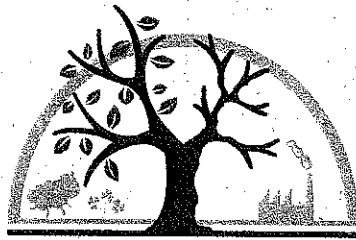


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LIVING WITH  
CONSEQUENCES



P O L I G R A F I

number 69/70 • volume 18, 2013

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EDITED BY  
TOMAŽ GRUŠOVNIK

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# PLACE, NARRATIVE, AND VIRTUË<sup>1</sup>

Paul Haught

“Individual human nature is a nature of relation in, with, and to a world where we dwell for a very limited time.... Without knowing what it is to dwell, we do not know what form of rationality is proper to human beings, or how to understand the human virtues.” (Christine Swanton, “Heideggarian Environmental Virtue Ethics”)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In 1988, Holmes Rolston published his celebrated *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. I choose the word ‘celebrated’ guardedly because Rolston’s book is as philosophically confounding—for his attempt to dissolve the is/ought distinction in ethics—and ethically controversial—he defends killing sentient animals—as it is ingenious for introducing an incredibly broad and rich set of environmental values. Although many of the debates in environmental ethics have migrated away from Rolston’s initial efforts to frame them, the book continues to reward anyone who takes seriously the possibility of nonanthropocentrism in ethics. Among Rolston’s unique contributions in this vein is his insight that the world is replete with values that are ‘carried by’ nature, an expression he chooses deliberately to discourage the presumption of a clear and sharp distinction between objective

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s Note: Earlier versions of the this paper were presented at the Living with Consequences conference in Koper, Slovenia in October 2011 and at the Ninth Annual Meeting for Environmental Philosophy in Allenspark, Colorado in June 2012. I am especially grateful for critical feedback from Matt Ferkany, Brian Treanor, and Phil Cafaro and for helpful questions and comments from Don Maier, Katie McShane and Holmes Rolston.

<sup>2</sup> C. Swanton, “Heideggarian Environmental Virtue Ethics,” in: Cafaro, P. and Sandler, R. (eds.), *Virtue Ethics and the Environment*. Springer, New York 2010, p. 148.

and subjective values.<sup>3</sup> One of the devices Rolston uses to illustrate his view that many environmental values, like some organisms, are hybrids is the image of an ellipse. The value of the ellipse, metaphorically, is its twin foci—having two ‘centers,’ as it were. Rolston gets substantial use out of the ellipse, using it to characterize not only how objectivity and subjectivity collaborate to inform environmental values, but to bridge other dualities including nature/culture (nature and culture are ‘twin foci’ for Rolston), universal/particular, system/species, species/individual, and the abstract and concrete. The image of the ellipse comes into play again to describe the importance of natural history for different kinds of environmental ethical ends. Rolston’s ellipse in this context contrasts what he calls the ‘idiographic’ or uniquely particular focus with the ‘nomothetic’ or recurrent focus. As he explains, “Under the idiographic focus, ethical concern will be directed toward historical particulars... Humans protect the Grand Canyon because it is the particular place it is, one of a kind, warranting a proper name—not because it is representative canyonland...”<sup>4</sup> Elaborating, he writes, “Under the nomothetic focus, the ethic will value natural forces and tendencies or type specimens. A reason for protecting relict wildlands is that they are living museums of the processes of natural history, and this is true in all the particular wilderness areas preserved.”<sup>5</sup>

This elliptical contrast between the nomothetic and recurrent occurs near the end of Rolston’s book in a section entitled “Storied Residence on Earth.” “Storied Residence” is a semi-autonomous essay on the hybridized descriptive and normative functions of narrative for environmental ethics.<sup>6</sup> In an oft-quoted passage from this section, Rolston writes,

<sup>3</sup> See H. Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1988, pp. 3–27.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 342.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that for Rolston there is no hard and fast distinction between ‘environmental ethics’ and ethics. The use of the term ‘environmental ethics,’ when it appears, is often for clarity or convenience. It does not appear to be his view that environmental ethics and ethical theory are essentially distinct.

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. ci*

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<sup>9</sup> *Op. ci*

The rationality of the ethic, as well as the area to be mapped, will be historical. That is, logic will be mixed with story. The move from is to ought, which logicians have typically thought it their job to solve before any naturalistic ethics could be judged sound, is transformed into movement along a story line. It becomes a move from is to becoming, and that historical movement is part of the ought-to-be. The ethic becomes an epic.<sup>7</sup>

Many other philosophers have noticed the normative dimension of narratives, of course, but what is unique about Rolston's notion of storied residence is its attachment to places and to a sense of place that connects each place to its natural and cultural histories. Moreover, this attentiveness to history activates awareness of attributes of places—especially living places—in general, such as their relation to large scale geological, evolutionary, and temporal dynamics. For example, after citing a long narrative passage by a reflective writer from rural New York, Rolston observes, "Residence in a local environment senses the recurrent universals particularly displayed in that place—the seasons, the regenerative, vital powers of life, the life support, the proportions of time and place."<sup>8</sup> He even enjoins his reader to discover this storied residence herself by providing in the text a to-do list of place-based observations and activities that one ought to conduct to evaluate the extent of one's awareness of residing in place.

