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### Laudato Si, Marx, and a Human Motivation for Addressing Climate Change

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# *Laudato Si*, Marx, and a Human Motivation for Addressing Climate Change

Timothy A. Weidel\*

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## Abstract

In the face of climate change, moral motivation is central: why should individuals feel compelled to act to combat this problem? Justice-based responses miss two morally salient issues: that the key ethical relationship is between us and the environment, and there is something in it for us to act to aid our environment. In support of this thesis there are two seemingly disparate sources: Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and the early Marx's account of human essence as species-being. Francis argues we must see nature as an "other" with whom we have a relationship, rather than dominating nature. Marx considers how we currently interact with "others," and the harms these interactions cause to us. In both contexts, we harm our environment by not acting to meet its needs, and harm ourselves by making it less likely to develop ourselves as more fully human persons. It is the avoidance of these harms that can motivate us to act against climate change.

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# I. Introduction

It has become increasingly clear in recent years that human influence is significantly impacting our environment in negative ways, and such changes in our climate and environment threaten our long-term survival as a species on Earth. But the presence of such scientific evidence, as robust as it may be, does not in and of itself answer the related moral question of why we should do something about this problem. Even the acknowledgement that such degradation is a severe problem for our ecosystem does not in and of itself provide sufficient motivation for us as human beings; many conservative critics argue that such change, however negative it may appear from our perspective, is part of the “natural cycle” of our planet and thus there is no imperative for us to intervene in any way. Thus, we are still left with the motivational question: why should individuals feel morally compelled to act to combat climate change and environmental degradation?

A number of responses have been developed in recent years to attempt to provide a philosophically (and perhaps pragmatically) defensible answer. Many of these arguments address the motivational question from the standpoint of justice, in one of two major forms. On the one hand, philosophers such as Simon Caney focus on the obligations of currently existing persons to future generations. Thus, we have a moral obligation to act to combat climate change because not doing so will cause harm to future (yet-to-exist) generations of human beings, and to not act would be to do an injustice to them given our opportunity to do something. (In other words, we are acting negligently should we fail to act.<sup>1</sup>)

Others such as Henry Shue and Darrell Moellendorf take the justice perspective, but argue that the obligation to act is developed in the relationship between those currently existing persons in the Global North and currently existing persons in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, those in the developed North are by and large responsible for the emissions that are contributing to climate change, and are the ones benefitted by the economic output of such emissions. On the other, those in the developing countries of the Global South see little benefit from such emissions (i.e., they are the poorest of our world); yet they are the most at risk to be severely impacted by climate change, due to rising sea levels, loss of fish and wildlife for hunting, and/or persistent droughts. Thus, on this view, our motivation is derived from a justice-based claim that we have an obligation to pay our fair share for the negative consequences we have already caused the currently existing poor. Moving forward, we must then continue to act to mitigate the harms we have created and prevent future harms from occurring to these poor persons.

Yet, such justice-based arguments face significant hurdles in terms of offering a compelling reason to act, even for those who accept that harms are occurring. The moral problem of climate change is perhaps unique in that we as a species are producing a harm that could not come about through individual actions. As Dale Jamieson notes, climate change is manifest in indirect ways that circumscribe standard casual analyses; it is quite difficult to point to a clear causal connection between one person’s actions and the harmful effect.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the emissions of one particular person driving his truck do not enter the atmosphere and settle over a developing country where they cause a marked rise in the sea level. Furthermore, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong rightly observes that individual emissions are themselves low, they do not cause harm in and of themselves, and the harms to future generations are caused by such actions that are neither necessary nor sufficient to produce the

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<sup>1</sup> For a version of this argument, see Simon Caney, “Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds,” in *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, ed. Stephen M. Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson, and Henry Shue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 163–80.

<sup>2</sup> See Henry Shue, “Global Environment and International Inequality,” in Gardiner et al., *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, pp. 101–11, and Darrell Moellendorf, *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Dale Jamieson, “Climate Change, Responsibility, and Justice,” *Science, Engineering, and Ethics* 16, no. 3 (2010): 431–45.

overall effect.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, one may claim that it is asking me to sacrifice too much to mitigate my role in causing climate change; I would have to make significant alterations to my daily life in order to limit emissions or rectify the harms of past emissions. Thus, the problematic upshot of these responses is that it is particularly hard for the justice argument to make a significant motivational case for an individual to act.

Despite these hurdles, my goal in this paper is not to disprove the philosophical underpinnings of these justice-based approaches, or even necessarily disagree that we may in fact have such obligations to future generations or to the poorest persons of our planet. On the contrary, such perspectives point toward the importance of taking account of our relationships to others, both in terms of our theorizing about our moral obligations, and in terms of being motivated by said obligations to act. Given the realities of our ever-increasingly globalized world (in terms of economics, communications, etc.), it is becoming impossible to posit oneself as an atom that both is unaffected by and does not have effects on others. These justice-based approaches do well to take into account this relational element of our existence.

