

**Exploring Notions of Environmental and Ecological Justice  
Among Settler Protesters Opposed to the Trans Mountain Expansion Project**

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## ABSTRACT

The Trans Mountain Expansion project entailed the construction of a new interprovincial oil pipeline in western Canada that terminates at Burrard Inlet in the Metro Vancouver region of British Columbia. This thesis focuses on settler opposition to the pipeline project as an entry point to explore how **religion** and **nonreligion** shape terrestrial relations amidst the planetary crisis. How do religious and nonreligious individuals understand their moral relations with those who share their dwelling place? The field of religion and ecology emerged in the mid-1990s and has since highlighted the role of religion in fostering moral beliefs and practices in a more-than-human world. Nonreligion is a relatively recent area of study and research on the intersections of nonreligion and ecology remains scarce. This gap is noteworthy given the rise of individuals who identify with no religion in and beyond Canada, especially during a time of heightened awareness for the climate and ecological crises. Contributing empirical research on religion, nonreligion and ecology, this thesis presents data from semi-structured interviews with (non)religious individuals actively opposed to the pipeline project. The conceptual framework is drawn from theories of **environmental justice** and **ecological justice**. The following question guided the analysis: to what extent do the perspectives of (non)religious individuals engaged in activism against the Trans Mountain Expansion project represent principles of environmental and ecological justice? The analysis revealed that participant views on the harms of the pipeline project, and their motivations for actively opposing it, resonated with climate justice for younger and future humans; procedural justice for Indigenous nations who did not consent to pipeline construction on their territories; and ecological justice for nonhumans directly harmed or threatened by pipeline construction. These notions of justice were evident to varying degrees in the narratives of both religious and nonreligious participants. The ways in which they manifested were influenced by participants' lifestances, which includes their nonreligious, spiritual and religious identities as well as a social imaginary shaped by Christianity.

**Keywords:** Trans Mountain, sociology of religion, nonreligion, religion and ecology, environmental justice, climate justice, ecological justice, lifestances, stewardship

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I dedicate this thesis to Soultana Strumos.

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Trans Mountain Expansion project casts a shadow of contradictions. Perhaps most apparent is the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure during the planetary crisis. The project saw the completion of a new oil pipeline and expanded marine terminal as part of an existent pipeline system that began operations in 1953. It starts near Edmonton in the province of Alberta and concludes at the Westridge Marine Terminal in Burnaby, British Columbia, which sits on and is surrounded by the unceded territories of several Coast Salish Nations. This expanded system, which officially commenced commercial operations on May 1, 2024, will increase the carrying capacity of the entire Trans Mountain system from 300 000 to 890 000 barrels of oil per day (Maki 2025). The expansion project was reapproved by the Government of Canada on June 18, 2019, merely one day after the House of Commons passed a motion to recognise that Canada is in a climate emergency.<sup>1</sup> While disappointing and contradictory for many, this decision was also anticipated. The project by that time was federally owned.<sup>2</sup> It was initiated by oil giant Kinder Morgan in 2012 but later purchased by the federal government in 2018. This purchase was preceded by the government's first approval of the project in 2016.

The government was faced with the decision to reapprove the Trans Mountain Expansion project following its halt by the Federal Court of Appeal in August 2018. In its decision for *Tsleil-Waututh Nation v. Canada (Attorney General)*,<sup>3</sup> the court concluded that the Order in Council authorising the construction and operation of the project was invalid. This decision was based on

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<sup>1</sup> It passed with 186 votes to 63. See: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Members/en/votes/42/1/1366/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information see *Canada's purchase of the Trans Mountain Pipeline – Financial and Economic Considerations*. Ottawa, Canada: Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019. Available at <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.867883/publication.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Tsleil-Waututh Nation v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2018 FCA 153.

two findings. First, the court concluded that the National Energy Board—the independent federal agency that evaluated and recommended the project for approval—excluded the impacts of increased marine vessels from its environmental assessment.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the National Energy Board inaccurately concluded that the project was not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects: a critical point in the government’s decision to approve it. Second, the court determined that the government failed to fulfill its duty to consult Indigenous peoples affected by the project.<sup>5</sup> The consultations that did take place, according to the court, were “unacceptably flawed.”<sup>6</sup> Improved consultations thus ensued alongside a new evaluation of environmental impacts, culminating in the National Energy Board’s reconsideration report for the Trans Mountain Expansion project, delivered to the Government of Canada in February 2019. For the second time, the National Energy Board recommended that project be approved, subject to conditions, because it is in the public interest.<sup>7</sup>

This reconsideration report solidified my interest in the Trans Mountain Expansion project. While reading it, I was particularly struck by the National Energy Board’s (NEB) treatment of the Southern Resident Killer Whales of the Salish Sea, who are listed as endangered under the *Species at Risk Act*. The NEB concluded that the economic benefits of the Trans Mountain Expansion project outweighed its environmental burdens. These burdens, both tied to increased marine oil

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<sup>4</sup> The National Energy Board did consider this impact under the *National Energy Board Act*, but not under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, 2012. The National Energy Board has since been changed to the Canada Energy Regulator.

<sup>5</sup> The duty to consult Indigenous peoples has been established by Canadian courts in their efforts to interpret Section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982 which recognises and affirms “existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.” See: *Haida Nation v British Columbia (Minister of Forests)*, [2004] 3 S.C.R. 511; *Taku River Tlingit First Nation v. British Columbia (Project Assessment Director)*, [2004] 3 S.C.R. 550; and *Gitxaala Nation v. Canada*, 2016 FCA 187.

<sup>6</sup> *Tsleil-Waututh Nation v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2018 FCA 153 at para. 557. In particular, the court determined that the duty to consult was not fulfilled during the final phase (Phase III) of the consultation process.

<sup>7</sup> See: National Energy Board (2019) Reconsideration of Aspects of its OH-001-2014 Report as Directed by Order in Council P.C. 2018-1177 (MH-052-2018).

shipping, were increased greenhouse gas emissions and harm to the Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKWs). The related social burden of increased marine shipping was its impacts on the ‘traditional use’ of the SRKWs by Indigenous communities. During consultations, many First Nations communicated their concerns about the Trans Mountain Expansion project’s impact on the SRKWs. These concerns often emphasised the place of the orcas in Indigenous spiritualities and cultures. For example, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (TWN), whose reserve land is directly across the water from the Westridge Marine Terminal, stated in a submission:

[The] significant adverse environmental effects of marine shipping ... will impair TWN’s cultural relationship with them. Specifically, losing SRKWs would impair TWN people’s traditional identity, which is dependent upon their ability to maintain their connection with their community and ancestors. This is derived in part from the ongoing tradition of SRKWs visiting Burrard Inlet upon the deaths of TWN chiefs and other leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Upon reading such submissions, I started to wonder: What about the culture of the Southern Residents themselves? The NEB did not take orca culture into account, only that of Indigenous communities. But does the ability of the orcas “to maintain their connection with their community” not also matter? Such questions arose behind that which I found most glaring: How could the Trans Mountain Expansion project be approved without the consent of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, when ‘we Canadians’ are in an era of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples?

As a white settler myself, the NEB report prompted a jarring (and admittedly embarrassing) realisation of how Canada’s legal processes are designed in such a way to uphold—and justify—asymmetrical power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples while implicating the more-than-human. I came to view the decision-making process behind the Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX) project as part of the unfolding colonial landscape, in which nonhumans often

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<sup>8</sup> See: Tsleil-Waututh Nation’s Record of Written Evidence. Vol. 1. (Tsleil-Waututh Nation’s Opening Statement; Affidavit of Ernie George; and Trans Mountain Expansion Project Reconsideration Hearing: Assessment of Oil Spill Risks, by Dr. Thomas Gunton and Dr. Chris Joseph) File OF-Fac-Oil-T260-2013-03 59, Hearing Order MH-052-2018 (Filed on December 5, 2018) at 6.



assume a key albeit backgrounded role. The colonial economy was once sustained by the hunting of beavers for their fur, which helped fund Christian missionary efforts and became a focal point in Indigenous-settler relations. Government policies that forced Inuit families into settlements led to the killing of thousands of dogs.<sup>9</sup> Today, the TMX project threatens the SRKWs (among many others), which is intimately tied to a legal process that undermines the self-determination and authority of Indigenous nations “in the place that they live” (Coburn and Moore 2022, 10). Scholars have demonstrated the ways in which settler colonialism, including the juridical power of the state, is systematically upheld in the management of nonhuman animal life and death (Kanji 2017, 64; see also Belcourt 2015; Deckha 2020).<sup>10</sup> This body of work helped to shape my understanding of the TMX project, and encountering it marked the most recent development in my passion for animal ethics.

Another significant moment occurred while I was completing my Master of Arts degree at Queen’s University in Kingston. Driving along Ontario’s Highway 401 to reach campus after holidays at home, I often saw trucks transporting pigs to slaughter. Sometimes this sight was unavoidable when they would be stopped at the same rest station. On one occasion my somber curiosity led me to approach and witness those inside a cramped truck. This confrontation was one defined by affect. Making eye contact with the pigs was overwhelming in the sense that I did not know how to react, or if there was even a reaction to give, other than to walk away. This encounter still lingers with me as a point of moral deliberation. It appeared when I read the NEB reconsideration report for the TMX project. If the lives of the Southern Residents do not matter

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<sup>9</sup> The Government of Canada apologised for this “dog slaughter” in November 2024. See: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1732300419996/1732300456676>.

<sup>10</sup> “Settler colonialism is a variant of imperialism in which the settlers come to stay, to seek out lives and identities grounded in the colony and for whom Indigenous people, their rights to land and resources, are obstacles that must be eliminated” (Kelm and Smith 2018, 1–2).

enough to prevent a new oil pipeline, what hope is there for those confined by intensive farming? Encountering the work of Carol J. Adams (1990) encouraged me to lean into the discomfort I felt towards the TMX project, especially the decision-making process that culminated in its approval. Adams is critical of ‘the disavowal of emotions’ towards animal suffering, as well as the disavowal of emotions as a source for knowledge and theorising. My overall response to reading the NEB’s reconsideration report, like that of encountering the pigs, was that it *felt* wrong. Seeking to better understand and articulate this wrongness has served as continuous motivation in writing this thesis.

The decision to focus on opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project as a student of religious studies occurred after my reading of a *CBC News* article. The article detailed an April 2018 protest by religious leaders and followers on Burnaby Mountain, in which “Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Unitarians, two choirs, members of 10 Christian denominations, and interfaith groups all participated by singing and chanting but also fixing prayers, rosaries and flags to the gates of Kinder Morgan’s site” (Pawson 2018). I wanted to explore points of similarity and divergence among religiously diverse individuals, and how their various identities shaped or were shaped by their shared practice of activism. What are the factors that lead protesters of different religious identities to work together on a basis of similarity? This question follows the ‘lived religion’ turn in sociology of religion, which shifted focus to how individuals understand, experience and express religion in various settings, especially outside of religious institutions (Ammerman 2016). As Courtney Bender (2003, 140) writes: “We no longer take it for granted that religious ideas constructed in one context are put to use in others without modification or change.” How might religious ideas about humans, animals and nature change or adapt as individuals encounter and respond to the TMX project?

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

When I expressed this research interest to my supervisor, Dr. Lori G. Beaman, she encouraged me to broaden my perspective to include nonreligion. The idea of researching nonreligion for a doctoral degree in the study of religion seemed strange and, at that time, even borderline heretical. The switch to nonreligion occurred when I read Dr. Beaman's 2017 *Sociology of Religion* article, in which she states:

As the work of sociologists of religion continues to respond to a changing world and a complex future, this article is a call to reimagine our research in ways that extend our focus from religious groups, to the interaction between religion and nonreligion and to the environment that supports us and with which we are intimately connected. By so doing we are better able to capture the ways in which religion is folded into everyday life. These crossroads of increased nonreligion intersecting with religion in the context of a necessary reconfiguration of our relationship to the natural world not only opens a space of uncertainty, but also a space of opportunity for social scientists. (Beaman 2017, 27)

I accepted the idea of a 'space of uncertainty' as a challenge. The study of nonreligion is relatively new, only receiving serious consideration from sociologists since the mid-2000s (Smith and Cragun 2019). It offers opportunities for novel ideas and, in turn, opportunities for unforeseen criticism, which both draw from the same well of critical thought by sociologists in their study of religion. There was a difficult balance I perceived between treating nonreligion as its own object of study, and remaining aware to its conceptual reliance upon, and indebtedness to, the study of religion. I was up for the challenge of entering into the new and daunting terrain of nonreligion.

The main reason I decided to incorporate nonreligion, however, was a realisation of the social context in which I would be working. According to Statistics Canada (2022), in 2021, which is when I began fieldwork for this thesis, 52.1% of British Columbia's population reported no religious affiliation, an increase from 44.1% in 2011. It follows that nonreligion has become 'the norm' in British Columbia. The rise of nonreligion in British Columbia echoes a trend in wider Canada that began in the 1960s (Brown 2012; Clarke and Macdonald 2017). The option to indicate

‘no religion’ as a valid census response did not appear until 1971, though, meaning that people with no religious affiliation had no clear way to identify themselves as such prior to that time. The census was also not self-enumerated until 1971. Brian Clarke and Stuart MacDonald (2017, 227) note that, as a result, those with no religion were often recorded as having not stated their religion. In 1971, when self-enumeration was enacted, 4.3% of the population identified as having no religious affiliation. Those with no religion then increased to 7.3% in 1981 and 12.4% in 1991. Most recently, in 2021, 34.6% reported having no religion, up from 23.9% in 2011. This makes no religion the second largest ‘religious’ group in Canada, with Christianity remaining the first. In 2021, 53.3% of the Canadian population reported a Christian religion, a decrease from 67.3% in 2011 and 77.1% in 2001 (Statistics Canada 2022).

In addition to a rise of nonreligion, British Columbia has witnessed a decline in affiliation to mainline Christian groups (Bramadat 2022, 13). This decline is linked to social challenges against Christian beliefs, morals and structures in the province that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. These challenges contributed to “creating more social and cultural spaces in which people could be free to define their own religious or irreligious choices” (Marks 2017, 178). Lynne Marks (2017) explains that various factors contributed to British Columbians challenge to Christian hegemony, for instance a perceived association between religion and oppression by the white working class. Nevertheless, religious hegemony existed in the early twentieth century, with Christianity holding “considerable social and cultural power” (Marks 2017, 7).<sup>11</sup> The same could be said about wider Canada, once imagined as a Christian nation. Amidst a post-World War II influx of migrants, a report by the Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour reads: “Canadians are a Christian people, very human and very ready to discharge their moral

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<sup>11</sup> Affiliation to Christianity in the province remains strong, with 34.3% of British Columbians reporting a Christian religion in the 2021 census (Statistics Canada 2022).

obligations.”<sup>12</sup> Clarke and Macdonald (2017, 16–17) explain that, prior to the 1960s, “the majority of people, even those who did not attend church, understood their society to be a Christian one; they accepted that the values and moral precepts of their society were Christian, and with the exception of the Jewish minority, they were socialized into the Christian religion as a matter of course.”

While affiliation to Christianity has been declining since the 1960s, Canada “still bears the imprint of its Christian past” (Seljak 2012, 10). Scholars have highlighted, for example, how Canadian law imagines religion as being individualistic and belief-based, reflecting a Protestant understanding of religion (Berger 2015). This narrow view of religion was crucial in the Supreme Court of Canada’s 2017 *Ktunaxa Nation* decision,<sup>13</sup> in which the Court determined that an Indigenous nation’s sacred natural site (located in British Columbia’s Jumbo Valley) could not be protected under the religious freedom clause of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Shrubsole 2019). The Court reasoned that the scope of religious freedom does not apply to the “object of beliefs,” but the freedom to hold and manifest beliefs (*Ktunaxa Nation* at para. 71). Residual Christianity—or the legacy of Christian hegemony—is also part of legal and public discourse that frames Christian symbols like the crucifix as part of culture and heritage, or associates ‘Christian values’ with ‘Canadian values’ (Beaman 2014; 2020). An instance of the latter occurred in British Columbia in November 2024 when the Vancouver Police Board’s vice-chair resigned over social media comments, which claimed, “Christian values serve as Canada’s moral compass” (Azpiri 2024). One stated directly that the “‘push for secular education isn’t about religion — it’s about erasing Christian values from the lives of our children’” (Azpiri 2024).

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<sup>12</sup> See: The Senate of Canada. 1946. Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour on the operation and administration of the Immigration Act, etc. Ottawa: Library of Parliament (1946 I55 A1) at 313.

<sup>13</sup> *Ktunaxa Nation v British Columbia (Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations)*, 2017 SCC 54, [2017] 2 SCR 386.

Residual Christianity in Canada is an ongoing legacy of settler colonialism. Churches and missionaries were agents of ‘God’s empire’ in the frontiers and aftermath of colonisation, working to advance the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into white Euro-Christian society (Carey 2011; Neeganagwedgin 2012). As Maneesha Deckha (2020, 77) succinctly states: “Like other settler colonial nations, Canada is a country built through structural racism and colonialism, supported by corresponding nation-building ideologies promoting Christianity and whiteness.” Scholars have also acknowledged that within Indigenous communities which adopted Christianity, Indigenous spiritualities were not entirely abandoned (if at all) (Rutherford 2002). Marks (2017, 20, 162) notes that the ‘depth of faith’ among Indigenous peoples was a source of worry for Christian missionaries in British Columbia, further posing a challenge to Christian hegemony. While the facilitation of settler colonialism by churches and missionaries is well established, therefore, Indigenous histories and encounters with Christianity are not singular. Their contours continue to be explored among scholars operating in the postcolonial milieu of Canadian academia.<sup>14</sup> Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton (2016, 5) articulately describe a “tension” felt by researchers of Indigenous-Christian encounters, with the recognition of Indigenous agency and Christianities on the one hand, and the harms caused by missionaries, churches and the residential school system on the other.

The link between Christianity and colonisation came to the fore through the residential school system. This system has received greater attention in recent years among the settler population, due in part to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC operated

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<sup>14</sup> As one example, Sean Carleton (2021) dispels a common misconception that Indigenous and non-Indigenous children were, in practice, always segregated by public schools and church-run residential schools in British Columbia, prior to official integration in 1949. Carleton (2021, 316) notes several reasons behind this unofficial ‘integrated schooling,’ including increased awareness among Indigenous communities about the harms of residential schools, and Indigenous parents’ desire for their children to be able to navigate capitalist settler society.

from 2008 to 2015 following the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.<sup>15</sup> Residential schools were funded by the government but run by Christian churches. They aimed to assimilate Indigenous children through education and conversion.<sup>16</sup> The TRC (2015, 4) states that this system was “based on an assumption that European civilization and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal culture, which was seen as being savage and brutal.” Residential schools were part of a larger imperial project that equates land to wealth, power and control. The TRC (2015, 5) states: “To gain control of the land of Indigenous people, colonists negotiated Treaties, waged wars of extinction, eliminated traditional landholding practices, disrupted families, and imposed a political and spiritual order that came complete with new values and cultural practices.”<sup>17</sup> The Trans Mountain Expansion project may be viewed as perpetuating an order in which colonial control over Indigenous lands is maintained and enforced for capital. It is not insignificant that much of the pipeline was constructed on unceded territories without the prior consent of First Nations, including the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, as noted earlier in this introduction.

## AIM OF THE STUDY AND NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

Settler colonialism informs the sociopolitical context in which the Trans Mountain Project has emerged. The social significance of religion and nonreligion are perhaps not as apparent. It is

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<sup>15</sup> This was the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history. It was announced in 2006 and addressed the damage of residential schools to former students, which included an established a fund to assist survivors in their recovery. The TRC (2015, 23) was mandated to “reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools, in a manner that fully documents the individual and collective harms perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples, and honours the resilience and courage of former students, their families, and communities; and guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally. The process was to work to renew relationships on a basis of inclusion, mutual understanding, and respect.”

<sup>16</sup> The major churches involved were the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches (TRC 2015, 3).

<sup>17</sup> In response to the federal government’s ‘white Paper on Indians,’ the Indian Chiefs of Alberta (1970, 189) stated that, regarding Treaties, “Many missionaries of many faiths brought the authority and prestige of whiteman’s religion in encouraging Indians to sign.”

certainly possible to talk about the TMX project without accounting for (non)religion. When looking at opposition to the pipeline project, however, religion and nonreligion become relevant as social forces that shape the context of this opposition. The TMX project arose within a region characterised by a growing presence of nonreligion alongside remnants of a Christian past. How have these two factors and ‘structures of history’ shaped the perceptions of those actively opposed to the Trans Mountain Expansion project?<sup>18</sup> In this thesis, I frame opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project an entry point to explore the relevance of religion and nonreligion for social relations in an era of planetary crisis. The term “planetary crisis” refers to ecological challenges caused by human activity that manifest locally but have impacts both regionally and on earth’s systems. The United Nations (2022) uses the term “triple planetary crisis” to refer to “three main interlinked issues that humanity currently faces: climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.” The TMX project is a material condition of the planetary crisis. It accelerates fossil fuel production and emissions, poses harm to soil, air and water through the inevitable threat of oil spills, and it endangers the lives of nonhumans like the Southern Resident Killer Whales, among other nonhumans who are discussed later in this thesis.

The term ‘planetary crisis’ is an alternative to concepts like the Anthropocene, the Technocene or the Captialocene. The term ‘Anthropocene’ was coined by atmospheric scientists to denote a current geological epoch in which human activity definingly alters earth’s systems.<sup>19</sup> Critics have highlighted that the term overemphasises—and places undue responsibility on—a singular ‘humanity,’ as opposed to a group of profit-driven humans who have implicated all life on the planet (Tănăsescu 2022, 12–13). Alf Hornborg (2015) proposes the term ‘Technocene’ in

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<sup>18</sup> Speaking of the ‘lived religion’ approach, Bender (2003, 7) writes that it “pays attention to both the meanings that individuals and groups make, and invest, in particular settings and to the ‘structures’ of history and institution that shape those lives and meanings.”

<sup>19</sup> This term is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.



place of ‘Anthropocene’ to capture the impact of technology and its connection to social systems that drives planetary change. He clarifies that the crisis cannot be adequately explained by human biology. In Hornborg’s (2015, 62) words: “there is nothing biologically inevitable about the institutions and forms of social organisation that we know as capitalism.” Jason W. Moore (2016) similarly defines the current epoch as one of capitalism. He uses the term ‘Capitalocene’ to highlight a system of power (not merely economics) that (re)organises relations in the web of life for the accumulation of capital. Given that this thesis is not concerned with the source of the crisis, but relationships within it, the more descriptive alternative ‘planetary crisis’ is used.

This thesis asks: What is the role of religion and nonreligion in shaping social relations during an era of planetary crisis? I use settler opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project as an entry point for exploring this question. I am interested in relations between groups of humans as well as humans and nonhumans. I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with settlers or non-Indigenous peoples, both religious and nonreligious, who have engaged in protest and/or direct action on the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Kwikwetlem Nations in the Metro Vancouver region. I also engaged in participant observation as an ‘insider,’ participating in a group that successfully delayed construction of the TMX project.<sup>20</sup> I realised that I needed to be present to appreciate the situatedness of this research. Witnessing pipeline construction helped me move from a more abstract view, towards one that resonated with those of my participants. I was only able to grasp the harm that participants were actively working against by seeing it firsthand. Behind all the ‘mature trees’ I read about in the National Energy Board’s reconsideration report, for example, were actual, living trees felled to make way for the pipeline. This realisation was enabled by my being present to witness them before and after they were cut.

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<sup>20</sup> I discuss this involvement in Chapter 3.

While this thesis is concerned with relations during the planetary crisis, this interest is balanced by a recognition of relationships (like those between humans and trees) as lived and situated.

This balance is maintained in part by my use of the term ‘terrestrial,’ as proposed by Bruno Latour in *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (2018) and *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis* (2021). For Latour, the identity term ‘terrestrial’ pulls us away from grand ideas of the earth or cosmos, and back towards the soil upon which we stand and from which we live. Latour (2018, 78) states: “Speak of nature in general as much you like, wonder at the immensity of the universe, dive down in thought to the boiling center of the planet, gasp in fear before those finite spaces, this will not change the fact that everything that concerns you resides in the miniscule Critical Zone.” We are humans experiencing a planetary crisis that is human in origin. In searching for a moral response, we may be tempted to create a new earthly or cosmological identity, whether we are planetary beings, made from stardust or one part of a caring god’s creation. These things may certainly work to ‘naturalise’ or ‘animalise’ the human identity. But we were not born of these things. Each of us were *actually* born from specific a person, into specific places and relationships, all requiring care (Latour 2021, 37). We do need to come back down to earth, according to Latour, but not as creatures of the planet, universe or creation: we need to do so as terrestrials, who inhabit specific dwelling places that we rely upon to survive alongside other terrestrials.

The language of ‘terrestrial’ overcomes the privileging of the human in terms like ‘non-human animals,’ ‘other-than-human beings,’ and so on. It does so while grounding us, not just in a moral or figurative sense, but by connecting us back to the place upon which we live and engage in relationships with other terrestrials. These relationships are vital to understanding what it means to live as a terrestrial. Our relationships are not *of* something, whether material or spiritual. This may be seen when scholars talk about experiences of awe ‘at,’ ‘in’ or ‘of’ nature in totality. For

Latour (2021, 53), our relations are always formed ‘with’ other terrestrials or living things, including the “soil, sky, oceans and atmospheres.” Acting in recognition of these relations, specifically with those who share our dwelling place (our fellow terrestrials), informs a political ordering that Latour terms ‘Terrestrial’ (capital ‘T’). The Terrestrial as a political actor recognises the implications of the global (it is not ignorant of the planetary crisis nor knowledge of our common origins), but while “attaching *oneself to a particular patch of soil*” (Latour 2018, 12). In this way, the political decisions needed to combat the planetary crisis can be achieved by reorienting ourselves back to the relations we rely upon for our own liveability. Latour (2021, 98) writes: “We are all, male and female, engendered and mortal bodies who owe our conditions of liveability to other engendered and mortal bodies of all sizes and of all lineages.”

It might be said that we are terrestrials experiencing a planetary crisis. The solution is not to turn towards the planetary, but towards the place in which we dwell. This arrangement complements the focus of this thesis. Interview participants spoke about many harms of the Trans Mountain Expansion project. These harms were primarily related to climate change, the lack of prior consent by Indigenous peoples and harm to nonhuman beings. Each of these issues can be contextualised globally. Yet, for the participants of this study, they are tied to a condition of the planetary crisis that threatens their own dwelling place. Participants did not explicitly describe themselves as ‘terrestrials,’ but it was changes to their dwelling place that prompted them to act against what they perceived as a threat to human and nonhuman living. Approaching their activism with Latour’s notion of ‘terrestrial’ in mind helps to foreground the situated relations articulated by participants. It also contributes to a scholarly aim of countering anthropocentrism in how we conceptualise and analyse (terrestrial) social life. Anthropocentrism in scholarship, specifically in the sociology of religion, is discussed in Chapter 1 when the literature review is presented.

This thesis draws on theories of environmental justice and ecological justice for its conceptual framework. The use of the term ‘terrestrial’ in this thesis is further intended to counter the anthropocentrism of these theories. In short, theories of environmental justice focus on the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among groups of humans, whereas ecological justice accounts for nonhumans. The latter includes what Western thought traditionally deems to be sentient and non-sentient life, including trees, water and landscapes (Baxter 2004). There is thus a form of justice for humans, and a secondary form of justice for ‘the rest.’ In recognition of this anthropocentric divide, some scholars have proposed theories of ‘multispecies justice’ (Celermajer et al. 2021), including from feminist and decolonial perspectives (Emel and Nirmal 2021; Winter 2023). These theories, however, would not have resonated empirically with the data. Participants voiced concerns about the TMX project’s impacts on various terrestrials, but the ways in which they articulated their concerns differed depending on the issue or being in question. For example, one finding of this thesis, discussed in Chapter 4, reveals that climate change was primarily framed as a human issue. By applying different theories of justice, this thesis highlights the divergences between their human-centered and nonhuman-centered concerns.

To my surprise, I did not find substantial consideration of religion in scholarship on environmental and ecological justice. I suggest this gap results at least in part from a relatively narrow view of religion as institutional beliefs and practices. A strong exception is Willis Jenkins’ *The Future of Ethics* (2013), in which he considers the lived moralities of religious communities in confronting environmental injustice. Jenkins (2013, 191–92) notes that there is an “obtuseness to white racism and social power within the field of religion and ecology, as well as obtuseness to religion in the social sciences that describe environmental justice projects.” He further states:

Anthropogenic changes on a planetary scale force cultures to reconsider their interpretations of the human role in earth, their symbols of nature and value, their narratives

of progress and purpose. Because religious traditions curate worldviews and grand stories of human purpose, they seem central to that reconsideration. Ethicists sometimes approach an overwhelming problem like climate change, therefore, by reconsidering the cosmology of major traditions. Yet religions are always more and different than their formal beliefs about the world, because they are carried by practitioners who constantly reuse their traditions in creative ways in order to meet the problems of everyday life. (Jenkins 2013, 19–20)

How do those who are not part of a religious tradition “meet the problems of everyday life”? What other resources—if not religious—might people use to confront the harms of “[a]nthropogenic changes on a planetary scale”? In accounting for nonreligion, this study attempts to deprive an association between religion and morality, which is elaborated upon in Chapter 1.

The rise in nonreligion has occurred at a time of heightened awareness for the planetary crisis. In British Columbia, a heatwave linked to climate change—where, again, the 2021 census revealed that more people do not identify with a religion than those who do—killed 619 people between June 25 to July 1, 2021 (British Columbia Coroners Service 2022). Ignoring the nonreligious as moral agents overlooks a significant proportion of the population who are being confronted by climate change. I aim to explore, therefore, how religion *and* nonreligion shape participant perspectives of the Trans Mountain Expansion project. I attribute greater significance to participant narratives by identifying to what extent underlying principles of environmental justice and ecological justice are at play. These principles offer a robust framework to explore how the (non)religious understand their terrestrial relations when faced with a condition of the planetary crisis. To what extent do the perspectives of nonreligious and religious individuals engaged in activism against the TMX project represent principles of justice? Are notions of environmental and ecological justice embodied by the religious and nonreligious? If so, how might (non)religious identities, ideas and language be relevant to grasping them? What points of agreement or tension

arise between religious and nonreligious moralities when viewed through a lens of justice? And what might this tell us about (non)religion in contemporary Canadian society?

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In **Chapter 1** I present the literature review, focusing on the fields of contemporary sociology of religion and religion and ecology. This review is not exhaustive but is meant to demonstrate where this thesis fits in the scholarly literature. It also details what I perceive to be shortcomings of each area, namely anthropocentrism in the sociology of religion, and the glossing over of nonreligion by scholars of religion and ecology. This thesis aims to address both of these gaps. This chapter also introduces the concept of stewardship, as it appears in the religion and ecology literature, which is used in the Chapters 4 and 6 analyses. In **Chapter 2** I outline the conceptual framework, based on distributive theories of environmental and ecological justice. These theories are used to inform the analysis and interpretation of interview data. **Chapter 3** covers the methodology of this thesis. It details the qualitative methods used, including my experience of participant observation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also offers an overview of participant demographics.

**Chapter 4** is the first analysis chapter. It explores how participants talked about climate change in relation to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. These perspectives heavily resonated with principles of climate justice, a form of environmental justice. Climate justice was the most prevalent form of justice in the interview data. It is argued that participant notions of climate justice, which focused on the distributive harms of climate change to younger and future humans, reflect a model of stewardship and a social imaginary shaped by Christianity. **Chapter 5** discusses participant perspectives on procedural justice, another form of environmental justice, in regard to First Nations who did not consent to the TMX project. It situates this finding in a broader

discussion of participant views on and experiences of Indigenous-settler relations in the context of anti-TMX activism. In this context it frames ‘settler’ as an identity that can intersect with that of being religious, but not necessarily so. It also introduces the ‘lifestances’ approach developed by sociologists Lori G. Beaman, Ryan T. Cragun and Douglas Ezzy (forthcoming) as a viable alternative to lived (non)religion, as well as the concept of ‘worldviews,’ for capturing the diversity and overlap of participants’ settler, religious and nonreligious identities. **Chapter 6**, the final analysis chapter, presents participant notions of ecological justice. This form of justice was the least common in the interview data. However, I demonstrate that prerequisites of ecological justice, or what Val Plumwood (2002) calls ‘interspecies justice,’ such as nonhuman equality, subjecthood and intentionality, are prevalent throughout the data. The idea of stewardship is used as a conceptual comparison to clarify the principles of ecological justice. I suggest that there is a tension between ecological justice and stewardship, although the two are not irreconcilable. The concept of lifestances, introduced in the preceding chapter, is used to make sense of how participant religious and nonreligious identities, language (like ‘sacred’) and ideas (like ‘the soul’) are reflected in their views of nonhuman equality, subjecthood and intentionality.

This discussion leads into that of the conclusion chapter, which provides a summary of the analysis chapters. The overall finding of this thesis is that religious and nonreligious participants both articulated their moral relations in ways that resonate with principles of environmental and ecological justice. Climate justice for younger and future humans was most prevalent in the data, followed by those of procedural justice for First Nations, and ecological justice for nonhumans directly impacted by the TMX project. The nuanced ways in which participants articulated their relations—whether or not they resonated with principles of environmental and ecological justice—reflected their religious and nonreligious identities to varying degrees. Beyond the level of

individual expression, religion as a social force is evident in the prevalence of participant representations of climate justice (presented in Chapter 4), which, I argue, reflect a form of residual Christianity in contemporary Canadian society. Nonreligion as a social force informs the ‘so what’ of the research findings, presented in the concluding chapter. I have argued elsewhere that the global trend of legal rights of nature, which is an institutional manifestation of ecological justice, may be supported by the rise of nonreligion (Strumos 2024). I return to this argument in the conclusion. I suggest that the conceptual foundation which makes ecological justice not just conceivable but possible in contemporary societies—in the form of nature’s rights—can be found among ordinary individuals like those soon to be featured in this thesis. The ordinary individuals who participated in this research expressed views of terrestrials that challenge human exceptionalism and stewardship, while supporting nonhuman subjecthood and intentionality. These are factors required to achieve justice for our fellow terrestrials.



## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

The emphasis of this study is on how individuals relate to other beings, both human and nonhuman, in an era of planetary crisis. It aims to demonstrate the relevance of religion and nonreligion for how these relationships are socially constructed. This chapter offers an overview of contemporary sociology of religion and religion and ecology, with a focus on the aspects of these subfields that inform this thesis and those to which it aims to contribute. The sociological study of religion emerged in the nineteenth century, when early social scientists sought to define the substance or function of religion in human societies. Indeed, religion was seen by the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology as uniquely human, above the realm of ‘the animal’ (Christiano et al. 2015, 4; see also Gross 2015; Schaefer 2015). Many contemporary sociologists have since adopted a social constructionist approach, in which they do not aim to locate or define the ‘essence’ of religion, but to research how it shapes and is shaped by social actors and contexts (Woodhead 2011). Nevertheless, certain assumptions remain embedded in how sociologists understand the concept of ‘religion.’ Anthropocentrism in particular has persisted since the field’s inception, evidenced by the human-centeredness of much its scholarship.

Scholars of religion and ecology have confronted anthropocentrism, engaging environmental ethics and philosophy to explore what it means to be human in a more-than-human world. Medieval historian Lynn White, Jr. (1967) proved instrumental in the formation of the field when he made a connection between religious cosmology and the anthropocentrism of r Christian dogma (Jenkins 2009). Critical views of religion also appeared in ecofeminist critiques of anthropocentrism like that of Val Plumwood (1993), who is discussed in the next chapter when the conceptual framework is presented. Such works in addition to White’s helped pave the way for

religion and ecology to become a recognised field in 1996, following a series of conferences at Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions. Led by John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker (1994, 2014), these conferences established an activist foundation for the field by exploring how various religious traditions can foster respectful relationships with nature. Perhaps due in part to its activist foundation, as well as its overlaps with theology, the field tends to lack critical considerations of religion as a concept. This includes the idea that religion is tied to morality.

The sentiment that religion is tied to morality has been complicated by the emergent study of nonreligion among sociologists of religion. Nonreligion began to attract serious attention from sociologists around the mid-2000s (Smith and Cragun 2019). While a relatively new area of research, one current area of focus is on the substantive content of nonreligion. What do the nonreligious believe in and what do they practice? In which ways are they similar to and different from the religious? In some sense this scholarly interest is a backlash to the term 'nones,' which constitutes a negative definition of the nonreligious by focusing on what they do not have (i.e., religion).<sup>21</sup> Substantive nonreligion has a central place in this thesis through its exploration of how nonreligious participants understand their moral relationships. Thus this thesis contributes to the study of nonreligion, where interest in ecology is growing but remains relatively marginal among sociologists, who, as this chapter explains, have only recently responded to the nonhuman turn in the humanities and social sciences.

## CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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<sup>21</sup> The “‘none label’” was first discussed by Glenn Vernon in his 1968 article “The Religious ‘Nones’: A Neglected Category,” published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. It took decades for sociologists to respond to Vernon’s call to treat “the religious ‘none’ or independent [as] a phenomenon worthy of study.”

The sociology of religion was once marked by debates regarding the substance and function of religion.<sup>22</sup> These works remain influential in the contemporary field, as seen in works that utilise, for example, a neo-Durkheimian view of religion (e.g., Hervieu-L  ger 2000; Edgell 2012; Astor 2023). However, many sociologists have since embraced a more social constructionist perspective, exploring how phenomena we categorise as religion contextually shapes and is shaped by social actors and processes. James A. Beckford (2003) illustrated this approach by distinguishing between religion as a first-order and second-order concept. He stated that religion is:

[An] observer’s construction that is supposedly based on the first-order beliefs, practices and experiences of human actors. To put this point more simply, many human actors have beliefs and experiences associated with, for example, the power of deities to influence human affairs or the sense of being in the presence of a supernatural power. Actors do not have generic or ‘contentless’ religious beliefs and experiences: they have beliefs and experiences with *particular* contents. Only in reflective moments do actors sometimes apply the label of religion to these beliefs and experiences. Similarly, social scientists do not observe religion directly: they analyse evidence of various beliefs, actions and experiences that they separately choose to categorise as religion. (Beckford 2003, 21)

Conceptualising religion as an analytical category resonates with scholarship from religious studies, particularly in the wake of the postmodern turn. As J. Z. Smith (1998, 281–2) prominently wrote: “‘Religion’ is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology.” Whereas Smith was largely interested in how scholars conceptualise, study and use the term ‘religion,’ Beckford (2003, 29) offered an empirically practical approach he compares to methodological agnosticism.<sup>23</sup> Beckford (2003, 215) did not task himself with deconstructing religion as a concept, or disproving any potential essence of

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<sup>22</sup> See Davie (2007) for an overview of the early functionalist and substantive approaches to religion.

<sup>23</sup> Methodological agnosticism has faced criticism from scholars of religion following Smith’s footsteps. See McCutcheon 2024, xii; 191.

religion. He also claimed that searching for an essence is not a worthwhile endeavor. The social scientist should rather focus on understanding how religion—or what humans call religion—appears and operates in social life, from the individual to institutional levels of society. For even if the power of deities is true, our study of religion can only arrive through human interaction.

Following Beckford, this thesis treats religion as a first-order and second-order concept. Religion as a first-order concept is represented by interview data. This includes participants who consider themselves to be religious, and make reference to what they consider to be religious traditions, beliefs and practices. As a second-order concept, I use religion to categorise participant perspectives. What counts as religion in this study is not random, but done in accordance with relevant scholarship on religion, which, in turn, is based on “first-order beliefs, practices and experiences of human actors” (Beckford 2003, 21). For instance, in Chapter 4, I present the idea of ‘stewardship’ as religious, which relies upon a line of scholarship that roots stewardship in Christianity.<sup>24</sup> That is not to claim that stewardship is, in fact, essentially or objectively religious; this would require a definition of religion. Beckford (2003, 20) stated:

Given the wide extent of uncertainty and disagreement about what counts as religion in everyday life, it would be unwise for social scientists to intuit or to impose a definition of their own making, especially if it were restrictive. A better strategy is to map the varieties of meaning attributed to religion in social settings, to discern the relative frequency of the prevailing meanings and to monitor changes over time.

What counts as religion in this thesis is relational and contextual, being dependent on my interview data, and understandings of what is religion (or more accurately, what is ‘religious’) in the subfields in which this thesis is situated, as well as participants and their social setting of contemporary British Columbian society. When I asked participants whether they consider themselves to be religious, for example, some replied by identifying themselves with a Christian

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<sup>24</sup> The association between stewardship and Christianity is discussed later in this chapter.

tradition. It follows that Christianity appears under the categorical umbrella of ‘religion’ in the data, and by extension, ideas associated with Christianity by participants or by scholars (such as stewardship) are relatedly categorised as religious. Employing religion as a second-order concept allows for a deeper engagement with the data, and it helps to connect the research findings to wider scholarship on religion.

Similar to Beckford, Véronique Altglas and Matthew Wood (2018) emphasise that religion for sociologists is not to be treated as an objective truth. They call for a ‘critical sociology of religion’ whereby religion is not studied as an insulated phenomenon, but as “socially constructed and as a prism through which to understand the social beyond the narrow description of religion for itself, making it a social phenomenon that needs to be studied in conjunction with other social trends and facts – the family, authority, work, ethnicity, health, and so forth” (Altglas and Wood 2018, 6). This thesis falls within the ‘and so forth’ category by looking at religion in relation to a condition of the planetary crisis, or ‘the environment,’ which has largely been excluded by sociologists of religion from their conception of the social. This exclusion is problematic for a critical sociology of religion, which entails an awareness of the conditions of knowledge production and how “knowledge is affected by these conditions” (Altglas and Wood 2018, 28). One of these conditions, which has shaped the study of religion since its inception, is anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism (Gross 2015).

Until very recently, the ways in which nonhuman beings shape social life has been virtually ignored by sociologists of religion. They have placed humans at the centre of inquiry without serious consideration of the more-than-human world in which they live (Beaman and Strumos 2024). Nonhumans do appear in some works, particularly those on ‘lived religion,’ but even in this literature they have received minimal attention. The lived religion approach emerged following

critiques of secularisation theory, which led sociologists to look for new ways to study the relationship between religion and society (Ammerman 2007).<sup>25</sup> It shifted focus away from macro-level questions about religion, and towards how ordinary individuals or groups understand, experience, and practice their religion in everyday life (Bender 2003; Woodhead 2011; Ammerman 2021).<sup>26</sup> The lived religion approach has been met with some criticism for lack of reflexivity and scholarly bias, either by inflating religion's presence or hastily accepting or rejecting emic positions (Altglas and Wood 2018, 2; Cotter 2020, 216; Cragun et al. forthcoming). Regardless, turning their focus towards religion in ordinary life prompted sociologists to think more critically about their object of study.