My present interest in discussing Rolston's notion of storied residence is provoked by how he connects narrative to character. He claims:

Ethics must be written in theory with universal intent, but the theory must permit and require ethics to be lived in practice in the first person singular. This person will not be the solitary Cartesian ego, isolated from its world, but the subjective 'I' in singular communion with its objective world. The logic of the home, the ecology, is finally narrative, and the human career will not be a disembodied reason but a person organic in history. Character always takes narrative form; history is required to form character.<sup>9</sup>

Central to this notion of storied residence, then, is a narrative-informed understanding of one's embodied connection to place(s). To

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., p. 347.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., p. 349.

think of oneself in this way is to reject alternative self-constructions that dislocate the self from one's terrestrial environment. For reasons I hope will become clear, this is more than a warning to avoid the pitfalls of Cartesianism. Rather, I argue it is fundamentally an injunction to live a richer life by recognizing that the complete story of one's life is of embodied residing in place(s), that is, places with their own stories with which one's own narrative is intertwined. I take this advice to be a non-trivial matter for ethical theory. In the passage above, it should be noted that Rolston is also laying out a distinction between formal (logical) and adequacy conditions for an ethical theory. On the one hand, I take him to be welcoming the formal task of evaluating an ethical theory—such as a theory of environmental ethics—by its success in explicating norms or articulating general principles of action, rights, or justice. On the other hand, I see Rolston as also wanting to hold ethical theories to a standard of fitness, that ethical theories must ultimately pass a test of adequacy in accurately describing and thereby being able to influence the lives of moral agents. In short, an ethic must achieve a good fit with the world of moral agents. Adequacy for an ethical theory in the era of environmental ethics, moreover, requires articulation and awareness of an environmental sphere of action; ethics does not end with the interests, rights, feelings, goals, or needs of humans—environments matter, too. Rolston's project in *Environmental Ethics*, as it has been throughout his career, is to define and describe the diverse ways in which environments do and ought to matter. Yet what emerges from "Storied Residence" is that the environmental ethicist's task—of ensuring theoretical adequacy—is made difficult if agents are cognitively and psychologically unfit to grasp the significance of belonging to a history that includes the evolution and generation of life and also the evolution and generation of environmental and cultural values. Without awareness of one's own storied residence on earth, the development of moral character in an era of environmental ethics is stifled—and an environmental ethical theory cannot be rendered adequate to a life truncated by the absence of a contextualizing environmental narrative.

The connection between narrative and character was certainly in the philosophical air in the late 1980s, and Rolston may have been thinking of Alasdair MacIntyre's account of narrative and the unity of the self

advanced in MacIntyre's influential work *After Virtue*. In a relevant passage, MacIntyre writes,

But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do? If I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed.<sup>10</sup>

Rolston's storied residence shares with MacIntyre's narrative 'unity of a life' this sense that we are only at best partial authors of our own stories. One implication is that culture is not merely a backdrop for each human drama, but is actively co-participating in supplying values and suggesting options for what form a life can take. What Rolston's storied residence again adds to this account is an expression for how places are also fundamental co-participants—because they carry values—in the forms of life that people take.

#### Environmental Virtue

Moving forward to the present and to the orientation of my discussion here, there is another noteworthy feature of storied residence that forms the subject matter of this essay, and that is its conceptual location in the growing discourse of environmental virtue ethics. Although there are perhaps as many approaches to virtue ethics as there are philosophers who write about it, there are several common features to these approaches. One place to begin outlining these features is the shared view that moral *evaluation* fundamentally concerns the patterned conduct of agents in terms of their possession of or failure to possess certain character traits. This is not to say that actions do not factor into moral evaluation, but when they do, they do so as indications of an agent's success or failure in possessing the relevant virtue. Consequently, virtue theories place significant emphasis on the cognitive, moral, and emotional *development* of agents—as opposed to the content and form of an agent's rational choice, for instance. Agents need to be able to acquire

<sup>10</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1984, p. 216.



the traits that enable them to hit the targets of virtues. In this vein, virtues have unique profiles—defined by their target situations that call for their possession. Virtue theories also tend to accommodate a rich diversity of virtue and vice terms (or catalogs) that are also closely attached to forms of moral life within diverse moral communities. Ultimately, the possession of virtue—i.e., to be a virtuous person—is to be well fit to respond to one's circumstances and needs as these are experienced within and sometimes between communities. The traits that we admire in ourselves and others convey that fitness, but because circumstances and needs change, so often do the virtues and even the meaning of virtues.<sup>11</sup>

My proposal concerning storied residence is twofold. First, storied residence clearly belongs to the discussion of environmental virtue ethics not only for its congruent narrativism, but especially owing to the prominence it assigns to place(s) in character formation and moral development. By contextualizing moral development within a horizon of place-based narratives, storied residence informs and broadens an agent's awareness of the circumstances and needs that determine the specific targets of virtue. Second, like most virtues, storied residence itself *fits* an agent well to respond to the demands of the world.<sup>12</sup> Simply knowing one's story and its connections to narratives of place and culture arguably situates one better to respond to various demands—for example, threats to environmental value—than by failing to become aware of one's relatedness to a place, its characteristic and unique features, and

<sup>11</sup> For example, Hans Jonas argues that the meaning of humility is changed by life in a technological age. No longer is it attached to a sense of human weakness relative to the power of the gods or God, but to a need to reign in our own self-destructive power. See H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> I share Swanton's view that not every virtue has to be defined by such fitness. For instance, we can admire traits for reasons other than their instrumental value in meeting the world's demands. See especially, C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, p. 93, where she discusses affinities of her own approach to the non-teleological virtue ethics of David Hume and Michael Slore. Ronald Sandler, who disagrees with Swanton that virtues could be correctly defined by their admirability and other non-teleological qualities, nonetheless reserves room for non-eudaimonistic virtues in his theory. Many environmental values fall under this category. See especially R. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*. Columbia University Press, New York 2007, pp. 26–30. Later I discuss how Sandler's pluralistic approach is useful for explicating the virtuous features of storied residence.