With that being said, I argue that by focusing on the relationship between persons (whether currently existing poor persons or future generations) the justice argument overlooks the key ethical relationship that is necessary to focus on in the case of climate change: the relationship that exists between us and nature/the environment. By turning our focus to this relationship and considering it as between us and an identifiable “other,” rather than as something separate and nonhuman, an alternative and potentially more attractive motivation for combatting climate change comes to light: avoiding harms to ourselves. In other words, there is something in it for us to act to aid the “other” that is nature. To unpack our interest in acting to benefit the environment, I want to draw on two seemingly disparate sources: Pope Francis, and the early Karl Marx’s account of human essence as species-being (influenced heavily by Aristotle).

## II. *Laudato Si* and Nature as “Poor”

In his recent papal encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis pushes back against what he sees as the current Anthropocene perspective, wherein nature is solely a resource to be bent toward human ends. Francis addresses many aspects related to the increasing ruin of our natural environment: he criticizes an ever-increasing consumer mindset that exacerbates the problem, and decries technological solutions as constituting no meaningful break from the Anthropocene worldview.

Here I focus on a more foundational concern that Francis takes up: the ways in which the paradigm of the Anthropocene affects our fundamental ethical relationships, particularly the relationship between human beings and nature. After unpacking what I see as Francis’ development of an alterity relationship with nature, I argue that considering nature (and our relationship to it) in this light reveals an alternative moral motivation for acting to prevent harms to nature.

In contrast to the Anthropocene, Francis wants us to reflect upon and return to a meaningful ethical relationship with nature. He offers an image of this relationship as grounded in the life of his papal namesake St. Francis of Assisi: “He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”<sup>5</sup> To examine the development and parameters of this relationship, Pope Francis returns to the Biblical account of creation in Genesis:

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations,” in Gardiner et al., *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, pp. 332–46.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care For Our Common Home* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), p. 15. He also invokes St. Bonaventure who would call all creatures by the name of “brother” and “sister.”

*God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”<sup>6</sup>*

The themes of “subjugation” and “dominion” are drawn out of this story of creation, seeming to put humankind in a hierarchical relationship over nature; it is to be bent to our ends, and we are to direct its cultivation from a position of superiority. Later in Genesis 2:15, it speaks of our mandate as “to till it and keep it.” As Francis points out, this relationship between humans and nature is affected by the original sin of Adam and Eve, forever altering the paradigm:

*The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the Earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the Earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19).<sup>7</sup>*

Sin, as a breaking of our mandate, causes harm to this relationship between us and nature. In our contemporary world, Francis argues we have abandoned the paradigm that St. Francis of Assisi offers: “This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.”<sup>8</sup>

On Francis’ view this paradigm should be applied to all three of the relationships he sees as primary (the first two being to God and to our neighbor); to this end an underlying theme of the encyclical is to bring the voices of the poor and indigenous in the Global South to bear on environmental concerns. That being said, Francis directs his focus in the context of this relational model at the third of the relationships mentioned: between human beings and the “Earth itself.” Here Francis argues that the conception of dominion that is drawn out of the creation story has been misinterpreted (driven perhaps by the “sins” discussed above) into a relationship of domination. Rather than recognizing a reciprocal relationship between us and nature, the contemporary view has “encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting [humans] as domineering and destructive by nature.”<sup>9</sup> He argues that we must return our focus to the text, to recognize the way in which the domination perspective misses a significant aspect of context:

*The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>7</sup> *Laudato Si*, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

According to Francis this lack of contextual awareness has resulted in a perversion of dominion as domination, which has in turn led us to view nature merely as a natural resource for unlimited consumption. In contrast, he argues we must return dominion to its appropriate paradigm, one wherein we have a relationship of “mutual responsibility” between us and nature.

As part of the basis for this relationship, Francis speaks of our environment in a much more ontologically robust manner. The environment is not merely a backdrop or context for human activity; nor is it a passive recipient of our benevolent “tilling” and care. Rather, he distinguishes it as something that has independent ontological status, a part of existence that shared many characteristics with us as human beings:

*In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature”, for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.<sup>11</sup>*

Speaking of nature or our environment in this way as “creation,” Francis argues it is bestowed a level of “reality” that is a part of the “universal communion” into which we all are called: both us as humans, and nature/creation. In this way, it has its own “value and significance.” Thus, nature/creation itself, as well as all parts of it, have an inherent value. Francis is careful to acknowledge that this is not meant to argue that all members in creation (e.g., humans, animals, or environment) are equal; humans still occupy a place imbued with a unique kind of dignity.<sup>12</sup> Instead, his claim is that all have value that cannot be merely subordinated to human aims. This argument and its moral import can be summed up well in an important couplet of passages:

*A rediscovery of nature can never be at the cost of the freedom and responsibility of human beings who, as part of the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop [creation’s] potential.<sup>13</sup>*

*If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.<sup>14</sup>*

In both passages Francis speaks of creation in a particular way, one that develops a certain ontological status that is akin to human beings. In the former, humans have a responsibility to cultivate nature to help develop creation’s potential. Notice that this potential is not developed as potential for human beings, or as a potential resource for us, but rather as potential proper, in the context of creation itself as distinct from humans. In the latter, there is a clear relationship between human beings and creation wherein we have an obligation to limit and direct our material powers in ways that protect and promote the value of nature.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> “This is not to put all living beings on the same level nor to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails. Nor does it imply a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility. Such notions would end up creating new imbalances which would deflect us from the reality which challenges us.” Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> To capture these aspects of potentiality and relationality I use the term *nature* going forward, as opposed to Francis’ preferred *creation* or the broader term *environment*. *Creation* entails a theological worldview that may not be shared

Francis therefore pushes back against the view that he sees permeating the Anthropocene age, wherein nature is merely raw material to be bent toward whatever human end. Every aspect of nature therefore has intrinsic value, not merely instrumental value for human beings to use as they see fit. Thus, it is clear that Francis wants to argue for an intimate connection between humans and nature, one that demands of us a concern for the well-being of nature for its' own sake.