The turn towards lived religion was accompanied by a challenge to the notion that religion is primarily about belief. This notion, as Robert A. Orsi (2005, 180) demonstrated, stems from a subtly embedded Protestant bias in the study of religion, which has produced “unacknowledged assumptions, prejudices, and implications in power.” It is tied up in the universalist claims of Christian missionaries during colonisation, which helped make belief “the measure of what religion is understood to be” in and beyond scholarship (Lopez 1998, 33). Meredith McGuire (2007; 2008) likewise confronts the tendency to privilege belief by emphasising the prominence of material bodies. She states: “Human bodies matter because those practices—even interior ones,

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<sup>25</sup> During the second half of twentieth century, the sociology of religion became shaped by the secularisation thesis that developed across social and political disciplines. Linked to modernisation theory, the secularisation thesis proposed that religion would decline, in one form or another, as an inevitable result of modernisation. This thesis has roots in the Enlightenment theories of the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology, who grappled with the consequences of industrialisation for institutional religion as observed in their own national contexts. Max Weber, for instance, held that religion in modernity would progressively erode at the cognitive and cultural levels of existence (Davie 2013; Woodhead 2011). The concept of secularisation has remained present in the sociology of religion, both as a theoretical framework and as a starting point to theorise religion beyond modernisation. See Casanova (1994), Beyer (2006), Furseth (2017) and Kasselstrand, Zuckerman and Cragun (2023).

<sup>26</sup> This includes how religion intersects with other aspects of identity, including sex, gender, race and ethnicity (McGuire 2008; Beyer and Ramji 2013; Neitz 2014), and how individuals navigate, negotiate and engage their religious identities in social interactions (Bender 2003; Beaman 2017; Selby et al. 2018).

such as contemplation—involve people’s bodies, as well as their minds and spirits” (McGuire 2007, 187). Orsi (2005, 29) also considers the role of bodies, particularly in American Catholicism, where suffering is understood to have divine purpose as opposed to requiring a solution (as found in Protestantism). McGuire (2007; 2008) is less interested in conventional forms of religion, focusing instead on seemingly mundane practices like gardening, which, she reasons, can constitute lived religion if it facilitates connections among an individual’s mind, body, and spirit.

The works of Orsi and McGuire help to expand a traditional focus on belief, yet a normative belief of anthropocentrism lingers throughout their work. McGuire (2007; 2008) calls attention to material bodies, but there is no clear acknowledgement that the material body is not exclusively human, or that lived religion can emerge, for instance, in a space of interaction between human bodies and plant beings.<sup>27</sup> Orsi (2005, 188) offers a description of snake handling Christians in Appalachia, and he is critical of a preceding author’s portrayal of them as radical others, practicing a form of ‘bad religion’ (‘good religion’ is concerned with the mind and spirit, not handling wild animals in a bout of religious ecstasy).<sup>28</sup> The snakes in this account are also painted as ‘others,’ but unlike their human handlers, they are not re-afforded agency by Orsi. They remain a backgrounded character in his critique of othering fellow humans. Referencing this account, Beaman and Strumos (2024, 412) ask: “What does it mean for the practice of the snake handlers to rely on the control of the snakes’ own bodies?” This point is not intended as a critique of Orsi.

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<sup>27</sup> Drawing on affect theory, Donovan O. Schaefer (2015, 35) considers how human bodies are variously engaged in the material world through affective “flows of power” that implicate what gets called religion. He shifts focus away from cognition, language and belief to ‘animalise’ the human body and religious practice. Schaefer (2015, 182) explains: “Rather than a discursive apparatus, affect theory understands religion as a dance: a homeodynamic correspondence between a body and a thickly textured world propelled by the fluid currency of affect.” McGuire (2008) is likewise concerned with bodily practice and emotions, but in her approach, the religious practitioner is an autonomous human actor, closed to the affective influences of other material bodies or powers in precognitive and multidirectional ways.

<sup>28</sup> Orsi (2005) further argued that liberal Protestantism has informed a moral baseline for deciding what counts as ‘real religion’ or ‘good religion.’

It is rather meant to demonstrate that the ‘lived’ part of lived religion can involve ‘living beyond the human,’ and that entry points for such consideration have been largely ignored.

The anthropocentrism of Western research paradigms has been challenged by works that focus on Indigenous religions or spiritualities from within postcolonial and decolonial frameworks. Regarding the term ‘Indigenous religion,’ Paul Gareau (2021, n.p.) explains that “many people prefer to talk about Indigenous spirituality in order to better represent the noninstitutional, localised nature of Indigenous ways of being and knowing. But, akin to religion, spirituality also carries with it colonial baggage that misrepresents Indigenous experiences, epistemologies and ontologies, and kinship structures.” Regardless of whether the term Indigenous ‘religion’ or ‘spirituality’ is used, relationality should be at the centre of its conceptualisation, in order to reflect the cruciality of co-constitutive relations between humans and more-than-humans in Indigenous epistemologies (Gareau and LeBlanc 2022).<sup>29</sup> Works that include Indigenous voices or knowledges in contemporary sociology of religion are relatively few but continue to grow, including in the study of nonreligion (Rahmani et al. 2024; Simmons 2024). This presence calls attention to broader power implications in the study of religion, which has only recently responded to the decolonial turn (Avalos 2024), illustrating how knowledge production is “neither acultural nor apolitical” (Kovach 2021, 32).

Beyond work on Indigenous religions or spiritualities, sociologists of religion have only very recently begun to address anthropocentrism. In a special issue of *Social Compass*, published in September 2024, social scientists were asked to reflect on ‘(Non)religion, spirituality, and the

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<sup>29</sup> On defining the concept of ‘relationality,’ Gareau and LeBlanc (2022, 40) turn to Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2016, 71), who explains: “Relationality is grounded in a holistic conception of the interconnectedness and inter-substantiation between and among all living things and the earth, which is inhabited by a world of ancestors and creator beings. It informs our epistemological and ethical premise that social research should begin with an awareness of our proper relationships with the world we inhabit, and is conducted with respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation, and reciprocity.”



multispecies turn.’ In the introduction, editors Anna Halafoff, Rachel Harris and Lori G. Beaman (2024) discuss various shifts that prompted sociologists of religion to start thinking more seriously about nonhumans, including transdisciplinary influences. One of these is a parallel decolonial turn, which has pushed Western scholars to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing that, as noted above, entail more-than-human relations. The authors highlight the influence of *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) by Anishinaabekwe scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer, which has gained popularity among the public, appearing in outlets like *CBC News* and the *New York Times*. This influence suggests that the field’s response to the nonhuman turn is not solely an insular academic development, but it arises from a closer engagement between sociologists of religion and the societies that they study (and in which they also participate). This engagement was made possible in part by the lived religion approach, as it required scholars to pay closer attention to ordinary people and their interests in broader contexts of social change.

In their introduction, Halafoff et al. (2024, 391) indicate that the slow response of sociologists of religion to the nonhuman turn may seem strange, considering these shifts have already emerged—and are indeed rooted in—the works of other social scientists in anthropology (see Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). In their special issue article, Beaman and Strumos (2024) note that a call to take animals seriously was first made by Clifton D. Bryant in 1979. As a sociologist, Bryant (1979) offered a detailed overview of the ‘zoological components’ of Western society. In addition to living animals, like companion animals or those used for work, he explained that nonhuman animals are prevalent in more abstract forms. One example is common phrases or metaphors like ‘cry wolf’ and ‘quiet as a mouse,’ for which Bryant (1979, 402) stated: “This strong zoological flavor in our language would suggest a considerable animal influence in our cultural fabric.” Making his call to sociologists, he concluded:

Our social enterprise is not composed of humans alone. Creatures of all variety are inextricably involved in many of our behavioral activities and play important interactive roles in society. [...] To truly understand human social behavior in all its vagaries, and to be completely sensitive to the full array of its nuisances and subtleties, we must enhance our appreciation of its zoological dimension. Accordingly, we might all be well advised to add animals to the lexicon of our discipline. (Bryant 1979, 417)

Overall, the discipline did not respond, with Clinton R. Sanders and Arnold Arluke (1993, 377) noting that, after Bryant, sociologists still showed “a remarkable reluctance” to take animals seriously. For Sanders and Arluke (1993, 384), the difference between human and nonhuman animals is one of “degree rather than kind,” but in perceiving this difference as one of kind, sociologists have omitted animals from their discipline as fellow social beings. Sanders and Arluke did not identify this viewpoint as one of ‘human exceptionalism,’ but the idea that humans are unique is later identified as such by Bob Carter and Nickie Charles (2016).

Carter and Charles (2016) offer three reasons for the marginalisation of nonhuman animals in sociology, including an underlying assumption of human exceptionalism.<sup>30</sup> “Human exceptionalism refers to the idea that the human species is exempt from natural constraints (primarily because of its scientific and technological achievements) and is evolutionarily unique (because of its capacity for language and the capacities for meaning making and cultural development that are emergent from this)” (Carter and Charles 2016, 81). Religion is also part of this equation, if we accept Lynn White’s (1967) argument that Christian dogma positioned humans, the only species made in the Christian god’s image, as radically separate from nature as its masters. In that case, the modern foundations for constructing a unique human identity—whether it is the capacity for science, technology, language, meaning making or culture—are still rooted in, or are a continuation of, the master’s separation from nature (Plumwood 1993, 101).

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<sup>30</sup> The other two reasons are sociology’s fraught relationship with biology and its emergence during a time of industrialisation and urbanisation. For a summary, see Beaman and Strumos (2024, 410).

Alternatively, if there is a self-sustaining, evolving universe that was created by god (Berry 2009), then the evolutionary exceptionalism of humans, as the ones with ‘the rational soul,’ remains divinely sanctioned.<sup>31</sup> Human exceptionalism in each case remains part of the cosmos.

The assumption that human social life is exceptional to the rest of nature and creation, or that it operates in isolation from nonhuman subjects, is embedded in the sociology of religion. Failure to address this assumption reflects and reinforces the human/nature dualism traditionally found in Western thought (Beaman and Strumos 2024). If this assumption exists, at least in part, through an underlying Christian bias, then failure to confront human exceptionalism may indicate a failure to maintain a critical distance from Christian theology, where discussions on human uniqueness persist alongside those focused on human animality (Meyer 2018). If so, then the integrity of a critical sociology of religion is compromised, for it requires a clear separation from the religious field (Altglas and Wood 2018, 5). This thesis aims to advance research in the sociology of religion that challenges its anthropocentric foundation. It primarily does so by exploring how (non)religious individuals opposed to the Trans Mountain Expansion project express notions of ecological justice and nonhuman intentionality, including multispecies communication, which relies upon a conception of nonhumans as social beings with agency. These findings are presented in Chapter 6 and expanded upon in the concluding chapter, when the significance of nonreligion for manifestations of ecological justice is discussed.

## NONRELIGION

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<sup>31</sup> Speaking to narratives of ‘anthropological exceptionalism,’ Eric Daryl Meyer (2018, 4) writes that “despite the characteristics that human beings share with other creatures, God sets human beings apart in some way (an immortal or rational soul, for example) so that human beings can be neatly separated out from all the others.”

The recent attention given to nonhumans in the sociology of religion coincides with an increasing interest in nonreligion (Beaman and Strumos 2024, 416). The term ‘nonreligion’ is often used to indicate phenomena that are simultaneously distinct from and related to religion. Lois Lee (2015, 32) understands this connection as central to nonreligion, so that nonreligion is “not the absence of something (religion) but the presence of something (else), characterized, at least in the first place, by its relation to religion but nevertheless distinct from it.” Johannes Quack (2014) also proposes a relational theory of nonreligion. He defines nonreligion as that which is distinct from yet related to religion either directly or indirectly. The religiously unaffiliated, for example, may have no connection to religion in ordinary life, but they nevertheless ‘become nonreligion’ when they are positioned in relation to religion by scholars (Quack 2014; Quack and Schuh 2017; Schuh et al. 2019). The term ‘nonreligion’ thus functions for many sociologists as a second-order concept (Beckford 2003; Steele 2020; Cragun and McCaffree 2021). It helps them locate, organise, and make sense of social phenomena that are “conceptually tethered in one way or another to the category of religion” (Smith and Cragun 2019, 321).<sup>32</sup> Nonreligion, as a relational and second-order concept, is expanded upon in Chapter 4, when it is used to examine participant notions of climate justice.

When the term ‘nonreligious’ is used as an identity category, it likewise entails a relationship with religion. The nonreligious are those who “variably ignore, reject, or are indifferent to conventional religion and its surrogates” (Smith and Cragun 2019, 322). This includes but is not limited to individuals who self-identify as atheist, humanist, spiritual but not religious and agnostic, as well as those who are simply indifferent to religiosity. Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme (2015, 495) clarifies that “the religiously unaffiliated in Canada do not form one

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<sup>32</sup> As Cora Schuh et al. (2019, 13) explain: “What counts as religion ... and nonreligion is not defined a priori but analyzed instead as an object and outcome of social (including scholarly) constructions and contestations.”

homogenous group devoid of all forms of religiosity.” While some have little to no identification with religious or spiritual beliefs and practices (Beyer et al. 2019, 21), others engage in practices like prayer or hold beliefs in a higher power or life after death (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; 2022; Miller and Beaman 2024). Being nonreligious does not imply an absence of all things religious. This observation is supported throughout this thesis by participants who do not identify as religious, but still engage in a practices, use language or make reference to ideas typically considered religious. The diversity of participants’ nonreligious identities is highlighted in Chapter 5, when they are shown to intersect with that of being a settler.

The identity of ‘nonreligious’ does not reveal anything about people other than they are not religious. But nonreligion as a social phenomenon entails more than an absence or rejection of religion. It is not a residual category lacking substance, or an “insubstantial, empty, baseline norm that remains when religion is removed from the equation” (Cotter 2020, 55). Exploring the diversity of values, practices and beliefs of the nonreligious has become a research trend known as substantive nonreligion (Lee 2015; Manning 2015; Smith and Cragun 2019; Steele 2020; Steele 2023; Cragun and McCaffree 2021). When focused on the experiences and expressions of ordinary individuals, this area of research may be understood as taking a ‘lived nonreligion’ approach (Salonen 2018; Malone 2020; Ezzy 2021; Beaman and Strumos 2024). Again, this does not necessitate a strict divide between ‘lived religion’ and ‘lived nonreligion.’ The lives of the nonreligious are not devoid of interactions or encounters with religion. Rather, this research demonstrates that material and immaterial things typically associated with religion, such as answering existential questions or engaging in rites of passage and life-cycle ceremonies (Lee 2015, 65–66), can be enacted without relying upon religion.

One avenue of research is exploring how people construct moral relationships without religion (Brown 2017; Beaman and Stacey 2021; Beaman and Strumos 2024). This poses a challenge to the sentiment that morality is tied to religion.<sup>33</sup> Douglas Ezzy (2021, 149) states: “The way we study [religion and nonreligion] can easily mask privilege, and in particular Christian privilege, through the historical influence of Christian assumptions about the academic study of religion. These include the assumption that nonreligious people are not moral.” The idea that religion does not own morality is not some novel claim made by sociologists. Fraans de Waal (2014) argued that morality emerged through evolution, but not human evolution exclusively. He also noted that, given the influence of Christianity on conceptions of morality, knowing what morality would look like in Western societies without religion is impossible. The study of nonreligion is not anti-religious. It does not entail ignoring the historical influences of religion on dimensions of social life, including morality. It rather calls for an approach (the one adopted by this thesis) that does not preconceive religion as central to or ontologically necessary for human morality. This approach is demonstrated in Chapter 6, when notions of ecological justice are located in the narratives of religious and nonreligious participants, both with and without any reference to religion.

## RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

Religion and ecology became a recognised field in the 1990s with a series of conferences at Harvard University’s Center for the Study of World Religions. As part of this series, John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker (2014) called on religious traditions to become less ‘anthropocentric’ and more ‘anthropocosmic.’ They encouraged religious thinkers to engage in a process whereby

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<sup>33</sup> For works that acknowledge this association, see: Beyer (2006); Brown (2017); Salonen (2018); Steele (2020); Steele (2023); Stacey and Beaman (2021); Ezzy (2021).

traditional sources, such as scriptures and rituals, become retrieved, renewed and reconstructed to support a flourishing Earth community. Grim and Tucker (2014, 20) remark that the “rational appeal to justice, to enlightened self-interest, or even to the well-being of future generations does not alone seem to have had a significant effect or traction” in addressing the planetary crisis. To adequately address the crisis, religions as moral forces are necessary, but not in their current form. They must first remedy their anthropocentric flaws. The field of religion and ecology has included Asian religions since its inception.<sup>34</sup> However, the process of reconstructing tradition has primarily focused on Judaism, Christianity and Islam, due in part to the perceived moral repercussions of their anthropocentric cosmologies, as first identified by Lynn White in 1967 (Jenkins 2009).<sup>35</sup>

In his article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” published in *Science*, White (1967, 1205) infamously accused Christianity of being “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.” He argued that medieval Christian dogma placed humans over and above nature as its masters, forging a human/nature dualism which was accompanied by a divine will that “man exploit nature for his proper ends” (White 1967, 1205). The exploitation of nature became

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher Chapple presented on Hinduism and Jainism in 1997 and 1998 respectively at Grim and Tucker’s ‘Religions of the World and Ecology Conference Series.’ He later edited the collections *Hinduism and Ecology* (2000, with Mary Evelyn Tucker) and *Jainism and Ecology* (2002).

<sup>35</sup> That being said, anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism have been considered outside of Western contexts. Anne Vallely (2020) explains that, in Jainism, only humans can attain liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) due to their cognitive ability of contemplation. Yet the path to *moksha* is predicated on reverence for all lifeforms. In Jainism, “one comes to experience the world around oneself as animated by individual, embodied subjectivities, each endowed with an eternal soul on its own spiritual trajectory” (Vallely 2020, 553). This vision precedes compassion and the “desire to minimize harm to all beings—large and small, visible and invisible, including even such one-sensed beings as air, all of whom are subjects in their own right” (Vallely 2020, 555). Nonviolence is an ethical duty in Jainism. It is not a divine responsibility bestowed upon humans from above, but made necessary by the sentience of each lifeform, who participate alongside humans in a world of suffering. *Ahimsa* assumes various degrees of importance depending on the religious context in which it takes shape, and it does not always seamlessly translate into ordinary life. The cow and her products in Hinduism, for instance, are found in various stories and identified with deities like Lakshmi (the goddess of fortune) and the divine cowherd Lord Krishna, whose devotees serve and strengthen their connection to him by caring for cows (Valpey 2020, 153). However, Yamini Narayanan (2018) reveals that cows are not always treated with sanctified care or in accordance with *ahimsa*. She details the ways in which cows are instrumentalised by Hindu nationalists, who view the cow as India’s giving mother, and the dairy industry, which uses Hindu stories of milk and images of Krishna to mobilise dairy consumption. What goes unseen are the living cows behind the industry who suffer from reproductive exploitation. Such research counters romanticised conceptions of Asian religions as being innately harmonious with nature (Harris 1991).

exacerbated by the coupling of science with technology, which emerged from natural theology and became driven by Christian ideals of perpetual progress. For White (1967, 1207), the solution to the ecological crisis could not be found in science and technology; it required a religious “remedy” to address its underlying causes. White (1967, 1207) turned to Saint Francis of Assisi, praised him for trying to “substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation,” and proposed him as the patron saint of ecologists.

Responses to White’s article varied, but many theologians offered alternative views on the place of humans in creation. John Cobb directly challenged White’s thesis in *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, first published in 1972, by asserting that Christianity requires humans to live in kinship with other creatures.<sup>36</sup> Cobb stated:

The fateful story of creation represents human beings as created like the rest, from the dust of the Earth. We are cocreature with fish and birds and beasts. The fundamental duality lies between creator and creature, not between the human species and other animals. Yet the story speaks of God creating humans in the divine image, thus lifting them above the rest, and Christian theology has focused more upon the image of God than upon human cocreaturehood with other animals [...] It has thus led to a threefold distinction of God, humanity, and nature against the more basic biblical distinction of creator and creation. It is the image of cocreaturehood that we need now to recover without the loss of the biblical sense of humanity as the apex of creation. (Cobb 2021, 66)

Humans emerge from god’s creating, like all other creatures,<sup>37</sup> but they have the exceptional status of being made “in the divine image.” This exceptional status, as Cobb and others have similarly argued (Dobel 1977; Attfield 1983), does not equate to a position of human mastery or dominion. Instead, humans should embody a responsibility of stewardship, tasked with caring for the earth

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<sup>36</sup>Stewardship, according to Cobb, is an inadequate concept as it presupposes that humans have a comprehensive knowledge of creation. He prefers to think of humans as participants in creation who need to learn from nature in order to “serve and work with it” (Cobb 2021, 96). Nevertheless, Cobb maintains the human/nature power imbalance of stewardship. His approach rests on a division in which humans—regardless of any learning curve—are the pinnacle of creation and sole carer of all creatures.

<sup>37</sup> The term ‘creature’ originates from Late Latin *creātūra*, meaning, “act of bringing into being, something brought into being.”



and its creatures.<sup>38</sup> Humans stand above nature as its stewards while remaining bound to the earth as creatures themselves. White himself was critical of this stewardship or caretaker model, proposing in later works a democracy of creatures that eschews hierarchy and reflects his “affinity to egalitarianism” (Riley 2014, 245).

Nevertheless, there was a “dominion-stewardship debate” that ensued following White’s article (Riley 2014). The legacy of this debate endures, seen in the continued attention given to stewardship by scholars (e.g., Warners and Heun 2019). This has included a focus on animals in particular, with Andrew Linzey (1987) offering a foundational account of how Christians can respond to animal suffering as part of a stewardship mandate (Patton 2006, 33). Elizabeth A. Johnson (2014, 266) explains: “The stewardship interpretation of the mandate to have dominion honors the singularity that the human species undoubtedly is while firmly connecting our powers with a moral responsibility to act for the well-being of other species.” The maintenance of human moral priority, while recognising the rest of creation as also having moral worth, has been called “hierarchical non-anthropocentrism” (Simmons 2020).<sup>39</sup> In Tripp York’s (2015) account, human primates stand apart from all other animals as the ones tasked with naming creation, as seen with Adam in the second creation narrative. This act of naming is one of power. When humans call a cow ‘meat,’ for example, York (2015, 37) reasons that they reduce her to a commodity, ignoring

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<sup>38</sup> In *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, first published in 1983, Attfield (1991, 45–46) argues that “there has been a strong tradition in Europe and lands of European settlement, a tradition of Judaeo-Christian origins but not confined to adherents of Judaism and Christianity, of belief that people are the stewards of the earth, and responsible for its conservation, for its lasting improvement, and also for the care of our fellow-creatures, its nonhuman inhabitants [...] These traditions, taken together, are at least as representative of Christian history as any despotic view, and may well be considered to offer materials from which an environmental ethic equal to our current problems can be elicited, without the need for the introduction of a new ethic to govern our transactions with nature. Indeed in our existing moral thought and traditions (whether religious or secular) the roots may be found from which, with the help of the findings of ecological science, a tenable environmental ethic can grow.”

<sup>39</sup> Another example is Friedrich Lohmann’s (2011) argument that intrinsic value can be ascribed to nature while maintaining a form of human superiority that compels stewardship. He takes the position that anthropocentrism is not inherently problematic. Roger S. Gottlieb (2006, 32) similarly recognises that stewardship attributes moral value to nature, but unlike Lohmann, he argues that it provides a foundation for “unprincipled anthropocentrism” to develop in which “only human beings have any moral value.”

her own species-specific, god-given needs and desires. York (2015, 57) argues that to properly care for creation, and eschew dominion, humans “must learn to name creation well.”

Beyond theology White’s article has sociological relevance. He did not define society as being overtly Christian, but maintained that the substance of Western thinking “remains amazingly akin to the past” (White 1967, 1205). He argued that modern science and technology “cannot be understood historically apart from distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma. The fact that most people do not think of these attitudes as Christian is irrelevant. No new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity” (White 1967, 1207). This view resonates with the idea of residual Christianity, presented in the introduction of this thesis and revisited in Chapter 4. For White, modern thinking can be traced back to a time of Christian hegemony, establishing a connection between the Christian past and what he cautiously called our ‘post-Christian era.’ This connection is not maintained by stewardship but an ethos of human mastery. Arguably, the weight placed on stewardship in the wake of White’s article occurred because the “dominant strands” of Western thought are indeed ones of mastery over nature (Plumwood 1993, 6). In fewer words, stewardship only needs to be stressed because it is not the norm. If White was wrong about Christian dogma, then, he could still be correct in observing that society’s basic values are reflective of human transcendence and dominance of nature.

Perhaps another influence of White’s article, early scholarship in religion and ecology often focused on traditional sources of the world’s religions. The field was not insular, however, with environmental philosophy playing a particularly influential role (Grim and Tucker 2014, 75). For example, in *Deep Ecology and World Religions* (2001), David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb explore points of compatibility and tension between religions and deep ecology. The term

‘deep ecology’ was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973 to distinguish between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ environmentalism. The former reflects the stewardship model, using science and technology to foster environmental protection and conservation. In contrast, deep ecology is ecocentric and calls for a fundamental shift in how nature is viewed and treated in Western society.<sup>40</sup> It positions humans as one equal part of an interconnected planetary community with no more intrinsic value than nonhuman beings or nature.<sup>41</sup> At the individual level, deep ecology calls for a reformulation of identity, shifting from an ‘individual self’ to an ‘ecological self’ who lives in connection with all life.

Robert Gottlieb (2001) paints deep ecology as religious in his chapter for *Deep Ecology and World Religions*, arguing that it orients people towards ultimate significance.<sup>42</sup> Gottlieb (2001, 19) states, for example, that “[a]s Jews or Hindus see themselves as receiving The Truth from scriptures or direct encounters with God, the deep ecologist receives sacred truths from the natural world.” Naess and other deep ecologists like George Sessions (2006) did not define deep ecology as religious, but they acknowledged that religion could motivate it. Naess (1995, 79) even listed Christianity as one of the “religious homes” of deep ecologists (see Taylor [2007] for an example).<sup>43</sup> They were also careful to highlight the diversity of the deep ecology movement, clarifying that its ethics can be cultivated with or without religion. Naess himself did not associate

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<sup>40</sup> The concept of ‘ecocentrism’ is elaborated upon in the next chapter.

<sup>41</sup> Deep ecology does not argue why nonhuman nature has intrinsic value, focusing instead on cultivating ecological states of being (Fox 1986).

<sup>42</sup> This definition is made in accordance with Paul Tillich’s understanding of religion as one’s ultimate concern, first presented in *Dynamics of Faith* (1957).

<sup>43</sup> Sarah McFarland Taylor (2007, 229) found in her ethnographic research of the ‘green sisters’ movement that some nuns emphasise land stewardship, while others envision relationships with nature more akin to deep ecology. As one Sister of Loretto stated: “I no longer believe in the old cosmology I had been taught—the hierarchical pyramid of creation [...] I am beginning to accept a new worldview in which all creation has inherent worth and beauty—a moral order in which all created beings are moving to a stage of harmony, equality, and respect for each other” (Taylor 2007, 167–68). Taylor (2007, 168) contrasts this ecocentric position with stewardship, which she describes as “a more anthropocentric model favoured by the institutional Church.”

with a religion and formed his own philosophy called ‘Ecosophy T.’ Hence Gottlieb’s (2001) conceptualisation of deep ecology imposes his own understanding of religion onto the movement, disregarding its diversity and ways of being in the world without religion. This approach perpetuates a sentiment that religion is tied to morality, with Barnhill and Gottlieb (2001, 1) defining “valuing nature for its own sake” (which they state is part of deep ecology) as an “ethical and religious attitude.” In doing so, they misrepresent and undermine those deep ecologists who are nonreligious, including Naess, while perpetuating a pro-religion bias in the study of religion (Altglas and Wood 2018).<sup>44</sup>

Employing broad definitions of religion and its discursive associates—especially but not only spirituality—is a theme in the religion and ecology literature. Leslie Sponsel (2016, 220) writes that spirituality is “undeniably an elemental and often pivotal manifestation of *human nature*; even atheists, agnostics, and secular humanists may be spiritual.”<sup>45</sup> This definition reflects a view of spirituality as “a universal anthropological constant,” which exists in separation from institutional, organised or established religion (Altglas 2018, 85).<sup>46</sup> It also aligns with the tendency to interpret exceptional experiences in nature as inherently spiritual (De Cruz 2020). Haydn Washington (2018, 4) defines wonder at nature as a universal human experience that, as a result, should “be considered spiritual even if it is not strictly religious (and certainly not in the sense of an established religion).”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Karen Bray, Heather Eaton and Whitney Bauman (2023) use

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<sup>44</sup> This interpretation of Gottlieb’s (2001, 23–24) work is further supported by his statement that “there remain aggressive and self-confident secular philosophies that have tried...to offer fulfilling visions of human life in nonreligious terms. Secular philosophies and their adherents, despite the excesses of Stalin or Hitler, the *Wall Street Journal* or *Playboy*, still often feel themselves every bit the legitimate equal or superior to religious perspectives.”

<sup>45</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> This distinction is rooted in a theological one between religious experience and religious institutions, for which only religious experience exists beyond social construction (Martin 2014, 61; cited in Altglas 2018, 85).

<sup>47</sup> However, social scientists have demonstrated that emotional experiences in nature can be studied without religious or spiritual explanation. David Thurfjell et al. (2019) reconceptualise the notion of transcendence to offer a definition that does not presuppose religion or spirituality. “Great transcendence,” Thurfjell et al. (2019, 208) explain, “is a mode of experience that reaches beyond the boundaries of the everyday in a way that is referred to as special. It is an

the term ‘religiosity’ in place of ‘religion’ in an all-encompassing manner. They write that religiosity “conveys not just the comparative approach to ‘world religions,’ but the aesthetics, values, practices, and meaning-making efforts that people employ in their daily lives” (Bray et al. 2023, 3). Accordingly, all humans may engage in aspects of religiosity, even if they are not properly religious.

The sweeping use of religion and religion-like language is found in Bron Taylor’s oft-cited *Dark Green Religion* (2010). Taylor (2010, 13) writes that dark green religion, which some describe as a form of eco-spirituality,<sup>48</sup> “flow[s] from a deep sense of belonging to and connectedness in nature, while perceiving the earth and its living systems to be sacred and interconnected.” In addition to the spiritual but not religious, Taylor (2001, 175) includes those who “eschew the label religion” like agnostics and atheists under his umbrella of dark green religion, so long as they exhibit characteristics of what he considers to be spiritual (see also Taylor 2010, 36). This criteria includes “feelings of belonging and connection to the earth,” even if these feelings are understood in strictly materialist terms (Taylor 2010, 5). He further collapses spirituality into religion when stating: “Unless one considers belief in divine beings or forces to be essential to a definition of religion, most contemporary spirituality can easily be considered religious” (Taylor 2010, 4). Taylor does not propose dark green religion as a remedy to the planetary crisis, although it includes a moral imperative to respect the sacredness of nonhumans and the earth as a whole. He presents it as something already occurring ‘out there’ and spreading

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emotional, aesthetic, sensuous, and embodied experience that places people at, or across, the border of the world they usually inhabit and makes them conscious of a larger cosmos.” Beaman (2021b) reconceptualises enchantment to be an affective human experience in their encounters with nonhuman animals. These encounters can be extraordinary or happen in the course of everyday life.

<sup>48</sup> Sponsel (2020, 77–78) defines ecological spirituality as the “vast, complex, diverse, and dynamic arena of intellectual and practical activities at the interfaces of religions and spiritualities with nature, ecologies, environments, and environmentalisms. The qualifier spiritual is used instead of religious, because it is far more inclusive.”

in the world, and he locates it in a range of settings, from environmental activism to the Disney film *The Lion King* (1994).<sup>49</sup>

Overall, any distinctions between religion and nonreligion, or religion and spirituality, are glossed over for the sake of uniformity. This uniformity is achieved through Taylor's expansive definition of religion, which reinforces the moral privilege traditionally granted to religion. The sentiment that religion is tied to morality is further seen in the idea of 'spiritual ecology' as described by Sam Mickey. The term 'spiritual' for Mickey (2020, 1) "seems to be a more comprehensive and inclusive category than religion, as the word 'religion' is often associated with organized religion and not with non-traditional or informal expressions of religious life." He continues:

What are the unique possibilities afforded under the heading of spiritual ecology? There is something provocative and transformative associated with spirituality, calling to mind experiential and experimental ways of life. Its resonance vibrates in feelings of inspiration and *esprit de corp*, perhaps the sort of feelings that are called for today to empower people to meet the unprecedented challenges of the current moment. This is not to say that all spiritual ecology is beneficial to people or to the lifeforms and ecosystems of Earth. Spiritual ways of life could empower adaptive, peaceful, and just responses to the proliferating ecological emergencies pervading the planet, but they could also disempower them. (Mickey 2020, 1)

Mickey distinguishes between 'good spirituality' and 'bad spirituality.' Spirituality in its bad form can be disempowering and foster selfishness, for instance, as opposed to relationality and "building alliances across human and nonhuman differences" (Mickey 2020, 11). Good spirituality, or spiritual ecology, empowers 'whole earth thinking' (Mickey 2016). Mickey does bring a more critical eye to spirituality in noting its potential to foster harm, thus challenging taken-for-granted ideas of its goodness, as found in earlier works like that of Sponsel's *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution* (2012). However, the normative foundation that readily permits a *sui generis*

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<sup>49</sup> Taylor (2010, 136) described the film as having a "'circle of life' spirituality of belonging and connection."

conception of spirituality to be allied with affect and morality (or “adaptive, peaceful, and just responses to the proliferating ecological emergencies pervading the planet”) is left unaddressed.

Accounting for nonreligion is not an assumed methodological aim of religion and ecology scholars. At the same time, there are instances of nonreligion, or that which is distinct from yet related to religion, already in their works. This presence is implicitly acknowledged when religion is categorically expanded to accommodate even those who “eschew the label religion” (Taylor 2001, 175). The underlying implication is that the nonreligious, without being tied to some ‘good’ form of religion or spirituality, are lacking a moral ingredient needed to adequately address the planetary crisis.<sup>50</sup> To be sure, I do not mean to argue that scholars of religion and ecology should follow sociologists in embracing nonreligion as a new area of study. The point is that when nonreligion does appear, it tends to be disregarded or absorbed into religion. This approach perpetuates a normative view of religion as morally superior. It also ignores the potential impact of the rise of nonreligion on how humans imagine their more-than-human relations, which this thesis investigates. In the next chapter I introduce the conceptual framework, which incorporates theories of ecological justice. Ecological justice offers a way to articulate moral concern for nonhumans, which can include but does not necessitate religion or religion-like language. It offers neutral ground for both religion and nonreligion, without incorporating one into the other.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to highlight some of the recent developments and underlying themes in the contemporary sociology of religion, the study of nonreligion, and religion and ecology. It is not

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<sup>50</sup> Recall Grim and Tucker’s (2014, 20) statement that the “rational appeal to justice, to enlightened self-interest, or even to the well-being of future generations does not alone seem to have had a significant effect or traction” in addressing the crisis.

meant to be a comprehensive overview of these areas. The intent of this chapter was twofold: to help situate the reader for the forthcoming chapters, and to identify the areas of research to which this thesis aims to contribute. This thesis aims to develop research at the intersections of religion, nonreligion and ecology from a sociological perspective. It addresses the lack of attention paid to nature and animals by sociologists of religion, and to nonreligion by scholars of religion and ecology. Relatedly, it aims to challenging two biases: that of anthropocentrism in sociology of religion, and the ‘pro-religion’ standpoint found in religion and ecology. I aim to counter these biases by utilising theories of environmental justice and ecological justice, which I introduce in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I offer an overview of the theories of environmental justice and ecological justice that inform the conceptual framework for data analysis and interpretation. I focus on the content of these theories, their place in scholarly debates, and their relevance to my research on religion, nonreligion and ecology. The purpose of this chapter is to not only to outline the conceptual framework, but to justify environmental and ecological justice as conceptual tools to better understand religion, nonreligion and ecology. To varying degrees, environmental and ecological justice both include a relationship between theory and practice. Environmental justice theories emerged at a crossroads of academic research, social movements, and public policy (Sze and London 2009). While primarily a scholarly project of environmental philosophers, ecological justice has recently expanded in its practical use, especially through the global movement seeking rights of nature (Celermajer et al. 2021), to which I return in the conclusion of this thesis. I bring together theories of environmental and ecological justice, using their principles as a lens through which I can locate, understand and attribute significance to the perspectives of the participants featured in the forthcoming analysis chapters.

The following discussion of scholarship on environmental and ecological justice is not comprehensive. My aim is to introduce readers to the theories that inform my conceptual framework. This study is not concerned with developing these theories but employing them to guide my qualitative analysis, which I present in the next chapter on methodology. The ways in which I make use of these theories is somewhat unusual. Justice is often associated with group and collection action, as opposed to the level of individuals (Wienhues 2020, 11). This thesis arises in the context of collective action, in that it focuses on individuals who come together in opposition

against the Trans Mountain Expansion project. The interest of this thesis, however, is in how notions or principles of justice may or may not be represented by the perspectives of individuals of this group. Hence my empirical application of environmental and ecological justice is at odds with much of the literature, which focuses on how justice characterises social movements as opposed to individual lifestances.<sup>51</sup> Given my primary interest is not in justice per se, but how individuals imagine their relationships, my adaption of justice theories in this thesis is warranted. I am not aiming to contribute to scholarship on environmental and ecological justice.

The first section of this chapter looks at environmental justice. Theories of environmental justice stem from a liberal conception of justice that rose to prominence through the work of John Rawls, which is briefly introduced in this chapter. Unlike that of Rawls, though, scholarship on environmental justice is closely connected to lived experience, emerging in response to a social movement in the United States during the 1980s. I address this social movement below, to the extent that it offers insights into principles of environmental justice that are replicated in its theorising by scholars. My focus largely remains on theories of justice, as these are used to guide the ensuing analysis and interpretation of data. The second section of this chapter outlines theories of ecological justice. These theories are far less developed in political philosophy and theory than that of environmental justice. This literature does, however, arise in part from a much longer lineage of scholarly debates on moral considerability. In this chapter I highlight the work of key scholars who have developed ecological justice, while drawing their works back to the broader theme of moral considerability, which is an important theme in Chapter 6 when ecological justice is discussed in relation to participant perspectives. In the final section of this chapter, I draw environmental and ecological justice into conversation with religion and nonreligion. I specifically

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<sup>51</sup> I introduce the concept of ‘lifestances’ in the next chapter and expand on it in Chapter 5.

turn to the work of Willis Jenkins (2013), who highlights how religion can be engaged in the creative project of responding to the planetary crisis. Inspired by Jenkins, this thesis also considers nonreligion, aiming to offer a more comprehensive understanding of terrestrial relations during a time when the number of nonreligious individuals in society has rapidly increased.

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Western theories of environmental justice are rooted in the work of John Rawls (1999), who was concerned with developing a theory of justice for liberal democracies. He was primarily interested in the *distributive function* of political and social institutions, as these impact the rights, freedoms, interests, and self-respect of individuals required to live a fulfilling life. According to Rawls (1999, 65), institutions should be governed by principles of justice as fairness, which he defined from a perspective of democratic equality. He argued that “all social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1999, 24). Equality of opportunity may require, for example, that states redistribute financial resources to enhance the education of underprivileged groups (Rawls 1999, 86). This distribution is fair because it would help to generate equality of opportunity, a key principle of Rawls’ political liberalism. Rawls justifies his conception of justice as fairness with a thought experiment he termed ‘the veil of ignorance.’ He reasons that if decision-makers stood behind a veil—from where they could not see race, ethnicity, gender, wealth, intelligence or strength—they could not make decisions in favour of their own status. It follows for Rawls that they would desire democratic equality, having no knowledge of their position on the “spectrum of privilege” (Kaswan 2020, 22).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The veil of ignorance has been critiqued as incomplete, being based on abstraction and thus “divorced from the realities of social life” (Matsuda 1986, 613). The presumed objectivity of the veil is also challenged by its ‘speciesism,’

The emphasis Rawls placed on distribution has profoundly shaped ensuing literature on environmental justice. Rawls was concerned with aspects of society such as the distribution of wealth and income, educational and economic opportunities, and “basic liberties” like freedom of conscience and association, which he prioritised above those related to economics (Rawls 1999, 53). Environmental justice shifts this focus to the distribution of benefits like access to environmental resources, and burdens like pollution from industrial waste. Disparities in distribution are attributed to decision-making processes that discriminate against certain characteristics—those which would be made invisible by Rawls’ veil of ignorance. These characteristics in the environmental justice literature include race, ethnicity, class, gender and immigration status (Pellow and Park 2002; Stein 2004; Sze and London 2009; Pellow and Vazin 2019; Kim 2021). Environmental justice scholars thus account for broader disparities that contribute to instances of injustice. They generally position events of maldistribution as the culmination of structural and sociopolitical inequality (Cole and Foster 2001; Ali 2009; Kaswan 2020). For instance, some scholars have considered the legacies of colonisation and race slave states, something that was disregarded in Rawls’ philosophy (Mills 2017).

Much scholarship has focused on race and class in particular. This focus emerged from a 1980s social movement in the United States that highlighted the disproportionate amount of waste sites in lower-income communities of colour. This movement, which catalysed environmental justice studies, has its symbolic origins in the 1982 protests of Warren County in North Carolina.<sup>53</sup> Residents there organised in protest of a state-approved landfill that would be used to dispose of

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a concept that is addressed later in this chapter. Individuals lose characteristics related to class, gender, and so on, but retain their human species membership.

<sup>53</sup> Though Warren County is frequently cited as the start of the environmental justice movement, various factors contributed to its emergence, including increased awareness of PCBs following the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), as well as the ground-breaking environmentalism of the 1960s to 1970s, which saw the founding of major organisations like Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund in both Canada and the United States.

hazardous waste. They assembled at a local church and marched towards a road where they blocked trucks carrying toxic soil. Protests of the landfill led to over 500 people being arrested. The site was still built, but protesters were successful in sparking a national conversation on the connections among chemical exposure, race and class.<sup>54</sup> The small town of Warren County was a farming community, and its residents were primarily Black. The landfill was not only an act of contamination but environmental racism and classism.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the environmental justice literature has since focused on the United States, but social scientific interest in environmental justice in Canada is growing.<sup>56</sup> The work of *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada* (2009), edited by Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay and Pat O’Riley, made clear the role of colonisation in perpetuating environmental harms specifically faced by Indigenous communities in Canada.

