goal of the environmental campaign groups that we have looked at in UK politics, in that they are based around a commitment to organising as a community and holding the government to account. While an environmentally virtuous society may have less of a need for groups like Friends of the Earth and Surfers Against Sewage, this is because emulating the values that motivate them would contribute to making society more environmentally virtuous.

We have seen that in Rojava, the political decisions do not always have the most environmentally friendly consequences, and this is one of the reasons why we cannot say that by emulating them exactly we will be more environmentally virtuous. This is perhaps the clearest example of why we cannot do this, because the circumstances under which they make their decisions, a continuing war against ISIS, are so radically unique. We should instead take guidance from the values that underpin the decision-making process in Rojava: a community-based approach where everyone has equal representation and rights, which grows from a demand to hold the government to account. This approach results in environmental protections because it empowers the most vulnerable people in society, who are the most likely to be affected by the consequences of climate change and otherwise would be the least likely to be heard. and there is a fundamental consideration of the need to protect the environment. Applying these values to our own decision-making processes is more likely to result in the cultivation of a virtuous political process than the one we have now.

From Native American communities we can emulate the idea of a 'land ethic', where the main aim of any process of farming or cultivating land is the maximisation of the sustainable yield. In this way we can ensure that we do not damage the environment by

seeking the maximum short-term productivity that we can extract from it. In order to instil

this view in future generations, it needs to be combined with a holistic view of the

environment, where every member of the ecosystem is given equal importance. From this

grows an understanding of the need to maintain biodiversity and view humans as stewards

rather than masters of the land.

This is reinforced by the example seen in aboriginal attitudes to the environment,

which have developed and changed throughout history, but have maintained at their core a

holistic view of the environment. Emulating this viewpoint means that we can develop a

virtuous character that motivates us to approach the various environmental problems we

face in appropriate ways. This concept, as Kohen observed, grew out of 'their spiritual and

religious beliefs' [Kohen, 2003, p.ix], which presents an obstacle to those who do not share

these beliefs. However, there are secular ways in which non-aboriginal people can adopt

these values, as Graham described, through education that promotes consideration for

other members of the community and a close relationship with the environment [Graham,

2008]. Through these processes, we can develop virtuous characters that will motivate us to

improve the way that we interact with the environment and properly address the problem

of plastic pollution. As evidenced by the aboriginal exemplar, this does not mean that there

is one morally good way to treat the environment, but that, as long as interactions with it

are derived from or motivated by a virtuous character that is inspired by these values, those

interactions will be virtuous.

Taking inspiration from the example that The Body Shop sets, we can emulate the

idea that environmental sustainability should be at the core of every business's ethos. By

comparing The Body Shop to the other, less appropriate candidates we have discussed, we

can see that it succeeds because everything that it does comes from a fundamental motivation to protect the environment as much as possible while still making a profit. In this way it is similar to the motivation that underpins the Native American land ethic, just adapted for the business world, in the sense that the goal is not to make as much profit as possible, but to grow the business as much as is environmentally sustainable. Taking inspiration from The Body Shop, other businesses could become environmentally virtuous by incorporating sustainability into their core values so that it informs business decisions in a similar way.

Another admirable characteristic of The Body Shop is the way that it scores its products based on how biodegradable they are, and then consistently tries to improve those scores. Other businesses could emulate this by bringing in similar methods of evaluating the environmental footprint of their products, which would allow customers to make decisions about which products they buy based on their habits of buying more environmentally sustainable products. In its turn, this would motivate businesses to compete to have the most sustainable products in order to attract as many customers as possible. Through this process the companies would develop a disposition to try to make their products more sustainable at every opportunity, and in doing so they would cultivate an environmentally virtuous character.

Businesses looking to become more environmentally virtuous could also emulate The Body Shop's attitude towards its supply chains, which it examines to track the environmental impact of its products at every stage of their lifecycle in order to reduce their environmental footprint. The results of this are exemplified by their partnership with Plastics for Change, but other businesses applying the same process will likely find other

ways of reducing their own environmental footprint in ways that are appropriate to their circumstances. What is important is that, by emulating The Body Shop, businesses can cultivate a disposition that motivates them to look for opportunities to improve their sustainability and reduce plastic pollution wherever they can.