What then is the character of this relationship? On the one hand, Francis is speaking of our caring for nature, as it is entrusted to us for such care and we must "protect" nature (as the quotes above state). But looking closer at his language, I argue that Francis goes beyond merely caring for nature/creation as our environment or as a backdrop to human activity.

Most commonly in Catholic doctrine, the concept of stewardship has been deployed, indicating that creation is thus our charge. But here in *Laudato Si*, Francis' language and perspective moves further to view nature in an altogether different one, one that seems to treat nature as an entity in itself, as an "other." Talking of our responsibility to help nature "develop its potential" indicates that the other entity (creation) has some potential that can be actualized in itself, for its own sake. Focusing on a "mutual responsibility between humans and nature" indicates a relationship that works not merely in one but in *two* directions: from humans to nature, and from nature to humans. As such, the entity that is nature/creation is elevated in its ontological status, to being a distinct other from human beings. Cajetan Iheka identifies the important contours of this relationship in Francis' argument: "Readers are asked . . . to visualize a shared vulnerability that transcends species and equally leaves imprints on humans, plants, and animals alike."<sup>16</sup> Our relationship, while it involves care for this other, is therefore a relation of alterity and vulnerability.

One of the most important indicators of Francis' development of this alterity relationship comes very early in the encyclical. In the opening sections, he draws an analogy between nature as an "other" and the poor persons who exist in our world, claiming that the Earth is our "sister with whom we share our life" and "among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor."<sup>17</sup> It is this analogy that I argue speaks most strongly of the paradigm that Francis develops here, wherein nature is not merely some external background or subjugated charge of ours, but an other for whom we have a responsibility to care, and an other with which we must develop a mutual and reciprocal relationship. He further cements this perspective by detailing what can cause us to neglect a meaningful and appropriate alterity relationship with creation:

*It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. These days, they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage.... This is due partly to the fact that many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems.... This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality. At times this attitude exists side by side with a "green" rhetoric. Today, however,*

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universally, while *environment* connotes a sense of a backdrop for human activity. *Nature* refers not merely to our ecosystem, but also to a multitude of species and plant life, enmeshed in a set of active relationships that form a unified biosphere.

<sup>16</sup> Cajetan Iheka, "Pope Francis' Integral Ecology and Environmentalism for the Poor," *Environmental Ethics* 39 (2017): 245.

<sup>17</sup> *Laudato Si*, p. 9.



*we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*<sup>18</sup>

Here again Francis' language speaks of creation as being able to cry out, and that we must not only hear, but also heed the cry of this other. The proper alterity relationship, captured here as an appropriate ecology (for it is a relationship between humans and nature), works in contrast to what Francis calls a "tyrannical anthropocentrism" that is unconcerned with creation for its own sake.<sup>19</sup> This relationship also excludes treating creation as an entity for our aesthetic consumption; while we are to appreciate the beauty of creation, it is not for this appreciation that it alone exists. Thus, this "other" is still independent of humanity, an entity with whom we must have an appropriate relationship, rather than merely something to which we can relate for our own ends. This relationship is one of solidarity with nature, rather than being in a hierarchical relationship over it.

On the one hand, it is worth recognizing that Francis' argument has an explicitly theological context, and the argument for dominion may only hold as much water as one's theological commitments may allow. On the other hand, there is a broader context to Francis' argument that admits of an important perspective: the relationship between us as human beings and nature. Francis explicitly acknowledges this, addressing the encyclical to "all people of good will," rather than just the faithful or any subset of persons.<sup>20</sup> As Iheka notes astutely, Francis' approach goes further to situate his account in the context of both spiritual and secular biological considerations: "His vision of biological interconnection encompasses those interdependencies between humans and nonhuman beings predicated on life processes."<sup>21</sup> By doing so, Francis

*. . . enables the secularist to identify a science-based understanding of planetary degradation. The demonstrable use of facts and statistics to ground the future consequences of environmental degradation as well as the appeals to preserve our common home for future generations, to cut waste, and to be concerned about the plight of the poor, especially in the Global South, are other elements of the encyclical that will appeal to the secular mind.*<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Francis establishes the encyclical as "a document grounded in religion, but also as a cosmopolitan treatise that can appeal to the non-religious."<sup>23</sup> One need not share his theological commitments in order to recognize a relationship with nature. *Laudato Si* therefore leads us in the direction of an alternative moral motivation, grounded in the development of a genuine relationship between human persons and the "other" that is nature. A recognition of this relationship and its moral significance is not necessarily predicated upon one agreeing with Francis' theology nor any version of a creationist argument for the existence of nature. As I discuss below, we are engaged in a relationship with nature that necessitates our being concerned with its ends, irrespective of the genesis of nature (let alone human beings).