There is a close connection between actual experiences of environmental injustice and scholarship on environmental justice. Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson (1998, 2–3) even argued that theorizing environmental injustice should be anchored in specific events of injustice. They also noted that while events of injustice are “socially and spatially differentiated,” their distributive impacts are not always easily defined (Low and Gleeson 1998, 19). One chemical plant, for example, can harm the health of workers, the surrounding community by way of residual waste, and the community that receives large quantities of discarded waste, either directly like at Warren County, or more indirectly by way of waterways (Low and Gleeson 1998, 123). Much scholarship does not focus on descriptions or impacts of environmental injustice, however, but the causes or

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<sup>54</sup> The protests added an environmental dimension to the United States civil rights movement, and they caused mainstream environmentalists to confront their disregarding of race and class (McGurty 2007; Bullard et al. 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Following the Warren County protests and direct action, the Church of Christ’s Commission on Racial Justice released a 1987 report entitled “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” which “found race to be the most potent variable in predicting where [toxic waste] facilities were located” (Bullard et al. 2008, 373).

<sup>56</sup> There may be renewed social scientific attention to environmental justice in Canada following Bill C-226, National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, which became law in June 2020.

‘whys’ of injustice (Parizeau 2006). For instance, Ingrid R. G. Waldron (2018) considers how white supremacy, racial violence, neoliberalism and capitalism as features of settler colonialism have contributed to a legacy of environmental injustice that harms the health of Indigenous and Black communities in Canada. According to David Schlosberg and Lisette B. Collins (2014, 361), asking “why those already exposed to other forms of disadvantage are also subject to environmental bads” is similarly a focus of environmental justice movements, further strengthening the link between scholarship and practice.

As scholars continued to investigate the discourses of environmental justice movements, their conception of justice expanded beyond the distributive framework rooted in Rawls. Schlosberg (2007; 2013) observed that distributive justice interacts with other activist discourses and experiences in social movements. In addition to justice as distribution, he outlines conceptions of justice as recognition; procedural justice; and justice as access to individual and community capabilities. *Justice as recognition* considers whether diverse ways of being are accounted for in environmental decision-making. This includes the respectful and serious consideration of various cultures, traditions, and relationships between peoples and their lands, for instance in the form of local food production. Recognition is related to *procedural justice*. Procedural justice, also known as participatory justice, explores who is included in and excluded from decision-making procedures. It considers who gets a ‘seat at the table’ and how this shapes the perspectives, knowledges, and experiences that receive recognition (Schlosberg 2013, 40). Recognition, participation, and distribution are distinct but interrelated processes, which interact to then harm or benefit the *capabilities* of individuals and their communities.

The idea of ‘capabilities’ was first developed by Martha C. Nussbaum (2011) and Amartya Sen (2009). It refers to the opportunities and capacities necessary for achieving well-being and

flourishing. Realisations of capabilities are termed ‘functionings,’ which broadly denote the “various doings and beings” that constitute one’s life (Nussbaum and Sen 1993, 3; Nussbaum 2011, 25). Literacy and the ability to access education, for example, are capabilities required for the functioning of reading (Schlosberg 2007, 31). Secure access to food is a capability required to achieve the functioning of being adequately nourished (Sen 1993, 36). Barriers to sustenance—as caused by unfair distribution, lack of sociopolitical recognition, and exclusion from political procedures—would thus constitute an injustice.<sup>57</sup> Hence injustice in the capabilities approach “comes not with a particular good denied, but with the capability that is limited” (Schlosberg 2007, 33). Breena Holland (2008, 324) proposes that ecological conditions constitute a ‘meta-capability,’ for without functioning ecological systems, human life is not possible, let alone the capabilities required for justice. Holland (2008) does not deny that nature has intrinsic value (an idea to which I return in the next section of this chapter). Her work rather highlights that humans are innately dependent upon their environments, meaning that nature has instrumental value to human capabilities needed for a fully functioning life.

The capabilities approach can be applied to communities as well as individuals (Schlosberg 2007; 2012; 2019). Lack of access to urban green spaces (a capability) impacts individuals who require access to nature for their well-being (a functioning). The absence of green space also has implications for public health, especially for communities which lack green space due to distributive disparities based on race and income (Wolch et al. 2014; Jennings et al. 2019). Environmental injustice, in the form of maldistribution of green space, impacts the functioning

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<sup>57</sup> Nussbaum and Sen differ in their primary concerns. Sen (2009, 238) considers whether one has the agency and freedom to access capabilities, whereas Nussbaum (2011, 33–34) formulates capabilities required for human dignity, universally defined. One of these capabilities is termed ‘other species’: “Being able to live with the full range of creatures and plants that inhabit the world around us. To be able to enjoy nature and appreciate its beauty” (Nussbaum 2011, 34).

(i.e., living a healthy life) of not only some individuals but a community. Injustice can also occur when attachments to place and access to commons are disrupted (Groves 2015; Schlosberg 2019). Community functioning is especially relevant to grasping the faced by Indigenous communities. Capabilities of Indigenous communities, according to David Schlosberg and David Carruthers (2010, 8), include the ability of a community “to continue and reproduce the traditions, practices, cosmologies, and the relationships with nature that tie [Indigenous peoples] to their ancestral lands.”<sup>58</sup> As indicated in the introduction of this thesis, the Trans Mountain Expansion project’s impact on the Southern Resident Killer Whales exemplifies this form of environmental injustice. The harm extends beyond the orcas themselves, negatively affecting the cultures and spiritualities of Indigenous communities.

The analysis chapters of this thesis feature three forms of environmental justice: distributive justice, procedural or participatory justice, and the capabilities approach to justice. Chapter 4 considers distributive climate justice and how it resonates with participant perspectives on the moral harms of climate change. Chapter 5 explores how some participants viewed the lack of prior consent from Indigenous nations—a principle of procedural justice—as one of the harms of the TMX project. Chapter 6 utilises the distributive and capabilities approaches to consider how participant perspectives illustrate principles of ecological justice (introduced below). In each of the analysis chapters I elaborate on the specific forms and principles of justice used in the analysis and interpretation of data. I am not interested in the ‘whys’ of injustice, but whether participant perspectives resonate with values of environmental and ecological justice, specifically when expressing their views on the harms of the TMX project and, relatedly, their motivations for

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<sup>58</sup> See also Wilfrid Greaves (2022, 119), who explains that “because Indigenous identities are ontologically connected to specific territories, changes to the land itself—particularly environmental damage that negatively impacts the health or viability of existing ecosystems—also affect Indigenous peoples’ collective identities.”



opposing it. I suspend theories of justice above my data, aiming to pinpoint where links between the data and theory may be interpreted. Again, the purpose of this chapter is to help situate the reader for this forthcoming analysis, and to demonstrate where the principles of justice are located in scholarly literature.

## ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

Ecological justice is essentially the extension of justice to nonhumans. It accounts for the distributive impacts of human activity on nonhuman life, including what Western thought traditionally deems to be sentient and insentient life (Baxter 2004). Environmental justice and ecological justice both address relationships in a more-than-human-world. In this way they are “two aspects of the same relationship” (Low and Gleeson 1998, 2).<sup>59</sup> Yet scholarship on ecological justice finds itself in a wider debate on moral considerability. Works on environmental justice operate on the universalist premise of human rights. There is no reason to justify why all humans are owed environmental justice. Scholars of ecological justice have been required to undertake this task, reasoning why nonhumans should be included in the realm of justice. Indeed, liberal theorists have traditionally limited justice and its ensuing rights to human beings, with nonhuman animals and nature deserving our moral concern but falling below the threshold of justice. This exclusion is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I set the stage for this discussion by

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<sup>59</sup> Low and Gleeson (1998, 2) introduced the idea of ecological justice in distinction from environmental justice with the following: “There are two meanings of ‘we’: ‘we the people’ and ‘we humans’. ‘We the people’ are always defined by a place within humanity, both social and geographical. So there is a distributional question: who gets what environment—and why? As to ‘we humans’, there are qualities we share as a species, and we humans have now to consider our relationship with the non-human world. The struggle for justice as it is shaped by the politics of the environment, then, has two relational aspects: the justice of the distribution of environments among peoples, and the justice of the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. We term these aspects of justice: *environmental* justice and *ecological* justice. They are really two aspects of the same relationship.” Returning to Latour, the concept of ‘terrestrials’ would replace ‘we the people’ and ‘we humans’ with ‘we terrestrials.’

positioning works on ecological justice in the broader debate on moral considerability. My overview of this debate is far from comprehensive. It highlights key works to better situate and clarify ecological justice, which is featured in the Chapter 6 analysis and returned to in the conclusion chapter of this thesis.

Arguments for extending moral consideration beyond the human have existed long before Brian Baxter's *A Theory of Ecological Justice* (2004), which offered the first comprehensive theory of ecological justice.<sup>60</sup> In his seminal text, *Animal Liberation* (1975), philosopher Peter Singer argued that animals deserve moral consideration equal to that of humans because of their capacity to experience pain and pleasure. Excluding animals from the sphere of moral concern constitutes speciesism: "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those members of other species" (Singer 1975, 7).<sup>61</sup> Singer did not use justice or rights-based language to make his argument. He put forward a utilitarian and welfarist perspective, finding affinity with Rawls' (1999) position that the sentience of animals makes them morally considerable. While morally considerable, animals for Rawls are not moral persons who demand justice. They are rather owed "duties of compassion" from humans (Rawls 1999). Although both Singer and Rawls extend moral consideration to animals, therefore, only Rawls can be charged with speciesism, as he limits the fullest expression of moral consideration (justice) to a human species membership.

Following Singer, Tom Regan laid the foundation for a rights-based approach to the moral consideration of animals. Whereas Singer advocates for equal moral consideration, Regan argues

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<sup>60</sup> Ecological justice was proposed earlier by Low and Gleeson (1998), but as Winchues (2020, 7) makes clear, they were not concerned with ecological justice in terms of distribution, but more as an abstract moral principle. This is due in part to their uncertainty of how ecological justice can be operationalised in the real world (Low and Gleeson 1998, 157–58). They purposefully leave open for debate how justice to nature can be implemented and sustained in both theory and practice, an objective later taken up by Baxter (2007).

<sup>61</sup> The term 'speciesism' was coined by Richard D. Ryder in the early 1970s but was popularised by Singer in *Animal Liberation* (1975).

for the equal intrinsic worth of animals, in particular those who, like humans, are ‘subjects-of-a-life.’ Beings who are ‘subjects-of-a-life’ are defined as such based on their “perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals,” among several other attributes (Regan 1983, 243). Justice for Regan (1983, 277) is broadly defined as treating subjects-of-a-life in a way that respects their intrinsic value.<sup>62</sup> This respect precedes any form of distributive justice, for it considers how subjects are treated (i.e., as equals or not) prior to any acts of distribution (Regan 1983, 250). Yet Regan does construct a boundary between those who are subjects of justice and those who are not. He states: “Amoebae and paramecia, for example, are in the world but not aware of it. Where exactly on the phylogenic scale do subjects-of-a-life appear? I have always believed that no one knows the exact answer, and I personally have never tried to give one” (Regan 2004, xvi). He still includes non-subjects-of-a-life in the realm of moral concern, but they are not entitled to the moral or political rights associated with justice (Regan 2004, 93).

Proposing a citizenship model for animals, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka build a bridge between political theory and animal rights as first popularised by Regan. For Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011, 32–33), both humans and animals are vulnerable as a result of their having consciousness. Consciousness carries moral significance because “it enables a subjective experience of the world” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 24). They talk about animals’ having “intersubjective recognition,” leading humans to realise that there is “‘someone home’” with “subjective experience” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 30). As conscious and vulnerable subjects, animals like humans deserve moral and political rights. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011) turn to Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to argue that humans should consider how animals

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<sup>62</sup> Bisgould (2004, 350–51) defines animal rights as “a term which means that animals have an interest in their own lives and an entitlement not to be treated as human property,” which makes animal rights “a concept of justice.”

flourish in accordance with their species, as well as their individual social contexts and relationships with humans. By living with humans, for instance, domesticated animals are part of an interspecies community, and this social context matters for their flourishing (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 97–99). In short, humans and animals are both owed justice, which for Donaldson and Kymlicka, is conceptualised in terms of flourishing and can be realised in part through citizenship rights. What they term “non-sentient nature” is excluded from considerations of rights and justice.<sup>63</sup>

Nussbaum (2022) herself later puts forward a theory of justice for animals based on her capabilities approach. She argues that animals have entitlements based on justice to enable their flourishing, with this entitlement being rooted in sentience. Sentience for Nussbaum does not simply entail the ability to feel pleasure and pain. She states: “Sometimes sentience is reduced to the ability to feel pain; but it is really a much broader notion, the notion of having a subjective point of view on the world” (Nussbaum 2022, 119). Justice in Nussbaum’s (2022, 153) framework entails that each sentient being “gets a decent chance to flourish in its own way,” with this flourishing, like that of humans, enabled by access to capabilities. Beings who are not sentient are still owed moral concern, but this concern is not an imperative of justice. The individualism of animal rights and liberal theory is conspicuous in Nussbaum’s work. The central concern of the capabilities approach is enabling individuals to act as their own ends, based on their own choices

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<sup>63</sup> Singer (1975) similarly addresses whether non-sentient life like plants deserve moral consideration. He reasons that without “brains and centralized nervous systems,” any pain experienced by plants would count less than that of animals. Singer acknowledges that plants communicate and are intelligent, but he highlights that science has not proven plants to be conscious. Responding to Singer’s view of plants, Plumwood (2002, 258) states: “Personally, to my sensibilities Singer’s proclaimed indifference to plant lives is deeply shocking. I have concern for plants and old trees I know well as individuals and feel regret and loss when they die or are harmed. I cannot see why my experience is any less rational, ethically valid or relevant than Singer’s, and I certainly cannot see any rational case, in the present dire ecological context, for making a virtue out of callousness and insensitivity to other species’ lives.” Nussbaum (2022, 150) also addresses plants, writing, “Plants do not have brains. They also don’t have anything like a central nervous system, specialized networks of cells that perform the function of signaling.”

(Nussbaum 2022, 90). It follows for Nussbaum, then, that an animal (she uses the term ‘creature’) requires sentience to strive to flourish for their own ends, just like human individuals do.<sup>64</sup>

Distributive theories of ecological justice likewise prioritise flourishing but extend it beyond the scope of animal sentience to include all life. Brian Baxter (2004) writes, for example, that a “tree has a good and the capacity for flourishing, it defends itself against attack, it reproduces itself, it is living.” Ecological justice for Baxter is the fair distribution of environmental goods to populations of species, informed by what by what they require “to survive and flourish after their kind” (Baxter 2004, 139). Baxter (2004, 128) argues that ecological justice is owed to populations of species as “some species contain members that are not strongly individuated.” He does not dispute that individuals can have moral standing and rights on their own (Baxter 2004, 128). Rather, populations or collectives should act as the baseline or starting point for distributive justice, from which point individual beings can also be considered. Anna Wienhues (2020, 37) likewise proposes a theory of distributive ecological justice that includes all living beings. Unlike Baxter she prioritises the individual, noting an “implicit individualism that is deeply engrained within the justice concept,” but does not exclude consideration of nonhuman populations (Wienhues 2020, 44). She states that some beings “are highly dependent on being part of a healthy population. Hence, in practice, in many cases it appears necessary to think in terms of populations instead of individuals in order to enable the individuals’ flourishing” (Wienhues 2020, 46).

Wienhues’ (2020) theory of ecological justice draws inspiration from Val Plumwood’s non-ranking methodology. Non-ranking for Plumwood (2002, 172) has two benefits: it avoids a moral hierarchy in which humans always assume the highest position (as in with Rawls), and it allows for the moral consideration of nonhumans without relying upon language or ideas of

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<sup>64</sup> Nussbaum’s earlier works present a less concise view of sentience. See Schlosberg (2007, 146–47) for a discussion.

equality and sameness. Plumwood (1993, 2002) is critical of conceptions of equal moral intrinsic worth, as it has enabled the moral extension seen in the above works of Singer and animal rights theorists. Humans decide which beings possess moral worth equal to that of our own, using human characteristics—like sentience—as the baseline or criteria for evaluation. This approach does not overcome a moral hierarchy but reconfigures it, expanding the category of ‘the human’ to be ‘the mindhavers,’ cut off from the rest of material nature (Plumwood 1993, 133; 2002, 153). Accordingly, in Plumwood’s words, she argues against “closed mappings of justice that try to confine ethics to sentient or conscious beings, recognizing only those non-humans who are believed most closely to resemble humans” (Plumwood 1993, 188).<sup>65</sup> Wienhues (2020), following Plumwood, is guided by the idea of ‘non-ranking’ rather than ‘equality’ in her formulation of ecological justice. She reasons that it is not possible, in practice, to treat all distributive claims as equal or the same. Someone’s interest will eventually ‘win.’ The key is to not prioritise one’s interests or claims a priori based on their species, but to balance distributive claims on a contextual, case-by-case basis. Winehues (2020, 40, 108) defines her approach as a form of ‘non-ranking biocentrism,’ which helps to ensure that the door to anthropocentrism remains closed.<sup>66</sup>

Like Baxter, Wienhues’ theory of ecological justice is biocentric, including all living beings (animal or otherwise) in the community of justice. This differs from ecocentrism, which entails that all living beings, ecosystems, waters and lands have intrinsic moral value.<sup>67</sup> This view

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<sup>65</sup> The centrality of sentience in animal rights theories may be considered zoocentric (Hall 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Regarding ‘non-ranking biocentrism,’ Wienhues (2020, 40) states that “duties, principles and so on are not already intrinsically built into an account of moral significance but are developed later on in a context- and relation-sensitive manner based on the starting point that all living beings are morally considerable, but without having predetermined that some entities are intrinsically always more (or even equally) worthy of moral consideration than others.”

<sup>67</sup> Aldo Leopold was the first to formulate a comprehensive ecocentric ethic with his ‘land ethic.’ He conceptualises humans as members or citizens of a biotic community that includes plants, animals, soils and waters. As members of a biotic community, humans should extend moral concern to their local land and act for the mutual benefit of all. Leopold (1949, 224) wrote: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

is represented by David Schlosberg's (2007) account of ecological justice, in which he aims to counter the individualism embedded in common conceptions of justice. He takes a pluralist approach in arguing that justice can be applied to individuals as well as collectives.<sup>68</sup> He demonstrates that sentient and non-sentient life can all be conceptualised as functioning and flourishing through self-direction and regulation, both individually and collectively (Schlosberg 2007, 137). It is not 'living' so much as 'functioning' that serves as a basis for justice in this framework. Schlosberg's approach thus resonates with that of Plumwood (1993, 135), who states:

Notions of growth, of flourishing, for example, are implicitly teleological and do not presuppose consciousness; some, concepts such as function, directionality and goal-directedness of a self-maintaining kind, are applicable to natural systems and processes generally. Mountains, for example, present themselves as the products of a lengthy unfolding natural process, having a certain sort of history and direction as part of this process, and with a certain kind of potential for change. Trees appear as self-directing beings with an overall 'good' or interest and a capacity for individual choice in response to their conditions of life. Forest ecosystems can be seen as wholes whose interrelationship of parts can only be understood in terms of stabilising and organising principles, which must again be understood teleologically.

Ecological injustice occurs, therefore, when humans impede the capabilities of others to maintain their integrity and flourish (Schlosberg 2007, 137, 151). This formulation of ecological justice pushes the boundaries of moral considerability in preceding theories. While perhaps unconventional (or at least nonconformist), Schlosberg (2007; 2013) casts the widest net for including other-than-humans into the realm of justice, overcoming exclusionary divides between the human/nonhuman, sentient/insentient and individual/collective. This broad approach, I suggest, is well-suited to empirical contexts where ordinary individuals may extend or challenge

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<sup>68</sup> Ecocentrism is usually understood in collective terms and in contrast to the individualism of animal rights. However this division is complex and not always supported in the literature. Deep ecologist George Sessions (1995, 157) argues, for instance, that an ecological ethic does not exclude consideration for "human and nonhuman individual beings," and that the individualism of animal rights and holism of ecological ethics should not be pitted against one another. He critiques J. Baird Callicott (1980) in particular for 'pitting' Leopold's land ethic against animal liberation's concern for individual animals (Sessions 1995, 157).

the traditional boundaries drawn by some scholars.<sup>69</sup> For instance, do individuals opposed to the Trans Mountain Expansion project consider the threat of an oil spill (a distributive environmental harm) to the lives of fish and birds, in addition to the integrity of local creeks and forests?

Schlosberg's expansive conception of justice emerges from his engagement with social movements. He states that "different discourses of justice, and the various experiences and articulations of injustice, inform how the concept is used, understood, articulated, and demanded in practice; the engagement with what is articulated on the ground is of crucial value to our understanding and development of the concepts we study" (Schlosberg 2013, 50). Understanding how notions of justice are embodied by ordinary religious and nonreligious individuals, I propose, can offer insights into the relevance of (non)religion for moral relations during the planetary crisis. I demonstrate this claim in the ensuing analysis chapters, where I consider how (non)religious ideas, identities and language are relevant to participant representations of environmental and ecological justice. Yet scholars of religion have largely been uninterested in environmental justice, let alone ecological justice. Willis Jenkins (2013, 191–92) attributes this absence to an "obtuseness to white racism and social power within the field of religion and ecology, as well as obtuseness to religion in the social sciences that describe environmental justice projects." There is also more generally a lack of attention to politics in the literature on religion and ecology (Berry 2022). Jenkins addresses this gap in *The Future of Ethics* (2013), considering how religious communities and ethicists confront problems of the planetary crisis, and in the process of doing so, transform their moral resources to interpret the crisis and enact social change.

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<sup>69</sup> Plumwood (2002, 196) writes: "The objectives and sympathies of activists who stand in front of bulldozers or do tree sits are usually much broader than the widest aperture moral extensionism can be stretched to cover. For these concerns we need an open ethics that covers trees, mountains, wild rivers, wilderness areas and endangered species, all of which are left out in the cold by moral extensionist and dualist forms of argument."



## RELIGION, NONRELIGION AND JUSTICE

The significance of Jenkins (2013) for this thesis is that he provides precedent for considering justice in qualitative research on religion in the context of planetary crisis. He indicates that the lack of consideration to justice in the study of religion is almost counterintuitive, highlighting the frequently overlooked role of religion in the Warren County protests, mentioned in the first section of this chapter. Jenkins (2013, 206) states:

Sociological observers [of environmental justice movements] have been eager to draw connections with the civil rights movement but they tend to skip associations with religion. When Warren County protesters marched to block the road, they marched out from a church. The protests were initiated when a [B]lack church and a white church came together to organize a coalition and were organized in church-based mass meetings, which included preaching and prayer along with soil science and protest tactics.

Jenkins indicates that Christian beliefs and practices played a role alongside science in the events leading up to the protest. He is not seeking to overcome a religion/science divide or argue for the importance of religion during the planetary crisis (Jenkins uses the term ‘Anthropocene’). He rather seeks to demonstrate how religion can be engaged in the creative project of responding to unprecedented ecological problems. Jenkins (2013, 2) states that the Anthropocene is “an epoch of ethics because it is an epoch of dominion by a moral species.” This thesis likewise considers religion in relation to morality and justice in an empirical context. But it also seeks to disentangle religion from morality, placing nonreligion on equal footing with religion.

While he does not use the term ‘ecological justice,’ Jenkins does consider justice for nonhumans and the earth more wholly. He argues that environmental justice projects, like that of Warren County, can transform to consider obligations of justice beyond humans (Jenkins 2013, 221–22). Jenkins states (2013, 222): “The logic of environmental justice projects does not start from obligations of justice toward earth, but it does bend that way.” A similar point is illustrated by Vandana Shiva (2016) in her description of the women-led 1970s Chipko movement in the

Himalayan region of Uttarakhand in India. Their non-violence resistance, which included hugging trees to protect them from being felled, emerged in response to the government's outsourcing of forestry labour to satisfy commercial interests that arose through British colonisation. The movement proved successful, with non-local forestry contractors being replaced with local labour and cooperatives. Even after local power had been restored, the women continued their resistance, fighting to protect the trees themselves and the exploitation of the forest. Shiva (2016, 74–75) explains: "It did not matter to them whether the forest was destroyed by outsiders or their own men." This does not necessarily mean that the women were embodying ecological justice; I hesitate to apply this concept given its roots in Western liberal thought. This example rather demonstrates how protest movements can encompass multiple motivations that change over time. These concerns can be for the sake of humans and the sake of nonhumans, as ends in themselves.

This thesis departs from Jenkins by engaging with a group of people who are not primarily defined by their affiliations (or lack thereof) with religion. The point of commonality among the participants presented in this thesis is their opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. The demographics of participants is presented in the next chapter on methodology. For now, I note that their identities were both religious and nonreligious, ranging from Christian to spiritual to "practicing atheist." Other participants expressed indifference towards religiosity. Theories of environmental and ecological justice are well suited to this diverse context. They offer concepts and language to discuss moral relationships without relying upon religion. At the same time, religion need not be excluded, as the work of Jenkins aptly demonstrates. Do certain (non)religious identities, beliefs or values make someone more likely to engage with notions of environmental and ecological justice? Do these factors impact how principles of justice are articulated? Overall, I draw from theories of environmental and ecological justice to construct a lens through which I

can offer new insights into substantive (non)religion, by accounting for the relevance of religion and nonreligion for moral terrestrial relations (morality being defined in accordance with justice).<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined environmental and ecological justice theories to situate the reader for the ensuing analysis in Chapters 4 to 6. Specific principles of justice engaged in the analysis will be elaborated upon in their respective chapters. The above discussion is not meant to be comprehensive. The aim of this thesis is not to contribute to the theorising of environmental and ecological justice. These theories inform the conceptual framework of this thesis, which seeks to contribute to scholarship on religion, nonreligion and ecology from a sociological perspective. Commonly used concepts in the study of religion and ecology, such as dark green religion or ecospirituality, are not attuned to the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of the nonreligious or nonspiritual in confronting a condition of the planetary crisis, like the Trans Mountain Expansion project, which “reshapes social and ecological relations” (Jenkins 2013, 13). In which ways might religion and nonreligion be required to comprehensively grasp these terrestrial relations? What insights can this investigation offer sociologists regarding religion and nonreligion in contemporary society? In contrast to much of the above political philosophy literature, this thesis applies notions of environmental and ecological justice to the level of individuals. This approach is taken in accordance with the methodology of this thesis, which follows the lived religion turn of the sociology of religion, introduced in the previous chapter and elaborated upon in the next, when I present the research methodology.

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<sup>70</sup> Another benefit of this approach is that it necessitates religion and nonreligion be considered beyond themselves, which is required by a critical sociology of religion and nonreligion (Altglas and Wood 2018), as presented in the literature review of the previous chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I outline the qualitative methodology of the research presented in this thesis. It begins with an overview of the research objectives, followed by the recruitment process and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic necessitated a shift to virtual interviews, rather than the initially planned in-person interviews. While I first perceived this as a limitation, I came to view it as a strength during the course of fieldwork. The data informing this thesis are based on thirty semi-structured interviews with individuals who have engaged in protest or direct action against the Trans Mountain Expansion project in the Metro Vancouver area. To complement the interview data, I undertook participant observation as an ‘insider.’ I discuss how this experience benefited the data collection and analysis phases of research. In keeping with positionality, I also discuss my reflections on conducting research in a postcolonial context, followed by my involvement in the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project, an international research project exploring the social impacts of nonreligion. Being a lead research assistant for this project offered me invaluable opportunities for collaboration, contributing to the development of many ideas presented in this thesis. To conclude this chapter I acknowledge the limitations of the research, particularly with regard to the sample size and researcher bias.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This thesis frames opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project as an entry point to explore terrestrial relations in an era of planetary crisis. It seeks to determine the relevance of religion and nonreligion for the ways in which these moral relations are imagined by ordinary individuals. As noted in the preceding chapter, terrestrial relations in this thesis are understood through lenses of

environmental and ecological justice. Drawing from these theories, I aim to contribute to scholarship on religion, nonreligion and ecology in a way that counters the anthropocentric bias of the sociology of religion. The primary question guiding the analysis of interview data was as follows: to what extent do the perspectives (non)religious individuals engaged in activism against the Trans Mountain Expansion project represent principles of environmental and ecological justice? I am not interested in how my participants conceive of environmental and ecological justice. Principles of justice inform how I interpret and attribute broader meaning to their narratives and perspectives. Do ordinary individuals structure their relations with other terrestrials in accordance with principles of justice? And are religious or nonreligious ideas, language and identities relevant for how these principles are expressed?

To answer the primary question, I asked two subsidiary questions: How do individuals engaged in activism conceptualise the human-related and ecological-related harms of the TMX project? And what are their motivations for actively opposing it? Through answering these questions, I aim to determine points of overlap and divergence among my religious and nonreligious participants. To do so I have displaced religion from the centre of inquiry. If this thesis were to focus exclusively on religion, the ways in which religion and nonreligion might relate to one another would be excluded or diminished. Douglas Ezzy (2021, 149) states:

Religion studies scholars who study nonreligion are still struggling to make sense of both religion and nonreligion. The relationship between the two is important, and understanding the nature of that relationship is crucial. When we assume that nonreligion can be understood in terms that limit it to its similarity to religion, we are potentially misunderstanding where nonreligion might be different and independently valuable in its own right.

By including both religion and nonreligion in this thesis, I explore how they may or may not be related to one another in the context of terrestrial relations. I also wish to demonstrate the value of nonreligion “in its own right.” I attempt to pursue this objective in the concluding chapter of this

thesis, when I discuss how nonreligion as a social force may be generating greater opportunity for terrestrial relations based on equality. The significance of nonreligion in this context is not solely dependent on religion, but rather derives from its possible impact on how humans relate to other beings.

This study is not focused on activism as a social movement but on individuals who engage in activism. In this way it follows the ‘lived’ approach of the sociology of religion, introduced in Chapter 1. As previously noted, scholars of lived religion view religion as dynamic, complex and fluid, and they are primarily concerned with how ordinary people experience, express and understand religion in various settings outside of religious institutions. Nancy T. Ammerman (2021, 5) explains that studying lived religion entails focusing “on what people are doing, as well as what they are saying.” I am primarily concerned with how individuals position themselves in relation to other terrestrials. In directing attention towards activism, though, this study also has a more ‘practical’ element that has proved beneficial for my objectives. During interviews I noticed that when people recalled their experiences of activism, a clearer picture of their identities, motivations and perceptions of the TMX project would emerge. This approach is not to claim that activism is a form of lived religion. Instead, insights into how individuals imagine their moral relationships can be gained through experiences and narratives of practice. Further, while reflecting upon the diversity of participant identities, I decided not to refer to them as ‘activists’ in my writing. Some of them certainly identify as activists, but most did not self-identify this way during interviews. Through interviews, it became clear that not everyone arrived at anti-TMX activism first and foremost as an activist, but as parents, grandparents, scientists, artists and terrestrials with meaningful connections to their dwelling places. Not collectively reducing their

identities in this way is meant to act as a counterweight to my imposing of categories like ‘religious’ and ‘nonreligious’, which is done for the purposes of clarity and analysis.

Sociologists have also started to research the ways in which nonreligion is lived.<sup>71</sup> This research has demonstrated that the line between religion and nonreligion is porous (Salonen 2018; Salonen 2019; Stacey 2020; Beaman and Stacey 2021). There is not always congruity between one’s self-identification and their actions, attitudes or language. This became particularly clear to me when one participant, a biochemist who does not call herself “a person of faith” but “a person of science,” said she is religious in practice and regularly attends a church. Nonreligion is an emergent area of study among social scientists. It thus calls for considerations of whether “established explanations and interpretations” are sufficient to make sense of it as a social phenomenon (Bukve 2019, 81–82). This thesis benefits from the innovative work of lived religion scholars by exploring the perspectives of (non)religious individuals outside explicitly religious settings. However, in the forthcoming analysis, I propose the concept of ‘lifestances’ as a more comprehensive alternative to lived religion and nonreligion. The concept of lifestances has been developed by sociologists Lori G. Beaman, Ryan T. Cragun and Douglas Ezzy (forthcoming). I have been fortunate to observe its development as a research assistant for the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project, which I discuss later in this chapter.

In short, lifestances involve how we think about and interact with the world around us. Religion or nonreligion inform one’s lifestance, but it also includes other aspects of one’s identity, such as being a parent, grandparent, scientist, artist or terrestrial. In Chapter 5 I more thoroughly introduce the lifestances approach and validate it as an alternative to lived (non)religion. I

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<sup>71</sup> Smith and Cragun (2019, 327) write: “[I]t is worth repeating that there is very little research on the lived experience of the nonreligious outside the United States and Western Europe. This fact should impel scholars working on religion’s other to explore other parts of the world as there are no doubt unrecognized cultural processes at play and novel sociological insights to be discovered.”

demonstrate its conceptual and methodological benefits, using it to explore how the individuals I interviewed directly or indirectly positioned themselves as settlers in an Indigenous-led movement against the TMX project. I briefly mention it now to emphasise the exploratory tone of this thesis. I seek to contribute to scholarship on (non)religion and ecology by utilising novel concepts in this area, in particular ecological justice and lifestances. Hence this thesis represents an attempt to grapple with the “struggle” to make sense of nonreligion, as noted by Ezzy, above. I do not seek to produce definitive or irrefutable findings regarding nonreligion. Of course, I make conclusions regarding (non)religion based on my data sample and analysis. I do not contend that these findings lead to firm conclusions beyond the context with which I am concerned. More importantly, I aim to demonstrate how nonreligion can be investigated alongside religion, while also being considered “an object of study in its own right” (Steele 2023, 21).

## RECRUITMENT AND IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In May 2020 I received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa to conduct face-to-face interviews with individuals who have protested the Trans Mountain Expansion project. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my research became indefinitely postponed at that time. Health and safety concerns suspended in-person research, interprovincial travel was discouraged, and protests of the TMX project notably decreased. Former energy minister for Alberta, Sonya Savage, stated on a podcast: “Now is a great time to be building a pipeline because you can’t have protests of more than 15 people” (Weber 2020). Adapting to the pandemic, I reformulated my recruitment strategy to become virtual and conducted interviews by Zoom. I posted a recruitment poster on Facebook groups geared towards stopping the TMX project, and I sent recruitment emails to environmental organisations and grassroots groups based in Metro



Vancouver. I also sent emails to Indigenous groups and organisations, which explained the purpose of my project and invited a response with any questions or concerns. However, my efforts to recruit people via social media and email correspondence resulted in only two interviews. I quickly realised that a relationship of trust is needed to conduct research within activist communities.

It was not until September 2021 that I could sensibly travel from Ontario to British Columbia. I moved to the city of Victoria at the start of September 2021 for a one-year fellowship at the University of Victoria's Centre for Studies in Religion and Society. As required by this fellowship, I also gained approval for my study from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board. Once I was living in Victoria the recruitment phase of my research started to progress. I often traveled by ferry and bus to Burnaby and Vancouver on weekends, joining anti-TMX protest events. Doing so allowed me to become more familiar with the local activist community, and I was able to build trust and rapport with regular attendees and grassroots leaders. As I began to meet people in person, I obtained ethics approval in October 2021 to contact individuals by email to invite them to participate in an interview. Sometimes I would only meet a participant in person after our Zoom interview occurred, which was always a pleasant surprise. Building trust and rapport also helped with snowballing, in that participants became more likely to contact friends to suggest they participate in my study. This relationship was one of a participant and researcher, but also between people who openly opposed the Trans Mountain Expansion project. I elaborate on my insider position later in this chapter.

The first in-person event I participated in took place at a park in Burnaby on 18 September 2021. It was organised by the grassroots group Protect the Planet to support members involved in a tree sit that blocked pipeline construction for over a year. After this event I took on a more active role in Protect the Planet, joining their media team and helping to organise in-person events. This

raises questions related to the categories of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider.’ I address these later in this chapter. For now, I wish to make clear that my personal involvement in this group had benefits for recruitment. Trust was established prior to some participants’ invitation to participate in my study. A key organiser also offered to circulate a description of my study for the purpose of recruitment, for which I also obtained ethics approval in October 2021. Originally, I intended to interview people who take part in activities like marches and rallies. As a result of my involvement in Protect the Planet, I decided to account for individuals’ experiences of nonviolent direct action. This comprises any physical or bodily act that disrupts pipeline construction, such as blocking construction equipment or occupying a tree sit in the line of construction. For several participants, their direct action also entailed being arrested for breaching an injunction that prohibited their being in or around work sites. One of the most memorable events I attended was a support rally for a participant outside a Vancouver courthouse on the day of their sentencing. I recall that the term ‘injustice’ adequately captured how I felt about their sentencing, which further served as motivation to work with principles of justice for this thesis.

## INTERVIEWS

In total I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with non-Indigenous individuals who engaged in activism against the TMX project in the Metro Vancouver region. I originally planned to interview forty to fifty individuals. Once my fieldwork began, however, I decided that my time and other resources were better used for participant observation than acquiring additional interviews. The overall goal of my sample size was to have sufficient data to “carry out a fine-grained, contextually sensitive analysis” (Brady et al. 2010, 22). Given the exploratory character of this thesis, thirty interviews proved to be sufficient for producing rich and nuanced data by

which I could locate notions of environmental and ecological justice. Interviews were conducted virtually by Zoom as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the exception of one, due to the unstable internet access the participant had at their island home. This in-person interview was conducted in a public location at a Victoria harbour. Each participant was interviewed once. Interviews were audio recorded but not video recorded. The electronic consent form (Appendix I) was exchanged prior to each interview by email. Participants had the option of providing informed consent through an electronic signature; printing, signing and then scanning the consent form; or offering verbal consent, which was audio recorded before the interview. Interviews generally lasted for one hour. The shortest interview was 42 minutes and the longest was almost 2.5 hours.

The decision to conduct interviews virtually by Zoom was one I made reluctantly. I was concerned that my data would not be taken seriously. Hannah Deakin and Kelly Wakefield (2014, 604) articulate this concern when stating that virtual interviews have often been “presented as a second choice or alternative” to in-person interviews. In addition, I predicted that the physical distance between me and my participants would be emulated in an emotional distance that impacted the quality of interviews. Interviewing by Zoom allowed me to commence data collection during the pandemic and prior to my being in British Columbia. Overcoming challenges of distance and geographical location is oft-cited benefits of virtual interviews (Gray et al. 2020). I did feel discomfort, though, about conducting research with a community of people I had never met who are opposed to a pipeline I had never seen. Upon reflection, I struggled in early interviews to navigate my ‘outsider’ status. I recall my first interviewee spending a lot of time telling me about the pipeline and the politics surrounding it, as opposed to her own experience of and motivations for opposing it. I have no doubt this was a kind gesture to help me become more informed. Nevertheless, despite an uncertain beginning, Zoom did not inhibit the emotional

dimension of my interviews. I attribute this to developing my researcher skills and becoming part of the community resisting the TMX project, which I will discuss later in this chapter. In addition, I initially was concerned that the technicalities of Zoom might prove bothersome for some participants. This was not an issue, though, which may be due to the familiarity people acquired with video conference platforms during the pandemic.

One benefit of virtual interviews is that they allow participants to feel more comfortable in a familiar space of their choosing. I believe this enabled participants to confidently pause the interview when needed, though most interviews proceeded uninterrupted. In one interview, the participant paused to take her dog outside. This ability to pause rather than ‘leave’ permitted the interview to potentially last longer than if it were in-person. The presence of a dog and our discussion of him also added a ‘personal touch’ that contributed to building rapport. Being in a comfortable space is also beneficial for discussing sensitive topics, in that it “may increase willingness to talk openly and honestly” (Nehls et al. 2015, 146; Deakin and Wakefield 2014). At times participants would share personal stories and grow visibly more emotional or start to cry while doing so. I believe that being in a comfortable space was beneficial at these moments. In addition, seeing their facial expressions change allowed me to offer a break perhaps more readily than if I solely relied on audio cues in phone interviews, which I did not conduct.<sup>72</sup> Occasionally at these more emotional times I would experience what Ezzy (2010) calls a ‘communion’ between researcher and participant. I felt effective at creating a space where participants detected my openness to their views and stories, and I related to them with empathy. Ezzy (2010, 168) states that an interview is “shaped by the emotional stances of the interviewer and interviewee.” My

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<sup>72</sup> Gray et al. (2020, 1297) found that an advantage of Zoom interviews is that participants “may stop and exit the interview at any time, which may be less intimidating than leaving an in-person interview in an unfamiliar environment.”

ability to approach interviews with emotional awareness certainly improved over time. I cannot claim that in-person interviews would have made an interview more or less likely to unfold like a communion. It is clear that Zoom was not a barrier to it.

Interviews were semi-structured to allow new themes and questions related to religion, nonreligion and ecology to emerge (Bremborg 2011). This was particularly useful when asking participants about their religious self-identification. The interview schedule (Appendix II) included the twofold question: Would you describe your views of the world as religious? If not, how would you describe these views? This question was intended to leave space open for an interviewee to easily identify as nonreligious. It was formulated around the idea of ‘worldviews’ which has been cited in the literature as an inclusive alternative to religion (Smith and Halligan 2021). Interviewees would take time before answering this question, or they would ask for clarification. In response I started asking participants, ‘Do you consider yourself to be religious?’ Sometimes participants would answer with a simple ‘no,’ or make clear that they are spiritual but not religious, in which cases I would ask them to elaborate. Only one participant identified as an atheist. Ten participants self-identified as religious. Two of them did not identify with a particular religion, and they intentionally complicated the line between ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion.’ Other religious participants identified with a form of Christianity and in one instance Buddhism.

#### A NOTE ON SETTLER POSITIONALITY

The ethics of research practice is often linked to the relationship or interactions between a researcher and participants. This is true of Western researchers conducting research with Indigenous communities (West and Schill 2022). Yet ethics is significant not only in terms of how and with whom the researcher interacts but where. I have engaged in ongoing process of reflection

that was informed by my actions as a settler researcher conducting fieldwork on the unceded lands of Coast Salish peoples. As I indicated in the introduction of this thesis, this process began prior to fieldwork, prompted by the National Energy Board's reconsideration report for the Trans Mountain Expansion project. This situation proved to be a moment of self-reflexivity regarding my social and political position in the settler colonial landscape. Joan Borsa (1990, 36) states: "Where we live, how we live, our relation to the social systems and structures that surround us are deeply embedded parts of everything we do and remain integral both to our identity or sense of self and to our position or status within a larger cultural and representational field." Pondering my response to the reconsideration report prompted an ongoing consideration of how I embody and perform the identities of 'white,' 'settler' and 'researcher.' The status of 'researcher' proved to be significant when interviewing the participants featured in this thesis. Although I empathise with participants, and share their commitment to opposing the TMX project, I realised I cannot know how it feels to have a destructive oil pipeline being constructed in my dwelling place.