its history. It may be the case that storied residence is valuable for *supporting* the development and cultivation of many other (environmental) virtues and thus is not a virtue itself. However, it also seems to have its own dispositional profile—to not only see oneself in narrative terms but as related to place—that the decision to include it within a catalog of environmental virtues strikes me as uncontroversial (especially for pluralistic theories). Indeed, storied residence may best be thought as a special mode of being in the world. As such, it is the achievement of the moral agent in unifying one's ethical projects of caring for self and caring for others through a coherent narrative arc rooted in the realities of one's embodiment and connection to place. Perhaps this characterization gives storied residence the ring of an intellectual or cognitive virtue, but there is a normative dimension to its profile, too. Rather, just as humility organizes an agent's beliefs about self, world and other into a relational vision of status, storied residence describes the activity of organizing one's historical and projective beliefs about self, other, and world into a coherent and ethically significant whole in which the environmental field of one's action is implicated as ground and coauthor. By establishing the connection between Rolston's version of place-based narrativism with virtue ethical achievement, storied residence becomes a key virtue in the fulfillment of an environmentally ethical life. If successful, this reading of Rolston's narrativism also opens up a new and amicable possibility for rethinking his own defense of nonanthropocentrism against virtue-oriented approaches in environmental ethics.

#### Situating Storied Residence within Environmental Virtue Ethics

For the sake of both brevity and clarity, I will focus my discussion, first, on why it is important to include a philosophy of place within virtue ethical discourse, then, second, on what it means to think of storied residence as a virtue. With respect to the former focus, I am also offering a response to a recent essay by Brian Treanor in which he advocates for the use of narratives in environmental virtue ethics.<sup>13</sup> Treanor's project

<sup>13</sup> See B. Treanor, "Narrative Environmental Virtue Ethics: *Phronesis* without a *Phronimos*," *Environmental Ethics*, 30, 2008, pp. 361–79.



is complicated by the fact that he is appealing to narrative to confront the problem of ethical relativism for virtue ethics. On Treanor's view, relativism arises for virtue ethics whenever virtue ethicists appeal to cultural and community norms, as they often do, to define what counts as a virtue (for instance, what it means to be hospitable in Memphis, Tennessee probably differs from what it means in Ljubljana—although hospitality is presumably a virtue in both communities). And although virtue ethics has a long history of making allowances for cultural relativity,<sup>14</sup> for Treanor it is contemporary postmodernism and its coinciding skepticism with respect to practical rationality that amplifies the relativistic problem. In short, postmodernism undermines confidence in the existence of a *phronimos*, the man of practical wisdom of Aristotle's virtue ethics, who can teach his moral community how to discern the virtuous mean. Lacking a *phronimos*, moral agents have nowhere reliable to turn for guidance in practical life. Narratives, therefore, are brought in to explain how agents can simulate virtuous conduct through imaginative confrontations with morally provocative situations. Narratives, on Treanor's view, allow agents to entertain the felt experience of virtuous conduct *as if* they were actually exercising virtues. This mimetic feature of narratives is especially important for environmental virtue to simulate responsiveness to the threats posed by environmental crisis with which agents might otherwise lack experience. It is especially by reading narratives that express historical accounts of human survival and of human flourishing that agents can come to possess virtues critical for responding to global environmental crisis. Written narratives, thus, in a sense create conditions for *phronesis* without a *phronimos*, restoring the

<sup>14</sup> Hume expresses this openness to cultural relativity through a fluvial metaphor (and in a manner especially fitting for an essay on narrative and place) in "A Dialogue" at the conclusion of his second Enquiry: "How shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgments of this nature [i.e., of conduct of agents from different cultures]? By tracing matters, replied I, a little higher, and examining the first principles, which each nation establishes, of blame or censure. The Rhine flows north, the Rhone south; yet both spring from the *same* mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite directions, by the *same* principle of gravity. The different inclinations on the ground, on which they run, cause all the differences in their courses." D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Selby-Bigge, L.A. (ed.), Nidditch, P.H. (rev., 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, p. 333.

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I am necessarily glossing over many careful moves in Treanor's thoughtful and thought-provoking account of environmental virtue ethics informed by the use of narratives, and I regret that I will not do justice to his discussion here. Nonetheless, there are features of his account that stand in contrast to Rolston's sense of storied residence and consequently call attention to the diversity of narrative forms that factor into moral life. Treanor, for instance, recommends that we read the American naturalist writings of Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold. Thoreau, he notes, is especially useful for giving expression to the virtue of simplicity in his nature writing. Moreover, and here I agree with Treanor, it is no stretch of the imagination to think that many of Thoreau's readers have come to possess at least a sense of this virtue and many others from reading him.<sup>15</sup> Such examples indicate that, among other things, the genre of nature writing is one form of narrative construct instrumental in helping agents acquire (environmental) virtues. Another example he cites is the book *Collapse*, by historian Jared Diamond. In *Collapse*, Diamond reflects on the ecological changes that coincided with the failure of several historical human societies. For Treanor, *Collapse* illustrates lessons important for our survival today, especially since many features of our contemporary environmental crisis resemble the conditions that led to the demise of the communities in Diamond's historical narratives. Yet Treanor also cautions against using *Collapse* as our only guiding narrative. We also require narratives of human flourishing as provided especially by American nature writers of the