In conclusion, it is clear that there is no one correct way to apply the exemplar approach to environmental virtue ethics, because there is no one correct way to emulate any of the exemplars we have identified. However, by looking at the values that inform how these exemplars interact with the environment, we have seen that their examples can be used as guidelines for cultivating our own environmentally virtuous character. Through adopting a view of politics that values equal rights for all, we can habituate ourselves to always consider people's right to a clean and healthy environment, and the responsibility that our representatives have to reflect these rights through their actions. Through adopting a holistic understanding of the environment, we can cultivate a disposition that drives us to always act in the most environmentally sustainable way. Through making sustainability one of the core values of our economy, we can create a business environment that is habitually disposed to take responsibility for its environmental footprint and always consider the sustainability of its practices. By following the guidelines set out by the environmental exemplars, it is possible for us all to develop an environmentally virtuous character.

Conclusion

At the onset of this research the scale of the crisis of plastic pollution was clearly presented, as was the need for us to radically change how we as a society engage with the environment. The main aim of this thesis was to determine how we can employ environmental virtue ethics to improve our relationship with plastic. The method by which I have attempted to achieve this aim was through the exemplarist approach to virtue ethics, which involved identifying exemplars of environmental virtue. The hope is that, by emulating these exemplars and asking the key question of "what would they do in my situation?" we can develop virtuous dispositions towards the environment in general and plastic in particular.

The difficulties in using the exemplarist approach to environmental virtue ethics were in finding the criteria for identifying appropriate exemplars. This was solved by adopting a wide interpretation of Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory that incorporated a knowledge of the Aristotelian virtues and the concept of the golden mean. According to this interpretation we can identify exemplars by searching for admirable individuals, communities and organisations who instantiate some form of environmental virtue that agents can practically emulate.

I feel that this thesis has contributed to the subject of environmental virtue ethics by showing that there are exemplars of environmental virtue ethics that can give us effective guidance on how to deal with the plastic pollution.

The first of these exemplars is Rojava, which is virtuous in its fundamental ideals of equality and environmental rights, which form an important part of its character that leads its people to act in an environmentally moral way. However, there is future research required

on this topic to determine whether, in a time of peace the society commits further to environmental causes and abandons fossil fuels as its main source of income. On the other hand, were the conditions in Rojava to worsen, and make survival in the region more difficult, it could be interesting to see whether the society stick to its fundamental principle of environmentalism or whether it is sacrificed for survival. The conclusions of this future research could have interesting implications for environmental virtue ethics.

The second group of exemplars identified by this research were indigenous populations, namely Native Americans and Australian Aboriginals, who are exemplary based of their holistic views of the environment and the importance of sustainability that grows from this. We have seen how this character can be cultivated even in cultures that do not share the same spiritual or religious beliefs. Further research into this topic could be conducted as more evidence is discovered about the history of indigenous populations. This discussion would also benefit hugely from the participation of indigenous scholars, as the insight they could provide into the values these communities hold would be invaluable.

The third exemplar of environmental virtue is The Body Shop, which can provide guidance to businesses on how they can cultivate an environmentally virtuous ethos through incorporating sustainability goals and setting long-term targets for reducing their plastic footprint. This chapter also identified some other companies that did not quite do enough to be called appropriate exemplars, but future research that looks at whether companies like Waitrose and Iceland stick to their goals and incorporate them into their ethos could conclude that they are appropriate. Perhaps future research could also look at how an industry-wide scoring system could be implemented to compare the biodegradability and

plastic footprint of different companies' products to allow customers to make more informed decisions about the products that they buy.

Finally, this research identified environmental campaign groups play an important role in holding the government to account and organising communities to take control of the political process. They also organise through local groups to affect real change to the environment on a local level by organising events that target reducing plastic pollution. In Chapter 8 I discussed the ways in which the UK government fails to be an appropriate environmental exemplar by not properly implementing the responsibilities it is given by the European Union's environmental authorities, and failing to build on the baseline environmental legislation to protect the environment and reduce plastic pollution. Further research could be conducted to see whether the government sets any of these targets, in which case its appropriateness as an environmental exemplar could be re-evaluated. More research could also be conducted into the governments of other countries that have more progressive environmental policies, and whether they can act as an exemplar for the UK government to follow.

In the crisis of plastic pollution, we do have environmentally virtuous exemplars to give us guidance. It is how we choose to emulate these exemplars that will reveal our own environmental virtue.

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