In preparation for fieldwork, I took a doctoral-level course on 'Research and Indigenous Communities.' Originally, I planned to work with Indigenous participants to explore their perspectives of resistance to the TMX project and settler allyship. The direction of fieldwork resulted in participants being non-Indigenous. I attribute this in part to my increasing involvement in settler activism, in addition to the Western research paradigm within which I work and situate this thesis. Once my data collection was complete, I felt pressure to justify why my research does not include Indigenous participants. I associate this pressure with my observations of a 'push' to include Indigenous voices in research. I have been present at research meetings or workshops where an attendee would ask the presenter if they considered their work from an Indigenous perspective. I had someone acknowledge that I only interviewed non-Indigenous peoples and

stated that they understood why I would do so, as if the reason were self-evident. This thesis was written at a time when universities in Canada are working towards their own goals of reconciliation, and the study of religion is responding to a decolonial turn. While Indigenous knowledges and research with Indigenous communities continue to occupy more space, there are also repeated instances of resistance, tokenism and ‘pretendians’ in academia.<sup>73</sup> Research that engages with Indigenous voices needs to be intentional, purposeful and reflexive (Kovach 2021). While my original research design included these objectives, the direction of my fieldwork and personal journey through settler spaces of activism led me to a different conclusion.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The empirical data used in the analysis of this thesis is interview-based, but I complemented it by engaging in participant observation between September 2021 and December 2022. I participated in seven in-person protest events in Vancouver and Burnaby. The first event was hosted by the grassroots volunteer group ‘Protect the Planet—StopTMX.’ Inspired by their activism, I became part of their media team, helping to run social media accounts, attending virtual meetings, and occasionally assisting with press releases. As a volunteer with Protect the Planet, I also helped organise two events entitled ‘Hug the Mountain.’ The first ‘Hug’ took place on May 7, 2022 and featured attendees forming a human chain around Burnaby Mountain, in an act of love and concern for the Mountain. The second Hug occurred on December 11, 2022 and involved making earth-friendly crafts as festive decorations to hang in trees on Burnaby Mountain. The following evening

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<sup>73</sup> Haley Lewis explains that ‘pretendian’ is a name for people who falsely claim an Indigenous identity. She writes: “A pretendian might claim their great-great-great-grandmother was a Cherokee princess. They might broadly say they’re Indigenous — which is an umbrella term for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people — but are unable to be more specific as to how. They could also have a tenuous and very distant link to an Indigenous relative, or have no ancestry at all” (Lewis 2023, n.p.).

I slept overnight at a camp that monitored pipeline construction along the Brunette River. My participation in these events was done as an ‘insider’ who was simultaneously opposed to the TMX project and working towards a scholarly objective. Graham Harvey (2021, 283) states:

Scholars who ‘belong’ within the community that they research will, while performing research, attend to different actions, have different questions in mind and experience events differently from when they are ‘just’ participating. There are, then, no ‘insiders’ who are not sometimes ‘outside’ to some degree in relation to those they observe.

In my ‘outsider’ role as a researcher, I would document my experience of events through jotting notes and taking pictures on my mobile phone. Taking pictures proved to be particularly useful. I found that when I later reviewed them my emotional response would be similar to how I felt at the moment they were taken. For example, on September 18, 2021 I attended a tour of Protect the Planet’s tree sit at Lost Creek, a tributary of the Brunette River in Burnaby. The tree sit acted as protection for the nearby water bodies and trees from pipeline construction. Less than one week following this tour, RCMP agents arrived to enforce an injunction and began to dismantle the tree sit. Following the destruction of this camp, on October 2, 2021 I decided to return to the site with a small group. I was taking pictures again in the same area as during my first tour. Reviewing these ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures evoked an affective response that reminded me of being there in person. Seeing the trees killed in the path of construction felt unsettling and ominous, foreshadowing more harms to come.

Many of my participants visited or volunteered at this tree sit. A few occupied the tree sit itself, living on tree platforms or in ‘skypods’ (a tarp hammock hanging in the trees) for varying amounts of time. Being able to witness the tree sit and nearby pipeline construction allowed me to understand and relate to my participants when they raised the subject during interviews. I would tell them I had visited the site but would wait for them to discuss it first. I found this approach would prompt my participants to speak of their experiences in greater depth. Participant



observation thus influenced my interviews and, accordingly, the data I obtained. Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt (2010, 19) explain that participant observation can provide “a sense of self and the other that is not easily put into words. It is a tacit understanding that informs the form of research ... and the subsequent interpretation of materials collected.” While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how participant observation impacted my findings, broadly, I can say that it enriched my understanding of participants and my knowledge of the topic of study, which counteracted the above-mentioned discomfort I initially experienced with Zoom interviews.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded in Microsoft word with the comment function. A coding scheme (Appendix III) was made prior to my completion of interviews, but as coding began it was altered to capture unanticipated themes. The most substantial change I made was to separate ‘Climate (In)justice’ as its own code, rather than subsuming it under ‘Environmental (In)justice.’ I made this change after noting the prevalence of climate justice principles in the data. Participant perspectives of climate change are the focus of Chapter 5. The primary themes of the coding scheme are: Religion and Nonreligion; Experiences of Activism; Affect and Emotion; Conceptions of the (Non)Human; Climate Justice; Environmental Justice; Ecological Justice; Relationships and Encounters; Language; and Power, Politics and Law. Several of these themes are not explicit in my data. They are meant to attribute otherwise dormant meaning to data in accordance with my conceptual framework. Hence the meaning that I attribute to my data is sometimes abstracted from its content. For example, the theme ‘Conceptions of the (Non)Human’ unites data on nonhuman agency; subjecthood; emotions; and intentions. None of these are equated with or exclusive to ecological justice; however, they reflect the egalitarianism of ecological justice, in which

nonhumans are subjects of justice with interests, needs and the capacity for wellbeing (Wienhues 2020, 27). This is a theory-informed study, in that theories of justice shaped the research process, especially the analysis and interpretation (Bukve 2019, 81).

Participant observation contributed to the data analysis phase. Engaging in participant observation allowed me to reflect upon my interview data with a richer comprehension of participant experiences. Being able to visualise the places they talked about, for example, contributed to my overall grasp and thus confidence in working with the data. Ezzy (2002, 54) states: “Research involves getting ‘close’ to the world of the people being studied and noticing the detail of their experiences and interpretations.” I wanted to make sure my coding framework captured important observations I made ‘in the field.’ For instance, I frequently encountered discussions at protest or social events about the injunction order and arrests. This led me to include ‘stories of arrest’ as a subcode. More broadly, I sought a balance in my coding framework between principles of environmental and ecological justice, and what I observed during participant observation. These two aims were not necessarily distinct; while in the field I noticed signs or banners that indicated the dangers of climate change for children or future generations, a facet of distributive climate justice. Finally, it was upon analysing the data that I realised that my participant observation allowed me to connect more easily with participants, as discussed above. In this way participant observation contributed to the quality of my data set.

## THE NONRELIGION IN A COMPLEX FUTURE (NCF) PROJECT

This thesis has been influenced by my work as a lead research assistant for the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project (2019–2026), funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and directed by my supervisor, Dr. Lori G. Beaman. Based at the University of

Ottawa, its research sites, in addition to Canada, include: Australia, the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland), the United States, the United Kingdom, and Latin America (Brazil and Argentina). As stated on the project website, the key research objectives of the NCF project are to: 1) Develop new research tools to measure and describe nonreligion; 2) Analyze the social impact of nonreligion; 3) Expand the conceptualization and theorizing of diversity to include nonreligion; 4) Map conflicts and collaborations between religious and nonreligious social actors; 5) Advance new knowledge for living well together that can be used to inform public policy and practice.<sup>74</sup> One of the project's focal areas is 'the environment,' for which there are two subprojects I worked in from 2019 to 2024: the 'Nature and Nonreligion: Community Gardens' and 'Experiencing Nature During Physical Activities' projects. The main goal of these projects is to investigate the positive or substantive content of nonreligion, specifically in regard to how individuals interact with other humans, nonhuman animals and nature. My involvement in these projects, especially my conversations with team members, allowed me to formulate and sharpen my own perspectives on (non)religion and ecology. This thesis has also benefited from their own ideas, especially that of 'lifestances,' as mentioned in this first section of this chapter.

There is a substantial overlap between this thesis and the NCF project in their shared 'sideways' approach to researching nonreligion (I borrow this term from Lori G. Beaman). It does not investigate nonreligion 'head on,' but turns to practices that are not explicitly religious or nonreligious. Similar to how this thesis positions opposition to the TMX project as an entry point, the NCF project uses community gardens as a "window." The project website states:

At first glance, community gardens might seem like an unlikely place to explore nonreligion. Digging deeper, however, we realize that there is much more we can learn through a study of community gardening than might meet the eye. Community gardening offers a window into how humans relate to the natural world and to each other: How, for example, do community gardeners deal with the intrusions of weeds or garden

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<sup>74</sup> See: <https://nonreligionproject.ca/the-project/>.

pests? How do the gardeners think about the needs of the plants they grow? How do they interact with each other and manage personal conflicts in the gardens? Is there a ritualistic aspect to community gardening? Is there a political aspect to it? What do people gain on a personal level from community gardening? All of these questions relate to how we understand nature.<sup>75</sup>

The benefit of this approach is that it offers a more nuanced understanding of how nonreligion impacts social life. While conducting interviews for this project from 2020–2021 (during which time I was also conducting fieldwork for this thesis), I realised that having people talk about experiences of practice (whether gardening or protesting) offered insights into how they think about and engage with the world around them. In other words, I did not have to ask participants directly what they thought about root vegetables in their gardens, or cottonwood trees threatened by the TMX project, for them to reveal how they relate to plants. The language, stories and opinions they shared based on memorable experiences would shed light on how they imagine nonhuman beings. This research insight is most applicable to Chapter 6, when I consider participant encounters with nonhuman beings during their experiences of activism.

## LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is the sample size (N=30). A larger sample size would have generated more diverse data regarding age and (non)religious identity. Participant ages range from 30 to 79. Perspectives of youth and young adults are noticeably absent from the data sample. In an attempt to recruit younger participants, I received ethics approval to share recruitment materials on the Protect the Planet's Instagram story, but this attempt proved unsuccessful. The majority of religious participants are Christian and the majority of those who are nonreligious self-identify as spiritual. One participant identified as Buddhist, and several described engaging in Buddhist

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<sup>75</sup> See: <https://nonreligionproject.ca/community-gardens/>.

meditation. The perspectives of people who are indifferent towards or support the pipeline are absent. By including participants with divergent views, more comprehensive conclusions regarding terrestrial relations could have been reached. Nevertheless, having a strong albeit potentially limited focus still allowed for a robust interpretation of my data (Brady et al. 2010).

Due to the qualitative nature of this thesis, the second limitation is researcher bias. Margaret Kovach (2021, 26) states: “Because qualitative research is interpretive, the stories of both the researcher and the research participants are reflected in the research analysis ... [It] seeks contextualized experience and acknowledges that the truth heard depends upon the voice heard.” I have attempted to be clear about my own positioning in this thesis, particularly as a settler opposed to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. This stance, as indicated in the introduction of this thesis, ultimately inspired me to focus on opposition to the pipeline project. Ezzy (2002, 53) notes that pursuing ‘objectivity’ is

to pretend that our preconceptions and biases are not influencing our research when they actually are an unavoidable influence on research practice. It is better to acknowledge how our subjective preconceptions and biases shape the research, and to deal with these biases openly and honestly, rather than to pretend they do not exist.

Keeping this in mind, I have cautiously maintained the posture of a social scientist. This entails being transparent about my own biases, and taking care to not overly impose notions of justice onto the interview data when it was not justified by the coding scheme. In the following analysis chapters, I do note when participants explicitly used language of ‘justice’ themselves. This was not an overly common occurrence, but it nevertheless strengthens the connection between the data and my analysis as a researcher.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the methodology of the research presented in this thesis. It began with an overview of the research objectives and guiding questions, followed by the recruitment process, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Zoom interviews through which data was collected. Overall, the primary benefit of Zoom interviews was that they provided a comfortable space for participants to share their experiences. Participant observation complemented this data collection and contributed to the quality of the interviews as well as data analysis. At various points in this chapter, I have aimed to make clear my positionality in three ways: as an insider opposed to the TMX project; a settler undertaking research in a postcolonial context; and as a research assistant for the Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) project. I have also made clear my own views of the pipeline project and its implications for researcher bias. This bias, along with the sample size, constitutes a limitation of the research. The next chapter is the first analysis chapter of this thesis. It explores how participants articulated their moral concerns about climate change, which resonated with principles of climate justice, a form of distributive environmental justice. The following chapter considers procedural justice, another form of environmental justice, in the context of settler activism. The final analysis chapter, Chapter 6, explores participant representations of ecological justice and its conceptual foundations like nonhuman subjecthood.

## CHAPTER 4: CLIMATE JUSTICE AND STEWARDSHIP

### INTRODUCTION

*So I became engaged in the review process for the expansion project back in 2013. And I was hired by BROKE, Burnaby Residents Opposed to Kinder Morgan Expansion, and NOPE, the North Shore No Pipeline Expansion to look at the health impacts of the pipeline. So I was ... shocked to learn that I could not examine the climate impacts on health. And, of course, that's the largest impact. So I knew then that the whole review process was a rigged process and it was rigged by the Harper government and the Trudeau government just maintained that unfair evaluation because it was inconvenient to consider the most impactful aspect of the project. Because, of course, then the project would not go ahead.*

*[T]hey rigged this process of review, ignored our findings related to leukemia risk, evacuation risk and deaths from, if an evacuation spill were to happen in Burrard Inlet ... basically ignored all of our work over the course of two reports, which were probably three to four hundred pages in total. [...] So the tree sits emerged as an effective way of exercising our rights to a healthy planet. And, yes, I have been figuring, based on all of the response from government, I had been figuring that it was going to come to this.*

*I feel as a physician and public health scientist, that it's my obligation to act when my other usual methods of policy making have, have failed. So my usual mode is to assemble evidence either through my own research or through the research of others, and to make a case to policymakers about a particular public health hazard. And in this case, those methods failed. And so I got to the end of my rope, so to speak. And recognised that it was my duty to block the pipeline because of what it means for public health.*

Tim is a physician scientist who has studied the health impacts of climate change. He explained that “a lot of inconvenient science was at work” in the National Energy Board’s review process for the Trans Mountain Expansion project. As indicated, Tim was motivated to start engaging in direct action to stop the pipeline when his “usual mode” of research and policy engagement was unsuccessful. Tim is a founding member of the grassroots group Protect the Planet, which was established with a tree sit on August 3, 2020 at Holmes Creek in the Brunette River Conservation Area in Burnaby. This tree sit was occupied by Tim, with the purpose of preventing the clear cutting of trees for pipeline construction. In December of that year, after a raid by security and police, the blockade was moved to Lost Creek in the same conservation area. This camp was held by land defenders for more than 280 days, until the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the national

police service, arrived in late September 2021 to remove it, following Trans Mountain's entry into the area earlier that month. Many participants of this study were involved in the tree sits as ground support, tour guides, and/or tree sitters. As noted in the previous chapter, I was fortunate to visit the Lost Creek tree sit one week before the raid.

During the interview, Tim often spoke about climate change and planetary health. When asked about how he felt being up in the trees, he answered: "It's often very peaceful because you're isolated in a sense, or at least you're in control of your isolation, pretty much. Just turn off your cell phone and then no one can reach you. But as the chainsaws are going around you, it's very, very, disheartening to know that your own tax dollars are funding the destruction of the planet and recognizing what it means for future generations to live in a world with higher temperatures." He also stated: "I could go on about the reasons, there are so many reasons why this pipeline is a bad idea. But the most fundamental one is about our obligation to future generations to have a healthy planet." For Tim, the TMX project's contribution to climate change is "the most impactful aspect of the project." Its consequences will be felt by future generations due to the planet they will inherit. This idea is central to climate justice, which considers the distribution of harms from anthropogenic climate change on younger and future humans.

In what follows, I begin by defining climate change and climate justice, the latter being a form of environmental justice. Participants commonly cited climate change as one of their reasons for opposing the TMX project. The extent to which it appeared in interviews ranged from a brief mention to a detailed discussion. Nevertheless, when climate change was raised by participants, it was often done in a way that places epistemic value on science and resonated with principles of climate justice. Next, I offer a brief overview of the relationship between climate change and morality. This overview sets the stage for the rest of the chapter and is inspired by Mike Hulme's



(2017, 28) argument that “the idea of climate exists as much in the human mind and in the matrices of cultural practices as it does as an independent and objective physical category.” Following the presentation of data, I conclude this chapter with a discussion that brings climate justice into conversation with religion. I propose that the manner and frequency by which participants represented notions of climate justice may reflect, or be explained in part by, residual Christianity, which was first discussed in the introduction of this thesis. To support this claim, I highlight parallels between climate justice and the stewardship model; and locate the human-centredness of climate justice in human exceptionalism, which is found in Christian doctrine as well as traditional liberal theories of justice. I propose that values of climate justice, as represented by participants, may exemplify one way that the Christian past lingers in the ‘social imaginary,’ a concept I also define in this chapter.

## DEFINING CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Although there is no scientific consensus on the definition of ‘climate change’ (Werndl 2016), the term is commonly understood to refer to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. There is agreement among climate scientists, however, that anthropogenic powers have accelerated climate change since the nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> The term ‘anthropogenic’ denotes “something caused by intended or unintended human agency” (Castree et al. 2013, 18). Human activities that generate greenhouse gas emissions, especially fossil fuel operations and industrialised agriculture, are leading causes of climate change. The consequences are changes in land and ocean temperatures, which then disrupt local and regional ecological conditions. Examples include ice

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<sup>76</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022, 6) states: “Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have *unequivocally* caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020” (emphasis added).

melting, coral bleaching, and increased storms, floods, droughts and wildfires. The first regions to experience the effects of anthropogenic climate change (hereinafter ‘climate change’) were the Arctic and tropical islands in the nineteenth century. This period is also the start of a geological epoch that Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2021) identified as the ‘Anthropocene.’ It is marked by the unprecedented role of human activities in altering the earth and atmosphere.<sup>77</sup> Climate change is part of the Anthropocene, along with other ecological issues such as deforestation and species extinction.

The concept of ‘climate justice’ addresses the disproportionate impacts of climate change on human populations. The United Nations (2019) states: “The impacts of climate change will not be borne equally or fairly, between rich and poor, women and men, and older and younger generations. Consequently, there has been a growing focus on climate justice, which looks at the climate crisis through a human rights lens and on the belief that by working together we can create a better future for present and future generations.” One example is temporary or permanent migration following natural disasters, or gradual shifts like land degradation and drought. These events can be economic drivers of migration, particularly when incomes are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, meaning that rural households are disproportionately affected (Cattaneo et al. 2019). The idea and language of ‘climate justice’ has gained much traction in political spheres, influencing policy debates and developments as well as international relations. Carlotta Minnella et al. (2024) explain that climate change first emerged on the world stage in the late 1980s as a scientific and technocratic ‘global issue.’ Nations of the Global South broadened this

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<sup>77</sup> While some like scientists like Crutzen and Stoermer (2021) trace the onset of the Anthropocene to late 1700s (or the time of the Industrial Revolution), others trace it back to the agriculture approximately 11 000 years ago, the agricultural revolution that began approximately 8000 years ago, or the ‘Great Acceleration’ of the 1950s, defined by “an explosion in human activities and their clear influence on the structure and functioning of the Earth System” (Ludwig and Steffen 2018, 46).

relatively narrow approach, emphasising how climate change impacts human rights and worsens existing disparities faced by their populations, as indicated by the above United Nations definition.

Climate justice may be understood as a form or manifestation of environmental justice.<sup>78</sup> At the grassroots level, Schlosberg and Collins (2014) note that climate change has long been a concern of environmental justice advocates. The differences between environmental and climate justice, they suggest, are ones of “accentuation, rather than definition” (Schlosberg and Collins 2014, 368).<sup>79</sup> For example, “while environmental justice activists have often talked about stopping the flow of toxins into communities, climate justice ... has been much more assertive about this point, insisting on leaving the fossil fuels responsible for greenhouse gases in the ground” (Schlosberg and Collins 2014, 368). The distinction between environmental justice and climate justice largely reflects the urgency and visibility of climate change across social and political domains. Both share the key tenet that anthropogenic harms are distributed to humans based on their physical *and* social locations. This occurrence is not unique to climate justice, although climate change stands out as the most discussed problem of the planetary crisis (Tănăsescu 2022, 12).<sup>80</sup> In this thesis I employ the term ‘climate justice’ as a form of environmental justice for two reasons: first, it has become widely used by social and political actors, adding credence to its empirical applicability; second, its use helps to maintain awareness of those aspects of environmental justice that the climate crisis has accentuated, especially intergenerational harm.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For an analysis of climate change through the lens of environmental justice theories, see Tremmel and Robinson (2014).

<sup>79</sup> See also Coventry and Okereke (2017, 365), who likewise explain: “Since the scope of the environmental justice movement had already expanded to address local and national issues around the world, as well as transnational environmental problems, the movement could adapt and engage with the complex and interconnected implications of climate change as scientific knowledge became more robust and widely disseminated.”

<sup>80</sup> Water justice, for example, constitutes its own social movement and area of scholarly interest (Zwarteveen and Boelens 2014).

<sup>81</sup> See Hiskes (2008) for a theory of intergenerational environmental (not climate) justice.

One of the leading injustices of climate change is its impacts on younger and future generations. In its Sixth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines distributive justice as including “fairness across generations,” and elaborates, “youth climate activists and political philosophers have argued that today’s children, as well as generations yet unborn, will be exposed to far greater risks than most living adults so that policymakers should work to avoid shifting all burdens of adaptation to future generations.”<sup>82</sup> For example, Wim Thiery et al. (2021, 158) estimate that “children born in 2020 will experience a two- to sevenfold increase in extreme events, particularly heat waves, compared with people born in 1960, under current climate policy pledges.” There is some research on the intersections of youth activism, intergenerational justice and climate change, especially in regard to youth-led climate strikes or litigation, which is sometimes framed as a way to secure intergenerational justice (O’Brien et al. 2018; Daly 2022; Kotzé and Knapp 2023). Political philosophers traditionally used the term ‘intergenerational justice’ to refer to obligations between generations that do not overlap. As indicated by the IPCC, above, this view has widened in the context of climate change to also consider living youth and children (Davies et al. 2016; Skillington 2019).

The environment was initially overlooked by early political philosophers concerned with intergenerational justice.<sup>83</sup> Donald Clayton Hubin (1976, 70) was the first to address this gap, claiming that contemporaries have a duty towards future generations to preserve environmental

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<sup>82</sup> The IPCC reports offer authoritative assessments of climate change, its impacts and mitigation measures. “Created in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the objective of the IPCC is to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies.” See: <https://www.ipcc.ch/about/>.

<sup>83</sup> Although he did not propose a theory of intergenerational justice, John Rawls (1999) was still concerned about distributive relations across generations. He argued for a principle of ‘just savings’ in which liberal societies set aside capital for future generations. These savings are meant to help societies establish or uphold their just institutions. This savings principle complements the difference principle explained in Chapter 2. The latter should consider “the long-term prospects of the least favored extending over future generations” (Rawls 1999, 252). That is, an inequitable distribution of wealth for the purpose of improving the social and economic conditions of a community (the difference principle) should not be to the detriment of its future members.

resources “in unpolluted form.” Brian Barry (1997) later argued that current generations owe a sustainable environment to future generations, so that they have equal opportunities and access to resources such as clean drinking water. The environment for Barry (1997, 94) is also valuable because it contributes to a “life worth living.” He states: “Perhaps people in the future might learn to find satisfaction in totally artificial landscapes, walking on the astroturf amid the plastic trees while the electronic birds sing overhead. But we cannot but believe that something horrible would have happened to human beings if they did not miss real grass, trees, and birds” (Barry 1997, 102). This view resonates with the capabilities approach to justice, introduced in Chapter 2. Edward A. Page (2006, 71) applies this approach to climate change, framing it is an issue of intergenerational justice, as it will impact the distribution of capabilities both across and within generations. Rising food insecurity due to drought, for instance, impacts the capability of bodily health, which is required for one to be “adequately nourished” (Nussbaum 2006, 76). Breena Holland (2008) takes this argument a step further, reasoning stable ecological systems, including the climate, make human life itself possible, let alone the capabilities required to flourish.

In more recent work Holland (2022) specifically considers the intergenerational dimensions of climate change. She argues that contemporaries have a responsibility to preserve capabilities for humans in a climate-changed future. This obligation requires mitigation by way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While this duty is shared collectively, “[o]nly those in the present who have a certain level of their capabilities secured are responsible for sacrificing as a matter of duty to others” (Holland 2022, n.p.). The term ‘sacrifice’ is likewise used by Danya Nadine Scott and Garance Malivel (2021, 178): “The fight against climate change, which is already exacerbating existing disparities between people living on the planet now, is one in which meaningful responses require sacrifice. Who will make these sacrifices?” As another example,

Jenkins (2013, 308) writes: “Both the refusals to address climate change and some policies to confront it may be a contemporary form of child sacrifice—not because we refuse to make sacrifices, but because we refuse to stop sacrificing.” This language of ‘sacrifice’ evokes conceptual links among religion, morality and climate change that is addressed in the next section.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND MORALITY

Climate change is a physical phenomenon that is located and explained through science. The ways in which humans interpret or respond to climate change is much more subjective.<sup>84</sup> Mike Hulme (2017) indicates that human cultures have interpreted changes in climate long before the climate crisis. He states:

[It] is unusual for humans to think that climates change for either natural or supernatural reasons *alone*. Far more common, and indeed perhaps more necessary, is to believe that the performance of climate is tied to the behaviours of morally-accountable human actors. For much of the past, and in most places, climate and humans have been understood to move together, their agency and fate conjoined through the mediating roles of natural processes and supernatural beings. (Hulme 2017, 50)

Hulme (2017) locates the interplay of human behavior, climatic change and supernatural beings in the deluge of the book of Genesis. In this narrative god sends a flood to cover the earth as a consequence of sin, so that the ultimate cause of the flood was not natural but human “wickedness” (Gen. 6:5).<sup>85</sup> The idea that climate events are tied to human morality is also found in lived religions. Randolph Haluza-DeLay (2014, 270) states that for some crab fishermen in the United States, “unpredictable weather is understood as a reminder that God remains in control of creation, and a

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<sup>84</sup> This point is made evident by debates on whether the phenomenon of climate change even exists. Right-wing evangelical Christians in the United States have received much attention due to perceptions that they deny climate change and oppose mitigation policies. Katharine Wilkinson (2012) found that some evangelical laities are hesitant to apply ‘creation care’ to climate change due in part to scientific skepticism. See Christiane Lübke (2021) for a discussion of climate change denial in Europe.

<sup>85</sup> Jeanne Kay (1988, 312) was the first to argue that nature in the Hebrew bible appears as an “instrument of divine reward and retribution.” This view is not unique to the bible but reflects the broader “cultural ecology” of the Ancient Near East, wherein deities animated the weather (Kay 1988, 323).

moral exhortation to avoid excess and greed.” Georgina Drew (2013) investigates responses of Hindu devotees to pollution and changes in the River Ganga’s flow, the latter caused by melting Himalayan ice. Some devotees attribute these changes to immoral human behaviour, so that the goddess would restore her conditions “if humans were to amend and improve their moral caliber” (Drew 2013, 30). The common point in these accounts is that humans do not cause climatic change, but they are held morally culpable for such changes in their relationships with a divine being.

Hulme (2017) argues that in contemporary Western societies, natural processes—rather than divine beings—are largely understood as the mediators between human behavior and climate change. Such behavior is often seen as willful, unconstrained and consumptive (Hulme, 2017, 40). This view is supported by Jason W. Moore’s (2017) notion of the ‘Capitalocene,’ which positions the unconstrained accumulation of capital as the defining feature of the current historical era.<sup>86</sup> Willis Jenkins (2013), introduced in the previous chapter for his work on religion and environmental justice, captures this behaviour in his use of the term ‘dominion.’ Addressing the Anthropocene more broadly, he states:

It is not unprecedented for a species to transform the biosphere. Up-start bacteria did it several billion years ago, radically remaking the atmosphere and banishing previously dominant species. It is unprecedented that a species should do so knowingly, worrying over the changes it makes, wondering if it imperils the systems on which life depends, if it acts badly, if it risks its hopes for the future. Never before (we think) has a species understood that its story was renarrating life, and asked itself if it was telling the story well. The anthropocene is an epoch of ethics because it is an epoch of dominion by a moral species. (Jenkins 2013, 3)

It is not unique for humans to recognise a connection between their behaviours and climatic change. What is distinct about the climate crisis is the scale at which this change occurs, and that

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<sup>86</sup> This concept was introduced as an alternative to ‘planetary crisis’ in the introduction of this thesis. Jason W. Moore (2017, 3) asks: “Are we really living in the *Anthropocene* – the ‘age of man’ – with its Eurocentric and techno-determinist vistas? Or are we living in the *Capitalocene* – the ‘age of capital’ – the historical era shaped by the endless accumulation of capital?”

humans, by way of what Jenkins calls their dominion, cause it knowingly. This knowledge is generated and made accessible by scientists, particularly those who study the natural processes connecting human behavior to changes in the climate. When expressing their views of climate change, the participants soon to be featured in this chapter did not reference divine beings. Many did point to scientific knowledge, for instance by mentioning the IPCC reports. Others explained that listening to ‘the science’ played a role in their decision to actively oppose the Trans Mountain Expansion project. Yet this chapter also suggests that the story of climate change and morality is not fully captured by scientific knowledge and natural processes. Religion also plays a subtle role in this narrative, by way of the lingering influence of Christianity on the social imaginary.

Drawing on the concept of ‘social imaginary,’ this chapter considers the framework that enables participants to convey a common understanding of climate change. Charles Taylor (2004, 23–24) defines the term ‘social imaginary’ as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” The social imaginary enables individuals to come together and navigate social problems as a collective. Climate change is one concern uniting participants in their collective opposition to the TMX project. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the ways in which participants imagine climate change align with principles of climate justice. These principles are represented by religious and nonreligious participants alike. The benefit of the term ‘imaginary,’ according to Timothy Stacey and Lori G. Beaman (2021, 4), is that it can “traverse distinctions between religious and nonreligious ways of understanding the world while avoiding thinking of either as unified systems.” Science in this social imaginary is an authoritative source of knowledge, serving as a basis for collective action against the TMX project. But deeper normative notions of this



imaginary have also been shaped by “the historical residue that Christianity has imprinted on society” (Beaman 2021c, 131). These two factors, intertwined in participant perspectives on climate change, become apparent when viewed through a lens of climate justice. In the next section I outline this analysis and interpretation of data.

## PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate change was the most common motivation behind participant opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. This concern was introduced at the start of this chapter by Tim. Recall his statement that it is “disheartening to know that your own tax dollars are funding the destruction of the planet and recognising what it means for future generations to live in a world with higher temperatures.” Another participant, Rosemary, likewise talked about humans in a climate-changed future. At the start of the interview, she made clear that her opposition to the TMX project is a form of climate activism. She stated: “I follow the science as much as I can [and] since I retired, I’ve really become a climate activist, I would say. And because I’ve read so many books and articles about it, it’s like the logical thing to do.” Rosemary further explained:

You’re constantly having areas of the world that are facing drought and they can’t live there anymore, or floods or tornadoes or whatever it is. We’re just destabilising the, the climate systems that allowed human civilisation to flourish for the last, you know, 5000 years or whatever it is. And so, never mind people in the future are not going to be able to have the luxury that I had, which was to just pursue my scientific pursuits, you know [and] try to discover wonderful things because we’re always going to be in a state of crisis.

Rosemary expressed concern for a collective “human civilisation” and “people in the future,” who will not have access to the luxury of following their own pursuits. Rosemary talked about her own pursuit of scientific interests, especially the ability to “discover wonderful things” in her field of biochemistry. She also spoke about the “joy” she found in her research: “Some of the joyous, most joyous times of my life was when we discovered something brand new.” Rosemary’s perspective

reflects the capabilities approach to justice that emphasises human flourishing (note that she used the term “flourish” herself). This flourishing, while subjective, requires access to basic capabilities like ‘emotions’ that are necessary for one’s wellbeing (Nussbaum 2011). In this framework, the emotion of joy (a capability)—or expressing joy while pursuing one’s interests (a functioning)—is a “luxury” that will become inaccessible by humans who are “always going to be in a state of crisis.” That harms to this capability will be distributed in a climate-changed future is what makes it an instance of intergenerational injustice.

Another participant, James, also illustrated a future-oriented perspective of climate change. When discussing his experiences of protesting, James talked about how he blends his interest in photography with his activism. He stated: “when an action is happening, a direct action is happening, I go and photograph it and then get it out on social media, get it out to news sources, if I can, and to document what’s going on, because I think it’s really important to bring that to light.” James first became involved in activism against the TMX project following his retirement from teaching. At that time he asked himself how he could “best give back,” and upon reflection, he realised that the “climate emergency [was] really becoming a thing.” Later, after observing test drilling for the pipeline project on Burnaby Mountain, he “felt a responsibility to get involved” in opposing that specifically. Reflecting on this responsibility, James stated:

You just have to listen to the science. The IPCC reports and it’s, it’s getting worse all the time. And, and so to drive by [the pipeline construction] or to go with my camera and I’m just watching this happen, it just, it honestly feels like I’m living in some kind of altered reality for something like this to be happening when, you know, the evidence is so clear [...] And I [guess] I feel a responsibility for the future generations because it’s not looking good for them. And I have three little grandchildren, and, I’m very, very worried for their future and the kind of planet they’re going to live on and what their opportunities will be compared to mine. And, so, I feel a responsibility to them and to all future generations to do what I can, because [if] they ask me, you know, what did you do? And I just shrug and say, I didn’t really pay much attention. No, no, I’ve got to tell them I did what I could.

James worries about the future of his grandchildren, future generations “and the kind of planet they’re going to live on and what their opportunities will be” compared to his own. This perspective reflects the idea of equal opportunity across generations, which is foundational to a liberal theory of intergenerational justice (Barry 1997). Rosemary also represented this idea, expressing concern over the opportunity (or lack thereof) of future humans to pursue their interests. It is not the reasoning of political philosophy but the validity of science, especially the IPCC reports, that grounds James’ concerns for the future. In his own words: “You just have to listen to the science.” Rosemary also emphasised science, stating: “I follow the science as much as I can,” and that regarding her climate activism, “it’s like the logical thing to do.” Science also played an important role in Tim’s interview. He indicated that this motivations for opposing the TMX project are entangled with his identity as a public health scientist. As he explained: “So my usual mode is to assemble evidence either through my own research or through the research of others, and to make a case to policymakers about a particular public health hazard. And in this case, those methods failed. And so I got to the end of my rope, so to speak. And recognised that it was my duty to block the pipeline because of what it means for public health.”

Similar to James, another participant, Beth, made reference to science by way of the IPCC reports. Beth is a pastor who helped found a church in Vancouver. She explained: “I’m a queer person and I grew up in the Baptist church and could not be ordained in that denomination when I married my wife. So I had a vision to start a church that would be more welcoming of LGBTQ people.” She also spoke about how, at her church, they spend time “looking at a different social issue through the lens of scripture,” including climate action. Beth first became involved in activism by blockading a road on Burnaby Mountain alongside other priests, ministers and lay leaders. “But kind of after that point,” she explained, “I lost that thread in my life a little bit, and

COVID came fairly soon after that, too. And so it really wasn't until [August 2021], I guess, when the most recent IPCC report came out that I really felt activated again around climate and realised how much worse things were getting." At the time of our interview, Beth had recently been arrested and charged with breaching an injunction and committing mischief for participating in a pipeline construction blockade alongside other women. When I asked about her motivations, Beth answered that she feels "a human responsibility to the next generation," then continued:

I don't have children of my own, but there are a lot of children in my life, like my niece and nephew and people's children in my church and my friend's kids that we watch a lot and just thinking about the world that they're going to grow up in and how we can do things today to give them the same opportunities to enjoy the air and the water that we have today, and so that their lives aren't just full of climate anxiety and the chaos that ensues from [the] climate emergency.

Though Beth feels "a human responsibility" towards the next generation, her perspective is also more personal, speaking about children who hold meaningful places in her life. Like other participants, she does not necessarily indicate concern for their survival, but their quality of life. She is concerned about their "opportunities to enjoy the air and the water that we have today." Beth was not the only participant without children of her own to mention children when discussing climate change. One participant even questioned whether she was "so late" to grasp the seriousness of climate change because she does not have children. She stated: "I don't have children. So it's not like, parents are really aware of, I think what their lives, their children's lives are coming to, what they're facing. And so, I don't have that."

Beth, similar to Tim, Rosemary and James, referenced science in her discussion of climate change. As indicated above, Beth noted that it was an IPCC report that motivated her to become involved in climate action again. She also referenced science later in the interview, but not in relation to climate change. Beth stated:

I think just the motivation of, of being as a science lover and a lover of nature and somebody who enjoys [the] streams and the rivers and the forests and knowing that it's going to increase tanker traffic by seven or eight times, that it's going to, this pipeline expansion that it will go under, I think it was like 1200 different streams and rivers it's going to cross. And just thinking of how much wildlife and how much of the natural world could be impacted by that, especially if there are spills, which does not feel like an if but more like a when. So just wanting to keep enjoy, you know, selfishly wanting to keep enjoying the species and the creatures that are part of my life and not see them harmed.

Beth does not frame risks to her own enjoyment of nature as a harm of climate change. It is more directly tied to the effects of the pipeline project itself, including future tanker traffic and oil spills, which will affect forests, water bodies, and “the species and the creatures” that are part of Beth's life. In a capabilities framework, these nonhuman beings and entities comprise capabilities that enable Beth to experience enjoyment. Harm to these capabilities, as a result of an oil spill, would constitute a form of environmental injustice. Beth's perspective highlights a common theme in the data, which is that harms to nonhumans are temporally situated in two primary ways: in the present, as a consequence of pipeline construction; or in the knowable future, due to the inevitable threat of an oil spill (which, for Beth, “does not feel like an if but more like a when”). I return to this finding in Chapter 6. For now, I note that participant views of climate change often took on a different temporal dimension, being directed towards a more distant or indeterminate future.

Some participants did talk about the impacts of climate change as a present-day issue, but in these cases, notions of intergenerational justice and an uncertain future were still evident. Mary is passionate about development psychology, and she expressed concern over the mental health harms that youth are experiencing. Making a link between the actions of present actors and the future, she stated: “we know that that the youth are terribly impacted by, you know, from a mental health perspective, knowledge of what's happening to our future through our actions now.” Later in our interview, Mary elaborated:

I actually really feel bad for families now where everyone is kind of paralysed talking about [climate change], because I think that's really hard for kids. I think that's a really, really hard place. I actually, as an aside, I'm considering writing a book from a developmental psychology perspective about how to talk to your kids about climate change. Not that I have the answer of how to do that, but I just think we really, really need to. And the fact that adults are not talking to each other about that is a problem. And the fact that we're not talking to our kids about that is a bigger problem. Like, in the mental health world, there's been a couple studies that have come out showing that, eco, you know, climate change and ecological collapses are leading to like, an epidemic, and I'm not exaggerating, like an epidemic of anxiety disorder in teenagers.

Mary, similar to Tim, Rosemary and James, has science folded into her views on the generational harms of climate change. She is speaking as someone working in the sciences and knowledgeable about research in “the mental health world.” There is an overlap between the mental health harm caused to kids and teenagers by climate change, made known through science, and a moral responsibility to act accordingly, which manifests by way of her climate activism.<sup>87</sup>

Although Mary spoke about youth and teenagers in a general sense, she made it clear that her primary motivation for her climate activism is her children. She stated: “I would actually say my first motivation was actually my kids. [...] I wanted to be able to tell them that I did everything that I could.” Sometimes she spoke about her children alongside considerations of youth more generally. For instance, speaking about her role in organising in school climate strikes, she stated:

I think that, you know, part of this part of the reason why I shifted to working on the school strike when I did was that I think the youth voice is incredibly important in this in so many ways. It's like the younger, the better, because who is going to bear the brunt of this? It's not me. And like, you know, I hope to live another 50 years or more. And so it's not like I will not experience, you know, the future that we're moving into. But my kids are, you know, another 35 years younger than me and they're going to experience more of it.

Mary emphasises who will be most impacted in a future shaped by climate change. While she acknowledges herself as well (“it's not like I will not experience, you know, the future that we're

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<sup>87</sup> The IPCC (2022, 15) states: “Mental health challenges, including anxiety and stress, are expected to increase under further global warming in all assessed regions, particularly for children, adolescents, elderly, and those with underlying health conditions.” Such challenges can arise from adverse events, but they may also be a consequence of “vicarious experience or anticipation of climate events” (IPCC 2022, 51).

moving into”), it is her children and other youth who will “bear the brunt” of it. Mary mentioned that her concern for the future was what initially motivated her to “do something” against climate change. She explained: “I was literally sitting in the car, going to my dentist and listening to the coverage about the IPCC report and just feeling this sense of doom, like, really like the world is going to end and why have people not been doing anything about it? And I actually had to convince myself to get out of the car. I was like, okay, I have to do something.” In referencing the IPCC reports, Mary further connects science with taking action against a climate-changed future. While she did talk about the impacts of climate change as a present-day issue, as noted above, she also referenced a more distant future, in which “the world is going to end.”

Overall, concern for younger, living humans or those of the future was common in participant perspectives on climate change. These resonate with the concept of intergenerational climate justice, which focuses on the distributive harms to humans based on their temporal locations. Participants did also express alternative principles of distributive climate justice. Mary, for example, explained that as she became more involved in climate activism, she learned that climate change will not impact everyone ‘uniformly’ based on their social identities. She stated:

This [climate change] is not something that’s going to happen up in the mountains. This is not something that’s happening to trees. This is like death and, you know, agricultural collapse, as well as it’s not going to, you know this, it’s not happening now and it won’t happen in the future uniformly to all people. It’s going to happen to the marginalised people who are already experiencing every other type of social injustice, right? I’m white, I’m cisgender, I’m Canadian. Like, there’s a million going for me. [...] Which is embarrassing to admit that wasn’t obvious to me before and that yeah, it’s, it’s going to, it is now and will, will forever be highly unequal.

Another participant, Peter, offered an example of the unequal impacts of climate change. Peter works at the Vancouver branch of an environmental charity, where he has organised “easily over 100 protests” against the TMX project. During our interview, Peter stated that his “biggest motivation” for protesting the pipeline project is “the climate crisis and the cognitive dissonance

between where we need to get to and the policies that our government is following is massive.”

When asked to elaborate on his motivations, Peter drew on the concept of ‘climate justice,’ stating:

I mean, it’s, it’s climate justice too, right? It’s that, you know, there’s, we’re continuing to put stuff in the atmosphere that’s killing people, and it’s killing people that have had no responsibility whatsoever for, for the problem. I mean it’s killing other people, too, but it, you know, it’s hitting the, the people less, the least equipped to deal with it first. And so, you know, I think, yeah, that that sense of fairness and justice is, I think, what drew me to climate stuff [before] I ever heard of Trans Mountain was just this like fundamental unfairness of the fact that the people who have done least to cause this problem, the people who are least equipped to deal with it are the ones who experience the worst impacts.