<sup>15</sup> As I write this, I am also thinking of Edward Abbey's float-trip ruminations on Henry David Thoreau. To some degree Abbey sympathizes with Thoreau's late 20<sup>th</sup> century critics, who seek to psychoanalyze him and thereby dismiss his odd form of moral life as the effect of psychological disorder. (See E. Abbey, *Down the River*. Plume Books, New York, 1982, pp. 31–32). For Abbey, however, Thoreau, while lonely, is also brilliant, brave, challenging, and in many ways a hero whose "mind has been haunting mine for most of my life" (op. cit., p. 13). Based on Abbey's reflections, it also seems reasonable to conclude that he would be agreeable to the thought that Thoreau is also an exemplary 'storied resident,' as evident in the following passage: "Instead, [Thoreau] made a world out of Walden Pond, Concord, and their environs. He walked, he explored, every day and many nights, he learned to know his world as few ever know any world. Once, as he walked in the woods with a friend. . . , the friend expressed his long-felt wish to find an Indian arrowhead. At once, Henry stopped, bent down, and picked one up" (op. cit., p. 46).

19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. These have the ability to teach us attention and observation, love of wildness, and to assist us in understanding "universal aspects of the human condition."<sup>16</sup>

I have no disagreement with Treanor's injunction to read classic works of American nature writing or excellent works of social and ecological history to teach us virtue. I am concerned, however, that such a recommendation not only invites the postmodern skepticism that Treanor worries about by privileging a particular genre of writing as morally exemplary, but it also obscures what I take to be the more profound insight—which is present elsewhere in Treanor's discussion—that a human life is encountered and developed in narrative mode. This is clearly evident to Treanor in his appreciation and cogent explication of the work of Paul Ricoeur on narrative and personal identity. Yet Treanor seems to conflate the *act of reading written narratives* with Ricoeur's understanding of human life in narrative terms. Ricoeur's own compelling insight is that we find ourselves (whenever we find ourselves) through narrative mode; we are storied beings, and for Treanor this makes Ricoeur especially valuable for virtue ethics. As he explains, "[Ricoeur] argues that hermeneutics is more than a tool for reading and interpreting texts, or, put another way, that 'text' should be taken in a much broader sense. Identity and action both have narrative structure—and this structure already points to narrative's usefulness for personal growth, cultivating habits, and other elements essential to virtue ethics."<sup>17</sup> On this rendering, *narrative* describes an individual's expression of the activity of discerning one's own emplotment within the nested sets of stories that circumscribe his or her life and that give direction to moral life and the acquisition and application of virtue. Unfortunately, I also think that Treanor moves too far away from giving this self-productive sense of narrativism its due. It may be that by reading, a person may come to appreciate Thoreau's simplicity or Aldo Leopold's humility (e.g., in recognizing his own moral fallibility for once supporting wolf eradication). However, there are limits to how much we can expect people to be transformed by such narratives, and that transformation might not

<sup>16</sup> Treanor, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 367.

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always be in a direction we prefer. Thoreau's simplicity is a virtue to some, but it is uncompromising (even egotistical) asceticism to others.

By contrast, Ricoeur's project, among other things, is to affirm the narrative form of moral life, enjoining us individually to become aware of the narratives to which we belong, and which help us become responsible for who we are, a perspective more fitting with MacIntyre's narrative-constructed "roles into which we have been drafted" than virtues acquired or strengthened by reading Leopold or Muir. As a result, Ricoeur's project has special force when brought into the discussion of place-based narrativism. It points toward a more fundamental task for moral development and moral agency than that which occurs through mimetic acts of reading. It is a project, moreover, that places emphasis on a person's direct relation to the world. Consider Linda Ethell's observation in her examination of narratives and personal responsibility. For Ethell, Ricoeur's project forces us to become aware of how significant and unavoidable the influence of the world can be:

We can only make sense of our lives (our finitude) if we can incorporate our existence as objects as well as subjects of experience into the narratives which comprise our identities. If we conceive of our inner experience in ways that take for granted our independence of the natural world, then we cannot incorporate our most profound and potentially illuminating experiences into our self-conceptions: there will be no room for stories that make vulnerability [for example] affectively (as well as intellectually) intelligible.<sup>18</sup>

By calling attention to our storied residence on earth, Rolston is similarly describing the narrative conditions of human life. Storied residence calls direct attention to the more-than-cultural narratives to which we belong, and these are encountered through our residence in place(s). Storied residence describes an achievement of the agent in coming to terms with (or at least beginning to come to terms with) the nature of her relationship to more-than-human otherness. That is, through storied residence, the agent is awakened to the active participation of place in her own personal development.

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<sup>18</sup> L. Ethell, *Narrative Identity and Personal Responsibility*. Lexington Books, Lanham, Md., 2010, p. 97.

## A Profile of Storied Residence

This achievement manifests itself in several ways, more than I will describe here, but one is, as already implied, that storied residence holds in place the dynamic tension between the projective self and genuine environmental otherness. As Rolston puts it, the story lines discovered through storied residence "are not simply found, though many lie there to be found. They must also be constructed, authored as they are detected by complex persons localized in the complex ecosystems they inhabit."<sup>19</sup> And as I suggested in the previous section, this nuanced sense of self-authorship can be obscured if too much emphasis is placed on the mimetic effects of reading environmentalist texts.