Recall, however, that my purpose here is not merely to unpack Francis' argument in *Laudato Si*, but to investigate its potential for providing a distinct and sufficient moral motivation for actors to combat climate change. While Francis' discussion of the relationship takes an important first step, I argue that it may not in and of itself provide sufficient moral motivation for potential actors. Particularly, if one does not share the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 37–38.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Iheka, "Integral Ecology," p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

theological commitments that serve as (part of) the foundation for this alterity relationship of dominion, the motivational thrust of the argument may be lost.

But even for those persuaded by the Biblical elements, the motivational element can be lost. For his part, Francis claims that “If we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.”<sup>24</sup> Citing the potential for positive examples of intervention on behalf of nature, he doubles down here to state that “gestures of care, solidarity, and generosity cannot help but well up in us” due to our being “made for love.”<sup>25</sup> It is here that I lose Francis’ apparent faith in our inherent ability to act for the sake of nature; merely feeling some semblance of unity may not be enough to override the appeal of cheap oil, luxury goods, or consumer culture. It may be hard to overcome the fact that the decision to choose paths that harm nature can provide benefits to us as individuals in the short term. I do think that Francis’ perspective takes the important step to elucidate the importance of a relationship, and the fact that such a relationship involves two parties, with two (interrelated) interests. Taking the ethical relationship from the standpoint of most contemporary ethical theories (utilitarianism, deontology, ethics of care), moral concern is focused primarily on the “other” in the relationship. Thus, we should feel compelled to do something for the other because it will produce better consequences for all affected, because we have a duty toward them, regardless of how it affects us, or because we have a responsibility to care for those with whom we have a relationship. What these perspectives miss, however, is a concern for the interests of both parties in the relationship.

To his credit, Francis makes what I think is an all-important point in considering the harms of neglecting a relationship with nature: “Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth.”<sup>26</sup> It is the point of ruining “my relationship with my own self” that I want to focus on here. As Francis acknowledges (perhaps without realizing it), there is a harm that we cause ourselves by neglecting to care for nature as other; thus, in turn, by doing something for nature, we do something for ourselves. As such, there is something in it for us as well.

### III. Marx and Species-Being

Given this connection that Francis draws between the Earth and “our poor,” it is important to step back and consider precisely how we interact with the poor we encounter in our lives. We are all no doubt familiar with the fact of global poverty, often confronting us via an ad on television asking us to donate to children facing malnutrition in developing countries. But beyond this, poverty confronts us on a daily basis as well when we are approached by (or pass by) beggars and homeless persons on the street. When this happens, we often feel bad and experience an impulse to help; yet we oftentimes keep on walking. In some cases, we have no money or may be concerned for our safety, but these are most likely the minority of instances. Most times we feel bad for this person and have something we could spare, but we refrain from acting. What is it that intervenes here between us and being moved by our affective state?

To further examine our responses to poor persons, and the problems that I argue it creates for us, I want to draw on the early Karl Marx. In his short piece “Free Human Production” (part of his comments on James Mill’s political economy), Marx considers the character of the relations that we have with other persons under capitalism:

*Our objects in their relation to one another constitute the only intelligible language we use with one another. We would not understand a human language, and it would remain without*

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<sup>24</sup> *Laudato Si*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

*effect. On the one hand, it would be felt and spoken as a plea, as begging, and as humiliation and hence uttered with shame and with a feeling of supplication; on the other hand, it would be heard and rejected as effrontery or madness. We are so mutually alienated from human nature that the direct language of this nature is an injury to human dignity for us, while the alienated language of objective values appears as justified, self-confident, and self-accepted human dignity.*<sup>27</sup>

The beggar experiences humiliation when he expresses his needs, while the one approached withdraws. On Marx's view this interaction results in both parties being alienated from our shared human nature or essence, what he refers to as "species-being." Drawing on Aristotelian metaphysics, Marx argues our essence is our potential, ideal form. As such it is a conception of our positive possibilities both as individual beings and as interdependent members of our species. Grounded also in Marx's historical materialism, this notion of our essence evokes an image of humans as members of a species actively responding to environmental changes to produce in ways that satisfy their needs. Marx writes:

*Man is a species-being not only in that he practically and theoretically makes his own species as well as that of other things his object, but also—and this is only another expression for the same thing—in that as a present and living species he considers himself to be a universal and consequently free being.*<sup>28</sup>

Delineating us from other animal species, we can conceive of ourselves as both individual entities and as "universal" beings, connected with others. We are, therefore, able to relate and empathize with any other member of our species, and with our species as a whole. Marx's species-being echoes Aristotle's claim that a "human being is by nature a political animal."<sup>29</sup> In striving to meet our needs, we produce not only individually, but also as a group; in such productive activity we depend upon other people to help us meet our needs. Only by recognizing this dependency and interacting with other members of our species in a meaningful way are we able to further develop and actualize our species-being.

Yet, our relations with others do not always happen on the positive terms of this essence. Rather than recognizing our inherent neediness, we reject displays of it as "effrontery or madness," and our mask of individual self-reliance appears as "self-accepted human dignity."<sup>30</sup> If persons are unable to stand on their own two feet, so to speak, they are an affront to their own dignity as human beings. By asking others for aid they offend our dignity, and thus we recoil in disgust.