Peter offered a local example of this “fundamental unfairness”:

I remember a Tsilhqot’in Chief [...] a couple of years ago when his community stayed behind to fight the wildfires. He said, Yeah, you know, the million-dollar homes in Williams Lake, that’s where they concentrate the firefighting resources. It’s not our homes. And so, yeah, it even plays out, it plays out on a global level, but it also plays out on the local level, like who gets [the] protections from these climate impacts.

Peter frames wildfires as a local-level impact of climate change, which disproportionately threatened an Indigenous community because they did not receive the same resources to “fight the wildfires.” Peter’s description illustrates how injustice entails collective community experiences. This collective dimension is not unique to Indigenous communities. “Many localities, and stakeholder groups within those localities,” Schlosberg (2012, 455–56) explains, “are coming to terms with what climate change will do to various aspects of community functioning,” including issues of community health, local economies, and climate migration. Members of the Tsilhqot’in Nation were not the only ones impacted by the wildfires. Yet their experience, as told by Peter, demonstrates how those marginalised face exacerbated inequalities due to climate change.<sup>88</sup> I return to my interview with Peter in the next chapter, when I discuss how participants framed the lack of consent by Indigenous nations for the TMX project as one of the pipeline project’s harms.

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<sup>88</sup> The IPCC (2022, 12) states: “Vulnerability at different spatial levels is exacerbated by inequity and marginalization linked to gender, ethnicity, low income or combinations thereof (*high confidence*), especially for many Indigenous Peoples and local communities (*high confidence*).”



The language of ‘climate justice’ was also used by Andrew, who, like many other participants, framed science as the way to know about climate change. He stated: “So I think I first became aware of [climate change] around [university], 1986 or so it came to my attention. And I was always one to kind of trust the science, so, I didn’t really need a lot of convincing, the science was, was there.” Andrew started hearing about the TMX project around the time that drilling began on Burnaby Mountain in 2014. He saw this as “the start of something profoundly negative” for various reasons, including the violation of a conservation area, safety issues regarding the oil tank farm, and the lack of Indigenous consent for the project. Not unlike Tim, Andrew acknowledged that people were resisting the TMX project through “the formal channels” and “the review process,” but they did so to “no avail.” This outcome inspired him to become more involved in climate activism, leading him to found the Vancouver chapter of an organisation dedicated to addressing climate change through grassroots initiatives. Speaking about this group, he stated:

[So] we talk about a just transition, transition away from fossil fuels to renewables. Support for people who are, are being most affected and those in the oil patch who are threatened by emissions and, you know, with money that will help to transition to other types of work. So, yeah, we need to change our laws, right now, of course, people who are fighting for climate justice are criminalised, and the corporations who are causing the damage are, are being protected. So, so there is a real judicial component, we need to change our laws. And, and, you know, they should be protecting people, not corporations.

When asked what climate justice means to him, Andrew answered: “Those who are being most affected are least responsible typically, so those are poor people, and younger generations who did not really create this problem. So there’s a generational, inequity and generational justice issue that is part of climate justice.” It is not uncommon for “poor people and younger generations” to be coupled in distributive considerations of climate change (Harlan et al. 2015, 127). These are not necessarily separate issues, though, in that young people from lower socioeconomic communities face greater risks than youth from more privileged communities. Andrew also

touched upon another idea of climate justice, which is that those humans who have contributed the least to climate change (especially young and resource-poor peoples) will face its worse outcomes. In Andrew's words: "Those who are being most affected are least responsible typically."

The connections between the social (including generational) and physical dimensions of climate change were highlighted by Kate. As someone working in the health sciences, Kate is passionate about global health and its implications for younger generations. When I asked her about the meaning of global health, Kate answered:

Global health is what's happening in our backyard. Global health is this [TMX project] being built. Global health is not respecting Indigenous rights. Global health is refusing Indigenous communities access to safe water. Global health is BC having the highest child poverty levels in this country, which is embarrassing. So that's global health. That's what I want to pass on to my students. Not to be too narrow minded, to think outside of the box, think about the world where you want to live in, where you want your children to live in, right?

Kate concluded her discussion of global health with a view towards the future, explaining that she asks her students about "the world [they] want to live in" and the world they want "their children to live in." Kate poses this question as someone passionate about public health and educating the next generation of professionals. This passion was also evident when she talked climate change in relation to the impacts of the TMX project. Kate stated:

And then of course the mental health impacts of it, right? So when you ask what other impacts TMX has. So I think sometimes we overlook that. But I think the impact on how young people feel about climate anxiety. You know, there are schools around Burnaby Mountain that are seeing what is happening near their school, right? [And] what they hear from climate leaders, what they hear from their teachers, is completely a different thing from what they see on the street when they go to school, a massive pipeline so close to their school.

Kate, similar to Mary, framed the mental health impacts of climate change as a present-day issue. Crucially, while a present-day impact, this anxiety is experienced by younger generations and is rooted in fears of a climate-changed future. Kate further indicates what might be interpreted as an

intergenerational tension: what is advocated for by climate leaders and teachers conflicts with what students see being built by other adults. Kate's observation inspired my decision to not to rely upon the term 'Anthropocene' in this thesis. It is humans causing the climate crisis, but not all humans act the same. Tănăsescu (2022, 12–13) states that "the idea of the Anthropocene focuses too much on 'humanity' having influenced 'the planet', when instead what is truer is that a select number of people, and the processes of accumulation that they have set in motion, have altered the planet for everyone." Those who approved an oil pipeline to be constructed "so close" to an elementary school do not share the ambitions of those who oppose it. It is likely they also do not share the anxiety felt by students forced to witness its construction. I have avoided integrating the concept of the 'Anthropocene' because it not only implies uniform human impact, but its use may minimise the experiences of ordinary individuals like those featured in this thesis. These individuals, like the students mentioned by Kate, are forced to confront a material condition of the climate crisis in their dwelling place, made possible by the actions of other humans. It is the actions of those actively opposed to such conditions that offers the empirical basis of this thesis.

## DISCUSSION: CLIMATE JUSTICE AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

The above overview is meant to demonstrate how principles of climate justice were represented by participants. It was the most prominent form of environmental justice present in participant narratives. The most common way in which this manifested was through concerns expressed for children, grandchildren, youth, and future generations in a climate-changed world. Some participants, such as Mary, Peter and Andrew, talked about other social dimensions of climate change. In any case, participants consistently highlighted how climate change disproportionately harms groups of other humans. The human-centredness of climate justice may have various

explanations. Given that the cause of climate change is anthropogenic, it may follow its effects are readily viewed through an anthropocentric lens. Its overlaps with environmental justice movements, which are concerned with the ecological dimensions of social justice and human rights, may also play a role. There could also be biological explanations, for instance a bias towards the human species in an act of self-preservation. Another is the need of parents to protect their children. These are speculations. I raise them to highlight the following point: I cannot offer a full explanation as to why notions of climate justice, as represented by participants, are human-centred. It is not my aim to do so. In what follows, I offer insight into this observation from a sociological perspective that accounts for religion and nonreligion. I propose that participant representations of climate justice may be explained, at least in part, by a social imaginary shaped by Christianity.

The human-centeredness of climate justice is rooted in a longer history of human exceptionalism within liberal conceptions of justice, as first discussed in Chapter 3. David Schlosberg (2014, 75) states: “The liberal idea of justice has always been based on human exceptionalism and separation from the rest of the natural world. The belief that we are distinct – from each other, from nonhuman animals, from the processes that sustain our physical lives – is the normative background of, and grounding for, a wide variety of conceptions of the ethical construction of justice.” This “normative background” becomes foregrounded in the work of John Rawls when he grapples with the idea of value beyond the human. For Rawls (1993; 1999) there is a hierarchy of beings, in which humans assume the highest position based on their capacity for reason and deliberation. This position grants them moral agency, which is the prerequisite for engaging in relations of justice. Animals and nature are thus excluded from justice, but not moral consideration (Rawls 1993, 246). Rawls (1999, 448) states: “A correct conception of our relations to animals and to nature would seem to depend upon a theory of the natural order and our place in

it.” In this position they may be situated to “assume a certain stewardship toward nature” (Rawls 1993, 246). He also notes that humans can value nature for the ways it benefits them, such as its “life-sustaining properties,” the preservation of which benefits current and future generations (Rawls 1993, 245).

Brian Barry likewise reserves justice for humans. According to Barry (1997, 44–45), “justice and injustice can be predicated only of relations among creatures who are regarded as moral equals in the sense that they weigh equally in the moral scales.” Barry does not use the term ‘stewardship’ like Rawls, but he appeals to an equivalent notion of ‘custodian.’ He opens his work on intergenerational justice with the following: “As temporary custodians of the planet, those who are alive at any given time can do a better or worse job of handing it on to their successors” (Barry 1997, 43). The idea that humans are above the rest of the natural world, whether as stewards, custodians or moral agents of justice, has a much longer history in Western philosophy. A similar entry point to Barry’s was used by John Locke to open *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, first published in 1689. He wrote that “it is the Understanding that sets Man above the rest of sensible Beings, and gives him all the Advantage and Dominion, which he has over them” (Locke 2008, 14). In the works of Rawls and Barry, human exceptionalism becomes integrated into theories of justice specifically. They also inherited the universalism and equality of Enlightenment philosophy. All human beings, no matter the time or place, are part of the community of justice. Barry (1997, 46) does not offer justification for this “fundamental equality,” attributing it instead to an “axiom.” The exclusion of animals and nature from relations of justice, however, is justified based on human superiority within the “natural order” and “moral scales.”

The history of human exceptionalism in Western philosophy is intertwined with theology. The natural law tradition of Enlightenment philosophy held that certain principles and rights were

universal, being inherent in the natural world. The “first and essential tenet” of these principles was “human equality” (d’Entrèves 2017, 26). Thomas Aquinas merged the ‘worldly wisdom’ of natural law with the ‘godly wisdom’ of theology, integrating natural law into god’s divine order (d’Entrèves 2017, 40). Humans were made subjects of god, like the rest of creation, but they were also participants in his world. “Alone among created beings, man is called to participate intellectually and actively in the rational order of the universe. He is called to do so because of his rational nature. Reason is the essence of man, the divine spark which makes for his greatness. It is the ‘light of natural reason’ which enables us to ‘discern good from evil’” (d’Entrèves 2017, 43). All humans are created equal, being made in god’s image, which grants them a shared equality among themselves. At the same time, it assigns them a “unique ontological status” among the rest of creation (Claeys 2015, 207), made evident by their capacity to know divine natural law. Embedded within the equality and universalism of natural law, therefore, is human exceptionalism. Humans are not separate from the world, but they are also exceptional in their rational nature, allowing them to know the laws of god’s creation.

Christianity, like all religious traditions, is not a monolith. The radical human-centredness described above is part of the mainstream Western theological tradition (Waldau 2006, 632–33). This tradition is intertwined with that of Western philosophy, which has likewise operated on a foundation of human exceptionalism, influencing theories of environmental justice to become what Paul Waldau (2006, 632) calls “environmental speciesism.” Alternatives to this intellectual lineage, which challenge a hierarchy between humans and the rest of creation, can be found outside of mainstream theology. As noted in Chapter 1, Lynn White (1967, 1207) observed a moral stance of equality in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, who tried to “substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation.” White (1978, 106)

also challenged human exceptionalism and the hierarchy of stewardship (or ‘trusteeship’ as he called it), stating: “Mankind cannot be trusted to be trustee for the rest of nature. When we must decide whether to benefit lilies or sparrows or ourselves, we will recall that while our Heavenly Father is mindful of both lilies and sparrows, he cares even more deeply for us; so, in obedience to the divine preference, we shall opt for us.” Another example is poet and printmaker William Blake (d. 1827), whose works depict animals as participants in the world, having moral value in themselves and existing in kinship with humans (Bruder and Connolly 2018). I raise these brief examples to emphasise that the ‘Christianity’ I discuss in this chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive representation of the religion. I am interested in the intellectual and moral influence of traditional and mainstream Christian theology. The above description of natural law is likewise by no means comprehensive. It is intended to demonstrate the intellectual tradition inherited and expanded upon by Rawls and Barry, who maintain human exceptionalism in their theories of justice on the basis of cognition.

The participants featured in this chapter did not only present human-related concerns when discussing the Trans Mountain Expansion project. Their discussions of nonhumans are the focus of Chapter 6. They also did not explicitly state that the impacts of climate change should only be considered in relation to other humans. Moreover, many of their perspectives and the language they used directly challenge human exceptionalism. Tim, for instance, introduced at the start of this chapter, spoke about harmony and holism: “It’s quite clear that for the human population to be sustainable, it needs to live in a in harmony with the rest of the planet. And we can’t just consume the planet and think that everything will be fine. So if you’re thinking in a holistic fashion about the plants and the animals and the ecosphere, then you’re less prone to destroy it.” I am not suggesting that the participants featured in this thesis are human exceptionalists; on the contrary,

I assert otherwise. The more nuanced claim I make is that their representations of climate justice, especially intergenerational climate justice, reflect a social imaginary shaped in part by Christianity. I attribute this influence to Christianity, not natural law, Western thought or liberal philosophy, because participant narratives also resonate with the stewardship model of Christian doctrine. It is through this model that human exceptionalism in a softer form is maintained.

Participants did not use terms like ‘stewardship,’ ‘custodian’ or ‘caretaker’ when discussing climate change. I use ‘stewardship’ as a second-order concept in this chapter, which allows me to explore how understandings of climate change are socially constructed. In what follows, I aim to demonstrate that there are parallels between stewardship and principles of climate justice, as represented by participants. These principles and their similarities to stewardship are found across participant narratives of climate change. The extent to which they appear suggests that there are deeper, underlying norms informing these similarities. In other words, there is a common social imaginary from which participant perspectives of climate change emerge. In this social imaginary, there may be a residual influence of Christianity that resembles the stewardship model. Science also commonly appeared in participant discussions of climate change. Participants spoke as individuals working in the sciences, they made reference to the IPCC reports, and some explicitly talked about ‘the science’ of climate change. Yet science was not implicated in the articulated moral harms of climate change. Science may motivate climate action, but climate change is not ‘wrong’ because it ignores calls to action by climate scientists. What primarily makes climate change a moral issue is its harms to younger and future humans.

In this sense, participant perspectives mirror the division inherent in the stewardship model. There are ‘the stewards’ and ‘the stewarded.’ The stewarded are vulnerable humans, especially but not only children, grandchildren, youth or future generations. The stewards are present moral



actors acting on behalf of these other humans, as opposed to a divine and transcendent god. Nature or the rest of creation is largely absent from this equation. However, this absence further indicates a norm of human exceptionalism, which is likewise embedded in theocentric accounts of stewardship. There are different kinds of human exceptionalism, appearing in stronger and softer forms (Plumwood 2001; Gross 2012). The human exceptionalism of stewardship relies on humans being exceptionally made in god's image, with the cognitive capacities required to thoughtfully care for nature. This differs from the dominion model or human mastery over nature, as critiqued by White (1967) and discussed in Chapter 2. In this model, humans exercise their exceptionalism by treating nature as only having instrumental value. I also presented human exceptionalism in Chapter 2 as a normative bias within the sociology of religion, where 'the social' has largely been viewed and treated as a distinctly human domain.

In non-theocentric accounts of stewardship, human exceptionalism appears by way of relegating animals and nature to the background of moral relations. Dominic Welburn (2014, 403) argues that liberal citizens act as "custodians" of the just institutions they inherit, and in preserving these institutions, make themselves "stewards" of successors of the liberal community. This position entails being "temporary custodians of nature," the impacts of which exceed any one generation (Welburn 2014, 395). In the study of religion, Christoph Baumgartner (2017, 62) proposes a form of 'planetary stewardship' for the Anthropocene, which he frames as an alternative to more traditional theocentric accounts. In planetary stewardship, present moral actors have "direct obligations to other human beings and members of future generations." Among these obligations is "a hospitable climate for future generations" (Baumgartner 2017, 62). Willis Jenkins (2013) outlines a generational account of stewardship, described as "the membership model," in which humans possess "trusteeship responsible for earth's future" on behalf of future generations

(Jenkins 2013, 298). This form of stewardship may be combined with theocentric accounts, “if the direct obligation to God is understood as a practical command to care for a trust for the sake of future generations” (Jenkins 2013, 298). The possibility of merging these accounts highlights their shared structure: moral individuals acting for reasons located beyond immanent time and space.<sup>89</sup>

Climate change is a material, this-worldly issue made knowable through science, but the future state of the planet evokes a sense of transcendence, lying beyond the comforts of predictability, familiarity or control. At its most extreme, the world in a climate-changed future may be imagined as almost other-worldly: presenting unprecedented challenges and urging new adaptations that were previously not part of human experience. If the line between transcendence and immanence is taken to be blurred (Steele 2023, 59–60), then signaling a climate-changed future may fold transcendence into immanence, making an indeterminate future part of the motivations of present moral actors. This link between immanence and transcendence is seen in the stewardship model when humans take care of material nature on behalf of a god. In climate justice, it appears when moral actors act on behalf of the climate-disrupted future. Crucial to this argument is that a future-oriented, linear view focused on ‘what’s to come’ is not universal. It excludes conceptions of time as cyclical, for instance, as well as human/nonhuman entanglements in processes of creation and recreation (Winter 2020, 283). Speaking from a Māori perspective on intergenerational environmental justice, Christine Jill Winter (2020, 289) states: “Mountains, ranges, lakes and waterways, and all living matter, human included, have a repetitive pattern, a pattern of birth, change and rebirth of continuity, circularity and synchrony.” When participant

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<sup>89</sup> As an earlier example, Attfield (1991) defined obligations towards future humans as part of a stewardship ethic that is rooted in religion but also extends beyond it. He argues: “Stewardship can after all be described and defended in terms of human interests (alongside the interests of other creatures), even though, for the religious believer, it continues to constitute an expression of responsibility before God, and before the moral community of which God is the principal member. No new ethic is needed to cater for our treatment of our successors: what is needed is the detailed application of some very ancient traditions” (Attfield 1991, 110).

concerns were not oriented towards the future, their focus was still often directed towards the impacts of climate change on other vulnerable humans, not themselves or all living matter.

Future-oriented concerns are not limited to linear conceptions of time. Under Anishinabek law, John Borrows (2006, 39) writes that “land does not belong to a person or people in the sense that they have absolute discretion and control; land is provisionally held for present sustenance and for the sustenance of those yet unborn.” Caring for humans “yet unborn” and concern for the future are not unique to Western contexts. But they may become more pronounced in a social imaginary shaped by Christianity, which readily accommodates moral actors whose motivations are anchored beyond immediate time and space. It is not that younger or unborn humans is a concern, or that they might even be a primary concern, but that this concern often appears to the exclusion of other possibilities. Further, when participants expressed concern for living children or youth, these concerns still related to a future impacted by climate change, including the anxiety this produces. In this case the stewardship model appears in the form of adult stewards acting on behalf of younger humans. The human/nature divisions replicated as adult/child.

Indications of this social imaginary may be found elsewhere. Speaking to the significance of ‘the Anthropocene,’ Paul Crutzen and Christian Schwägerl (2011, n.p.) state:

Students in school are still taught that we are living in the Holocene, an era that began roughly 12,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age. But teaching students that we are living in the Anthropocene, the Age of Men, could be of great help. Rather than representing yet another sign of human hubris, this name change would stress the enormity of humanity’s responsibility as stewards of the Earth. It would highlight the immense power of our intellect and our creativity, and the opportunities they offer for shaping the future.

Crutzen and Schwägerl define human responsibility with the term ‘stewardship.’ They reference human intellect and creativity, which allows humans to move towards a different future defined

by progress.<sup>90</sup> The totality thinking of Enlightenment philosophy is also present. Humans are ontological stewards of the entire earth (not terrestrials who engender their dwelling place, for instance). Through science humans may know their immense power over the earth, but this knowledge does not compel them to act. Their desire to act is rooted in a responsibility of earth stewardship, but in a framework of climate justice, this responsibility of stewardship is tied to other humans. Such an understanding is scientifically sound, in that climate scientists have made clear that the impacts of the climate crisis will only intensify.

However, the prevalence of which these principles appear, I suggest, indicates that there are deeper normative notions that underly such concerns. It may be that the salience of climate justice results from its interactions with both science and religion, although only the latter appears in subtle form, residually folded into the social imaginary. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, sociologists of religion have noted that there is a ‘Christian residue’ in Canadian society (Seljak 2012; Beaman 2021a). Notions of human exceptionalism and stewardship can certainly be found in other religious traditions. Given that Christianity was the majoritarian religion of Canada, it is this influence that I associate with the social imaginary. I do not suggest that the social imaginary *is* Christian, or that climate justice is somehow religious or even religion-like. Instead, the influence of Canada’s religious past may be seen in principles of climate justice as articulated by participants. The more modest argument is that these principles do not challenge human exceptionalism and a model of stewardship for moral relations. Such challenges are presented in

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<sup>90</sup> The linear conception of time and progress is also present in the United Nations (2019) definition of climate change, as cited in the second section of this chapter. It states: “The impacts of climate change will not be borne equally or fairly, between rich and poor, women and men, and older and younger generations. Consequently, there has been a growing focus on climate justice, which looks at the climate crisis through a human rights lens and on the belief that by working together we can create a better future for present and future generations.”

Chapter 6, when I explore how participant perspectives resonate with principles of ecological justice and nonhuman intentionality.

By drawing climate justice into conversation with religion, without defining it as religious, it may be argued that I position it as a form of nonreligion. This view relies upon a relational understanding of nonreligion, whereby nonreligion is that which related to but distinct from religion. This includes not only (non)religious identities but phenomena, and its relationship to religion can arise through scholarly construction (Quack 2014; Quack and Schuh 2017; Schuh et al. 2019). Mathew Guest (2022, 152) states that the nonreligion is conceptually useful as it helps scholars “probe broader questions about power, the bases of social order and the constitution of knowledge, as phenomena that emerge from an interaction between religious and non-religious social forces.” I am not arguing that climate justice is a form of nonreligion. I do not think this argument would advance a stronger interpretation of data. I rather suggest that the principles of climate justice, as represented by participants, emerge from a social order and constitution of knowledge (or imaginary) that has been influenced by Christian conceptions of morality. Therefore, climate justice may be more accurately described as existing within a ‘grey area,’ being shaped by religious and other social forces, including science as an epistemic authority.

Accordingly, returning to Hulme (2017), religion may still play a role in the connection between human morality and climate change. This does not contradict his observation that contemporary Western societies understand natural processes, not divine beings, as mediating the relationship between “morally accountable human actors” and “the performance of climate” (Hulme 2017, 50). This sense of moral accountability may carry remnants of the Christian past. If so, then religion has not disappeared from this relationship, but it assumes a less overt role. Religion is also evident in Hulme’s discussion of climate predictions. He states:

The cultures of climate prediction are many and varied. Noah discerned the voice of God to make his forecast of an extended global deluge, while the account in the biblical book of Genesis of Joseph in Egypt, and his prediction of alternating seven years of plenty and seven of famine, seems likely to have been based on his close reading of the hydrology of the river Nile, which reflected the oscillating climate of the Ethiopian headwaters. (Hulme 2017, 110)

While the practice of forecasting or ‘prophesizing’ future climates is not new, Hulme (2017, 107) notes that *strictly* scientific climate predictions are a relatively recent development. Building on Lynda Walsh’s *Scientists as Prophets: A Rhetorical Genealogy* (2013), Hulme (2017, 116) portrays climate scientists as modern-day prophets—“seers of the future” whose predictions inform collective decision-making. He thus positions climate scientists in a role traditionally associated with religion, drawing them into the ‘religion-like’ category. In so doing, he acknowledges how the contours of authority and knowledge can change over time, but not religion. That is, the role of the prophet is treated as transhistorical, responding to developments in authority and knowledge, but the potential of religion to change shape over time is overlooked. It merely dissolves in the face of scientific knowledge, with climate scientists picking up the pieces left by former prophets. This approach overlooks the complexity of religion as a social force in contemporary societies. Overall, I propose that religion remains part of the relationship between moral actors and climate change. It shapes conceptions of morality as part of a broader social imaginary. This influence may be seen in narratives of climate justice.

## CONCLUSION

Participants articulated their moral relationships with other humans through a sense of responsibility to address the climate crisis. This responsibility, to varying degrees, motivated their opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. The manner in which they articulated this

motivation resonated with principles of distributive climate justice. Central to participant narratives was the idea of acting on behalf of others in a collective sense, where ‘being human’ (rather than ‘being terrestrial,’ for example) served as a common identity. Treating religion as a second-order concept, I aimed to demonstrate overlaps between the stewardship model and principles of climate justice, especially intergenerational ones, as represented by participants. Both climate justice and the stewardship model are human-centred and locate a moral impetus beyond immanent time and space, whether in god or a climate-changed future. Hulme (2017) argues that contemporary society attributes climate change to natural processes rather than deities. Although god is removed from the current equation, religion, I suggest, has not entirely disappeared. Participants did not reference religious language, identities, or ideas when discussing climate change. In this chapter, I have proposed that religion is rather relevant in grasping the social imaginary from which participant perspectives emerge. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, I explore participant notions of procedural justice in the context of settler activism. The religious identities of participants were sometimes relevant to how they articulated these relations, while at other times, they were not. To help explain this finding, I introduce the concept of ‘lifestances,’ which will also be employed in the final analysis chapter on ecological justice.

## CHAPTER 5: PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND SETTLER LIFESTANCES

### INTRODUCTION

*[My family] moved here [to the West Coast] in 1970. My dad had grown up here on a farm in Coquitlam and one of his main passions was always hiking in the back country. I see where my son maybe gets this from. And when we first moved back here, that was one of the things that dad would, you know, do quite often is get us, you know, get us all up and hiking back in Garibaldi and [from] how he was when we were up in the Alpine Meadows there, or climbing up to the top of Black Tusk or going over to Wedge Mountain. [...] And his parents came, you know, came from England and Scotland. But so just in that short 70 years, he made this spiritual connection with this little part of the world.*

*And so, when you consider that [Indigenous] people, you know, have been in this neck of the world for 10,000 years and piled on with, with the stories and the knowledge and all the history with a place. I look at my dad's situation and how that impacted him. I know when, well, when he died, my son and I, [we] climbed up to the top of Black Tusk. And we spread his ashes and when we camped later that night down at the campground by the lake, there were some people up there. It was during a fire ban and some people having fire up there and, because, because of budget cutbacks, they, you know, they didn't have a park ranger up there everyday sort of thing. It was a little bit piecemeal. That's another story. But anyway, I was just absolutely shaking, I was in a rage that this group of young men who, you know, had carried up, I mean it is still quite a long hike, so good for them but you know, carried up a couple cases of beer and we're lighting a fire. I felt that disrespect. And again, that's just me respecting the experience of my dad and his connection to that place for 60 years or something like that. And so, I can only imagine what it feels like for somebody who has 100 generations of people who walked that land and then they see some soulless corporation coming in and wiping [it out].*

This story was told by Stephen, who has participated in numerous rallies against the TMX project.

He is a member of the Prayer Circle Action Group, which formed in July 2018 as part of the Protect the Planet grassroots volunteer organisation. Towards the end of our interview, Stephen mentioned that it offered him a “wonderful opportunity” to reflect, then referenced a song he wrote about gratitude, entitled ‘Hummingbird,’ that he sent me the morning of the interview. He stated: “I’m often a little bit more articulate when I, when I’m in the creative mode.” Stephen plays the guitar,



sings and participates in music circles. During the interview, he often articulated his views through storytelling,<sup>91</sup> including the above story about hiking with his son and spreading his father's ashes.

Stephen's story indicates his positionality as a settler. He mentions his father's own "spiritual connection with this little part of the world," as well as the "rage" he felt at a group's "disrespect" towards a place with meaning for his family. At the same time, he empathetically made a distinction between his family's relationship to Black Tusk, and those with a much deeper history of the same place. The Black Tusk is a significant site to the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations and the relationship between them.<sup>92</sup> Stephen shared this story in response to my asking him to elaborate on the term 'connection.' He previously expressed his desire for a "heart" shift to occur, whereby people acknowledge their "connection to every other person on the earth and every other being on the earth. [And] I do include the Indigenous understanding of every other being as being the trees and the, the hills and, you know, the rivers that run through them." Stephen was one of many participants who referenced Indigenous knowledges.

In this chapter I explore the motivations, experiences and identities of my participants in the context of settler activism. The term 'settler' lacks definitional consensus. Adam J. Barker (2009, 328) defines 'settlers' as "most peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants or who are otherwise members of the 'Settler society,' which is founded on co-opted lands and resources." In other usages, the term

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<sup>91</sup> Kovach (2021, 43) makes clear that storytelling is part of an Indigenous research paradigm, and it can be used in Western qualitative research as well.

<sup>92</sup> The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre explains that the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations once shared a village peacefully, but over time became disrespectful, leading the Thunderbird to intervene. "He flapped his wings causing a volcano to erupt and a massive rockslide that buried the ancient village of Spo7ez under a hundred meters of rock debris. Hundreds were killed instantly as the massive rockslide swept down the mountainside to the ocean. The survivors were sent home with a message, that we're friends, family and neighbors and we need to work together. [...] After the Thunderbird caused the volcano to erupt at Black Tusk both communities were told they could only have seasonal camps in the Whistler area. They were told that as you came into the valley and could see Black Tusk that would be the beginning of the shared territory." See: <https://slcc.ca/history/>.

‘settler’ is more closely associated with European identity and whiteness.<sup>93</sup> Chelsea Vowel (2016, 16) makes an important observation: though settlement is a component of colonialism that continues today, calling anyone who is not Indigenous a settler “obscures the way in which colonialism outside of Canada has created conditions that have given many peoples little choice but to seek homes elsewhere—including Canada.” The majority of participants in this study fit these broader and more narrow definitions of the term ‘settler.’ Stephen, for instance, was born in Pakistan and lived in various other places of the world before moving to Vancouver as a teenager. Similar to other participants, he self-identified as someone with “privilege,” stating, “I’m male and I’m white and I’m middle class.”

To be sure, in this chapter, I employ the identity term ‘settler’ to designate how individual participants positioned themselves, either directly or indirectly, as separate or distinct from Indigenous peoples. Crucially, this occurs within the context of their activism on unceded land and as part of a movement led by Indigenous peoples. I do not seek to make an argument regarding ‘settler identity’ in contemporary Canada more generally. It is still important to clarify, however, that ‘settler’ is not a monolith and, as indicated above, the term can carry different connotations, such that ‘settler Canadians’ may fit more or less easily into this category. Amy Fung (2021, 128) argues that the “settler identity cannot be reduced by race or class alone, but requires a dynamic interpretation within a shifting lens of economic powers.” The individuals featured in this thesis differ from the settler decision-makers who support the extractive economy through the exploitation of stolen land (in this case, the approval and operation of the TMX project), the concurrent disregard of Indigenous self-determination and the criminalisation of land defenders.

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<sup>93</sup> Anishnawbe playwright and humorist Drew Hayden Taylor (2022) states: “In a lot of my writing, I frequently use the term ‘settler’ in referring to those comprising the dominant society of Canada. In another time and age, they might be referred to as white people – i.e. the colour-challenged, or people of pallor. But in these more politically correct times, we in the Indigenous community prefer ‘settler.’ It sounds more neutral and historically relevant.”

This chapter does not aim to contribute to scholarship on environmental (in)justice in Canada, but I acknowledge that there are overlaps with this literature, which is often situated in the context of settler colonialism (Agyeman et al. 2009; Wiebe 2016; Waldron 2018). Some works consider climate justice as a social movement in Canada that resists colonial extractive projects, like the Trans Mountain Expansion project, while framing the climate crisis as symptomatic of colonialism and violations of Indigenous rights (Bliss and Temper 2018; McGregor 2021; Alook et al. 2023). Another area of scholarship develops theories of Indigenous environmental justice (IEJ). Deborah McGregor (2018, 8) notes that while injustices faced by Indigenous peoples are often the focus of environmental justice scholarship, a theoretical framework grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies is underdeveloped. She formulates one rooted in Indigenous legal and intellectual traditions, which require respect and reciprocity, ensuring not only the rights of humans to a safe environment, but also duties and responsibilities that ensure the wellbeing of animals, plants, rocks, waters, forests, and the earth (McGregor 2018, 13; McGregor et al. 2020, 36).<sup>94</sup> Kyle Whyte (2020, 272) similarly foregrounds kinship relationships, stating that “environmental injustice occurs when at least one society dominates one or more other societies by disturbing their kinship relationships.” In short, IEJ focuses on reciprocal relations and kinship obligations in a holistic sense, eschewing the divide seen in Western theories between environmental justice (for humans) and ecological justice (for nonhumans). The latter is explored in the next chapter.

This chapter considers how participants represented principles of procedural justice, in relation to Indigenous peoples’ right to free, prior and informed consent. It begins by defining this

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<sup>94</sup> McGregor (2018, 10) specifically utilises the Anishinaabek concept of *mino-mnaamodzawin* or ‘wellbeing,’ which she notes is “a life goal common to many Indigenous peoples,” and “considers the critical importance of mutually respectful and beneficial relationships among not only peoples but all our relations, which includes all living things and many entities not considered by Western society as living, such as water, rocks, and Earth itself.”

form of justice, which was first introduced in Chapter 3, followed by a brief overview of procedural injustice in the context of the TMX project. This overview offers context for the subsequent discussion of how participants represented notions of procedural justice. In this chapter I also explore how participant settler identities sometimes intersected with other identities, namely that of being religious or nonreligious. To do so I engage the concept of ‘lifestances.’ Lifestances are the behaviours, practices and beliefs that shape how people interact with the world around them. Religion is not a lifestance but can shape one’s lifestance (Beaman et al., forthcoming). I aim to demonstrate the efficacy of ‘lifestances’ for capturing the nuances of lived (non)religion, including how it overlaps with other aspects of identity. Overall, I conclude that some participants positioned themselves as settlers by representing principles of procedural justice and did so without any reference to religion. Participants who did not express these principles still positioned themselves as settlers in various ways, sometimes but not always with reference to their (non)religious identities. I explicate this variability using the concept of lifestances.

## PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND THE TRANS MOUNTAIN EXPANSION PROJECT

In this section I define procedural justice and provide an example of procedural injustice in the context of the TMX project. This example is meant to further illustrate procedural (in)justice, as well as offer context to ensuing participant perspectives that represent such principles of justice. Environmental procedural justice considers who participates in and influences environmental decision-making (Suiseeya 2021, 38). It is not merely about who gets a seat at the table, but about the actual power and authority distributed among participants at this table (Schlosberg 2013, 40; Bell and Carrick 2017, 109). “Procedural injustice occurs when persons have no voice or capacity to exercise self-determination in decision-making processes that affect their lives – and there are

no morally relevant reasons why they lack voice or information” (Whyte 2017, 117). One mechanism of procedural justice is Indigenous peoples’ right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). The right of Indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is a mechanism of procedural justice. This right entails that Indigenous communities possess authoritative and reciprocal roles in decision-making when their territories or lands are impacted. Reciprocity requires that “Indigenous people are not merely being asked to grant consent, but are determining the terms of consent [...] This is less a process of governments obtaining consent, but an active maintenance of Indigenous authority” (Yellowhead Institute 2019, 21). The TMX project serves as an example of procedural injustice, as it was approved without securing the prior consent of several First Nations along the pipeline route, including the Squamish Nation, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, and the Coldwater Indian Band.

The right to free, prior and informed consent is found in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which became an interpretive instrument for Canadian law in June 2021 with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNDA). Article 32 of UNDRIP states in part:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

The implications of this article for Canada’s UNDA are uncertain. Article 46 of UNDRIP states that the declaration should not be “construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States.” This leaves open interpretative space for free, prior and informed (FPIC) to be limited and applied narrowly in practice (Yellowhead Institute 2019). The principle of

consent in Canada has traditionally been limited by state and industry actors to the duty of consultation (Papillon and Rodon 2019, 261). Of course, obtaining FPIC may involve a process of consultation, but consent and consultation are not synonymous (Suisseya 2021, 45). While consent necessitates reciprocity through shared decision-making authority, consultation maintains a hierarchy between the ‘consultors’ and the ‘consulted,’ the latter lacking any binding authority.

This hierarchy was present in decision-making processes of the Trans Mountain Expansion project. In September 2023, for example, the Canada Energy Regulator (formerly the National Energy Board) approved a deviation of the TMX pipeline route that was opposed by the Stk’emlúpsenc te Secwépemc Nation (SSN). The SSN opposed the deviation because it would require a more destructive construction method, which would consequently harm the sacred Pípsell area. Prior to its decision, the CER consulted members of the SSN and listened to their oral testimonies. During an oral hearing in September 2023, Jeanette Jules, an SSN knowledge keeper, spoke to the profound significance of Pípsell. She stated in part:

There are many altars that are there. Some of them, we have told people where they are. Others, we have not told people because people like to go in, people like to destroy, and it’s the same with the -- what is deemed pictographs. There are numerous pictographs through there. We don’t like to tell anyone where they are because other people like to come with spray paint and spray paint them. And the pictographs that are done in red are the people who have gone up and done -- doing their étsxem. But the one that is done with the red -- with the black ochre are those that are training to be Tek’wilcs, medicine people. And there are areas within there that we have not told people that have the black paint for the training of medicine people. And those are extremely sacred. You can’t go in and you can’t destroy them, neither can you replace them. If something is taken away from there, it cannot be replaced. Everybody always tries to say, well, you can go and find another spot to do it. No, you can’t. One of the examples that we -- we as Tk’emlúps have always used is the Marian shrine in Poland and with some of the other sacred sites of westernized people. If we go in and destroyed or said, Let’s move your shrine or your sacred spot, people around the world would be not happy with that. That’s the same with how we -- we are. We do not want anyone destroying, touching any of the sacred sites that we have, and throughout the whole area, there are numerous burial mounds.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Canada Energy Regulator (2023) Oral Hearing for Trans Mountain Pipeline ULC Deviation Application. Volume 1. Hearing RH-001-2023 (September 18, 2023) at 24–25.

The Canada Energy Regulator (CER) recognised this sacred connection between the Secwépemc and Pípsell, and it weighed this connection against the financial burdens of not approving the pipeline deviation request. In the end, despite not receiving SSN consent, the CER approved the deviation as it would expedite construction and be more economically feasible. In its decision, the CER referenced article 32 of UNDRIP, UNDA, and its own “commitment to Reconciliation.” Grappling with its denial of SSN consent, the Canada Energy Regulator made clear that “there were good faith efforts to reach consensus among the parties and that the relevant requirements for consent that flow from article 32 of the UN Declaration, as affirmed through the UNDA, were met in this case.”<sup>96</sup> The CER limited the meaning of consent to consultation by defining “consultation” as the “relevant” part of consent, as opposed to treating genuine consent itself as mandatory. It bridged the gap between consent and consultation with the “flow” of “good faith efforts.” Hence the SSN did not hold decision-making authority in this matter but acted as informants for Crown decision-making (Papillon and Rodon 2019, 268). This arrangement perpetuates a colonial power dynamic—sustained in this example of procedural injustice—whereby Indigenous self-determination goes unrealised as it would challenge the economic interests of the state.

## PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES OF PROCEDURAL INJUSTICE

The above example of the Canada Energy Regulator decision is intended to offer a glimpse into the decision-making processes behind the Trans Mountain Expansion project, helping to situate forthcoming participant perspectives on the lack of prior consent. That the TMX project received government approval, despite the lack of consent from several First Nations, had the indirect effect

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<sup>96</sup> Canada Energy Regulator (2023) Reasons for Decision for the Trans Mountain Deviation Application Pursuant to Section 211 of the *Canadian Energy Regulator Act* – Pípsell (October 20, 2023) at 43.

of influencing non-Indigenous people's opposition to the pipeline project. Although procedural (in)justice occurs at the institutional level, a mechanism of procedural justice—in the form of Indigenous peoples' right to prior consent—was interpreted by settler individuals at the grassroots level. This was demonstrated by Corrin, who has participated in protests against the TMX project and provided ground support at the Protect the Planet tree sits in Burnaby. There, she also engaged in direct action by sitting “in front of the big cherry picker machine.” When I asked Corrin about her motivations for engaging in activism, she first talked about climate change. She stated: “Well, an oil spill is pretty serious in terms of groundwater and especially in terms of climate change. So every barrel that gets pumped through that pipeline is to be burned, which will contribute to emissions, which will contribute to climate change. And there's no. it's, it's not a maybe, like the climate science is clear, that oil and bitumen needs to stay in the ground.” When I asked her whether she sees “any other threats posed by the expansion project,” Corrin answered:

[One] of the things that is really compelling to me is Indigenous resistance to the project. So the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam who occupy these lands, it's their land, it's unceded territory. And there is no right for this colonial extractive project to push through their lands. Yeah, we have, we have no recourse. Like, they said no. They sued the government. And Canada is essentially a ton of corporations and banks in a trench coat. [...] And so really when I do this work, I am aware I'm standing on the shoulders of giants, like Indigenous resistance has kept so much oil in the ground and so much fossil fuels from being burned. And yeah, they are, they are the ones who lead. And I follow.

Corrin frames the movement against the Trans Mountain Expansion project not as a climate change movement, but an Indigenous-led resistance in which she situates herself as a follower (“they are the ones who lead. And I follow”). Following Indigenous leadership was expressed by several other participants. Stephen, introduced at the start of this chapter, talked about the “Indigenous leaders who have been kind of providing the ground for all of us to walk along with them.”

Another participant, James, talked about ‘standing with’ Indigenous Elders. James was introduced in the previous chapter. Like Corrin, one of his primary motivations for opposing the



TMX project is climate change. He expressed concerns for future generations and his “three little grandchildren,” particularly “their future and the kind of planet they’re going to live on.”

Elaborating on his motivations, James stated:

[T]here’s the whole Indigenous rights piece that’s pretty important. I think, you know, that the pipeline, they’ll say, well, we have consent from everyone along the route, but that’s not the case. There are nations that are opposed, including the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh and Coldwater and, and so, when I started hearing the elders speak, that really struck me as well. And just, they were just telling us that the Earth, you know, is their Mother. And so that, that’s so important. And when you hear it come from them like that, then you have to stand with them.

James explicitly used the term ‘consent.’ Corrin did not use this term, but she still framed the TMX project as an issue of procedural injustice: it is a “colonial extractive project” that pushes through unceded lands despite there being “no right” to do so, as some First Nations “said no.” Both James and Corrin indicate a connection between the lack of Indigenous consent—or ‘saying no’—and their own involvement in the activism. For these participants, the right to prior consent is neither forgotten nor relegated to the background of institutional decision-making. It serves as a key motivator for their on-the-ground opposition to the pipeline project.