Second, Rolston makes storied residence available to non-experts. One does not need to know the scientific names of all the trees in the forest, although learning them is likely to have positive outcomes for appreciating their value. Thus, despite not needing expertise, storied-residence is also progressive and developmental so that one's reflective engagement with place is enhanced by knowledge of natural history and environmental science, a view that Rolston continued to develop later on and in substantial depth in his essay "Aesthetic Experience in Forests." It is worth the risk of conflating the two essays to convey Rolston's intuition by citing him from "Aesthetic Experience." There, in a reflection on the role of scientific knowledge on aesthetic appreciation of nature, he asserts the following:

True, those who can count the needle fascicles and get the species right, if they never experience goose pimples when the wind whips through the pines, fail as much as do the poets in their naïve romanticism. Nevertheless, only when moving through science to the deeper aesthetic experiences that are enriched by science can the forest be most adequately known. Aestheticians are often not comfortable with this; they want to insist on human capacities to confront nature in relative independence of science. One must be moved, but one needs to be moved in the right direction, where 'right' means with appropriate appreciation of what is actually going on.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Rolston, *op. cit.*, pp. 350–51.

<sup>20</sup> H. Rolston, III, "Aesthetic Experience in Forests," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56 (2), 1998, p. 160.

As I elaborate in the next section, Rolston's sense of an agent's progressive ability to appreciate environmental value, especially with the acquisition of scientific knowledge, has important implications for fitting storied residence into an account of environmental virtue. Most virtue theories anticipate that agents gradually acquire virtues through practice, and here Rolston's sense of 'appropriate appreciation' points toward a mature stage of evaluative ability without precluding legitimate acts of appreciation absent of scientific knowledge. The fact that storied-residing can also be initiated without requiring the entire cognitive and evaluative tool kit shows that it has this affinity to Rolston's own developed expression of the engagement between self and environmental other (e.g., the forest).

A third feature of storied residence, also related to its gradual achievement by the agent, is the manner in which the relevant stories migrate back and forth between local residence in place and cognitive appreciation for evolutionary complexity and deep (even cosmic scales) of time. In "Storied Residence" this dynamic is conveyed by the dialectic between the idiographic and nomothetic described earlier, but this view is again developed in depth in the "Aesthetic Experience" essay:

The forest—we must first think—is prehistoric and perennial, especially in contrast with ephemeral civilizations, their histories, politics, and arts. The perceptive forest visitor realizes also the centuries-long forest successions, proceeding toward climax, yet ever interrupted and reset by fire and storm... The Carboniferous forests were giant club mosses and horsetails; the Jurassic Forests were gymnosperms—conifers, cycads, ginkgoes, seed ferns. A forest today is yesterday being transformed into tomorrow.<sup>21</sup>

Rolston is insistent on situating each human life in history. As he explains in "Storied Residence," if an "ethic is really to incorporate the whole story, it must systematically embed itself in historical eventfulness, or else it will not really be objective."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, this eventfulness includes the very distant past even if storied residence is fundamentally an engagement of individual persons living today within range of their more proximate and more strongly felt cultural and environmental

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>22</sup> Rolston, *Environmental Ethics*, p. 350.



histories. Consequently, Rolston also emphasizes that storied residence enhances the richness of human life at times by paradoxically dislocating the human from episodes in the evolutionary and cosmic drama; through storied residence one gains an appreciation of the achievements of natural systems and processes that occurred independently of human involvement for the vast majority of earth history.

Yet returning to the temporal span of an individual human life in which storied residence is actually lived, is a fourth distinctive feature, what Rolston describes as a "systemic" and "communitarian achievement."<sup>23</sup> "What goes on in the heads of individuals integrates into something that goes over the heads of any of us."<sup>24</sup> Among other things, this observation adds force to the conviction held by many moral narrativists, including Ricouer and MacIntyre, that each person finds herself already attached to a story (and stories) with their own normative dynamics. Yet, Rolston is also leaving room for authentic contributions to that normative set by the agent *and* by the places and communities in which one resides. As he puts it, "Environmental ethics will have a history entwined with these biographies of particular individuals. Such a code of ethics will have its rationality embedded in the historical developments in which environmental ethicists reside."<sup>25</sup>

A fifth feature of the achievement of storied residence is the development by the agent of the ability to sustain and express attitudes of "love of one's world and freedom in it."<sup>26</sup> Rolston even adventures to claim that this expression of love "is ultimately, what the evolutionary epic has been about...."<sup>27</sup> I suspect that the postmodern skepticism that Treanor worries about is lurking not too far away, perhaps ready to quip that Rolston's storied residence is patently biblical in its eschatological framing of the evolutionary epic. However, even if storied-residence bears the imprint of the Judeo-Christian narrative, it is important to recognize that (assuming it fits) it may very well be a feature of Rolston's own unique way of giving expression to his own experience of storied-resi-

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., p. 353.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., p. 352.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit.

dence. Seen in such a way, Rolston's account is an expression of a systemic and communitarian achievement as he has uniquely experienced it. Conversely, we may find ourselves (along with our skeptical friends) linked to many of the same stories as Rolston, and a failure to engage with them critically as potentially constitutive of our own stories may leave us deprived of value in much the same fashion as the uninspired scientists and naïve poets he admonishes in "Aesthetic Experience."

Each of these characteristics deserves more explication than I can provide here, but collectively they supplement an account of how the role of narratives in environmental ethics is more complex and morally significant than an injunction to read particular works of nature writing. This is not to say that storied residence or its indications of moral achievement are uncontroversial, and I will entertain critical questions about storied residence in closing. Yet to the extent that storied residence captures moral and developmental achievements (as the preceding list suggests), it invites consideration within the context of virtue ethics and its catalog of modes of moral achievement.