I acknowledge that Marx ties the emergence of this problematic relation to the alienation caused by relations of production in capitalism; in this paper I neither make nor endorse such a claim. Regardless of whether or not capitalism is the underlying structural cause of these problematic relations, I want to instead scrutinize and explicate the problems that such relations create for us.

One of these major problems is a disavowal of any inherent state of neediness. Marx, for his part, argues that our species-being entails that we are at a fundamental level needy creatures. One primary need we have is for interaction with other people, insofar as they can help us develop ourselves as more fully human persons. This

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<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, "Free Human Production," *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> Marx, "Alienated Labor," in Simon, *Selected Writings*, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a3-4. In Aristotle, *Selections*, trans. Terence Irwin and Gail Fine (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), pp. 450–516.

<sup>30</sup> This is a point echoed by Iris Marion Young and other feminist philosophers. On Young's view, the concept of liberal noninterference is an inappropriate paradigm for the human person. As Young argues, "this concept of self-determination as noninterference values independence, and thereby devalues any persons not deemed independent by its account." See Iris Marion Young, *Global Challenges* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press 2007), pp. 46–47.

understanding of our development goes beyond the level of our natural survival needs to a concern with what Marx deems our more “human” needs: forming enriching relationships with other persons, coming to a deeper appreciation of art, music, literature, and the world around us. In denying this aspect of ourselves, we falsely assert that individuals can rely solely on themselves, and need nothing from others. Even the materially well-off among us have both natural and “human” needs, and addressing these needs involves depending upon others in some very real ways. Thus, on Aristotelian terms we cannot develop our potentiality unless we engage in relationships with others that elucidate deeper ways of being human. This is true both for us as well as other members of our species: as we need and depend upon other people, so the poor person asking for aid does as well. Given that an admission of our own neediness does not undermine our human dignity, neither should the pleas of the poor person affect his human dignity.

But in many cases, we do seem affronted by the neediness of the poor person we encounter, and thus we pass them by without offering aid to them or engaging in any kind of meaningful relationship. We try to explain away the impulse to aid that we feel emerge within us, convincing ourselves that there are good reasons why we should not do anything to engage with or assist this person. This response is no doubt dehumanizing and harmful to the person who asks for our help, but I argue that what we fail to recognize is that it is also harmful to us. Our quick rationalizing reaction is a perfect example of what Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as “bad faith” or “self-deception.” Instead of acting upon our impulse (or at least pausing to reflect upon it), we lie to ourselves in a particular way. For Sartre, “Bad faith . . . is indeed a lie to oneself. To be sure, the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth.”<sup>31</sup> Our first impulse when we encounter a needy person is human (a recognition of the other’s neediness, a desire to help), but we quickly suppress it by convincing ourselves of the “pleasing untruth” that helping is not actually appropriate.

We resort to bad faith so quickly in order to protect ourselves from the jarring reality of poverty in our world. We do not want to live in a world where such misery and destitution occurs. But its existence and our encounter with it in the form of the beggar in front of us also forces us to confront a sort of moral paradox: we feel we are “good people” and hold that “good people” help others in need, but must explain to ourselves why a good person who helps others would actually *not help* in this case. We are therefore resorting to self-deception to try to protect ourselves from the harms caused by being confronted with the reality of poverty (embodied by the beggar before us).

Furthermore, a world in which poverty exists and forces us to pass such persons by is not a world that is amenable to our being able to develop ourselves as more fully human persons (by engaging in genuine relationships with those who are needy). Given our need for such interactions, we are unravelling our connections with others and making future connections less likely; we harden ourselves into islands, so to speak, and make it more likely for other to do the same. Over time we are stifling our ability to fully develop ourselves as more fully human persons, and our world as a more fully human one. These results, as one can clearly see, are harmful not just to the poor, but to us as well.

#### IV. An Alternative Moral Motivation: Self-Concern for Harm

Recognizing these harms of self-deception reveals that it is an obstacle to our flourishing with regard to species-being. It then is striving to mitigate these harms to ourselves that can motivate us to respond and help those in poverty. In other words, we find an alternative motivation in the form of a desire to help ourselves. As opposed to a predominantly altruistic motivation, we act to try to stop the harms inflicted upon ourselves. There is thus a primary concern for ourselves. Of course, a moral approach where our impetus is that some action is “good for me” has often been viewed as inappropriately selfish, and thus negative. Kant for example argues that we

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1977), p. 89.

should act in accordance with our moral duties for the right reasons, rather than for anything resembling self-interest.<sup>32</sup>

What this view overlooks is that in working against poverty, we are not acting only for our individual selves, but rather for “us,” both ourselves and the poor person with whom we interact. Our “selfish” concerns are not only focused on their effects on our individual selves, but also on others with whom we identify. In this way a motivation ground in self-concern does not exclude concern for others. On the contrary, this form of self-concern necessarily involves the opposite: we *must* be concerned for the other. Given that my human impulse is directed toward the needs of another, I cannot heed this impulse without acting for the sake of the other. Thus, meeting his or her needs does not function as merely an expedient to meeting my own needs; rather our needs are intertwined. Doing something to help the person I encounter (whether it be giving that person some money, buying him or her a meal, or simply having an interaction that treats him or her as a person rather than an edifice of the background environment) is motivated by a concern to help “us,” instead of “me” or “him/her/them.” Acting from self-concern is not therefore atomistic, but is instead focused on helping both me and/or us.<sup>33</sup>