Further, for Corrin, the issues of climate change and Indigenous rights are intertwined.

When asked if her motivations for protesting have changed over time, Corrin answered:

You know what, they really have. I thought I was getting into it just because I was like, Whoa, this seems like a problem. Like I, I’m going to get into it and we’re going to, we’re going to help stop climate change. And then I realised the depth of the Indigenous leadership and the depth of the Indigenous movement. And, so I’ve also become a huge proponent of Land Back as a solution to climate change.

The concept and movement of ‘Land Back’ calls for “the relinquishing of colonial control and recognition of true sovereignty by returning land and restoring Indigenous decision-making on Indigenous lands” (DeLancey 2023, 179). It can help mitigate the climate crisis given the success of Indigenous practices of land restoration (Yellowhead Institute 2019, 64). Corrin’s reference to

Land Back, and more broadly, to “the Indigenous leadership and the depth of the Indigenous movement,” indicates a process of learning. Her realisation of these aspects occurred after she became involved in activism. Other participants also indicated experiences of learning through activism as settlers and are presented later in this chapter

Similar to Corrin, Rosemary, introduced in the previous chapter, first talked about climate change when asked about her motivations for opposing the TMX project. She talked about finding joy in her scientific pursuits and how this is a “luxury” will be inaccessible to those in the future, who are “always going to be in a state of crisis” due to climate change. Rosemary also talked about “Indigenous groups that are in opposition to the pipeline,” stating:

The other thing [is] there are declarations from many Indigenous groups that are in opposition to the pipeline. And the federal government says that it has adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But, you know, with this pipeline, without engaging their concerns at the get go, there are a few Indigenous First Nations [that] are in support of the pipeline for sure. It’s a few, but I think the vast majority is opposed. Certainly in British Columbia, the vast majority are opposed. And yeah, so there’s a disconnect there, I think. And that’s not justice.

Although, like Corrin, she did not use the term ‘consent,’ Rosemary points towards procedural injustice by alluding the decision-making process behind the TMX project. During this process the concerns of First Nations were not engaged and “the vast majority” remained opposed to the pipeline project. This occurrence represents a disconnect from the UNDRIP, which, for Rosemary, is “not justice.” Similar to Corrin and James, Rosemary presents a general awareness of the rights distinctively held by Indigenous peoples whose lands will be impacted by the TMX project. This resonates with a key principle of environmental justice: instances of injustice are not universal but “socially and spatially differentiated” (Low and Gleeson 1998, 19). Participants talked about Indigenous Nations (social location) along the pipeline route (spatial location) who did not consent to the TMX project being built on their territories (a form of procedural injustice).

Peter, introduced in the previous chapter, presented climate change as his primary motivation for opposing the TMX project. He stated: “[M]y biggest motivation is the climate crisis and the cognitive dissonance between where we need to get to and the policies that our government is following is massive.” As noted in the previous chapter, Peter used the term ‘climate justice’ when discussing climate change. He used the language of justice again when discussing Indigenous communities and their rights. When asked about his other motivations, Peter answered:

I mean, like the love of the water and the place [...] I think there’s a huge place-based motivation for me to, to protect these waters and then, you know, stand in solidarity with the people that have been protecting them for millennia. [I] mean, every time I take a ferry, I just think, oh god, what if an oil spill happens here? That’s just going to be absolutely devastating. [And] then just like fundamental injustice of building a pipeline through people’s lands who haven’t given their consent for it. And especially like I think about the Westridge Marine Terminal sitting directly across the water from the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, and every time I’m there, I can look at it and see this big, ugly, polluting mess. You know how just absolutely unfair it is that because of the consequences of history and the genocide that Indigenous communities have to put up with this pollution and are forced to kind of fight for their rights.

Peter illustrates the affective dimensions of environmental justice. He talked about how much he enjoys kayaking, his connection to the water, and he described the West Coast as “a magical place.” He also said that “you can’t live here and not just be totally in awe of the marine ecosystem here and, you know, want to protect it.” For Peter, an oil spill in the water would be “absolutely devastating.” In a framework of environmental justice, injustice occurs when material and emotional connections to specific places are disrupted by anthropogenic harm (Schlosberg 2019). This view relies upon a capabilities approach to justice, in which the integrity of land or water (capabilities) are required to achieve functionings such as awe, or the ability to maintain relationships with a place. Similar to Stephen, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Peter’s attachment to a place is accompanied by a recognition of its deeper historical connections

to Indigenous communities. Further positioning himself as a settler, Peter stated that he aims to “stand in solidarity with the people that have been protecting [these waters] for millennia.”

Further commenting on the lack of prior consent for the TMX project, Peter stated:

[There’s] the injustice of [Indigenous peoples] not having any say the first time around when the original pipeline was built in the early 50s [...] Now there’s the expansion of the project that threatens all the waters and traditional foods and cultural values that Indigenous people in this province rely on. And to have it be put through again, you know, over their objections and without their consent is, like, have we really changed at all? Yeah. So there’s, yeah, just the moral failings of the colonial state.

Peter’s statement, “And to have it be put through again, you know, over their objections and without their consent is, like, have we really changed at all?” may further indicate his positionality as a settler. ‘Their’ objections refer to that of Indigenous peoples (the ‘outgroup’) while he asks whether ‘we’ (the ‘ingroup’) have changed since the first Trans Mountain pipeline was built.

The original Trans Mountain pipeline was also raised by Maxine, who explicitly mentioned ‘consent’: “[W]hen the tank farm and the pipeline itself were put in in the early fifties, nobody consulted the First Nations along the route. They didn’t even have to by law then. [...] So it was really unfair. And since then, you know, they’re supposed to be meaningfully consulting and getting informed consent.” During the interview, Maxine talked about how she lived in Jerusalem for seven years, where her work focused on the rights of Palestinians and nonviolent activism. She has been back to Israel and Palestine “about a dozen times” since returning to Canada in the 1990s. It was not until 2014 that Maxine learned she was living on the unceded territories of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam Nations. This realisation occurred as she became more involved in the opposition against the TMX project. Maxine framed this opposition as being Indigenous led: “It’s Indigenous land, the movement, and, you know, so we basically aren’t not doing anything that hasn’t been either asked for or approved by the Indigenous leadership of the

movement.” Maxine further talked about her experience of listening to Indigenous elders speak at demonstrations. She said that they have been “very outspoken” about keeping the movement “nonviolent” and “in the spirit of love.” She continued:

I’ve been interested in nonviolence as a strategy for many years. This is the, you know, that’s what my, my research you could call it, I guess in the Middle East was based on, you know, having been an activist with various groups for the eight years or so that I lived in Jerusalem. I saw this happening and I saw it under-reported and very often not called that by either Palestinians or Israelis for different reasons. And it needed to be made clear. Here it’s a very different situation because so the Indigenous leadership is very clear in the terminology and, and making it clear that that’s what they’re doing.

Maxine’s primary motivation for opposing the TMX project is the physical danger that it places her in. She explained:

It’s a threat to us. I mean, we’re already making preparations to move if we have to and we will consider that we have to, if, in fact, they do proceed with the expansion of the tank farm, because we feel, you know, even though, you know, we would get an evacuation order if there was a problem, we’re still within, well within the 5.2 kilometer radius that would be subjected to poison gases. And you know, what if something happens in the middle of the night kind of thing. [...] So [that was] the first motivation. And then, you know, finding out about the violations of Indigenous rights and, and just how dangerous the whole project is and has been and continues to be and how many leaks these, these pipes have had over the years.

Following Indigenous leadership as well as processes of learning, such as “finding out about the violations of Indigenous rights,” were also discussed by participants who did not represent principles of procedural justice. These principles constituted only one way that participants positioned themselves as settlers in the context of opposition to the TMX project. Other expressions of their settler identities are not captured by conceptions of environmental justice. For example, in Maxine’s case, her listening to Indigenous Elders speak opened space for her to find similarity and shared values (nonviolence in activism). In the next section, I explore additional ways in which participants framed themselves as settlers while reflecting on their activism. By

employing the concept of lifestances, I illustrate how religion occasionally intersected with their identities as settlers, while other times, it did not.

## DISCUSSION: SETTLER LIFESTANCES AND (NON)RELIGION

Maureen spoke collaborating with and learning from Indigenous leaders. She discussed “having the privilege to work with so many in the First Nations community and learn from them [and] their patience with us as we [laughing] find, figure, figure out how to work in a good way. In, in their, in their ways.” When I asked if Maureen would be willing to share an example of learning to “work in their ways,” she answered:

Well, just lessons about being invited to be a part of things and what that means. Going and taking part and recognising that we have so many rules about what’s expected of us I guess as guests or how things work and I guess you’re rushing from one place to another, and getting to a place with people and realising that you, you’re wondering what the schedule is, or what, what, what’s expected of you. And then you realise that actually, [the] expectation is that you were there, you’re in the moment, and you participate and, there is no schedule because you have to let it [happen] the way it’s meant to happen. And that’s a discovery process, not a regimented process of somebody deciding top-down this is what we’re doing, and what order it’s happening in, that it’s a fluid process that’s develops through the experience of everyone being there together. And how that, that progresses and how long it takes is as long as it needs to take. Not as long as I, you know, not until my, you know, my show’s on, or I have [laughing] to be somewhere to go with my kids, it’s like, this [is] where I need to be now.

For Maureen, her engagement in activism prompted learning experiences as a settler. Maureen did not explicitly use or self-identify with the term ‘settler.’ She nevertheless positioned herself as distinct from Indigenous leadership and culture. This distinction formed the basis for her privileging Indigenous practices—she learned to work “in their ways” and made herself responsible for her own learning. She learned about being present in the moment and letting something happen “the way it’s meant to happen.” This lesson emerged through listening to and following Indigenous leadership as a settler activist, while being met with patience in the process.

The theme of learning was also present in Elan's discussion of how, similar to Maxine, she came to realise that she was living on unceded lands. She called this realisation "a total switch around for me," which was initiated by her joining a group called 'Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder Morgan Expansion' (BROKE). Describing BROKE, Elan stated: "The BROKE concept has always been information to try and reach the people and give them information about the dangers of this pipeline." Elan spoke to the significance of her joining BROKE:

[It] wasn't until I joined BROKE and we were planning a people's procession and art walk in 2014 where I became aware of non-treaty unceded lands. I'd never heard of that. And growing up in Alberta, we drove through reservations. You know, it's like you go through with blinders on these reservations not understanding, and not understanding about residential schools. Raised in a Catholic school in the, in high school, there were four Indigenous women who were staying at the convent [...] We didn't socialise with them, had no idea what their life was like in the convent. Just the whole thing of residential schools, unceded lands, none of that hit me until, you know, I'm past 50 and all of a sudden, I'm hit with these things. So that's, my education started there, it started with the, what was then known as the Kinder Morgan expansion. I had gone to a meeting where they were talking about, you know, this expansion in my neighborhood.

Elan further described this "education" as a "growing, learning process" that occurs "continually." This process for Elan is interwoven with religion. She was raised in the Catholic church and went to a Catholic school, and she self-identified in the interview as a "lapsed Catholic." Learning about residential schools, she stated that she "was touched and just horrified that this was the church that I grew up in and loved and had left for a while and came back to it." She also talked about the Pope's visit to Canada in July 2022, when he apologised on behalf of the Catholic Church for its role in the residential school system. Regarding this visit, Elan stated:

And I found it interesting when the Pope came here, he also, you know, he apologised. He apologised and then put the blame on the government of the day. But, you know, not addressing it. I think the pope has had a lot of time to think. I think he was misled by his advisors before he came [because] I think his choice for the mass [sighs] and his homily in the mass was about grandparents. And I thought, how can he be talking about the need of grandparents when he's, when he's here to apologise to the Indigenous peoples for depriving them of their grandparents, right?

This perspective on the Pope's visit highlights Elan's journey of understanding residential schools. More broadly, religion served as a reference point as she navigated and reflected on the impacts of colonialism within her own life story. Elan also self-identified as a "white settler" and noted that she no longer attends church, due in part to "all my awakenings," but she does believe in "Christ" and "his teachings of love."

Elan also talked about her involvement in the Prayer Circle group, which, as noted in the introduction of this chapter, was formed in July 2018 as part of the Protect the Planet grassroots organisation. She explained that the Prayer Circle is "based on a Quaker tradition" but consists of "all kinds of people," and it meets each month at the Watch House under "a beautiful cedar tree." A Coast Salish Watch House or *Kwekwecnewtxw* ("the place to watch from") is a site where members watch for their enemies and protect their communities. Construction of the Watch House that Elan referenced was led by members of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation under the direction of elders. It was completed in March 2018 and is situated on Burnaby Mountain near the new Trans Mountain pipeline route and adjacent to the existing tank farm. The Watch House became a meeting point for collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who were united in their opposition to the TMX project. Speaking of the Watch House, Rueben George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation stated: "The elders have said they want to do a call to all religious leaders, all spiritual leaders, all interfaith leaders, to come say a prayer at this watch house" (Boothby 2018).

Another participant, Valerie, also talked about her involvement in the Prayer Circle. Valerie described the circle as having a feeling of "real interconnectedness. A shared sense of desire. A shared sense of responsibility. A shared sense of hope. And the faith is from all over. I mean, many of us have different faith practices and who we call God or Allah or Creator." Valerie holds a master's degree in theological studies and works with an ecumenical organisation focused



on ecological justice and human rights. Her identities of being a settler and Christian were often made clear during the interview. She explained, for example, how she noticed a “shift” among her “United Church friends” that she attributes to Indigenous knowledges:

And I’ve also noticed a shift, I’m not a United Church person, but I’ve noticed a shift within my United Church friends who constantly refer to God as Creator. So that language we’re learning from [Indigenous peoples] are infiltrating even into the religious language, which is widening and making, making language of what is typically seen with a gender connection more neutral. I think, I find the Western culture puts far too much emphasis on gender identity.

Valerie also talked about following Indigenous leaders in her opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. She discussed organising a march on Burnaby Mountain in 2014, which took place when “many people were being arrested in the injunction zone.” She stated:

[We] organised together that spiritual quest and gathering, which coincided with the day that, interestingly enough, the Indigenous elders chose to come as well. So we, complete reversal and shifts in plans, we had the Indigenous leaders go up the mountain, we followed. Again, this is a huge marker and a shift in how things were done, colonially. And we purposely just followed.

Valerie did not represent notions of procedural injustice, but she did talk about the “injunction system” as well as “Indigenous rights,” further noting that she has learned about a “concurrent sort of theme of resource extraction being connected to Indigenous rights.” Reflecting on the day of the march, Valerie explained:

And I saw the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officers protecting the rights of the corporation, not the rights of the people. And there was that direct opposition that was visual that I saw, recognised, thinking, okay, who’s on what side of justice here? And who’s protecting who? For what? To what end? And being with the people, and what is supposed to be for the people, but not. And instead defending corporate rights. And since then I’ve learned a lot about the injunction system that exists within and often used within the [British Columbia] resource extraction.

Like other participants, Valerie described a process of learning, specifically about the injunction system, as well as following Indigenous leadership. As she stated: “we had the Indigenous leaders go up the mountain, we followed [...] we purposely just followed.” Valerie’s religious and settler

identities overlap in this experience. She organised the event, which was a “spiritual quest and gathering” in expression of her Christian identity, while her position, following Indigenous leaders, symbolised her identity as a settler.

Stephen, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, also participated in the Prayer Circle. He described the various people involved in the group based on their religious identities, stating:

[T]his is an interfaith Prayer Circle. We’ve got people who follow Buddhist tradition and Quakers and Anglicans and people who are, follow the Jewish tradition. Catholics. And then, well, and Unitarians and atheists, anyway. Well, actually, I don’t know if there’s atheists. [Interviewer: But it’s quite diverse] Yeah. Anyway, so. And we do, we actually just met this past Saturday up there, three days ago just to, well, first of all, be up in that environment like we were right there on the little forest trail. That’s 100 meters away from this ongoing construction project. And we’re sitting under this vast cedar tree and it’s, it’s snowing a little bit, but we’re kind of in this, have the refuge of the cedar tree and we’re giving gratitude for, you know, what still exists and [kind of] supporting each other in the various kinds of grief that people are going through with, you know, the destruction that’s going on all around us.

Towards the end of our interview, when I asked Stephen whether he considers himself to be religious, he answered: “Actually, no.” Even though he does not self-identify as religious, Stephen often referred to his participation in the “interfaith Prayer Circle,” as well as a church he regularly attends in Vancouver. Stephen spoke fondly about the church, its minister and other members, with whom feels a sense of community. He explained: “I see Jesus as [a] role model of how to how to be in the world and how to interact with other people. [It] just so happens that this little loving community of people exists here in Vancouver.” Stephen further stated: “I also know that, yeah, for a lot of people, Christianity has been the cause of a lot of suffering and [...] what I do tell people is that I am glad that I have found a community where I can show up with my, all my warts and, and my vulnerabilities. And, and I, I have a number of circles that I interact with that I would say you could characterise those circles in the same way.” Included in these “circles” are

his church community, a singer and songwriter group with a weekly open mic night, and the Prayer Circle that formed in opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project.

Another participant, Sarah, also spoke about the Prayer Circle. She presented it as her “in” to activism: “The Prayer Circle was my in, and I loved, the reason why is I love the combination of direct action, you know, anti-pipeline, in combination with spirituality of like, we’re going to sit in prayer in front of the bulldozer, which to me was exactly the way that I wanted to engage in any kind of protest in a very peaceful, meditative kind of way.” When asked whether she considers herself to be religious, Sarah replied:

I don’t follow a religion. And in fact, a little story about that, I am a member of the Prayer Circle. And we had training about, I don’t even know, I think it was about direct action is what it was. And we were in a Zoom meeting and they had everybody introduce themselves, of course. The question was, okay, so what’s your name? You know, what’s your, what’s your faith, and I don’t know, maybe where you’re from or something like that. And they go around the circle and everybody can say, you know, hey, I’m so-and-so, I’m Catholic, hey, I’m so-and-so, I’m Buddhist, hey, I’m so-and-so. And everybody had their, like... [Interviewer: Identity] And then they got to me and I’m like, I’m Sarah and I’m here. And it was such a weird, so strange. I was like, I don’t actually have a stock answer for that. But it actually kind of bothered me. I’m like, I need to have an answer. [And] when I was walking the water from Hume Park to the Watch House, one of the men that I was walking with was a minister from some church and, you know, we were chatting, and of course that question comes up again. And I now have an answer, my answer is a hyphenated answer. [...] So now, now my answer is that I’m a Shamanic-Wiccan-Yogi. That’s my answer. So is that a religion? No. But it’s most certainly a, you know, spirituality, for sure.

Sarah demonstrates the nuances of (non)religion. She clearly stated, “I don’t follow a religion,” yet she engages in a prayer group based on a Quaker tradition. This demonstrates how lived (non)religion among ordinary individuals can be complex, not easily captured by categories of ‘religion’ and ‘nonreligion.’ Similar to Stephen—who does not self-identify as religious, but also attends the Prayer Circle and a church—Sarah does not easily fit into pre-defined categories, hence her ‘hyphenated answer.’ It is such diversity that the lifestances approach is well attuned to capture.

Lifestances are the aspects of one's life that shapes their relations with the world around them. These include practices, relationships, beliefs, habitual behaviors and life histories (Beaman, Cragun and Ezzy, forthcoming). Religion and nonreligion can inform one's lifestance, but lifestances are more than religion and nonreligion. For instance, in the previous chapter, it was indicated that being a parent, grandparent and scientist shaped how individuals perceived and responded to the TMX project. This chapter highlights how religion and spirituality influence some participants' approach to activism, especially through the Prayer Circle. These influences may also intersect. For example, Valerie, introduced above, who self-identifies as a Christian, obtained a graduate degree in community health and epidemiology in addition to one in theological studies. Discussing her experience of working in public health, and her decision to later study theology, Valerie stated: "I wasn't able to speak my heart language of my faith and relate the work around ecology and the passion that I had for the future of the environment and our Mother Earth, I wanted to, yeah, translate that and be able to apply it with a faith perspective."

The connection between religion and science became clear as Valerie shared her motivations for opposing the TMX project. She explained that, as a policy researcher, she had worked for several years as part of an ecumenical programme, during which time:

I was pressing for a policy statement that we could make to ensure that no expansion of the pipeline, or no expansion of the tar sands would be permitted. So we got that in writing. So I felt assured that our ecumenical justice forum had a statement publicly if I was ever questioned by a fellow Christian or others who say, 'well, why are you engaged in this?' 'Well, it says right here, and I support this, right?' That was the science and the sort of the academic backing that I felt I needed. So I had a rationale that could, that would boost my motivation. Not to mention the interconnectedness I very much know around how we are codependent, interdependent as life forms. And that, that health of our ecosystem has to be maintained and that we are reliant upon it. And to simply have these machines continue to destroy not only what is in our midst, but continue in the path of destruction that we know is impacting CO2 emissions and other situations.

Religion and science shape Valerie's lifestance, playing a complementary role in how she perceives and responds to a pipeline project's "path of destruction." Valerie integrates her "faith perspective" into her activism, but science is important, too, contributing to her knowledge of the TMX project's harms and 'boosting her motivation' for opposing it.

Not all participants were religious, nor did all participants talk about science. One point of commonality (as lifestances are concerned) was that of being a settler. In various, non-uniform ways, being a settler shaped participant views of the TMX project and its harms, their own self-understandings as settlers, and their practices or experiences of activism. Some participants expressed their settler identities when representing notions of procedural injustice. They highlighted the absence of prior Indigenous consent, recognising it as outsiders to the process themselves. Notably, they did not frame prior consent in a personal manner, for instance by asserting that should also have a right to prior consent. The lack of prior consent from First Nations was acknowledged as a harm in its own right. Lifestances are about how someone understands their relationships to others, how they react and engage with what happens around them, as well as their sense of moral obligation (Beaman, Cragun and Ezzy, forthcoming). Being a settler played a role in how participants articulated these relations. Further, in the context of activism, the concept of 'lifestances' may carry a more material meaning. Participant engagement in settler activism takes place on unceded lands, where they quite literally take their 'stance' against the TMX project. Lifestances encompass not only how individuals express their place in the world, but how a place and its history can shape their engagement as well.

The term and idea of 'lifestances' helps to bridge the divide between religion and nonreligion. Similar to that of 'social imaginary,' it accounts for religion and nonreligion, but it does not position either as an entry point, allowing for other important aspects of one's everyday

life to be brought to light, such as being an activist, scientist, teacher, artist or parent. Hence the lifestances approach does not rely upon or reify distinctions between religion and nonreligion. It can serve as a conceptual tool for identifying when religion and nonreligion are distinguished, as well as moments where the boundary between them becomes blurred. Another participant, Daniel, demonstrated how religion and nonreligion can interact while offering insights into his lifestance. When asked about his motivations for opposing the TMX project, Daniel raised climate change as a key concern. He stated that “you read about the climate and you realise that we are, I, I believe from, from everything I can gather from scientists that we’re in very dangerous, a very dangerous situation.” He also talked about being on “the right side of history,” and joked that he was “quite lazy because I waited until something [the TMX project] was in my backyard.” Daniel self-identified as “a practicing atheist.” When I asked him what this means, he replied:

[I]t’s like my funny little way of describing it. It means I say that I’m an atheist. You know, there are probably a lot of atheists in the closet who really don’t want to say because all their friends are religious. One form of religion or another, if they say they’re atheist, then ugh! So they’re very reluctant. In fact, there are countries where if you’re an atheist, you’ll be killed. So you’ve got to be, to be a practicing atheist it means simply that you’re willing to say it.

Daniel mentions religion in his explanation of being an atheist ‘out of the closet.’ This is not uncommon, in that atheism is often defined by what it is not, especially a belief in god (Brown 2017). Throughout the interview, Daniel also challenged a strict binary approach to religion and nonreligion—not by referencing religion directly as he did above—but by blurring the lines between them. For example, he presented a non-theocentric view of humans as caretakers, offering a nonreligious interpretation of a concept that is framed as religious in other contexts. He stated:

So when the bible says we have dominion over the world [short pause] I take that to mean we have care over the world. So, our, you know, we are, we are supposed to be the guardians, the caretakers of the world. And there are a lot of reasons, you know, a lot of even, kind of like biologists would understand that perfectly well. I think ants understand it, you know, that you just don’t want to destroy the thing that gives you life. [And] so I

would say that is our relationship is that we, and that's part of intelligence. You know, the minute you push, the minute the species push, is pushed toward intelligence, that's the only answer. It's the only ultimate answer I should say, because they're, obviously we're doing exactly the opposite. So there's a problem there

Daniel references what I consider to be the stewardship model, in which humans are "supposed" to have stewardship or care "of the world" in totality. He does not locate the reasoning for this status in religion or the bible. He rather turns to intelligence, presenting a view of humans as caretakers not on behalf of god, but their own intelligent species. As discussed in the previous chapter, intelligence has been used to justify human exceptionalism, including within the dominion model that Daniel challenges. He also resists anthropocentrism by acknowledging how biologists and 'even ants' understand that "you just don't want to destroy the thing that gives you life." Daniel further linked intelligence to compassion:

[We] may even get replaced by robots, you know? But there's something, you know, there's always this impression that the, there is always the hope, that intelligence of some sort, is a positive thing, that it is a compassionate, positive thing. And that we, for the moment, we're kind of up there in the intelligence category. If we get replaced by robots, I'm assuming they will be compassionate robots [laughing] and they would be better than us at being compassionate.

Later in the interview, Daniel framed compassion as a point of commonality between Christians and atheists:

[U]nfortunately for some Christians, they're all quite happy for the earth to die because they believe that they'll go to heaven after the earth dies. [In] fact, that's one of the criticisms of the Trump administration, is that some of the religious people there were saying, bring on the apocalypse because we would like to join Jesus, you know. And this is, this is very dangerous, of course. But most Christians, the ones I know, at any rate, are very protective of the Earth. And they do it because Jesus teaches compassion. Teaches that you don't want anything to suffer. Period. And I think an atheist, there's, I don't know why it would be any different for, for an atheist to, to have the, to see oneself as being compassionate.

Daniel references religious ideas, such as Jesus' teaching compassion, to articulate his own moral views as an atheist. While his lifestance is informed by atheism, this does not preclude religion from shaping how he formulates and expresses morality.

At other times, Daniel offered insight into his moral perspectives without directly referencing religion or nonreligion. Daniel described his motivation for opposing the TMX project as a "moral stance," wanting to be on the "right side of history." This opposition included direct action. He participated in the Protect the Planet tree sit, where he spent days living in one of the 'skypod' hammocks attached to the cottonwood trees. When asked about the harms of the TMX project, Daniel explained: "it was not the motivation, but if ever I needed any motivation, all I have to do is think about the heat dome and the 600 people who died. That is the motivation. But then it is this biodiversity loss, which is criminal, absolutely criminal [...] it's just everywhere, the same thing, you know, these industrial projects that are destroying the planet." Daniel also used the word "evil" to describe the "biodiversity loss" and the "billions of sea creatures" that died during the heat dome. When asked why he considered these things evil, Daniel said they harm "the wealth of the planet" and noted that "we depend on this rich life for our own existence." Though Daniel used language of morality—particularly "evil"—he did not make explicit references to religion, Christianity, the bible or atheism. His moral insights are rather centred on the interconnectedness of terrestrials and the planet.

The lifestances approach situates religion and nonreligion on equal ground without using either as an exclusive point of reference. It encompasses both religion and nonreligion, acknowledging their overlaps, divergences and contexts where (non)religion appears to have little or no relevance. In Daniel's case, although he self-identifies as an atheist, he sometimes engages with religious ideas in formulating his own moral stance. Other times religion is absent. He also



locates an overlap between his atheism and Christianity, specifically in the value of compassion. He further articulates a view of humans as dependent upon “the wealth of the planet,” which is not framed as being exclusively atheist or Christian. He likewise does not make overt reference to religion or nonreligion when describing biodiversity loss as “evil.” These observations are not precluded by alternative concepts, such as lived (non)religion, introduced in Chapter 1. One of the potential drawbacks of this approach is that it positions religion as the primary reference point (Cragun et al. forthcoming). Nonreligion is understood as that which is distinct from yet related to religion (Lee 2012; Quack 2014; Quack and Schuh 2017). Lived nonreligion is, therefore, conceptually dependent on a prior concept of lived religion, from which it must be distinguished. This approach sits uneasily with the lifestances of individuals like Daniel, where atheism serves as a primary referent, with which religion may or may not interact. Alternative terms like ‘lived atheism’ risk overstating atheism’s significance in contexts where moral stances are expressed, but no clear connection to atheism exists. The lifestances approach seeks to resolve this conundrum.

In addition, the concept of ‘lifestances’ offers an alternative to that of ‘worldviews.’ Ann Taves et al. (2018) similarly frame worldviews as moving beyond a divide between religion and nonreligion. They propose three categories of worldviews: atheism, agnosticism and theism. Each of these worldviews has competing answers to ‘big questions,’ like where we come from and how we should live. Answering these big questions is what religion and nonreligion have in common. Accordingly, these questions for Taves (2018, 2) provide “a neutral starting point for analyzing worldviews that is not biased toward religious categories” (Taves 2018, 2). That being said, the idea of ‘worldviews’ is not necessarily neutral. It is consistent with a phenomenological and cognitive turn in the study of religion, which conceptualised religion as a universal search for meaning (Beckford 2002, 67). Indeed, Taves et al. (2018, 209–10) frame worldviews as a

culmination of meaning making tied to human evolution. Taves (2018, 3) continues: “If meaning is bound up with sense of purpose, then an implicit sense of meaning is inherent in purposeful, goal directed action. This would suggest that, as evolved animals, we would generally experience life as meaningful without reflecting on the fact or trying to express why we feel it to be so.”<sup>97</sup> One potential drawback of this approach, I suggest, is that it may reflect and perpetuate the totality thinking of Enlightenment philosophy (Tănăsescu 2022).

Taves et al. (2018) do consider the salience and coherency of worldviews. They question whether worldviews are stable across lifetimes or situations, and whether they are conceptually coherent (Taves et al. 2018, 212–13). Taves (2018, 3) further cautions against reducing worldviews to beliefs. She focuses instead on meaning and purpose, stating: “We need to consider the possibility that meaning in the sense of purpose is our default mode and not something that necessarily requires reflection” (Taves 2018, 3). In this way, worldviews, like lifespaces, can be more implicit, revealed through practices, behaviors and perspectives that are not aimed at answering life’s ‘big questions.’ Yet in focusing on purpose, meaning, and linking these experiences to human evolution, the concept of worldviews may distract from more situated and contextual investigations, including those that are terrestrial inclusive. It is unclear, for example, the implications of someone having a ‘scientific worldview.’ We may ask: whose science?<sup>98</sup> From

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<sup>97</sup> Italics removed.

<sup>98</sup> In asking ‘whose science,’ I mean to challenge the positivist approach of the demarcation tradition that seeks to define science in opposition to non-science, as outlined by Isabelle Stengers (2000). This tradition is characterised by a “radical asymmetry,” whereby science is defined in hyperseparation against what it is not, so that its legitimacy cannot be called into question by anything beyond its own boundary (Stengers 2000, 25). If science is not sociology, then sociology cannot be used to question the validity of science. Science is privileged, untouchable from that which is non-science, existing in its own exclusive domain. Acknowledging that there are different sciences (not branches of science, but different ways of conceiving science) challenges positivism, for it views science as separate from society and therefore ahistorical. Vandana Shiva (2016), introduced in Chapter 2, distinguishes between ‘modern science’ as a universalist project, seeking to displace other knowledge systems, and the science of ancient Indian traditions, which is characterised by a holism that nurtures diversity. In contemporary society, the concept of multiple sciences is reflected in discussions that distinguish between ‘Western science’ and ‘Indigenous science’ as separate but complementary knowledge systems. If the idea that there are multiple sciences is accepted, then asking what it means for someone to have a ‘scientific worldview’ requires explanation, which leads us to a path of particularity associated

where do they actually view ‘the world’ as ‘scientific’? What about people like Valerie, who weaves together scientific knowledge with her “faith perspective”? The methodological strength of ‘lifestances’ is that it does not treat religion or nonreligion as the sole entry point, nor does it embark from what they have in common (i.e., answering ‘the big questions’). It does not strive for categorical uniformity but emphasises the subjectivity of people in relation to the world around them. Overall, organising research on (non)religion around the concept of ‘worldviews’ does not orient scholars in the same way as organising it around ‘lifestances.’ Their points of departure lead scholarship in different directions: one towards big questions, the other towards relationships that are situated and (inter-)terrestrial.

The participants featured in this chapter who identified themselves as religious did not always draw from religious ideas, beliefs or language when discussing morally relevant relationships. Their ‘worldviews’ did not constitute an integrated, comprehensive lens that directly informed how they articulated their moral stances in totality. This point is made clear by participants, like James, who represented notions of procedural justice without reference to (non)religion. When asked if he considers himself to be religious, James answered:

I use the term spiritual rather than religious. I don’t belong to a church at all. But I do believe there is something greater than what we have here, what we’re experiencing. So. Yeah, I see, I see kind of a spirit in everything. And what we’re seeing here is just a small piece of that. And there’s [a lot] more. And, and I kind of excited about that, but I don’t put names to it or labels on it. I just kind of try to tap into it when I can. And like I said, often through photography or just being still in the natural world.

This spiritual identity was reflected in James’ use of the term ‘sacred’:

I got involved in photography, so I got some decent cameras and, and that just drew me. And so I can go for hours and hours at a time and just crawl around with my camera and connect with the land [in a] kind of deep way. Just really feeling the presence of the plants and the animals and the birds. And I always feel kind of filled up when I do that, I feel, I

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with the lifestances approach. Otherwise, any assumption about what constitutes ‘science’ within this worldview, and its implications for how one lives their life, risks perpetuating the privilege historically granted to the positivist, Western and universalising tradition of science as critiqued by Shiva (2016).

feel better when I do that. So that's why what's happening with the pipeline is just so, so striking right now. It's just so destructive to what I hold as, as sacred, really.

In addition to using the term 'sacred,' James spoke about his "spiritual connection with the land," and explained that he has participated in the Prayer Circle group. He also talked about doing a group "walking meditation" by the Trans Mountain tank farm on Burnaby Mountain near the Watch House, which involved "connecting with the land." Spirituality influences James' lifestance, as evidenced by his opposition to the TMX project. It informs his view of the pipeline, which he sees as threatening what he holds sacred, as well as his practices, including the Prayer Circle and meditation. Further, as explained earlier in this chapter, James spoke about "the Indigenous rights piece" of the TMX project. He also mentioned reconciliation, stating: "And Canada has got a very, very long way to go still with regards to reconciliation," and that "you know, we're in a time of reconciliation and, and what's going on [with the pipeline project] is so very, very wrong." Like other participants, James did not use any spiritual language, ideas or beliefs when discussing the rights of Indigenous peoples, but his spirituality becomes evident when articulating other moral stances.

In the previous chapter, I argued that a social imaginary shaped by Christianity has influenced, or at least resonates with, principles of climate justice as represented by participants. In this chapter, principles of procedural justice were found to have no discernible ties to religion. This absence can be elucidated by the lifestances approach. An individual's lifestance is not defined by their religious or nonreligious identity in a holistic manner. No person interacts with the world all at once. Religion may or may not shape how they respond to who or what (including an oil pipeline) is present in the world around them. Religion was only sometimes raised by participants when they discussed perspectives or experiences related to Indigenous-settler relations. Religious, nonreligious and settler identities intersected for those who took part in the

Prayer Circle that assembled at the Watch House. For many others, religion was absent. They expressed moral stances outside of a religious framework, including principles of procedural justice and ‘working in a good way’ with Indigenous peoples (in Maureen’s case). How participants understand or express their positionality as settlers has room for religion to appear, but not inevitably so. Religion appeared most relevant to how moral stances were actuated or lived, particularly through the Prayer Circle. Yet even in that setting, nonreligion appeared by way of individuals like Stephen, Sarah and James, who participated while purposefully distancing themselves from ‘religion.’

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explored how participants indicated their positionality as settler activists. Some participants did so by talking about the rights of Indigenous peoples and the lack of First Nations consent for the TMX project. These discussions resonated with a mechanism of procedural justice, specifically the right of Indigenous peoples to prior consent. Procedural justice is an institutional matter, but the principle of prior consent shaped settler perspectives at the grassroots level. I aimed to demonstrate the various other ways in which participants positioned themselves as settlers, for instance by following Indigenous leadership or learning about settler colonialism. At times these narratives intersected with religion, while in other instances, they did not. Seeking to explain this diversity, I introduced the concept of lifestances, which accounts for religion and nonreligion without privileging one over the other. It also explores their intersections and divergences, while considering whether neither is present, allowing for a more accurate understanding of how and to what degree (non)religion appears in a given context. In this chapter, it was being a settler that was pertinent to grasping similarities across participant lifestances. In the next chapter, I continue to

apply the lifespaces concept to explore how participants represented principles of ecological justice, along with related concepts such as nonhuman intentionality.

## CHAPTER 6: ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND NONHUMAN INTENTIONALITY

### INTRODUCTION

*I guess the ones that I'm most concerned about are the impacts on communities that did not give consent, including ecological communities. So fish, mollusks and mammals and birds. [...] So unfortunately, most of our ecosystems don't have rights and, and yet in many cases, you know, like the Nooksack Dace in the Brunette River and the, the salmon runs of the Brunette River. Like, we're at a period where the salmon populations on the West Coast are in dire states. And of course, there's huge consequences for all the ecosystems that they are part of.*

*Least to say, like the orca, in the case of the coho [salmon] [and] the fact that, like, they don't have any rights. And they, I, you know, the Nooksack Dace is like this endangered little minnow size, nocturnal fish that lives in, has, like, four micro populations in B.C.. And one of them is, like, right where they're planning the horizontal drilling. And, yeah, I mean, how do you ask for consent from a species that doesn't speak your language? I mean, asking consent from communities of humans who do speak the language and who say no. And to nevertheless push on suggests it doesn't matter what language is spoken.*

*You know, in the case of like, let's say Nooksack Dace which has been here since the last ice sheets retreated, like this is all they know. And so, for one species to decide that, that that species is not worth existence and to force it into extinction is the utmost violence. So, it's, it's breaking the first [Buddhist] precept of non-harm. And, yeah, like forcing something towards extinction or, I mean, actually killing any being without, yeah, just full stop. Killing, killing is the most violent of any form.*

*And, you know, whether it's nesting birds, cutting down the trees that they have been nesting in for years, and that they would like to come back to, but suddenly the decision is made that, well, no, they're not important. And so that's going to, that's impacting their well-being, not to mention possibly their population. Their wider population. Yeah. So extinction is, like, the most violent of all killings. And there's strong, strong ethics there.*

During the interview, Emma's lifestance became clear as she reflected on the Trans Mountain Expansion project's impacts on nonhuman beings, emphasising the individual loss of life and the risks of species extinction. She self-identified as a practicing Buddhist and noted that "the Buddhist path is defined by ethics." One of her primary motivations for opposing the Trans Mountain Expansion project was, in her words, "just being an ethical human being in a very conflicted time." She later remarked: "Whether or not you see cray, crayfish and frogs in [a stream being bulldozed], it's a destruction. It's a violent imposition. Changing the nature of that evolved system, whether

it's, whether it's a stream or a plant community. Or a network, a soil network. Or the individual beings that depend on it." Emma's moral consideration of both individual and collective nonhumans, animals and otherwise, resonates with principles of ecological justice.

As discussed in Chapter 2, theories of ecological justice include all life in the realm of justice. They account for anthropocentric harms to nonhumans, and how this interferes with what they require not only to survive but to flourish. Scholarship on ecological justice emerges in part from a scholarly debate on moral considerability. Lines are generally drawn between the individual and the collective, the former being found in the animal rights literature and the latter in environmental philosophy. This traditional divide is not necessarily applicable to empirical contexts. Emma demonstrates concern for both "individual beings" and "ecological communities." The harm of cutting down trees not only impacts the well-being of individual nesting birds, but possibly "their wider population." In a capabilities framework of ecological justice, nesting is a functioning, required for the well-being of individual birds and their population. The act of "cutting down the trees that they have been nesting in for years" constitutes a distributive harm to the capabilities they require to nest and thus flourish.

In addition, Emma represented principles of procedural justice, specifically the right to prior consent, as discussed in the previous chapter. She asked: "how do you ask for consent from a species that doesn't speak your language? I mean, asking consent from communities of humans who do speak the language and who say no. And to nevertheless push on suggests it doesn't matter what language is spoken." The right of nonhumans to participate in institutional decision-making is an expression of justice (Celermajer et al. 2020, 130). This right can be realised through human representation. Emma stated: "there are human spokespeople and those are, and [there] absolutely are Indigenous people who know that river intimately and they can speak on its behalf." Not unlike



other participants, featured in the previous chapter, she makes a link between principles of procedural justice and Indigenous peoples. She distinguished Indigenous peoples as having a distinct relationship and knowledge of a river, indirectly positioning herself as a settler, not belonging to that group. It is a subtle distinction that locates part of her own social identity. Emma was the only participant to make substantial reference to consent beyond Indigenous communities. Other participants did, however, represent other principles of justice, specifically the distributive and capabilities approaches to ecological justice.

This chapter explores how participants represented principles of ecological justice. This form of justice was the least common in participant narratives, with climate justice being the most common, followed by procedural environmental justice. However, when principles of ecological justice were absent, participants often expressed precursors or conceptual ‘building blocks’ required to achieve justice beyond the human. These include humility, nonhuman agency and an openness to nonhuman intentionality. When participants expressed these concepts, they did so in ways that reflected their own individual lifespaces. Accordingly, they were not articulated in consistent or uniform ways. Sometimes they intersected with (non)religion, and other times, they did not. In what follows, I first demonstrate how participants represented principles of ecological justice. This discussion includes insights into how participants also expressed concepts of humility, nonhuman agency and nonhuman intentionality, especially nonhuman and interspecies communication. Employing the lifespaces approach, I note when and how these expressions intersected with (non)religion. The final discussion section of this chapter draws on the work of Val Plumwood (2002), and her conception of interspecies justice, to consider points of tension and overlap between ecological justice and the stewardship model. Drawing on participant perspectives, I highlight how the data both challenges and reflects notions of stewardship. This

discussion lays the groundwork for the concluding chapter, where I propose the significance of nonreligion for grasping manifestations of ecological justice in contemporary society.

## PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES OF ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

Representations of ecological justice in participant narratives were often identified in the context of harm associated with the TMX project. They rarely addressed distributive harms to nonhumans from climate change or their exclusion from institutional decision-making. That is to say, harm to nonhumans was mostly presented as an issue of the present. For instance, Maureen expressed concern over the harms of pipeline construction to frogs she encountered at the tree sit. Maureen was introduced in the previous chapter. She talked about collaborating with and learning from Indigenous leaders, stating: “having the privilege to work with so many in the First Nations community and learn from them [and] their patience with us as we [laughing] find, figure, figure out how to work in a good way. In, in their, in their ways.” Discussing her time of living at the tree sits, Maureen stated:

I mean we have frogs that are hanging out, like little, two little adorable frogs, actually one's quite big, hanging out next to the tree sit. And I always say hi to them when we go by and check to make sure, and try not to scare them and it's like, find my route around to get there. And this is their home. This is where they live. They don't have anywhere else to go. I mean, the reason they're here in that zone, and not over in the pretty part on the greenway by the Brunette [River], is because well people are walking their dogs, and there's people running, we've already claimed that. And we made it look nice for us, right? And this idea that well this piece isn't useful to us, but it's useful to all these other creatures that need it. They needed a place to be and they needed a place just to, yeah just to live and have the right to have that just without us coming in and ripping it up to put in a pipeline so that a few people make some money.

Maureen expresses concern over the frogs' homes and their right to live there, focusing on the well-being of the frogs themselves. This perspective aligns with distributive ecological justice, which address the distribution of harm (“destroying land”) in relation to the needs and interests of

nonhuman beings, including their habitats. While human understanding of other animals is limited, it is evident that certain conditions are essential for nonhuman life and flourishing (Wienhues 2020, 42). One of these critical requirements is the place or territory in which nonhumans reside, especially when, as Maureen notes, they “have nowhere else to go.”

Further, Maureen makes a distinction between “other creatures” and “us” humans. It is the latter who has “claimed” land to make it “useful” and “look nice for us.” This distinction was addressed in a broader sense by Maureen later in the interview. She was critical of the idea that humans are “separate somehow from everything else that exists in the world.” She explained:

And then you look at a forest, and the forest has all these different types of trees and there’s all kinds of other stuff, like they’re interconnected with their roots woven together, there’s fungal connections, they actually speak to each other through that and communicate, and all these different levels. It’s not just trees. It’s, a forest is not made of trees. A forest is made up of millions of different types of creatures that all live together and keep the forest healthy. And they all need each other. And human beings have spent so much time seeing ourselves as outside the ecosystem and pretending we that can live and that’s not true [laughs] we’re in it. [...] And well we try to draw these things like trees and stuff, like we’re, you know, apex predators and all this other stuff, but it’s not like that. It’s just a web, right? [This] is one of the teachings, you know, from some of the First Nations groups I’ve heard is the idea that you can remove the two-leggeds from the world, and it would be a small gap and it would figure out how to fill in and work around this. But you can’t remove the other things. You can’t remove the trees, you can’t remove the bugs, you can’t remove the, like it would all collapse. It doesn’t work.

Maureen refers to nonhuman functionings, such as fungal communication and the health of a forest, which other creatures rely upon. In a framework of ecological justice, the health of a forest itself as well as “the creatures that all live together and keep the forest healthy” are instrumental in ensuring survival and flourishing at the individual, species and ecosystem levels.<sup>99</sup> Maureen

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<sup>99</sup> Wienhues (2020, 46) states: “[T]he ‘health’ of ecosystems is also of instrumental importance for the living beings they comprise. Claiming that the flourishing of living beings matters in terms of justice, therefore, also provides a derivative protection to ecosystems from considerable anthropogenic influence. [...] Most living organisms, to differing degrees, have the need to be immersed in a population in order to survive and flourish. Thus, populations are of instrumental value for the wellbeing of individual organisms.”

does not frame her perspective in terms of justice, however, but in terms of human ignorance. Humans are not beyond living in ecosystems. We are not “apex predators” but part of “a web.” She further demonstrates her lifestance as a settler learning from First Nations groups, referring to an idea about humans (or two-leggeds) not being essential to the world.

Maureen’s lifestance as “a mathematician and a physicist” was also revealed in this discussion. She expressed that she understands some of the “complex systems” of nature, while indicating humility by addressing a limited human knowledge of other systems. She further noted that like other species, humans may face a risk of mass extinction, which “people don’t seem to actually realise is possible.” Maureen stated:

[W]eather is such a complex system that we’re only starting to get programs that can model it accurately to a certain degree, right, and there’s so many, like the Gulf Stream, what would happen if it shut down. And there’s so many ideas and models, but we can’t actually predict what’s going to happen, and we really don’t want to be there and find out for real I think because most of us are [laughing] know that it’s different levels of horrible [like] mass extinctions again. And it might be ours. That’s the one that people don’t seem to actually realise is possible.

Maureen later made a call for human humility when she stated:

[W]e need to dismantle the pyramid and dismantle even the web that has us in the centre and see ourselves as just being one of the, you know, it’s like checkers instead of chess. Where chess, like there’s the pieces have different rankings, and we want to be the, we think we’re the queen or the king, right, that’s, it’s, you know, the most important and everything else can go, so long as we’re still there we win. And that’s not it at all. There’s got to be a different way of describing things that we learn to always be adding to the area around us, not just for our own needs, but always being aware I think of, yeah, that we have, it’s just the humility, I think.

Maureen explicitly uses the term “humility.” She more implicitly calls for a sense of equality, making a comparison between checkers, where all pieces have the same function, compared to chess where pieces have hierarchical rankings. Humans are not only at the top of a pyramid, or in the centre of a web, but as one equal part of a web.

Maureen later returned to idea of humility, as well as nonhuman functioning, when I asked her whether she considers herself to be religious. She explained that her parents were raised Catholic, but she was “brought up with a very strong expectation that a lot of times religion does more harm than good.” Maureen made clear that she is not religious, but she mentioned spirituality, associating it with a sense of affect. Referring to her time at the tree sits, Maureen explained:

I think the idea of having a spiritual connection to things is important. I think for me, I don't feel myself to be religious, but when I'm more peaceful and calm and recognise that I'm alright with just being a small part of, of a bigger world, maybe it's through the sitting, you know, being, meditating when I'm sitting up in the tree and hanging out and just listening to the birds [...] I think there's some, you know, and just feeling connected to the trees and the ecosystem there and recognising how incredibly resilient and complex it is. It gives me again that security and trust that I don't have to be in charge of everything, there's a lot of stuff out there that's doing just fine on its own, I need to just not get in the way, just let it do its job. Making oxygen.

Maureen did not clearly self-identify as spiritual, but she indicates a “spiritual connection” to trees and an ecosystem while participating in the tree sit. Yet there are not overt links between spirituality and the moral concern Maureen expressed for nonhumans at the trees sit. This absence differs from Emma, introduced at the start of this chapter, for whom Buddhist ethics was prominent. What Maureen and Emma do have in common is a moral concern for nonhumans that is not located beyond these other beings themselves. They express concern for the functionings of both individuals and ecosystems, without linking concern to a moral source located beyond immanent time and space. The locus of moral concern, as found in theories of ecological justice, is in the immanence of living, functioning and flourishing.

Sarah, introduced in the previous chapter, likewise represented principles of ecological justice by considering nonhumans for themselves. Sarah associated herself with spirituality, self-identifying as a “Shamanic-Wiccan-Yogi.” Spirituality was one factor that shapes Sarah's lifestance in regard to how she relates to trees. Another was growing up in northern Ontario “on

the lands of the Nipissing First Nation.” When I asked Sarah about her motivations for opposing the TMX project, she first mentioned her daughter as “the impetus” for what she does. She continued: “I guess, I would say it’s just a deep attachment to, to the planet, you know, to probably, trees would be a big part of that, growing up in northern Ontario. So the trees would be a big part of that.” Sarah talked about her participation in a Prayer Circle ceremony after the Protect the Planet tree sit had been dismantled. She described it as a “grief ceremony for not just the loss of the tree sits, but the loss of the trees.” When I asked Sarah if she could elaborate on what she thinks or feels about trees being cut down for the TMX project, she answered:

I’m a work that reconnects practitioner, right? And facilitator. And so, part of that work is, is called deep time. And really starting to see ourselves, you know, as, you know, like, maybe not me, Sarah, but pieces of me have been here for millions of years. [...] To me that’s really important to try to start to imagine ourselves in this grander kind of scale. And so, like I said, it just feels like so short sighted. And that’s the thing that just goes through my mind is just, it’s not thinking ahead in any, anyway. And then just the, just like the loss of a life, like, you know, the tree has a loss of a life. It’s a cedar tree at the side my building. And they come out here with chainsaws fairly regularly to cut them all back. And it’s horrible. It’s a horrible thing. The one beside me that I could see really well, all the spots where they’ve, they’ve cut their branches are all weeping. Like, it’s sad, but it looks like they’re all weeping. It’s all the spots where the branches are tight and it’s just like, ugh, right? Like it just breaks my heart.

Sarah’s spirituality is an important part of her lifestance, made clear, for instance, in her participation in the Prayer Circle grief ceremony for the tree sit and trees. Such overt connections to spirituality are not made, however, when Sarah talks about trees. She states that “the tree has a loss of a life” without any other point of reference. That is not to claim that Sarah’s views and relationship to trees is not part of her spirituality. The point is that harm to the trees is located in the trees themselves. When asked to elaborate on threats posed by the TMX project, Sarah responded:

I mean, climate change is most certainly a big, a big part of that. Deforestation, certainly. And then just the threats to, to, you know, animals, birds, fish, all of that. The water. Oh, my gosh. The, ugh, the thought of them drilling under the Fraser River and having a

pipeline under the Fraser River is like just mind boggling, so mind boggling to me that that like if anything happens, like the whole of the Lower Mainland [region of British Columbia] is screwed. That river functions for us in so many ways, like so many ways to keep us alive here [...] And it just feels so short sighted to me as well, right? Like, it's not thinking beyond, you know, like five years or something. Like, it's just so short sighted. And then, of course, just at the end, like kind of connected to that obviously is the threat to humans. Now I've seen the pipeline by the school when I actually went there and saw like, oh my gosh it literally is [right by it], and all the people on Burnaby Mountain that if anything goes wrong that are, you know, trapped up there. Like it's, it really, it threatens every facet of, you know, of the planet, of the people, of the animals, the water, the air, just everything.

Sarah acknowledges various impacts of the TMX project. These harms include its threats to humans, as well as a river that “functions for us in so many ways, like so many ways to keep us alive here.” In so doing she represents how humans depend upon the integrity of other beings or entities in their dwelling place. Extending moral considerability to these beings and entities, due to how they function for humans, does not exclude taking into account their interests for their own sake (Plumwood 1993, 213). As Sarah demonstrates, concern for humans, and the rivers they depend upon, can coexist with concern for a cedar tree for its own sake.

Another participant, Matthew, who self-identifies as spiritual, similarly expressed concern for trees as the “nonhuman victims” of the TMX project. Speaking about the pipeline project, he asked: “And why should there be this gap, this hierarchy, wide open, so that [we don't consider] the needs of nonhuman species the same way that we consider the needs of humans? And I do think that's very valuable. I think it extends to trees as well as animals.” By acknowledging their “needs,” Matthew locates moral worth not only in other animals but trees as well. In regard to ecological justice, the idea of needs is significant for establishing who counts as a moral subject (Wienhues 2020, 33). It is the needs of these subjects that becomes the focus in distributive concerns of justice. Matthew offered insights into his own connections with trees, especially when talking about his experience of walking a portion of the TMX project's route. He stated:

So I remember on the first pipeline route that I walked, there was a massive cedar that was tagged for removal. And the guy who orientated me, on the trail, again with having post-concussion syndrome, he did it once with me and when I went back the next time, I couldn't quite remember where I was supposed to go. So I was sort of feeling my way through. When I found that tree, I was like, I know it's this tree. And this tree had this really strong presence so I kind of hung out there for a while, which was cool. And then I brought a lot more people through there because that's where we started doing tours, was at that Stoney Creek site, right across on the road, where the pipeline was. So that tree really stands out.

Matthew describes the cedar tree as having "this really strong presence." It shaped his experience of walking the pipeline route and leading tours at the tree sit. This does not lead into ecological justice but signals a precursor: the recognition of a tree as alive and influential, having a presence, rather than a passive instrument, for example, that merely provides us with oxygen. Matthew's responsiveness to the tree is not explained with language of 'spirituality.' This experience does, however, complement his later explanation of spirituality as an "awareness and connection and respect and also being open to that. Energy, consciousness, connectivity between all things, between the natural world and animals and other people."

During his interview, James shared a memorable experience involving a hummingbird. As noted in the previous chapter, James considers himself to be spiritual but not religious. When asked if he considers himself to be religious, he answered in part: "I use the term spiritual rather than religious. I don't belong to a church at all. But I do believe there is something greater than what we have here, what we're experiencing. So. Yeah, I see. I see kind of a spirit and everything. And what we're seeing here is just a small piece of that. And there's a lot there's a lot more." Hummingbirds were discussed by many participants, particularly about an incident that delayed pipeline construction for five months. This halt was caused by a disturbance to a nesting Anna's hummingbird, who is protected under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* (1994). The temporary halt was achieved through the efforts of the grassroots volunteer organisation, the Community Nest



Finding Network, which successfully prompted an enforcement officer from Environment and Climate Change Canada to visit a Trans Mountain construction site in the Brunette River Conservation Area. When talking about looking for hummingbird nests, James explained:

I think there's a whole layer of communication going on that humans just disregard. And, and so, I was with a couple of people that were just kind of watching where the, the destruction was going to be happening. We were kind of trying, going in around Government Street looking for more hummingbird nests. And we were just being still, quieter, it was just three of us, just kind of enjoying the space. And the hummingbird just came. It just came and just sat right on a branch near us. And I know it knew why we were there. And I just, you know, it was just a connection. And then the, the people in the tree sits, it's often reported that hummingbirds and sometimes some other birds, too, would come way closer than they normally would to a human. And so, it feels like they were communicating to the people that were there to protect them. And it just felt like there was a level going on where they knew that something was up and that we weren't the enemy. We were there to help. I just got that feeling.

James reflects on a connection he perceived between the hummingbirds and “the people that were there to protect them.” This connection relies upon a view of hummingbirds of subjects, with awareness (“it knew why we were there”) and the ability to communicate. It was not verbal communication, but it still indicates what Plumwood (1993, 213) calls “a sharing of agency and consciousness” across members of different species.

Corrin also spoke about memorable encounters with animals. Corrin was introduced in the previous chapter, where her views on the TMX project as a “colonial extractive project” pushing through “unceded territory” were discussed. Corrin did not talk about harm to hummingbirds as part of her motivations for protesting the TMX project. She more generally indicated that harm to animals is not something she can easily incorporate into her activism. She stated: “I do have to have boundaries in this work and that's one of them. I can't look up sad animal stories like those starving polar bears in the Arctic. I consciously, I do not watch those videos because it's too upsetting. Like, that kind of stuff is overwhelming and I'm doing what I can.” Corrin nevertheless

offered insights into this aspect of her lifestance when she talked about her experiences, especially engaging in direct action at the tree sit. She stated:

So [my friend] was up in the skypod which was essentially just a hammock in the trees and it was really high up. And when he was being extracted, I was there. So we were singing to him. And then a hummingbird came and landed in the tree next to him. And we were all like, what is happening right now? Like, I was not raised to be religious, and I am not particularly religious, but I would be lying to you if I said I haven't had profound experiences in those woods. Like when I was sitting in front of the cherry picker, a rabbit came and sat on my foot and I was like, that's not normal. I was like, thank you bunny.

When later prompted about her (non)religious identity, Corrin clarified, "I don't really identify with anything" and explained:

I just think that the time that we are given is what we have. And I think that that's okay. I'm okay with it. I just want to live a meaningful life while I'm here. And I, the people I love, I love them so much, but it's okay like, when they're gone, I think they're gone, and that's okay. [Interviewer: You mean in the sense of no afterlife?] Yeah. Yeah, but I mean, through this work, I've met some really amazing people from faith groups who are really opposed to TMX and their support is invaluable.

Corrin described her experience at the tree sit as "profound," rather than somehow religious or spiritual. Yet Corrin still positions her encounters with the hummingbird and rabbit in relation to religion, highlighting the profoundness of these encounters. In doing so she suggests that these encounters are distinct from her ordinary (nonreligious) life, while demonstrating that profound encounters with animals do not presuppose religion or spirituality.

Another participant, Donna, a member of the Community Nest Finding Network (CNFN), also talked about hummingbirds. She also spoke about the story of the Anna's hummingbird who brought a temporary halt to pipeline construction, as mentioned above. Donna explained:

Ultimately [we] were able to leverage a law called the [*Migratory Birds Convention Act*], an old law that prevents the destruction or disturbance of nests during nesting season. And it's against the law to do that, but only for migratory birds. And the Anna's hummingbird is a migratory bird, and the wildlife conservation officer was brought to the site and he was able to witness the, it was just like, again, a miracle. He happened to witness the destruction of a tiny ... Anna's hummingbird, an active hummingbird nest and stopped work. [...] So that was a really big win. So, a hummingbird stopped the pipeline. A hummingbird. A tiny little momma hummingbird stopped the pipeline where humans couldn't. Where humans

didn't, couldn't do it. And yet this, and, you know, part of the success was of that action, of the hummingbird was the recognition that the hummingbird had agency, that the hummingbird, that nature has a voice, that nature has, nature, if we listen, tries to tell us how to look after them, they're not really silent or voiceless. That all beings have life. And there, you know, according to the Tsleil-Waututh there was a time when humans and animals and trees could talk to each other and listen to each other, and humans could listen more. We're able to be more open to listening.

This story of the Anna's hummingbird, as told by Donna, highlights themes of nonhuman agency and communication, along with human humility: a "hummingbird stopped the pipeline. A hummingbird. A tiny little momma hummingbird stopped the pipeline where humans couldn't." Part of the success of this experience, for Donna, is not just that pipeline construction was stopped. It was that humans acknowledged the "agency" of the hummingbird, which has a voice like the rest of nature. They are "not really silent or voiceless." Indicating her positionality as a settler, Donna distinguishes this knowledge from that of the Tsleil-Waututh people. Crucially, her perspective does not represent ecological justice, but its precursor of humility. Humility, as Wienhues (2020, 116) explains, creates "the necessary motivational grounding for agents to take the demands of ecological justice seriously."

Donna further indicated humility while talking about learning a lesson about connection from the hummingbird. She stated:

It wasn't a matter of just like, oh, let's go find a bird nest over there. [It] was through the intimacy of that connection that we were able to work with the hummingbird to stop the pipeline. [So] I think that's the lesson there is being able from our experience is, besides the hummingbird lesson, her lesson, that another bigger lesson is to, to just have a deep connection to a place. And, and with that deep connection, it's easier to know how to support that the health and wellbeing of all the creatures and the land and the waters in those places.

For Donna, finding the Anna's hummingbird nest was not a 'fluke.' It emerged from a connection that was fostered by a "community of us being there every single day." This connection allows for humans to "support ... the health and wellbeing of all the creatures and the land and the waters."

Such support is not framed in hierarchical terms. Humans worked *with* the hummingbird to stop the pipeline. The hummingbird is not simply a character in this story, but a protagonist. This collaboration further depicts a sense of nonhuman agency, in that the hummingbird was working alongside humans towards a shared objective.

Another participant, Sarama, represented themes of nonhuman communication in a way that connects to his spiritual identity. Sarama is a filmmaker whose documentary, *This Living Salish Sea* (2017), “explores the living treasures of the Salish Sea and the powerful undercurrents of resistance to the corporate fossil fuel agenda that threaten it,” particularly the Trans Mountain Expansion project.<sup>100</sup> Sarama explained that, after learning about the pipeline project, he thought: “well, one way for me to protest this was to actually make a film about it. And I realised that was my, what I could bring to the table was the fact that I was a diver and I was an artist.” When asked about whether he identifies as religious, Sarama stated:

No, I’m not religious. No, not at all. And I have a deep respect for science and evidence-based decisions. However, I do have a sense of spirituality, and I feel the connection to the universe that is not bound by materiality or what, what you see in front of you. So I feel a spiritual connection to things. [...] No, I’m not religious, but I do, I, you know, I exist as a spiritual being in the cosmos, you know. It’s a very different thing. You know, [I] don’t have a faith-based religion or anything like that.

Sarama contrasts religion with spirituality, the latter compatible with science, beyond materiality and constituting a connection to the universe. He also stated: “I’m not one of the people who think that, you know, humans are god’s gift to the planet.” Sarama continued:

I am a part of nature, and nature is part of me. And a lot of people have the idea that, well, there are humans and then there’s nature out there somewhere. Well, but in reality, we, we are, the earth is us and we are the earth. It’s not like, you know, the earth is out there and we’re separate from the earth. I mean, when you really think about it scientifically even, that’s the reality. And you say, oh, well, there’s people say there’s animals and then there’s humans. Well, guess what? We’re human animals, you know. So, my sense of spirituality with nature is, is a feeling of being connected with everything, with, with the planet. With

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<sup>100</sup> In 2017 the pipeline project was still owned by Kinder Morgan. See: <https://livingsalishsea.ca/wp/coming-this-fall-2014-the-feature-documentary-this-living-salish-sea/>.

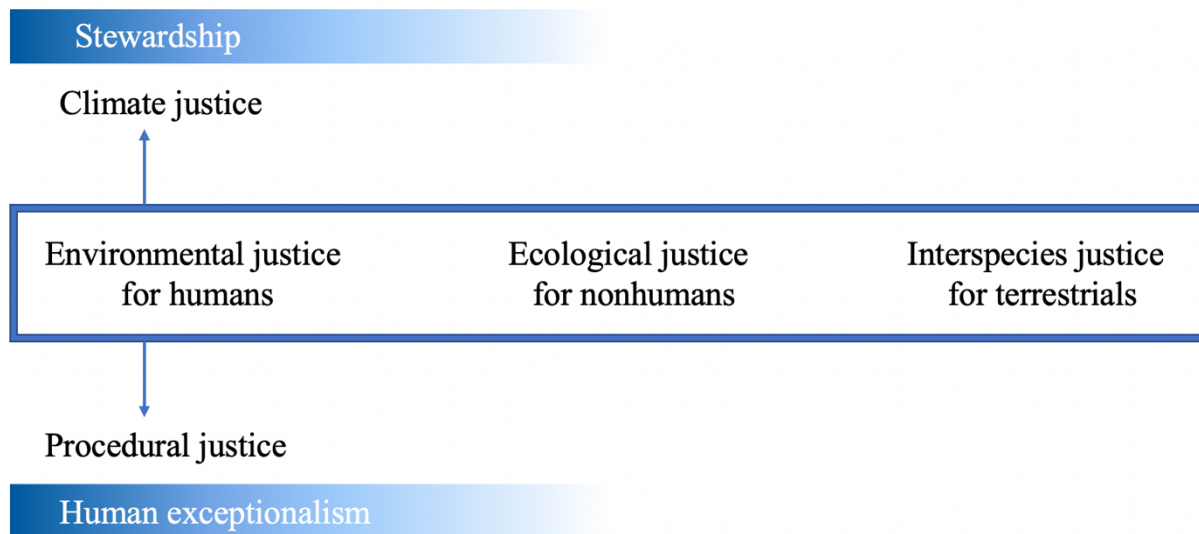
the energy of the planet, with the energy of the universe. And I'm out there running around with my camera and documenting things and trying to, you know, maybe educate people on my feeling and views that this is actually the planet speaking. You know, like there's people's saying, oh, animals, you know, if only animals could speak or we should, you know. Well, animals are speaking all the time. And trees are speaking all the time and we're just not listening. You know if we'd paid attention and spent some time alone quietly observing animals and actually feeling them and understanding the way trees work and actually feeling them, you arrive at a connection with, with nature that is there, that is always there.

For Sarama, that humans are connected to the earth is a 'scientific reality.' Feeling this connection is part of his "sense of spirituality with nature." It is through being an artist that Sarama works to share this connection with others. Hence both spirituality and artistry play a role in his lifestance, made clear by how he responded to the Trans Mountain Expansion project. His lifestance is also one characterised in part by humility. Sarama states that "there's people say there's animals and then there's humans. Well, guess what? We're human animals, you know."

Participant articulations of humility, nonhuman agency and intentionality are significant because they challenge anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, which both place humans at the centre of moral consideration. They do so by demonstrating qualities in other beings which are required in considerations of justice, such as having needs and communicating them. For Val Plumwood (2002, 169), it is openness to these qualities that is most important. She explains:

It is important to distinguish then between the use of intentionality as a criterion of individual moral worth (higher placement in a ranking of value or consideration) and what is more inclusive and different, the importance of our openness to the non-human other's potential for intentionality, including their potential for communicative exchange and agency. It is not that their degree of intentionality acts as a criterion of their qualifications or deservingness for receiving moral consideration from us, but that our willingness and ability to recognise the other as a potentially intentional being tells us whether we are open to potentially rich forms of interaction and relationship which have an ethical dimension. (Plumwood 2002, 181)

Plumwood highlights the importance of openness to nonhuman intentionality, not as a criterion for moral worth or consideration, but as an entry point to other interactions and relationships, including ones of justice.



#### DISCUSSION: ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE IN CONVERSATION WITH STEWARDSHIP

The above figure attempts to clarify the forms of justice included in this thesis and the following discussion. Participants represented the principles of two types of environmental justice: climate justice and procedural justice. Representations of climate justice focused on the distributive harms of climate change to younger and future humans. Representations of procedural justice focused on the mechanism of prior consent, as a distinct right of Indigenous peoples. In accordance with traditional liberal theories of justice, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, participant representations of climate justice and procedural justice centred on other human beings. An exception was made by Emma, featured in the introduction of this chapter, who talked about consent from other species. Participant representations of ecological justice were less common than those of environmental

justice. Most often, participants exhibited qualities that serve as precursors to ecological justice, particularly humility and the recognition of nonhuman agency and intentionality. Plumwood (2002) highlights these qualities in her conception of ecological justice, which she terms ‘interspecies justice.’ (What other scholars call environmental justice Plumwood terms ‘ecojustice’). In what follows, I discuss Plumwood’s (2002) approach to interspecies relations, while drawing it into conversation with the stewardship model. This discussion is intended to further demonstrate the significance of openness to nonhuman agency and intentionality as represented by participants.

The way in which an idea is conceptualised depends on the framework in which it is situated. Plumwood’s (2002, 188) idea of ‘interspecies justice’ is situated in a framework that eschews generalisations. It opposes any universal formula for interspecies relations, and it rejects homogenous conceptions of ‘the human’ and ‘nature.’ Plumwood (2002, 169) accordingly calls for decentring ‘the human’ in how we imagine our ethical relations with others. This process involves decentring human-like vocabularies and conceptions, including those of ‘rationality’ and ‘sentience.’ As indicated in Chapter 2, Plumwood (2002) is particularly critical of sentience as a criterion for moral consideration. For her it constitutes a ‘moral extensionist’ approach, whereby nonhumans are incorporated into the sphere of moral concern based on their similarity to humans (i.e., how sentient they appear). This approach extends the ‘human’ side of the moral human/nature dualism to include animals, or certain human-like animals, but it does not deconstruct it. As a result, only certain nonhumans receive equal moral consideration, based on their likeness to humans and to the exclusion of others. These ‘others’ for Plumwood (2002, 149) include plants, which she describes as “organised intentional and goal-directed beings which value their own lives and strive to preserve them in a variety of challenging circumstances.”

Plumwood (2002) proposes an alternative approach that requires a stance of ‘openness’ to all beings and entities. She does not question or ‘gatekeep’ who receives moral consideration, but rather focuses on how humans can equip themselves to engage in ethical relationships. As indicated above, this includes relations with what Western thought traditionally deems to be sentient and insentient life like plants. Seeking a point of commonality, which does not perpetuate human exceptionalism, Plumwood (1993, 134) turns to intentionality: “Intentionality is an umbrella under which shelter more specific criteria of mind such as sentience, choice, consciousness and goal-directedness (teleology). Thus intentionality provides a way to realise continuity without assimilation, to represent the staggering and exuberant complexity and heterogeneity of nature.” Plumwood (2002) calls for humans to be open to the intentionality of others, which is complemented by listening to them and remaining open to communicative exchange (Plumwood 2002, 194, 206).<sup>101</sup> These stances necessarily unfold within specific, situated relationships. That is, openness and attentiveness require us to engage with actual living beings—for instance, communicating with Anna’s hummingbirds themselves, rather than abstracting them from their contexts as ‘birds.’

Plumwood’s approach finds affinity with the terrestrial identity as proposed by Bruno Latour (2018) and outlined in the introduction of this thesis. The question for Latour is not whether one is human but terrestrial, dependent upon the soil where we live. Being terrestrial entails a situatedness that resonates with Plumwood’s emphasis on contextuality. We are not terrestrials

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<sup>101</sup> Regarding the importance of communication, Plumwood (2002, 188–89) states: “Once we get up the courage to go on through the gateway into the interspecies ethical community, we will need a range of ethical frameworks suitable for the contexts that we will encounter and the relationships we may establish. The first thing we are likely to need in our philosophical toolbox is a communicative ethic, for we will need to ask permission to enter the interspecies community, and once inside we will need such an ethic to pursue negotiation and participation in dialogical relationship with the other inhabitants. [...] Perhaps the most important task for human beings is not to search the stars to converse with cosmic beings but to learn to communicate with the other species that share this planet with us.”



because we belong to the earth, conceived in totality, but because we belong to and rely upon for survival a specific place on earth. Crucially, the shared identity of ‘terrestrial’ does not erase difference in the name of singularity or homogenisation. It offers a non-anthropocentric way for humans to position themselves as they enter interspecies relationships. It ultimately challenges human-centredness, which for Plumwood (2002, 114) is “first and foremost a question of justice,” as it constitutes an obstacle to achieving interspecies justice. Plumwood (2002, 194) thus calls for “reconstructing human identity in ways that acknowledge our animality, decentre rationality and abandon exclusionary concepts of rationality.” These aims are accomplished by ‘the terrestrial,’ which shifts the human away from rationality or sentience and re-centres them on the soil on which they live with billions of others.

In more practical terms, engaging as a terrestrial invites reconsideration of how we share our habitats with other terrestrials. This involves matters of distributive justice, in regard to how space is distributed or shared among species. Plumwood (2002, 117) states: “Interspecies distributive justice principles should stress the need to share the earth with other species (including difficult and inconvenient ones like snakes, crocodiles and bears – animals that are predators of humans or of animals under human protection) and provide adequate habitat for species life and reproduction.” As terrestrials, the task does not lie in how we share ‘the earth’ in totality with other species, but how to best cohabit with other terrestrials in our dwelling places, including how we share it. Latour (2018) states that “we must agree to define a dwelling place as that on which a terrestrial depends for its survival, while asking what other terrestrials also depend on it?”<sup>102</sup> This does not entail erasing species distinctions or ignoring the fact that some animals pose inconveniences.<sup>103</sup> Instead, it repositions the human to acknowledge shared dependencies,

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<sup>102</sup> Italics removed from original.

<sup>103</sup> In the words of Lynn White (1978, 109): “We must extend compassion to rattlesnakes and not just to koala bears.”

particularly with those who share our dwelling place and whose life and reproduction make our own survival possible.<sup>104</sup> Such considerations do not necessitate a framework of justice. The point is rather that the idea and language of ‘terrestrial’ offers one way to approach ecological or interspecies justice, as proposed by Plumwood (2002), that eschews human exceptionalism.

Ecological justice can take shape in other conceptual frameworks, including one of stewardship. For instance, Steven Bouma-Prediger (2019) proposes a model of stewardship, which he terms ‘earthkeeping,’ that necessitates justice as a virtue. Bouma-Prediger (2019, 184) states: “Because the God of the Bible is just, those who worship God should be just. Of particular concern are those most likely to be treated unjustly—namely, the voiceless, the powerless, the homeless. And while this concern is most often focused on humans, it also includes those nonhuman creatures whose voices remain silent to human ears.” He further talks about human humility and the flourishing of all creatures, using language that resonates with theories of ecological justice. These principles manifest within a broader framework of earthkeeping, however, where humans, as ‘the keepers,’ remain exceptional in their calling to care for ‘the rest’ of creation. Following Plumwood, Wienhues (2020, 41) cautions that, in constructing interspecies relations, “we should become more suspicious of a ranking (1) the more it relies on a broad generalisation, and (2) the closer it is associated with moral relevance.” While humans share characteristics with other creatures, the earthkeeping model fundamentally relies upon broad generalisations, positioning humans as *the* keepers in creation. Regardless of their diversity, the rest of creation is eventually homogenised into the category of ‘the kept’ based on their not being human.

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<sup>104</sup> Latour (2018) explains: “A territory, in fact, is not limited to a single type of agent. It encompasses the entire set of animate beings – far away or nearby – whose presence has been determined – by investigation, by experience, by habit, by culture – to be indispensable to the survival of a terrestrial.”

Elizabeth A. Johnson (2014) presents a similar but more open approach to human responsibility in creation. She likewise talks about the “flourishing of all creation” while positioning humans within a community:

Community becomes the radical context which puts the special role of human dominion, best understood as stewardship and responsible care, in its rightful place as one among many important exchanges we have with the natural world [...] Human responsibility is exercised within creation, in relation to other fellow creatures who are created as we are, and upon whom we depend for our own lives. As a role among creatures, it is shepherding for which we are ultimately responsible to God. (Johnson 2014, 280).

Johnson (2014, 240, 268) asserts that “the human species is a singularity,” expressed in the above idea “shepherding” creation. Yet for Johnson this role is merely one within a much larger community, noting that “stewardship and responsible care” are “one among many important exchanges we have with the natural world” (Johnson 2014, 280). Accordingly, she softens the traditional emphasis placed on stewardship in theology, acknowledging its significance but not endorsing it as an all-encompassing model or framework.

At the same time, Johnson (2014) seems to affirm a weaker notion of human exceptionalism, reframed in terms of ‘singularity.’<sup>105</sup> She states, for example:

[H]uman beings find themselves uniquely emplaced on the planet. Bodily earthlings who like all other living creatures interact with their environment as they are born, wax, wane, and die, they are yet able mentally to transcend any particular time and place [...] Religious teachers add that they are created in the divine image and likeness, being a complex unity whose body comes from the dust of the earth and whose soul is breathed into them by God, each one gifted with unique dignity. The point is, the human species is a singularity. Johnson (2014, 240)

Johnson (2014, 240–41) is clear that human beings are part of a community of creation, but they are not “simply one more sibling.” They “belong in the first instance as fellow creatures alongside God’s other creatures,” while remaining exceptional in their “unique capacities for language,

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<sup>105</sup> Plumwood (2002, 115) clarifies that “just as other forms of supremacism and centrism, for example those based on race and gender, appear in various forms and guises, so there are weaker and stronger, more upfront and more subtle forms of human-centredness.”

reason, morality, and love” (Johnson 2014, 241, 272). This unique status does not prohibit humans from extending moral consideration to other species, as well as ecosystems, with Johnson (2014, 257) describing such considerations in terms of justice (she specifically uses the term ‘ecojustice’). It remains unclear whether all of creation is considered morally equal or if some beings possess greater intrinsic worth. As a result, her emphasis on human singularity could lead to anthropocentrism, if this ‘singularity’ is used to prioritise humans in moral decision-making.

As demonstrated by Bouma-Prediger (2019) and Johnson (2014), ecological justice may be included within a model of stewardship if being a good steward, earthkeeper or shepherd involves seeking justice for nonhumans. However, at a conceptual level, a fundamental tension exists between the stewardship model and theories of ecological justice, as found in works on environmental philosophy like that of Plumwood (2002). When nonhumans are included in the community of justice, either as individuals or collectives, they are not treated as existing under human responsibility, stewardship or care, but as specific moral subjects with a right to flourish for their own ends, valued no more or less than that of human subjects. Ecological justice ultimately opposes the homogenised, hierarchical division between humans and ‘the rest’ that is embedded in the stewardship model. Plumwood (2002, 117) makes clear: “We must take much more seriously concepts of distributive justice for non-humans, as not inferior or lower in priority to human justice issues.” Such clear statements on inferiority or priority are absent when Bouma-Prediger (2019) and Johnson (2014) mention justice. It may be that, in a stewardship model, all of creation is owed justice, but not necessarily in equal measure. Moreover, as indicated above, Plumwood’s (2002, 169; 1993, 155) emphasis on contextuality means that, in some cases, alternatives to justice—such as care, negotiation, solidarity or friendship—may be better suited for

interspecies relationships. Plumwood does not use the term ‘steward,’ but there is space to consider it as another contextual response, as opposed to an all-encompassing framework.

Some participants, like Robert, positioned principles of ecological justice in relation to the stewardship model. Robert has attended various protests against the Trans Mountain Expansion project in an effort to bear witness. He noted that “the most important thing you can give to someone or a cause is your presence.” Referencing deep ecologist and Buddhist Joanna Macy, he likewise stated that “the most important thing one can do at this time is to be fully present to everything that’s happening in the world today. And I very much subscribe to that that.”<sup>106</sup> Robert made various references to religion during our interview, especially Buddhism. When I asked him if he considers himself to be religious, he answered:

Our dear friend Rumi [the Sufi poet] again says religion is the quest for inner knowledge. So of course I’m religious. Of course I’m, I have a quest for inner knowledge. And I think, the word religion and, and spiritual have a false separation between them so that religious, spiritual but not religious, I understand completely what they’re saying, because when people say that it means the way our spiritual church has been organised around certain, well, has brought together certain organisations that believe that they’re special or separate from other ones. And the separateness itself is what’s, what’s, what can cause such evil, such diminishing and the, the agency of other beings.

Robert also referenced agency when I asked him what he means by the term ‘stewardship.’ He had noted that dominant Western culture has “lost track” of “what it means to be stewards of the land.”

Robert explained:

The Buddhists talk about the Three Jewels, the Buddha, which basically means having an awareness, some sort of pure awareness. And there’s the Sangha, the community, which means the interbeing of all appearances, the sacred interconnection that everything has. And, and then the Dharma is the kind of the, the law, the practice that connects the two. So that, that Dharma or community is, is us. It’s not just people walking around, things with two eyes and two legs and funny noses. It’s, it’s everything. And so when you, when you start looking at what is it that’s interconnected, well you start, you start seeing it’s all of us. And so how, how can we not, how can we not feel devastated if some particular being, a bird or a mammal or a fish, whatever, goes extinct? You know, creation is, is snuffed out because of our bad practices. So being stewards is avoiding that. I believe in good and evil.

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<sup>106</sup> See pages 38–39 for a discussion of the philosophy and movement of Deep Ecology.

Good is where one works to create conditions that facilitate a growth of and understanding and awareness of other beings of themselves, okay? So, let's say a person, good person is creating an environment where that person can, you facilitate their growing up and seeing their own abilities and their own skills. And that's not for me to say what those skills are, it's for them to say. I create that, help to create the conditions which nurture that. Evil is inhibiting it. And the same goes with animals, like the little birds that come to my feeder, especially during the snowstorms, because it was so, so hard on them, because we got so much snow even, even in Vancouver. My facilitating them is, is putting out my bird feeder and helping to create conditions where they can do the things that birds do. You know, they sing, they sing because they have a song, not because they have a message. They just sing because they sing. And that's as far as I can tell, and this is, this is my job to just to support them. And then the same with trees and anything else. So that stewardship is just that nurturing their, their health and vibrancy and ability.

Like other participants, Robert noted that humans are interconnected with other beings, but he referenced religious ideas to do so. Humans are part of the Sangha along with the rest of creation. Thinking we are “special or separate” (something associated with ‘organised religion’) leads to “evil.” Yet Robert does not refer to sin or karma while elaborating upon good and evil. He rather refers to the immanence of functionings (like a bird’s singing) and capacities or conditions (a bird feeder). Robert also signified an openness to listening and intentionality: “And that’s not for me to say what those skills are, *it’s for them to say.*”<sup>107</sup>

Robert’s understanding of stewardship encompasses facilitating the “health and vibrancy and ability” of other beings. This view of stewardship also reflects a positive interpretation of ecological justice. Whereas a negative interpretation requires humans not to inhibit flourishing, a positive interpretation entails actively enabling flourishing, even if non-flourishing is not caused by any human agents (Wienhues 2020, 65). Any snowstorm that negatively impacts a bird’s ability to feed is not Robert’s fault, but he still offers the conditions the birds need to “do the things that birds do” amidst the snow. Moreover, Robert challenged a notion of human exceptionalism, in

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<sup>107</sup> Emphasis added.

which specialness is predicated superiority or supremacy, which act as barriers to justice for nonhumans. He explained:

And when we view ourselves as special, that's, that's really B.S.. I mean, there are, well, we can argue in terms of consciousness, that we, we clearly are a species that has a sense of self-awareness. How much do whales have it? I don't know. So I'm not going to start saying us versus everything else. But we have to a certain self-awareness, particularly if we just sit in silence rather than try to work it out. And with that, it puts us in a position where we, we, we see that we, we have considerable agency. And then that agency can be used either for Trans Mountain projects or to, or to try to facilitate and try to undo the harms.

Humans not only have agency but self-awareness of this agency. He is careful to not turn this awareness into an "us versus everything else" hierarchy. Humans "are a species that has a sense of self-awareness," but not necessarily the only one. A fixation on self-awareness is problematic when it acts as an extensionist criterion, admitting only the more 'human-like' (i.e., aware) animals into the sphere of moral concern (Plumwood 2002, 147). But Robert does not ascribe moral weight to having such awareness or agency. He acknowledges it and is rather more critical of how it is used, including for "Trans Mountain projects."

Stephen likewise raised the question of human specialness. As noted in Chapter 5, Stephen is a member of the Prayer Circle and attends a Christian church, but he did not self-identify himself as Christian or religious when asked about his identity. This complexity is reflected in his "struggle" with the idea of stewardship. Stephen stated:

This is where I do run into, I do struggle with, well, the Christian concept of, well, in first Genesis, dominion and the, but of course, in second Genesis, we talk about stewardship and, I think that's a remnant certainly of Christian faith that still needs a lot more wrestling to yeah, to put us in our place in the in the order of things. There are many examples within the Christian tradition where people have had revelations about, you know, this necessary connection to, to all other beings and, and, and I think certain aspects of our, you know, modern behavior as a faith community reflect that. But it is, yeah, I would, I do struggle with, is there something special about us? You know, about us two-legged ones who have the ability to, or some of us have had the ability to, you know, write great operas and, and paint a painting that can move you to tears just by looking at it. And, but I think that's a

little bit of arrogance. There's a level of arrogance in there that, and blindness for many people.

Similar to other participants, Stephen indicates humility by being critical of human arrogance, which may even amount to a sort of ecological "blindness." Again, humility does not amount to ecological justice, but it is a precondition. He refers to operas and painting, indicating that human creativity is a marker of what makes us distinct. But he balances this perspective by animalising us as the "two-legged ones," while also directly questioning whether human abilities grant us a special status within "the order of things."