#### Storied Residence as Virtue

If storied residence is to play a key role in making ethical theory adequate, as intimated by Rolston's quote from earlier, then it is meaningful to ask what the theory as a whole should look like. Although Rolston does not wed his environmental ethics to a particular ethical theory, his general approach favors deontological notions of value and respect for environmental values with a particularist sensibility to places and communities. This otherwise unhappy marriage at the theoretical level is one that virtue theories often attempt to sustain by deriving moral principles from virtues (v-rules) while simultaneously holding onto the adequacy criterion that the informal virtue discourse of actual moral communities is ultimately decisive. Rolston is clearly paying homage to both poles of ethics in his discussion of storied residence, but there are other reasons to think that storied residence belongs within the virtue ethical conversation and may be a candidate environmental virtue as well.

To see how, I'll begin with Rolston's overt objection to environmental virtue ethics. Alluding to Thomas Hill's account of the environmen-

tal virtue of humility, Rolston dismisses environmental virtue ethics on anthropocentric grounds. If you recall my characterization from earlier that virtue ethics emphasizes the evaluation of character over action, then you'll appreciate Rolston's worry that from the standpoint of evaluation, virtue ethics will always render environmental values secondary to the moral success of the agent. This becomes especially apparent in Hill's discussion. Hill imagines a person who, in destroying the ecological and aesthetic richness of his own property, acts within his rights yet provokes the judgment that he lacks humility; this person simply does not appreciate the limits of his own destructiveness.<sup>28</sup> For Hill, recognition of this moral failure is an important development for environmental ethics; it helps to articulate intuitions that many of us have about such behavior. Unfortunately, this achievement for environmental ethics in demonstrating the relevance of virtue discourse nonetheless fails to justify the stronger judgment that the man ought to be punished or sanctioned. Perhaps even more disconcerting is that the man's lack of humility only appears to those who possess an environmentally friendly outlook; many of the man's neighbors might actually *approve* of his conduct. To an author with Rolston's environmental sensibilities, therefore, further advice to develop environmental ethics along virtue ethical lines seems wrong-headed. It fails to move environmental ethics any closer to genuine respect for nonanthropocentric values in nature by rendering that activity little more than a cause to celebrate one more human achievement.

There are two avenues for rebuttal from the standpoint of virtue ethics. The first is to stress that Rolston fails to consider the importance of targets of virtue—namely independent environmental values—within his criticism. Although such considerations may not always be necessary in evaluating an agent for the possession of virtue (one can be compassionate without compassion always reflecting responsiveness to environmental values), they are critical for justifying and defining virtues.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See T. Hill, Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellences and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics*, 5, 1983, pp. 211–24.

<sup>29</sup> For a criticism of Rolston's objection to virtue ethics along these lines, see Sandler, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–13. Swanton also weighs in on this debate in claiming that Rolston is correct to recognize the independent value of natural objects, but that he overlooks the distinction between

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Consequently, environmental values, to the extent that they appear as ends that justify and help to define the virtues, always matter. Put differently, and in terms that might even be acceptable to Rolston, justification and evaluation should be seen as twin foci for an elliptical model of virtue ethics. If our emphasis is on justification, then we will focus our concern on the targets of virtue, including environmental values. Conversely, if our emphasis is on evaluation, then the agent is elevated to prominence.

The second line of response is to recruit Rolston's 'storied residence' into the catalog of virtues. On first glance, to the extent that storied residence represents an achievement in an agent's capacity to respond to environmental values it resembles other virtues in equipping agents to respond to demands of the world. Rolston's objection to virtue ethics thus appears to be misguided if storied residence refers to an admirable disposition to discover and respond to environmental values. From a more theoretical perspective, storied residence also appears to have much going for it as a virtue. One framework with which it fits well is the virtue ethical pluralism recently advanced by Ronald Sandler. On Sandler's view, virtues are justified by their conduciveness to equip agents dispositionally to achieve certain ends. These ends include: 1) the agent's own survival; 2) the continuance of the species; 3) the agent's characteristic freedom from pain and enjoyment; 4) the good functioning of the social group; 5) the agent's autonomy; 6) the agent's accumulation of knowledge; 7) a meaningful life; and 8) "the realization of any noneudaimonistic ends...in the way characteristic of human beings...."<sup>30</sup> On the whole, environmental values tend to fall under the category of noneudaimonistic ends on Sandler's account, and this distinction is significant because many environmental values might otherwise only serve the anthropocentric interests of humans and their communities. The kind of outlook that one acquires through storied residence arguably amplifies the prospects for discovery of these noneudaimonistic values while also fitting agents well for many of the other

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objects of praise and blame (i.e., agents) and objects that possess independent value. See Swanton, "Heideggerian Virtue Ethics," p. 147.

<sup>30</sup> Sandler, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

ends that define the virtues, especially the accumulation of knowledge and living a meaningful life.<sup>31</sup>

There is another theoretical value for making the connection between Sandler's pluralistic schema of virtue ethical ends and storied residence. For a trait to be a virtue it must enjoy a fairly tight relation to ethically desirable beliefs, desires, or behaviors,<sup>32</sup> and Sandler's schema is invoked precisely to supply such desirability. It could be thought that storied residence is already adequately captured by socially or behaviorally desirable expressions of awe or caring, but I am hesitant to embrace these reductive moves too hastily. Rather, I see Rolston, through the concept of storied residence, as endeavoring to describe a special way of being in the world, a way of being that can be illustrated by expanding on Hill's depiction of humility as an ideal of moral excellence. Although Hill does not make the distinction, we often say that an agent *acts* humbly, but it may be more accurate to say than an agent *thinks* humbly since to act humbly requires the recognition of one's relational status compared to something else. In Hill's example, this is the natural environment, but one doesn't really *act* humbly by not destroying the environment. At best the act is one of *restraint*, but such restraint is only meaningful against the (also) humble activity of *cognitively* organizing the features of the world into various relationships of status. To *be* humble, then, is to adopt a system of beliefs—in Hill's case, an environmental worldview—that describes those relationships in such a way as to emphasize a separation between agent and other. This recognition of difference is desirable because it enables respect for the other and thereby contributes