In doing so, my argument moves beyond any semblance of ethical egoism (wherein we would show concern for others only insofar as they are instrumentally important to one’s own well-being). On such a view, any interests of others are always reducible to my own interests. To view this through a Marxian lens, ethical egoism undermines our social essence in ways that run akin to the alienation he sees emanating from private property: “Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is ours only if we have it.... Hence *all* the physical and spiritual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of them *all*, the sense of *having*.”<sup>34</sup> To view others as only instrumentally valuable to our own ends is to have distorted our relationship to them (speaking the non-human “language” referenced above). Marx goes on to argue that “sense subordinated to crude, practical need has only a narrow meaning.”<sup>35</sup> Taking the stance of an ethical egoist would certainly involve some level of concern for others, but the instrumentalization of other persons and their humanity means that we only have a “crude” sense of their human needs. We can only develop as social beings on Marxian or Aristotelian lines if the interactions we have with other human beings happen on human grounds (using a “human language”).<sup>36</sup> To develop ourselves into the kind of human person that goes beyond seeing a “narrow meaning” in others involves interacting with them over time as actual human persons, wherein, as Marx puts it, “need or satisfaction have thus lost their *egoistic nature*.”<sup>37</sup>

Note that I am not trying to ground a dutiful imperative to act in the way traditional arguments for moral motivation do. As I argued above, such a duty can run aground when a person sees acting to fulfill that duty as a cost to them and a benefit only to another. I agree with Dale Jamieson in saying that it is perhaps quite a hard

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<sup>32</sup> See here Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 37–108, and “The Metaphysics of Morals,” pp. 353–604.

<sup>33</sup> Alongside Kant, Francis’ Catholic worldview no doubt also condemns “selfishness” as an inappropriate motivator in moral concerns. But as I develop my concept of self-concern, particularly as it has roots in Aristotelian ethics, it becomes clear that self-concern is not as diametrically opposed to the kinds of moral motivation offered by a Catholic perspective.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” in Simon, *Selected Writings*, p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> This connection between a concern for one’s own well-being and that of others is expressed in Aristotle’s conception of the virtue of *philia*, which has as part of it the importance on self-love. According to Aristotle, the virtuous person develops a hexis of self-love to benefit both himself (or herself) and others. Thus, the virtuous person loves himself (or herself) to both (his or her) own benefit and that of fellow humans, whereas the wicked “egoist” loves himself (or herself) in a way that harms both him (or her) and others. See here Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1168a28-1169a17, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999), pp. 260–62.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, “Private Property,” p. 74.

sell to ask the rich to stop doing things that benefit them for the sake of the poor.<sup>38</sup> My argument instead relies on an affective moral desire, grounded in species-being and Marx's Aristotelian influence; we seek to develop ourselves as better persons over time, and drawing on Marx such development is only possible through interactions with others on human grounds.<sup>39</sup>

It is no doubt true, however, that many people wall themselves off from persons in poverty, seeking to avoid having to interact with them. Yet, even the act of avoidance belies my point: they seek to wall themselves off because encountering those in poverty is jarring to our human senses. The potential for developing oneself as a fully human person on the Marxian/Aristotelian grounds I put forth here is stunted when one acts to deny and avoid the humanity of persons in poverty. Poverty writ large does not go away if one merely hides from the persons experiencing it (this is yet another example of self-deception). However, having a human interaction with those in poverty we encounter allows us opportunities for human development. In those interactions, one will be moved to act because he or she does not want to live in a world wherein he or she is forced to engage in behavior that harms him or herself. Interacting on human terms with persons in poverty whom one encounters is the only way I may address the unsettling features generated by such moments. There is a eudaimonic element here: I aid the poor in some way because I am concerned with being a better human being, and I want to live in a world where I do not have to endure the harms to myself and others caused by the existence of poverty. While I exhibit self-concern, the only way I can achieve my ends is by recognizing the humanity of the poor person in front of me and doing something to help meet his or her needs as well.

## V. The Convergence of Pope Francis and Marx

My argument here is to offer a synthesis of Marx and Francis' insights. In the context of Marx, reflecting on our responses to the poor persons we encounter shows us that we engage in self-deception and deny neediness in order to protect ourselves from the harms of poverty. It is true that Marx does not include nature as a member of our species-being; instead he seems to treat it as a background condition for our development as a species (as we respond to changes in our environment). Here we must take Pope Francis' analogy between creation and "our poor" seriously. In doing so, we see that nature is something ontologically significant; it is a something, rather than merely a background condition. Coupling this with my Marxian-influenced analysis above that we do not speak a "human language" when interacting with such poor persons, we see that our responses to the poor and the problems that they create for us are echoed in our problematic responses to nature and its needs. I am not arguing that we must "extend" our conception of species to include nature. Instead, by discarding our "tyrannical anthropocentrism" we are forced to confront nature as an other with whom we are to have a relationship that mirrors the relationship we have with other members of our species.

Francis makes this connection clear by pointing out how our negative responses can transfer from one relationship to the other:

*Moreover, when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty toward fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other*

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<sup>38</sup> See Jamieson, "Climate Change," p. 444.