Mary demonstrated humility when she talked about consciousness beyond the human. As discussed in Chapter 4, Mary made clear that her primary motivation for opposing the TMX project is her children. She also spoke at length about climate change and its harms on younger generations, including their mental health. Insights into how Mary thinks about nonhumans was gained when I asked her whether she considers herself to be religious. She answered:

I'm not religious in that I'm not, certainly was not raised religious. So my mom, I was never baptised. I come from sort of a Christian, what I would generally call a culturally Christian background. So I certainly spent time in the United Church growing up. My dad has some mental illness and part, it's funny, I shouldn't tie religion to mental illness, but for him and his life, different times in his life, and part of it's related to much of his life, is kind of punctuated by illness and wellness. But he often comes out of wellness or recovering from illness, the United Church was very important for him, and so I was sort of brought to the church as part of that, I would say. But I always felt very, like I, whenever they were talking, I just couldn't get, you know, like I got it from like, again, social justice or like we're, we want to be good people. But in terms of faith it never connected with me. And I always kind of lacking for that. But my mom got very involved in Unitarianism more recently, when she's really not been religious at all through her life. And I guess I would consider myself spiritual in that I believe that the world is very soulful, but yeah, so I don't know.

When asked to clarify what she means by "soulful," Mary responded:

I study the brain and I've studied things like consciousness and free will and I don't think that's a human property. I think even in, from the scientific definition, it's hard for me to say 'I certainly do not believe in all the animals, don't have consciousness or don't have free will.' And people who think that, I think it's just, I can't even start. Or you know, at



one point we thought that babies couldn't feel pain. It's like, from a scientific perspective, it's ridiculous. Personally, I feel that. But like the idea that a tree doesn't have consciousness, like we can't explain its consciousness because it doesn't have a brain. So clearly consciousness isn't just about a brain. Trees learn, you know, in incredible ways. Mushrooms learn in incredible ways. And I love the scientific work around that. I'm very inspired by it, but I've always felt this arbitrary idea that like humans have souls or have consciousness or all of these things and like animals and plants do not, is very arbitrary and it's never made sense to me. And so at this point, I kind of reject it. And I don't know about rocks and mountains. But I'm happy to think of them as soulful.

Mary talks about nonhuman learning and consciousness, which, like communication, requires intentionality. She does not limit these factors to animals, suggesting that trees have consciousness without a brain ("clearly consciousness isn't just about a brain"). Further, while Mary used the term 'soul,' her lifestance as someone working in the sciences is evident. The soul as expressed by Mary is not associated with religion, the divine or transcendence, but with the immanence and intentionality of learning, feeling, free will and consciousness at large.

Valerie, introduced in Chapter 5, also represented humility in a way that reflects her lifestance. Her Christian identity and scientific knowledge were often intertwined when she talked about the TMX project. For instance, when asked if she plans to continue to oppose the TMX project, and continue her involvement in the Prayer Circle, Valerie answered:

I think, yes, I think so. Yeah. I'll support it. And, and, and encouraging others to really sort of discern where their mind, their heart is, with respect to the ecological justice concerns, which do relate to climate justice and the wider connectivity we have as human beings within an ecosystem that we are all a part of. And again, this comes from the social and the environmental science piece that we know the human, humanoids and the human species is but a small, small fragment of this wider, bigger ecosystem. And how dare we think that we can take over and we can dominate and, and take control over something that is not for us to control, but to take care of. And those are teachings that are very, very, very important to me. And I, I seek to walk humbly and to seek justice and to have kindness in my heart, as Micah 6:8 does, speak up.

Valerie's scientific and religious perspectives come together in her articulation of "ecological justice concerns." Like other participants, she highlights humility, but does so by referencing scientific knowledge and the biblical prophet Micah, demonstrating a lifestance shaped by both

science and religion. Later in the interview, Valerie framed her opposition to the pipeline project as part of an “ecological justice quest,” and again made clear that humility is an important part of this quest. She stated:

As I press forward, the idea that we are all part of a bigger ecosystem, that we as humans must know of our humble place in this ecosystem. And some would say, oh, why would you equate us in the same light as being the same as a dog or same as an insect, or same as a minnow or an orca? And I said, no, not the same. But I would say that we, we need to know that we interrelate with one another and that we are connected to one another and that we are codependent on one another. So, you know, we all know about the food chain and we claim that we’re the top of the food chain. Well, I mean, that comes by us knowing that we have the assurances of knowing that we have brainpower and language and, and all the things that we can do as humans. But I think there’s far little attention paid to the way we intuit and communicate one another, with one another from, from our source and from our heart and, and, and engage with nature, even in that light. I think meditation practices, prayer, that time of being in oneness with nature is part of this quest. And I think we’ve gotten too far removed from it. And it’s to our detriment. We have gotten so disconnected that we don’t know what cause, what harm we are causing. And I sometimes wonder it, and I’m pretty sure it’s done intentionally in terms of the corporate rule around bringing workers and lifting them out. Bring in another. They’re not attached to the land or the resources that they are extracting because they’re in and out. They don’t see the long-term consequences. And that is done purposely.

Valerie distinguishes humans from other animals primarily through their brainpower and language.

This advantage does not have to facilitate disconnection and harm. Instead, it can help to foster relationships based on connection and care. Recall her statement that nature is “not something to control, but something to care for.” Following Valerie, perhaps ‘care’ is a more fitting concept than ‘stewardship’ to accompany justice. One must care about the flourishing of nonhumans to work towards ecological justice, whether they do so as caretakers/stewards or not.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explored how participants represented principles of ecological justice and its precursors. Sometimes these principles were expressed when participants discussed their views of

humans in an abstract sense. Other times, they were revealed when participants discussed memorable experiences of engaging in activism. Notions of humility, nonhuman intentionality, and interspecies communication were not divided among participants based on their religious or nonreligious identities. These identities may have shaped how such concepts were articulated, but they did not determine whether they were used. Yet participants did not express these concepts uniformly. They did so in ways that resonated with their own lifestances, offering insights into how (non)religion shapes understandings of humans in relation to other terrestrials. This chapter also compared ecological justice to the stewardship model, seeking to demonstrate a conceptual tension between them. Sometimes participants articulated notions of stewardship with reference to religion, while other times, they challenged ideas of human exceptionalism or ‘specialness’ as found in the stewardship model. In the next chapter, the conclusion of this thesis, I return to the concepts of ecological justice and stewardship, drawing them into conversation with nonreligion. I propose that nonreligion, as a social force, may be creating space for principles of ecological justice to manifest in terrestrial relations during the planetary crisis.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relevance of religion and nonreligion for terrestrial relations during the planetary crisis. Terrestrials for Bruno Latour (2018) not only inhabit a dwelling place, but they engender it by way of their own interests and agencies. This process was indicated by Lynn White in his 1967 article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” He stated: “All forms of life modify their contexts. The most spectacular and benign instance is doubtless the coral polyp. By serving its own ends, it has created a vast undersea world favorable to thousands of other kinds of animals and plants. Ever since man became a numerous species he has affected his environment notably” (White 1967, 1203). White was concerned with the origins of the ecological crisis, placing the burden of guilt for it on Christian dogma, the underlying cause being man’s divinely sanctioned mastery over nature. For White, this status underlies the modern marriage of science and technology, which enables humans to modify their environments in unprecedented ways. Yet humans are not exceptional in modifying their contexts. White situates his observation in a historical trajectory shared with other species, including the coral polyp, who sustain the conditions of their underwater dwelling place. The dwelling place of concern in this thesis is threatened by the Trans Mountain Expansion project. It is one example of how (some) humans have altered their dwelling place to serve their own ends and with planetary implications.

The Trans Mountain Expansion project emerges against a social backdrop of settler colonialism, which encompasses the political processes that led to the construction and operation of the pipeline project. In addition to settler colonialism, a lingering history of Christian hegemony, and the increasing number of people who are nonreligious, shape the social context in which opposition to the TMX project has occurred. Taking these factors into account, this thesis has aimed to avoid what Willis Jenkins (2013, 4) calls the ‘cosmological temptation,’ in which focus

is placed on religious cosmology while “concrete problems” and “dynamics of cultural change” are overlooked. White’s article is again relevant here. Though he was concerned with Christian cosmology, White (1967, 1203) balanced this focus with reference to terrestrials, like the coral polyp in its “vast undersea world,” or oxen used to draw field plows. White (1967, 1205) concluded: “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves *in relation to things around them.*”<sup>108</sup>

The TMX project serves as an entry point to consider how individuals think about themselves in relation to the world around them. This approach does not require beliefs or cosmology to be abandoned, but a conscious effort to not be swept away by ‘big thinking’ at the expense of concrete problems and social change. The participants featured in this thesis were not solely asked about their thoughts on ‘humans’ and ‘nature.’ Their opposition to the TMX project worked as a sort of anchor, keeping this thesis situated in the lived experiences and perspectives of those responding to a material condition of the planetary crisis. The lifestances approach introduced in Chapter 5 also helps to avoid the cosmological temptation. We could talk about ‘nonreligious cosmology,’ but doing so conceptually privileges religion by relying upon a prior ‘religious cosmology’ from which it must be distinguished. The same might be said for ‘nonreligious worldviews’ and ‘religious worldviews,’ or ‘lived nonreligion’ and ‘lived religion’ (the latter avoids a focus on belief but still privileges religion). The lifestances approach is intended to account for both religion and nonreligion on common ground, while offering space for other identities that shape how we live in our dwelling places, such as being a settler.

The use of environmental and ecological justice theories complements the lifestances approach. In the context of this thesis, principles of environmental and ecological justice offered

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<sup>108</sup> Emphasis added.

a structured yet flexible way to locate and interpret the terrestrial relations articulated by participants. The term ‘flexible’ denotes the space allowed for religion and nonreligion to appear as second-order concepts in the analysis and interpretation of data. Environmental and ecological justice, as noted in Chapter 3, have received little attention in the study of religion. Religion makes an appearance in the environmental philosophy literature, but it is not treated as crucial to cultivating a non-anthropocentric ethic (as found in the religion and ecology literature). In this sense environmental philosophers have long challenged the sentiment that religion is tied to morality, which has recently been taken up by scholars of nonreligion (Ezzy 2021). While environmental and ecological justice can be discussed without any reference to religion, this thesis demonstrates how religion can be included in empirical considerations of justice. In addition, as noted in Chapter 1, the use of ecological justice in this thesis helps to confront a norm of anthropocentrism in the sociological study of religion. This norm has only recently been challenged (Beaman and Strumos 2024), demonstrating a lack of critical reflexivity in the field, as well as a passive endorsement of the human exceptionalism implicated in the planetary crisis.

This thesis was written during a time of heightened public awareness of the planetary crisis, especially but not only climate change. Canadian society is concurrently experiencing a ‘new diversity,’ which includes a rise in nonreligion and renewed settler awareness of the legacies of colonisation (Beaman 2017). There is also a decline in commitment to Christianity, accompanied by a Christian residue stemming from Canada’s Christian past. How do these factors shape the ways humans construct their terrestrial relations? In what follows, I summarise the main findings of the analysis as presented in Chapters 4 to 6. The question driving the analysis was: to what extent do the perspectives of (non)religious individuals engaged in activism against the TMX project represent principles of environmental and ecological justice? These two notions of justice

offered a lens through which to locate, understand and describe the moral relationships, both human and nonhuman, articulated by participants. In addition to offering a conceptual framework, environmental and ecological justice theories, like the lifestances approach, further helped to keep this thesis grounded in concrete problems and social change. This point is clarified at the end of this chapter, when the ‘so what’ of this thesis for religion, nonreligion and ecology is presented in conclusion.

## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The most prominent form of environmental justice located in the interview data was climate justice. When explaining the harms of the TMX project and their motivations for opposing it, participants often expressed concern for younger and future humans living in the climate crisis. Sometimes this was articulated in terms of future generations or youth, while other times participants referred to specific children or grandchildren. Some did both. Participants in these discussions often mentioned science or spoke about climate change as individuals working in the sciences. Yet their articulations of climate-related harms were not merely framed as problematic for going against ‘the science.’ The distributive harms of climate change were seen as a human concern, disproportionately impacting younger and future humans. I aimed to demonstrate that this moral interpretation of climate change, framed in terms of climate justice—especially intergenerational climate justice—supports Mike Hulme’s (2017) view that climate is linked to morality. Hulme (2017, 50) argues that contemporary Western societies largely understand climate change to be caused by natural processes but “tied to the behaviours of morally accountable human actors.” I suggested that this link is supported by a social imaginary shaped by Christianity, which helps to explain the prevalence of anthropocentric climate justice principles in the interview data.

In the discussion of Chapter 4, I argued that a model of stewardship is detectable in participant expressions of climate justice. Whereas theocentric accounts of stewardship hold that humans act on behalf of god, participants demonstrated a model whereby humans act on behalf of more vulnerable humans in a climate-changed world. Crucial to this argument is that climate change was not framed as a terrestrial concern, but as a primarily human one. Such a focus on humans is likewise seen in the foundational works of John Rawls and Brian Barry, who held that only human beings are entitled to justice. They do not exclude animals or nature from moral consideration, but they do claim that nonhumans lack the capacities necessary to be defined as subjects of justice. Rawls (1999, 448) stated: “A correct conception of our relations to animals and to nature would seem to depend upon a theory of the natural order and our place in it.” Such reasoning evokes the ‘great chain of being,’ which, in both theological and philosophical accounts, positions humans above the rest of the material world of plants and animals. In this way traditional liberal theories of justice, like the stewardship model, constitute a form of human exceptionalism. Participant perspectives were not exclusively defined by stewardship, and their concerns were not exclusively human; far from it. In the particular context of climate change, however, emphasis was repeatedly placed on harm distributed to other humans, especially younger and future ones.

I attribute this finding to a Christian residue in society, in particular the lingering influence of Christianity on morality. While I cannot validate this claim, I can assert that participant notions of climate justice did not pose a challenge to the stewardship model. The ways in which they articulated moral relations during the climate crisis, between present/adult and future/younger humans, draws from a framework that reflects the anthropocentric and binary thinking of stewardship. Yet religious language or ideas were not present as first-order concepts when participants discussed climate change. The place of Christianity in this argument results from an



interpretation of data that accounts for religion as a second-order concept. By drawing climate justice into conversation with religion, particularly stewardship and human exceptionalism, it may be argued that I position climate justice as a form of nonreligion. This line of thinking results from a relational understanding of nonreligion that accounts for scholarly construction (Quack and Schuh 2017). In more practical terms, participant representations of climate justice may be one example of how religion remains subtly folded into spaces that are not overtly or definingly religious. This includes how we imagine and enact our moral relations during the climate crisis.

The second most common form of environmental justice in the interview data was procedural justice, in relation to Indigenous nations who did not offer their prior consent to the TMX project. Participants who expressed this notion of justice did so while differentiating themselves as settlers. They were not concerned that they also did not consent to the TMX project being built in their communities, which sit on unceded Coast Salish territories. The right to consent was presented as belonging to Indigenous peoples, and its violation served as motivation for settler opposition to the pipeline project. This finding demonstrates that, more broadly, principles of procedural justice characterise how some settlers understand Indigenous rights in postcolonial society. Other participants, who did not articulate principles of procedural justice, still positioned themselves as settlers when discussing their experiences of activism. For some, these experiences were characterised by learning, including learning from (and following) Indigenous leadership, learning about the injunction system, and learning what it means to be living on unceded land. Participants did not view their dwelling place as apolitical, therefore, but as one shaped by settler colonialism, which they have come to understand more deeply through their opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project.

In the Chapter 5 discussion, I suggested that the concept of lifestances captures how participant settler identities may or may not intersect with (non)religion. The advantage of the lifestances approach is that it does not prioritise religion or nonreligion, allowing for a more accurate understanding of how (non)religion may or may not interact with other identities that comprise one's lifestance. It offers a situated and balanced approach to capturing religion and nonreligion in everyday life. In the context of this thesis, religious and nonreligious identities were key to how some participants situated themselves as settlers in their activism. In other instances (non)religion did not appear in these discussions at all, even if participants identified themselves as religious, nonreligious or spiritual at another point in the interview. If religion is part of one's lifestance, therefore, it does not necessarily serve as a primary identity or lens through which all else arises or takes shape. I suggested that the lifestances approach is more attuned to such variability than the concept of 'worldviews,' due to its disposition towards belief and totality thinking (both of which are well suited for the cosmological temptation).

Among participants, the most common manifestation of (non)religion in relation to being a settler was the prayer circle that assembled at the Watch House, constructed under the leadership of Tsleil-Waututh First Nation members and elders. It is through being a settler actively opposed to the TMX project, and someone who engages in prayer, that contributed to one's participation in this group. While prayer is often considered a religious practice, and the prayer circle is inspired by a Quaker tradition, it included participants who were spiritual but not religious or did not readily identify themselves as religious or Christian. Hence the Prayer Circle was a site where the nuanced (non)religious identities of participants intersected with that of being a settler. In other participant expressions of their settler identities—including those who demonstrated notions of procedural justice—there were no evident ties to religion or spirituality. The key point is that being a settler

was the most consistent identity among participants, with religion and spirituality sometimes being woven into expressions of settler identities, but not always and not in articulations of procedural justice. Religion is not always a primary reference point in how people think about and relate to those around them in a given context, like that of being a settler opposed to an oil pipeline project.

In Chapter 6, I aimed to demonstrate how participant lifestances were further revealed in their concerns for nonhumans impacted by the TMX project. Sometimes these concerns clearly resonated with notions of ecological justice. Most often, however, participants articulated precursors to ecological justice, namely openness to nonhuman intentionality, especially in the form of nonhuman communication. Such openness is predicated by values of humility and respect, which “can create the necessary motivational grounding for agents to take the demands of ecological justice seriously” (Wienhues 2020, 116). Religion appeared in these discussions by way of the language used by participants (such as ‘soul’ and ‘sacred’) as well as Christian or Buddhist ideas to which some referred. Religion offered a repertoire, therefore, from which some participants could draw to express their views of nonhumans as subjects with their own functionings. Other participants did not mention religion or spirituality, further indicating that openness to nonhuman intentionality can be part of the lifestances of religious and nonreligious individuals. Lifestances entail how people engage with the world around them. For the participants featured in this thesis, this engagement not only challenged notions of human exceptionalism and mastery over nature, but reflected values of respect, humility and equality between humans and nonhumans, which was seen, for instance, in their accounts of interspecies communication.

The division between environmental justice for humans, and ecological justice for ‘the rest,’ maps onto the human/nature division embedded in the stewardship model. Arguably, both are a legacy of human exceptionalism, in that humans must maintain a separation from everything

else, even when moral considerability is extended beyond the human species in terms of care or justice. It is not merely that humans (like all other species) are different than others, but that this difference is used to define humans as categorically different *against all others*. As indicated earlier in this thesis, this division between ‘humans’ and ‘the rest’ has been challenged by conceptions of multispecies justice (Celermajer et al. 2021). In this thesis, differentiating between different forms of justice proved effective in capturing the distinctions made by participants. Their articulations of justice principles were not uniform and varied depending on the relations they discussed. Notions of climate justice were focused on younger and future humans; procedural justice was geared towards Indigenous nations; and ecological justice and its precursors were applied to nonhuman beings directly impacted by the construction of the TMX project. Accordingly, younger and future humans, the rights of Indigenous peoples, and nonhuman beings were all treated as morally considerable by participants, but the ways in which they were considered varied and resonated with different notions of justice.

Enacting justice in a non-anthropocentric manner requires justice to be contextual and relational, meaning that there is no ‘one size fits all’ formula to addressing distributive harms in human or interspecies relationships (Wienhues 2020). Otherwise, the specificities of other beings are not considered but denied in favour of hegemonic reasoning, which has historically been defined by human interests and needs, working to uphold human privilege (Plumwood 2002). Although participant representations of justice were contextual, they did not reflect a conception of justice that challenges divisions between humans and nonhumans. Distributive harms to nonhumans were largely excluded from participant discussions of climate change, for instance, which as Wienhues (2020, 137–38) indicates, complements a lack of consideration among scholars as to whether the impact of climate change on nonhuman life is an issue of justice (see Schlosberg

2012 for an exception). At the same time, participants framed the nonhumans of their dwelling place—or fellow terrestrials impacted by the Trans Mountain Expansion project—as subjects with intentionality, agency and their own functionings. Again, openness to these qualities in other terrestrials is required to achieve ecological justice, while more generally posing a challenge to anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism.

## THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION AND NONRELIGION

The research presented in this thesis indicates that religion is relevant to terrestrial relations in two ways. The first occurs at the level of the individual. The ways in which participants articulated their perspectives of the TMX project, as well as their experiences of actively opposing it, sometimes referenced with religion. I have aimed to highlight such occurrences throughout this thesis. It was seen when participants discussed the Prayer Circle, for instance, or used terms such as ‘creation,’ ‘sacred’ and ‘soul.’ This language was not only used by religious participants, but by those who self-identified as spiritual or did not clearly identify themselves at all. The religious and nonreligious identities of participants did not influence whether they represented principles of climate justice, procedural justice, or ecological justice and its conceptual building blocks. Religion may have nuanced how these principles were articulated, for example when Emma demonstrated notions of ecological justice while referencing Buddhist ethics (see the introduction to Chapter 6). Yet such appearances of religion were unpredictable and varied, defying clear-cut categorisation. I cannot claim that ‘religious participants thought this’ and ‘nonreligious participants thought that.’ The conclusion I reach, therefore, is that the values of environmental and ecological justice can constitute a common moral ground between the religious and nonreligious.

The second way that religion is relevant to this thesis is as a social force. This is seen in the above argument that participant notions of climate justice resonate with a social imaginary moulded by Christianity. As explained in Chapter 4, the use of the term ‘social imaginary’ is meant to “traverse distinctions between religious and nonreligious ways of understanding the world while avoiding thinking of either as unified systems” (Stacey and Beaman 2021, 4). This concept adequately captures a tension between participant views that represent principles of climate justice and those that relate to ecological justice. Again, climate justice was not delineated across religious or nonreligious lines, but it constituted a common framework (or imaginary) that shaped how participants articulated their moral concerns about climate change. This framework emerges from, or at least resonates with, a Christian model of stewardship and human exceptionalism. Yet participants also challenged this model in their expressions of nonhuman intentionality, subjecthood and agency, which I have framed as conceptual building blocks to ecological justice. I suggest that this finding can be attributed in part to the social impact of nonreligion.

The rise of nonreligion may be fostering the conditions necessary to reshape how humans relate to other terrestrials. I have adopted this reflection from Lori G. Beaman (2021b), who argues that nonreligion has “opened space for an imaginary of equality in which the human relationship with non-human animals and the world around us is in the process of being renegotiated.” These renegotiated relationships are not tied to or dependent upon religious or nonreligious identity. Instead, they reflect a broader social imaginary that challenges the human exceptionalism of stewardship and human mastery over nature, which is evident in the lifestances of both the religious and nonreligious (Strumos et al. forthcoming). Although the rapid increase of nonreligion is a contemporary phenomenon, nonreligion is not new, with religious unbelief and skepticism, for instance, being found in medieval Europe (Brown 2017). Alternatives to hierarchical models for

terrestrial relations is likewise not unique in Western thought or history. White (1967) noted that equality can be found in the accounts of Saint Francis of Assisi. The poetry of mystic William Blake (d. 1827) framed animals as being worthy in themselves, in addition to being sources of human wonder (Fosso 2019; Bruder and Connolly 2018). Another example is the work of Charles Darwin, which challenged the ‘great chain of being’ by locating humans in the dynamic continuity of the material world (Strumos et al. forthcoming). What is new is the rapid increase of those who are nonreligious, which may be accelerating or making more commonplace challenges to human exceptionalism.<sup>109</sup>

I am proposing that religion *and* nonreligion are social forces shaping how terrestrial relations are imagined during the planetary crisis. Crucially, the boundary between the two is not fixed. Nonreligion may contribute to the social conditions that allow for the hierarchies of dominion and stewardship to be challenged. Participants featured in Chapter 6 demonstrated this challenge, but some did so while using religious language or referring to religious ideas. It is not that principles of ecological justice must entail a clean break from religion, or that they constitute a ‘religion-free zone.’ Similar to how stewardship subtly underlies participant narratives of climate justice, religion may also be folded into empirical expressions of the principles and precursors of ecological justice. Regarding the social impact of nonreligion, Cory Steele (2023, 168) states: “The nonreligious bring with them alternative ways of thinking about controversial social issues. As the number of people who no longer affiliate with religion continues to grow, these alternative ways of thinking about social issues become more visible in Canadian society, often challenging the historically dominant religious narratives of these same social issues.” I am suggesting that

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<sup>109</sup> This proposition was previously made by Lauren Strumos, Lori G. Beaman and Mathilde Vanasse-Pelletier (forthcoming) based on international research by the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project on (non)religion and community gardeners. For more information on this project, see [nonreligionproject.ca/community-gardens/](https://nonreligionproject.ca/community-gardens/).

nonreligion is defying historically dominant models of dominion and stewardship. Another area where this argument can be substantiated is in law, in particular legal rights for nature.

As I have argued elsewhere (Strumos 2024), nature's rights—an institutional manifestation of ecological justice—offers an opportunity to use language of equality in terrestrial relations that is precluded by stewardship. There has been one instance of this occurring in Canada. In 2021, the Magpie River (English) or Mutehekau Shipu (Innu) in the province of Québec was granted legal personhood through parallel resolutions adopted by the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality. As a result, the River possess nine fundamental rights that enable its flourishing. These include: the right to live, exist and flow; the right to respect for its natural cycles; the right to maintain its natural biodiversity; the right to maintain its integrity; the right to perform essential functions within its ecosystem; the right to be free from pollution; and the right to regeneration and restoration. Val Napoleon (2013, 232) states that “law is societally bound – it is only law within the society that created it.” This case of the Magpie River gaining legal personhood arises in a social context of postcolonialism. It is an example of how settler political actors can collaborate with Indigenous nations in their ecological decision-making. Another part of the social backdrop to the Magpie River/Mutehekau Shipu resolutions, I have argued (Strumos 2024), is a rise of nonreligion, which has contributed to the social conditions necessary for nature's rights to become not only conceivable but enacted in settler legal systems.

Legal rights of nature present a challenge to human exceptionalism at an institutional level. Humans are no longer exceptional to other beings in their being worthy of legal subjecthood. Accordingly, nature's rights challenge the dominant legal framework for regulating human/nonhuman relationships, which often reflect either the stewardship or dominion models. For instance, the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1993* states that “principles to be



considered in the administration of the Act” include the “principle of intergenerational equity, according to which it is important to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>110</sup> The link between protection and future generations is enabled by an imaginary of stewardship. ‘The stewards’ are human protectors in the present, while ‘the stewarded’ is the environment protected on behalf of future generations instead of god. Both future generations and the divine god are located beyond immanent time and space, reflecting the centrality of transcendence in Christian metaphysics (Ezzy 2021). The harsher model of dominion can be seen in laws that treat animals as property (Morgan 1993; Francione 1995; Biscould 2014). Such laws are not religious, but they reflect an imaginary shaped by human exceptionalism, with its residual influence informing the normative notions that underly political institutions (Strumos 2024, 105).

Ecological justice and the stewardship model are not necessarily irreconcilable in empirical contexts. As noted in Chapter 6, one may seek to achieve justice as part of a stewardship ethic. In his call for animal rights, Andrew Linzey (1987) demonstrates that the moral and legal rights which flow from justice can exist in a stewardship framework. Yet there is a fundamental tension between the equality insisted upon by ecological justice and the divisions of stewardship or dominion. When nonhumans enter the community of justice, they are on equal footing with all other subjects of justice.<sup>111</sup> This does not mean that all claims to justice are treated the same, but that there is something common among all beings that grants them equal moral consideration. It is not the idea of intrinsic worth, but equal moral worth that finds ecological justice at odds with dominion and stewardship. Plumwood (1993, 135) states:

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<sup>110</sup> *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1993* Section 5.1 para. a.2.

<sup>111</sup> As Jenkins (2013, 221) clarifies: “It is important to note that justice is not here *extended* to nonhuman subjects as if honorary human individuals; all earth is rather *included* within the justice owed human persons” (author’s emphasis).

Notions of growth, of flourishing, for example, are implicitly teleological and do not presuppose consciousness; some, concepts such as function, directionality and goal-directedness of a self-maintaining kind, are applicable to natural systems and processes generally. Mountains, for example, present themselves as the products of a lengthy unfolding natural process, having a certain sort of history and direction as part of this process, and with a certain kind of potential for change. Trees appear as self-directing beings with an overall ‘good’ or interest and a capacity for individual choice in response to their conditions of life.

Ecological justice attributes moral worth to all terrestrials for their own sake. This worth may be tied to processes of growth, flourishing and self-contained interest in one’s own ends, which is not limited to animal sentience but is also extended to trees and mountains. To be sure, the link between ecological justice and nonreligion is not causal. Nonreligion is not synonymous with equality, and the nonreligious can engage in practices that are “destructive and cruel” (Ezzy 2021, 142). The point is that a trend of disaffiliation with religion, and in particular Christianity, helps to open the door to moral frameworks that break from the human exceptionalism of traditional Christian doctrine. This potential moral shift in the social imaginary is indicated by participant representations of ecological justice and its conceptual foundations. It is this finding that heralds the relevance of nonreligion for terrestrial relations.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

There have been several instances where I have told people that I study religion, nature and animals in graduate school. The response I receive is usually along the lines of: ‘What does religion have to do with nature or animals?’ I have yet to think of an adequate response that does not result in an impromptu lecture. The broader significance of these moments is that they serve as a reminder of a lack of awareness of religion’s connection to various areas of social life. The position of this thesis is that, in societies with a history of majoritarian religion, religion continues to play a role in social responses to contemporary issues, including those of the planetary crisis. This role may

be subtle, but its presence still warrants investigation from those who are experts in religion and social life. Explaining nonreligion is a different task, especially when social scientists are still negotiating how to more effectively conceptualise, research and explicate nonreligion. The lifestances approach represents one attempt to do so, which has served well for framing the research presented in this thesis. Although the study of nonreligion has gained momentum among social scientists, research on nonreligion and ecology remains minimal. Greater attention is needed to the intersections of religion and nonreligion, particularly in contexts that allow us to explore terrestrial relations. My hope is that this thesis has contributed to this pressing task.

The social backdrop of opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project has characterised the analysis presented in this thesis. Elements of this context are absent from the data and analysis. Foremost is the absence of Indigenous voices, and Indigenous perspectives on working with settlers in confronting destructive (and unjust) profit-driven developments on their territories. There is also a lack of diversity concerning religion, with religious participants affiliating themselves with Christianity or Buddhism. This gap is also a result of the interview data that was gathered. The ways in which religion and nonreligion appeared would have differed if I were to focus on an interfaith or exclusively religious or nonreligious group (such as a humanist society), as opposed to a more diverse and dispersed group of individuals. More research is needed to develop fuller conclusions regarding religion, nonreligion and ecology at a time of heightened awareness for the planetary crisis in Canadian society. In addition, there is a small but growing interest in the intersections of religion and climate politics (Berry 2022), but scholars of (non)religion in Canadian society or politics have yet to generate much interest in this area. Evan Berry (2022, 2) notes that there is a “secular bias latent in much of the scholarly literature on environmental politics,” which has contributed to the lack of consideration for religion in such

politics. I would propose that nonreligion also deserves attention in this area, in order to explore those identities, perspectives or phenomena that come into contact with religious while remaining distinct from it. Overall, the politics of climate justice may be one example and an avenue for future research on (non)religion.

In this thesis, I have sought to explore the relevance of religion and nonreligion for terrestrial relations. When broad concepts such as ‘religion,’ ‘nonreligion,’ and even ‘terrestrials’ or ‘humans’ are used, no findings can be comprehensive. This thesis does not aim to provide ‘the answer’ to religion or nonreligion’s relevance during the planetary crisis. It rather demonstrates how accounting for religion and nonreligion can deepen our understanding of how individuals imagine their moral relationships. Douglas Ezzy (2021, 149) writes:

The world feels like it is on the edge. Climate change, ecological destruction, and pandemics are reshaping our lives in profound ways. These challenges mean that understanding how humans learn to engage in respectful relationships that may be religious or nonreligious is an increasingly pressing task. [...] We need to understand the social processes, the symbols, imaginaries, practices, emotions, rituals, and relationships that enable us to live well in the world and that also have enabled us to live in ways that have led to such disastrous outcomes.

In accordance with Ezzy’s call, I have aimed to shed light on how ordinary individuals, both religious and nonreligious, understand their moral relationships to other humans and nonhumans. The social imaginary that informs these relationships is characterised in part by three social processes: the lingering influence of the Christian past on morality; greater awareness among the settler population of the legacies of colonisation; and the dramatic increase of people who do not affiliate with religion. These three factors are part of what Beaman (2017) calls ‘the new diversity’ of Canadian society. Its influence may be seen in how participants understand the vulnerability of younger and future humans during climate change; how they position themselves as settlers through their motivations and experiences of activism; and the ways in which they perceive the

nonhumans who share their dwelling place. Each of these relationships, whether abstract or lived, resonated to varying extents with principles of environmental and ecological justice.

As first indicated in the introduction to this thesis, my turn to theories of environmental and ecological justice resulted from the inadequacy I perceived in my scholarly fields for producing critical research. By ‘critical’ I mean work that challenges norms that I perceive to hinder the advancement of empirical research. This norm in the sociology of religion is human exceptionalism. It has led sociologists to ignore or not take seriously how human social life is connected to animals and nature (Beaman and Strumos 2024). If the proposition of this thesis is correct—that ordinary (non)religious individuals are challenging the hierarchies of stewardship and dominion in their terrestrial relations—then sociology’s failure to examine its own underlying norm of human exceptionalism reflects both a disconnect from the social world it studies and a lack of reflexivity. Social scientists have wrestled with the concept of ‘religion,’ being cautious of its boundaries (especially now that nonreligion has entered the picture) and of pre-conceived notions in intellectual and social spheres. The concept of ‘the human’ deserves similar attention. Otherwise, sociologists of religion remain implicated in the same intellectual structures contributing to the planetary crisis. Aaron S. Gross (2014) makes this point about animals specifically. He maintains that, in the study of religion, “the denial or obfuscation of animal personhood is implicated in a violence against them that would appear, to quote Derrida, ‘monstrous’ to most human communities in most times” (Gross 2014, 118–19). Arguing for nonhuman personhood in the sociology of religion reflects a normative stance, but so too does the idea that religion exists in a vacuum of human social life, devoid of all other terrestrials.

The idea of terrestrials requires a bottom-up approach to investigating relations amidst the planetary crisis. This crisis demands attention to the various conditions that contribute to it. This

thesis has focused on opposition to a material condition, the Trans Mountain Expansion project, while engaging with the social dimensions that both uphold and challenge human exceptionalism, as found in the stewardship model and human mastery as identified by White (1967). In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood (1993, 6) states: “The master culture must now make its long-overdue homecoming to the earth. This is no longer simply a matter of justice, but now also a matter of survival.” Latour accomplishes this homecoming through his concept of the terrestrial. I propose that, based on my research, evidence of this shift may also be found among ordinary individuals, religious and nonreligious, who are doing the on-the-ground work of confronting the planetary crisis to the benefit of all terrestrials

## APPENDIX I: CONSENT FORM



Université d'Ottawa  
Faculté des Arts  
Département d'études  
anciennes et de sciences des  
religions

University of Ottawa  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of Classics and  
Religious Studies

### Consent form

**Title of the study:** "Capturing Common Ground: Exploring Notions of Environmental and Ecological Justice Among Protestors Opposed to the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project"

**Researcher:** Lauren Strumos, PhD Candidate in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa.

Email:

**Supervisor:** Dr. Lori G. Beaman, Professor in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa, and Canada Research Chair in Religious Diversity and Social Change.

Email:

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Lauren Strumos for her PhD thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Lori G. Beaman.

**Purpose of the Study:** This study's purpose is to investigate the views and beliefs of individuals who engage in public protest activities such as marches, picketing, protest songs, and rallies against the Trans Mountain Expansion Project. It will gain insight into how individuals with diverse identities, whether religious and nonreligious, or Indigenous and non-Indigenous, cooperatively come together on a basis of similarity to protest in Vancouver, Victoria, and Burnaby, British Columbia. Theories of environmental and ecological justice will be used to analyze the human-related and environment-related reasons protestors have for opposing the Trans Mountain Expansion Project, as well as locating overlap between these two reasons. Broadly defined, the theory of environmental justice states that certain groups in society face harm, whether social, cultural, economic, or religious, as a consequence of harm caused to their local environments, including land and water pollution. While environmental justice focuses on humans, ecological justice extends inherent worth to nature, calling for the protection and just treatment of nature for its own sake. Using these theories of justice, this study explores the understandings of individuals who have protested against the Trans Mountain Expansion Project, which become shaped by religious, nonreligious, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous worldviews and cosmologies.

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**Participation:** My participation will consist of one virtual interview session over Zoom technology (<https://zoom.us/>) which will last for approximately one hour. The interview will be audio-recorded.

**Risks:** My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information, including potentially sensitive views and beliefs related to the Trans Mountain Expansion Project. As a result, I may experience emotional discomfort or anxiety during the interview. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. I am able to pause and take a break from the interview, reschedule it, or withdraw my participation altogether. By participating in an online interview, someone around me may overhear what I am saying. It is therefore important that I plan well for the interview in a place that provides me with a maximum of privacy.

**Benefits:** My participation in this study will allow my opinions and experiences related to the Trans Mountain Expansion Project to be heard and play a role in advancing knowledge related to cooperative activism in a time of ecological and climate crises.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to my identifying information. I understand that my data will be used only for the purposes of the researcher's dissertation and related publications and presentations. Data from the study may also be re-analyzed in the future if they are related to the researcher's other projects.

**Anonymity will be protected in the following manner:** I have the option of remaining anonymous by asking the researcher to use a pseudonym instead of my real name. Disclaimer: those who are publicly known may have their identity revealed on the basis of the information they share even if their real name is changed to a pseudonym.

I choose to (check one box):

Remain anonymous

Reveal my identity (have my real name used)

**Conservation of data:** Electronic consent forms, audio recordings of Zoom interviews, and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected folder on an external hard drive that belongs to the researcher. The researcher and supervisor will have access to my data which will be stored for five years. After five years my data will be completely destroyed in a secure manner.



**Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. My decision to stop participating, or refusal to answer questions, will not affect my relationship with the researcher or the University of Ottawa. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed wherever possible and at the earliest ability of the researcher to do so.

**Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Lauren Strumos of the Department of Classics and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa, whose research is under the supervision of Dr. Lori G. Beaman.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: (613) 562-5387

Email: [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

I have the option of providing verbal or written consent. Verbal consent will be documented over Zoom, and written consent will be documented through signing this electronic consent form.

Participant Signature:

Date:

Principal Investigator Signature:

Date:

## **APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Interview Guide**

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

### **Protesting Against the Trans Mountain Expansion Project (Project)**

1. Can you tell me about your involvement in the protests against the Project?
  - a. How did you first learn about the Project?
  - b. How many times have you protested?
  - c. What kind of protest activities have you taken part in? When and where did these protests occur?
  - d. Can you describe to me how you feel when you're protesting?
  - e. Do you have friends or family who take part in protests?
  - f. What is your main source of information for the Project?
  - g. Have you attended community meetings for the Project?
  - h. Do you think that you'll take part in protests in the future?
2. Can you tell me about your motivations for protesting the Project?
  - a. What made you first decide to take part in protests?
  - b. Have your reasons changed over the course of protesting?
  - c. What are the threats posed by the Project?
  - d. Does the Project have any benefits?
  - e. Are the protests an important part of your life?

### **Religious and Nonreligious Identity**

1. How does your involvement in these protests relate to how you see the world?
2. How do you see humans' place in the world?
3. Would you describe your views of the world as religious? If not, how would you describe these views?
4. Do you engage in any religious or spiritual practices?

### **Demographic Information**

1. How old are you?
2. In terms of gender how do you identify?
3. What is your highest educational degree?
4. Where did you grow up?
5. Where do you live now?
6. What is your current occupation?

### APPENDIX III: CODING SCHEME

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Religion and Nonreligion      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-identifies as religious; raised religious; religious practices; nonreligious; nonreligious self-identification (e.g., atheist, secular); self-identifies as spiritual; spiritual practices; (non)religious beliefs (e.g., in god, life after death)</li> <li>2. Linking spirituality, religion or nonreligion to nature</li> <li>3. Critical of religion; criticism of religion; harm of religion</li> </ol>                                                                                    |
| Experiences of Activism       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Type: tree sits; blockades; prayer circle; rallies; marches; spreading awareness; public events; art, music, or photography</li> <li>2. Personal narratives: beginning of; motivation(s) for; memorable experiences of; importance or significance of</li> <li>3. References to activist community, organisation, or group</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                |
| Affect and Emotion            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emotions during direct action; during protest; in response to climate change (e.g., climate anxiety)</li> <li>2. Feeling awe; connected to nature; part of something bigger; hopefulness or optimism; discouragement; frustration</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Conceptions of the (Non)Human | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. dominion; stewardship; caretaking; notions of equality (e.g., partnership, kin); human 'responsibility' for [explicitly]</li> <li>2. humans as part of nature; humans are animals; humans as insignificant; humans as different or special; humans as separate from nature; humans as bad for the earth</li> <li>3. descriptions or indications of nonhuman agency; subjecthood; emotions; intentions</li> </ol>                                                                                     |
| Climate (in)justice           | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. harm to: other countries; human life and health; youth; future human generations; Indigenous rights and lifeways; nonhumans; the 'earth' or 'nature'</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Ecological (in)justice        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. harm to: species of nonhumans; individual nonhumans; waters; future nonhuman generations; the earth; systematic exploitation or oppression of nonhumans</li> <li>2. representation of nonhuman voices, lack thereof</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Environmental (in)justice     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. harm to other countries; human life and health; youth; future human generations; Indigenous rights; Indigenous lifeways; 'natural resources' (e.g., drinking water)</li> <li>2. representation of minority or Indigenous voices, lack thereof</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Relationships and Encounters  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encounters with nonhuman animals; trees; water</li> <li>2. Watching nonhuman animals; trees; water</li> <li>3. Family, friends</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Language                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ecofeminist (e.g., mother earth, nature as nurturer, absent referents like rape of land)</li> <li>2. Religious (e.g., sacred; apocalypse; creation)</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Power, politics and law       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The state versus citizens or society; deception; corruption; provincial politics; education system; federal government; democracy [explicitly]; municipal politics; stories of arrest; political inaction (e.g., over climate change); covid-19; police or RCMP</li> <li>2. treaties; unceded land; Indigenous law; Indigenous rights; settler colonialism, colonial law [explicitly]</li> <li>3. Formal rights for: nonhuman nature, nonhuman animals [this links to ecological justice]</li> </ol> |

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