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<sup>31</sup> Sandler's account, like Rolston's philosophy, is married tightly to a kind of scientific naturalism, although both philosophers are non-dogmatic about scientific claims. Science on both of their views adheres to a principle of fallibility (or falsification). Nonetheless, as I hinted at earlier (in note #12) virtue ethical approaches need not be teleological in the way that Sandler advocates. Even while retaining their naturalism, virtue ethics can be fundamentally expressivist with respect to human sentiments, earning their justification on more particularist terms than Sandler's justificatory schema allows. In addition to Swanton (*Virtue Ethics*, op. cit.) Simon Blackburn develops this kind of virtue ethical theory. See S. Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998. At the practical level, however, there is little dispute between approaches that virtues can be cultivated to prepare agents to respond to predictable social and moral situations, and even predictably chaotic situations such as environmental crisis.

<sup>32</sup> I wish to thank Matt Ferkany for highlighting the need to address this issue.



to an agent's fitness to meet many of the ends of an ethical life. Similarly, storied residence is something agents should also want to acquire because by organizing oneself and the features of one's world into coherent narrative sets one also becomes better equipped to meet the ends of an ethical life. To be sure, a significant feature of this way of being is the activation of various modes of caring, for example, care for oneself—in living a knowledgeable and meaningful life—and for others, at the very least as the coauthors and collaborators in one's personal narrative. Yet storied residence is also desirable insofar as it stimulates the effort to structure one's beliefs in a way that lends coherence to one's ethical projects and thereby makes it possible to live in ways to fulfill them. Moreover, Rolston suggests that storied residence is an antidote to those behaviors, often stimulated by dis-locating technologies, that obscure the realities of our embodiment and connection to place. As a result, storied residence describes a significant achievement in one's moral development. The effect dispositionally may be more cognitive than practical, but one practical effect is to make it possible to order the ends of an ethical life into a coherent, embodied, and emplaced whole.

### Questions

If storied residence passes the test for coherence within an environmental virtue ethical approach, it nonetheless generates several more questions for its practical implementation within a framework of moral excellence. One concerns the relativistic threat that Treanor worries about in his own discussion of narratives and environmental virtues. This problem seems to emerge with storied residence because of its emphasis on place-based narratives in character development. Variant experiences of residing in place(s) potentially lead to variant expressions of value, thereby undermining confidence that moral disputes arising from conflicts between values can be resolved. In response, virtue ethics is sufficiently pluralistic to tolerate variance in agents' cultural and environmental experiences. Nonetheless, storied residence also entails anticipating that by residing in place and by attending to dynamic characteristics of place (through one's narrative engagement and reflection on residing), features common to humans dwelling in diverse environ-



ments will emerge. Surviving and flourishing are general characteristics of humans in all sorts of environments, for instance. Different virtues may be enlisted for such ends, or shared virtues may reflect different sensitivities to local conditions, but there is likely to be a broad range of similarities with respect to how human communities survive and thrive, even if commonalities are only compared on the level of human physiological needs. Similarly, although aesthetic sensibilities may be honed by storied residence to the unique features of the particular places in which humans dwell, responsiveness to the aesthetic features of places in general can also be anticipated by storied residence. Aesthetic responsiveness can also be developed and extended to a variety of places as one's sense of storied residence is amplified by scientific and cultural narratives of place(s).<sup>33</sup> Relativism, on the other hand, implies that variance viciously undermines the prospect for moral consensus. The pluralism of storied residence and virtue ethics, by contrast, allows for the possibility of consensus on moral and aesthetic norms without requiring that any particular localized norms must be universalizable.

A second problem for storied residence is related to the concern about relativism, and it concerns the question of whether storied residence privileges a kind of environmentalist worldview. The answer is both no and yes. To the extent that all people have the capacity to cultivate storied residence in their own communal and environmental place/space, then there is no expectation that the perspective it engenders is wedded to political environmentalism. In this sense, storied residence underdetermines one's politics. However, it is quite arguable that for storied residence to be adequate for environmental ethics in certain communities and places, then particular forms of responsiveness to environmental values (e.g., sensitivity to extinction vortices or environmental injustice) are to be cultivated and encouraged. Consequently, storied residence may overdetermine one's political sentiments, but this is an

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<sup>33</sup> For example, through positive aesthetics. See especially, A. Carlson, "Nature and Positive Aesthetics," *Environmental Ethics*, 6, 1984, pp. 5-34 and E. Hargrove, *Foundations of Environmental Ethics*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1989, pp. 165-205.

issue for environmental virtue ethics broadly, and I would submit for environmental ethics as a whole if it aspires to nonanthropocentrism.<sup>34</sup>

Storied residence may also overdetermine the appropriate content for environmental narratives with its dependence on scientific descriptions of natural history and processes. The issue this concern generates is similar to the issue in environmental aesthetics that interrogates the role scientific knowledge should play in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Opposing sides of this controversy debate the claim that the possession of scientific knowledge enhances one's aesthetic experience of nature. Rolston, as we saw in "Aesthetic Experience in Forests," is a proponent of this view, but as his account of storied residence implies, experiences of place, even in built environments, do not require scientific knowledge even if appreciation of one's residence in place(s) is also often enhanced by such knowledge.