<sup>39</sup> Although Aristotle's view of such development depends upon the existence of a human telos, my argument instead relies on a version of John Stuart Mill's proof for the Principle of Utility: the evidence that it is desirable is that people actually do desire it. Says Mill: "The only proof capable of being given that an object is desirable, is that people actually see it.... The sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it." John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 168.

*human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people.*<sup>40</sup>

In turn, I argue that a more positive relationship (grown out of a recognition of the harms of poverty to us) with poor persons can “show itself” in our relationships with nature as well.

Turning to our relationship with nature, our lack of a motivational response comes along the very same terms of self-deception: we fail to recognize that we have a need for nature in order to flourish as human beings, and so we convince ourselves that neglecting this “other” is appropriate because their needs are not our needs. While our relationship with nature could easily be understood in anthropocentric terms (developing our senses involves engaging with beautiful mountains on a hike, majestic eagles flying above us, and so on), the connection is more aptly one on a constitutive level. As Stephen Gardiner and David Weisbach argue, “Nonhuman nature represents the world from which we evolved, and against which we understand and define ourselves. Our relationship with it plays a considerable role in determining our self-conception.”<sup>41</sup> Considering both aspects of the relationship between humans and nature, Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer conceptualize our Aristotelian development ecologically: “That is, we must see *both* to what extent our ecological nature shapes the map of human life into which virtue fits and to what extent human excellence ought to extend outward to encompass our relation with other forms of life and with the ecologies we affect.”<sup>42</sup> These notions link well with Francis’ argument that our interests are intimately bound up with nature, and to Iheka’s point above, they do so by expanding the “secular” notion of our biological interconnection with nature (which can thus motivate those who do not share Francis’ theology). We necessarily exist and act within the context of nature; thus, for us to flourish, it must flourish as well.

Furthermore, our interactions with nature come along the same lines as the poor person on the street. We see the degradation of nature and have a human impulse arise to stop such ruin; upon reflection, we realize that we are practicing bad faith by “walking past” the impoverishment and neediness of nature when we have the impulse and ability to aid. To hearken back to Francis’ point, it is here that we must hear the “cry of the Earth.”

But how do we actually encounter the “crying” Earth? In the case of poverty, we walk past a tangible person who asks for our help, and it is this that spurs our human impulses grounded in species-being. Nature and the harms of climate change, on the other hand, are much more ethereal. It seems we are unable to encounter them in the same way. Yet, looking at the two cases there is a common thread in our experience: the connection between individual cases and the underlying foundational problem. In the case of the beggar, the harm(s) we seek to avoid are related to the problem of poverty in our world. These harms are in turn personified in the individual case of the poor person with whom we interact and are moved to aid. With nature, the problem that undergirds the harms for us comes from climate change. Although we cannot and do not interact with “climate change,” its harms are made manifest in instances we can and do interact with directly: species endangerment/extinction, extreme weather events, widespread droughts, the destruction of coral reefs, etc. These are harms we “pass by” and in which we can see both the harms to nature and our human impulse to aid nature. While there are a multitude of instantiations with our relationship with the broad category of “nature,” Iheka is clear that Francis “takes aim at the technocratic inclination to conquer the Earth to satisfy the yearnings of a consumerist class while neglecting the implications of such actions for the nonhuman environment.”<sup>43</sup> No matter how we encounter nature, we are undermining our own well-being by either dominating it for our ends,

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<sup>40</sup> *Laudato Si*, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Gardiner and David Weisbach, *Debating Climate Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, “Introduction: Adapting Humanity,” in *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change*, ed. Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Iheka, “Integral Ecology,” p. 249.

or showing a lack of concern for its “cry”: cases wherein harms are rendered to it from which it may not necessarily recover. It may be that in some cases that we cannot do something about particular instantiations of the harms to nature, just as we might not actually be able to address the poverty of the person we encounter. Yet, the lack of a Marxian human response here comes not from failing to solve the problem, but rather failing to interact with the other on human grounds, recognizing its needs and at least stopping to consider the ways in which we may be able to act.

Note here that I am not necessarily taking a stand on the debate between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric conceptions of the ontological status of nature, or whether such distinctions can converge, as on Bryan Norton’s view.<sup>44</sup> My account does, however, have some overlap with J. Baird Callicott’s Earth ethic, which draws on Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic to ground an all-encompassing ethic that is an “international and intergenerational anthropocentric Earth ethic” wherein we consider the scale of Earth (nature, on my account) on particular ontological grounds, both anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric.<sup>45</sup> My primary claim, however, is that no matter in what way it is conceptualized, we can encounter nature in a morally significant way, and in doing so this can connect to our human impulses along the same Marxian lines as persons in poverty.

If we recognize our connection and actively respond to the needs of nature, we are able to garner benefits for both nature and ourselves. For the other that is nature, it gains the benefits of being properly “tilled and kept.”<sup>46</sup> In this way, it is no longer degraded and subject to being pillaged with a myopic eye toward human consumption. Responding to the needs of nature also offers benefits for us, both in terms of human and natural needs (to use Marxian terminology). In the near-term, we are acting on our human impulses to aid an other whom we encounter as needy. Doing so helps us over time to develop ourselves as the kinds of persons who aid others, and who experience such neediness as central to our humanity. We thus actualize our potential when given the chance, rather than shunning it as somehow “effrontery or madness.” This chance to act goes beyond mere tokens of encounters with nature; as Francis correctly observes, we are connected to nature via a mutual relationship that unfolds over time (and through which such token interactions take place). By acting for nature through this relationship we are further developing our world as a place wherein we are better able to develop ourselves as human persons over time.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, doing nothing and allowing things to worsen will, as Breena Holland notes, “undermine people’s capabilities, putting the possibility of living a dignified human life beyond a person’s reach.”<sup>48</sup>

Taking things from the standpoint of our natural needs reveals a quite practical concern for our well-being outside of our dignity: our survival. We are harming ourselves and our interests by making our world one where it is increasingly less likely that we will be able to survive. As temperatures continue to increase, seas begin to rise, potable water becomes scarcer, and species die off, it will become harder and harder for us to survive.

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<sup>44</sup> See Bryan G. Norton, *Toward Unity among Environmentalists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> J. Baird Callicott, *Thinking like a Planet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> I use the concept of “tilling and keeping” to keep in line with Francis’ argument and his view of the natural world, although it is perhaps Anthropocentric as well. Just as we are not to view nature as able to be bent to human ends, we must also not view it as being subordinate to human well-being or value (thus putting us “in charge” of nature).

<sup>47</sup> Henry Shue makes this point well, at least in reference to potential harms that we do. Even the proposal to “do nothing” about climate change is at this point not morally neutral. We thereby continue to make the background conditions of our lives and the lives of future persons worse. Furthermore, even if future generations are able to successfully adapt to radically increased climate changes, we are raising the bar that they will have to clear. See Henry Shue, “Deadly Delays, Saving Opportunities,” in Gardiner et al., *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, pp. 150–51.

<sup>48</sup> Breena Holland, “Environment as Meta-capability: Why a Dignified Human Life Requires a Stable Climate System,” in Thompson and Bendik-Keymer, *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change*, p. 151.



Acting to care for nature is therefore in our natural, pragmatic interest as well; if we don't do it, we will not be long for this planet.

## VI. Conclusion

Thus, putting together Francis' emphasis on a relationship with nature as a morally significant "other," and Marx's concerns for our development as human persons, we see that the neediness of nature in the face of our actions is not something external to us; in fact, it is very personal and immediate to us as individuals. If we are to develop ourselves as human beings with such dignity, we require interaction with "others," as well as an environment (as in a contextual world) that helps us to flourish as human beings. By not responding to the needs of nature with whom we are in a relationship, we are not only harming it, but we harm ourselves as well. In this way, acting to combat the harms we render unto nature is then not done because it will stop harms to nature, but rather because it will halt the harms caused to *us*.

Looking back on the standard rights-based arguments for action, Simon Caney correctly points to something that proponents of such approaches have going for them: if this approach is correct, we must act to combat climate change no matter what the cost to oneself. As noted above, the individual costs of addressing climate change are prohibitive, and thus a potentially significant stumbling block to motivating actions.<sup>49</sup> What the justice/rights argument leaves behind, however, is the bi-directional nature of our relationship with the natural world. Considering it as an other, we must be concerned about the harms caused it, but we must also be concerned about stemming the harms to ourselves; appreciating our response of self-deception and responding to these harms is of critical importance for motivating us to act.

The rights approach also focuses on the causal question in ways that obscure the relational element. We are harmed by climate change irrespective of whether or not we are implicated in causing it; thus, in trying to establish a moral argument for why we should respond based on our relationship with nature, it does not matter if we are causing it. Regardless of the causes, our concern for the effects on us (we humans and the other that is nature) can and should drive our efforts.

Toward what these efforts should be directed is admittedly outside of the scope of this paper. My concern here has been to focus on reasons why someone should be doing *something*, and that such actions must take account of the interests of both nature and ourselves (thereby providing the integral element of Francis' ecology). On this point, I do agree with Sinnott-Armstrong, Jamieson, Caney, and others who argue that small individual actions will not in and of themselves solve the problem; large governmental (and international) steps must be taken. That being said, I do not agree that the nature of the problem precludes any need for individual actions. Just because acting to help one poor person we encounter does not solve poverty writ large does not mean we should not do what we can to aid said individual poor persons. Similarly, while we cannot stop climate change by limiting our emissions or lobbying for regulations, we can move toward a proper human relationship with nature by undertaking individual actions. No matter how small a given action may be (whether it be reusing something rather than discarding it, or consciously choosing to limit our emissions in some way), we garner benefits for ourselves in a fundamental way. It is, as Francis puts it, "an act of love that expresses our dignity."<sup>50</sup> Thus, by acting for the sake of the other that is nature, we further develop ourselves in terms of our human dignity (or species-being in Marxian terms).

It is these benefits to ourselves that I argue can better spur persons to act to combat climate change and environmental ruin. We must therefore hold "dominion" over the Earth in a way that helps meet our human needs and develops our world as a place more amenable to our further human development. Given that this

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<sup>49</sup> See Caney, "Climate Change," p. 171.

<sup>50</sup> *Laudato Si*, p. 142.

paradigm involves a functioning relationship between two entities (on the view I have drawn out of Francis and *Laudato Si*), we do not act solely to halt the harms to nature, but rather we also act to halt the harms to ourselves. We should act against climate change not for “it,” nor for ourselves, but rather for “us.”