### Conclusion

In closing, the proposal that storied residence should be considered within the framework of environmental virtue ethics faces at least one other challenge, and it has to do with the urgency of environmental crisis. It is unfortunately all too easy to despair that anthropogenic devastation of earth's ecological support systems is so extensive that our sole virtue ethical task ought to be to prepare today's children for a world that will require their radical adaptation to chaotic swings in weather patterns and coinciding agricultural failures and economic collapse. In such circumstances, prudence would seem to dictate following Treanor's advice to heed the warnings implicit in Diamond's *Collapse* and identify narratives of hope and survival in hopeless situations. Yet as urgently as environmental crisis presents itself, the temporal scales of life's own struggles and achievements that storied residence compels us to contemplate also become significant in preparing agents for appropriate moral

<sup>34</sup> This is an issue I take up with respect to environmental virtue ethics in P. Haught, "Hume's Knave and Nonanthropocentric Virtues" in: Cafaro and Sandler (eds.): *Virtue Ethics and the Environment*. Springer, New York 2010, pp. 129–43 and with respect to environmental justice in P. Haught, "Environmental Virtues and Environmental Justice," *Environmental Ethics*, 33, 2011, pp. 357–75.

action. Indeed, among the narratives that residing in place(s) can illuminate are those that describe the ecological and evolutionary dynamics of places that we inhabit today. This is not to encourage narrativistic flights of fantasy or nostalgic yearning for wild lands that our ancestors probably never encountered.<sup>35</sup> But it is to remind ourselves of the mode of our own belonging to these grander stories. And this reminder may in small part help to supply the rational warrant for hope by reminding the storied resident that the drama of earth history is yet unfolding and continues to surprise, astonish, cultivate our wonder, and on occasion to overwhelm us with its beauty. My own sense of things is that despite the evident imminence of environmental crisis, opportunities to cultivate a sense of storied residence still abound globally—even in a warmer, more crowded world. Moreover, these opportunities are more likely to be impeded by human dependence on dislocating technologies, especially those related to information and food distribution and production. To dwell in place in the sense conveyed by storied residence is to interrupt the placelessness that characterizes many contemporary forms of life. More significantly, by fostering the development of a narrative-based sensitivity to one's *emplacement*, storied residence supports awareness of the existence of the conditions for environmental crisis, a crisis that undoubtedly seems impossible to those whose narratives are increasingly informed by the *dis-embodied* and *dis-located* sources of experience so prevalent today.

#### Postscript

Although the preceding discussion is framed by concerns that are most germane to environmental ethics, this essay is also an exploration of the significance of bringing together two distinct intuitions concerning the role of narrative in moral development and agency. The first concerns the special domain of environmental ethics where narratives concerning place and places have often been thought to be important

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, W. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon (ed.): *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. W.W. Norton, New York 1996.

for acquiring or strengthening one's discernment of and appreciation for environmental values. The idea here is that one might miss out on the benefits of unique and important values if one is unaware of or overlooks the fact that one resides in a particular place (at any given time) and that each place has its own unique ecological and (very likely) cultural history. One's life is richer in value—more complete—to the extent that one learns the ecological and cultural history of one's place(s).

On a weak version of this intuition, one might say that knowing these histories adds value to one's life. A stronger version of this intuition is that place-based narratives are constitutive of agency and self-identity. Indeed, it may be common for people to tacitly respect the values embedded in these narratives because they are broadly reflected in the languages and culture of the people who reside in particular places. One may become more conscientious of the influence of these narratives on one's worldview, and it may even be possible to moderate that influence. Nonetheless, each of us is more or less tethered to place-based narratives that both inform and transcend our own individual life stories.

For the moment I am not passing judgment on the plausibility of either weak or strong intuitions of place-based narratives, even though the distinction strikes me as non-trivial for a theory of self-identity since the weak version implies that 'self' may exist prior to and independently of place. The role of narrative in self-identify, however, also finds expression in theories of virtue. Thus, the second intuition about narrative and self I confront in this essay is one common to virtue ethics, namely that moral agency as reflected in one's character is encountered reflexively in narrative mode. Our lives are encountered in story form, and each one of us may occupy several stories, which collectively describe origins and imply outcomes for the forms of moral life we take on. These are stories of upbringing, of education, of career, and of relationships. They are stories of choices made and experiences endured. These stories may be fractured or seamless, and they may have a variety of sources, but whether full of fits and starts or marked more by linearity, the stories that circumscribe each of our lives hold open the promise of coherence and supply the basis for an account of our own ability or inability to acquire and grow in the possession of virtue.

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Unfortunately, both of these intuitions concerning place-based and virtue-ethical narrativism attract skepticism once one factors in the likelihood that any narrative will be at best a hybrid of fact and fiction. Even a coherent narrative, whether of one's place or one's career path, will inevitably be condensed, edited, and will actively recruit the imagination to add flourishes to (or subtract unwanted memories from) the story. Doubts only grow when one considers that we may be only occasionally and then only dimly aware of the stories that circumscribe our lives in place or that help us understand our moral projects. Our minds may echo and distract us with myths, misinformation, and mimetic desires channeled through our parents, teachers, peers and numerous other social forces for conveying information that sometimes fades and sometimes lingers in the space between our ears. Fortunately, to mitigate some of this skepticism, it is also plausible that narratives of place and self can be and ought to be examined (self-) critically—even skeptically—to minimize the influence of flights of fancy or unwarranted optimism (or pessimism) implied by the stories. Whether one story or another ought to persist in determining the trajectory of our future choices is, if Ricouer and Rolston are correct, an option over which we can continue to exercise some control through self-authorship. And as I have begun to argue in this paper, the virtue-oriented approach has much going for it in making sense of how to get the story straight, first for one's own ethical journey, and second, for those with whom one resides on earth.

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