Death, the Environment, and Theology

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Abstract
In order to fare better amidst a growing environmental crisis, we need to face death and mortality in more profound ways. Recent psychosocial research on environmental themes has provided crucial insights. People have trouble dealing with mortality, and because environmental threats remind them (often unconsciously) of death, they tend to escape into non-sustainable behavior. In this article, I present key insights from this interdisciplinary research and explore its relevance to practicing theologians.
(72 words)

Keywords: eco-anxiety, existential anxiety, eco-psychology, environmental education, climate change, religion

Short Bio
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Article

Introduction

Climate change feels like death. This is the experience of numerous people around the world, although they relatively rarely say this explicitly. Sometimes they do; there is a growing body of profound poetry and prose which deals with the existential impact of environmental problems. (The growing field of 'environmental criticism', or 'eco-criticism', provides information about this literature; see Garrard 2014.) And there is a growing, international field of multi- and interdisciplinary research on the connections between death, mortality, and the environment.

This article is not only about climate change, but for several reasons, I will focus especially on it. First, climate change is linked with most other major environmental problems. As a result, it has become almost a synonym for environmental problems in general. Second, as regards death and environmental matters, climate change is a major culprit. It causes physical death through extreme weather events and indirect causes. And climate change is closely related to the main topic of this article: the avoidance of environmental matters because of their unconscious links with death and mortality, and the resulting loss of both well-being and resilience.

Research and writing on such theme as the relation between death and the environment necessarily moves on a large-scale level. When mortality rates caused or effected by climate change are

studied, the analysis concerns large populations. Such research reveals percentages and probabilities: for example, numbers related to the increase of deaths because of heat waves. (For an overview of health and climate change in the US, see https://health2016.globalchange.gov/, accessed 30th July 2018. This easily-approachable material is a useful read also for people from other countries.)

However, research and writing about the symbolic – but real – connections between climate change and mortality as regards the psyche operate on an even more large-scale level. There is case evidence about how persons react to these matters. But the real force of the arguments is on the level in which important strands of behavior are analyzed as regards whole cultures, societies, and communities. A prime example is one of the most relevant social aspects of the subject matter, namely the connections between denial of death and the appeal of authoritarian movements and leaders.

As a result, my discussion on the theme has a certain philosophical and theological character – in the old sense of these fields of inquiry, the effort to explore and partly explain life in its varieties. My discussion is about seeking wisdom (Sophia) as regards the conditions of life in the 21st Century. I will refer to many empirical studies, but the heart of my discussion is related to humanistic and theological writing.

My method is what we call in Helsinki 'systematic analysis': a careful effort to understand the thinking behind various uses of terminology by people from various fields. Analysis leads to a synthesis, in this case a proposal in constructive theology. However, much of my discussion will be approachable to people from any religious stance, and I will recommend co-operation between all people of good will on these matters.

I will argue that theologians and religious leaders have important possibilities to provide hope-engendering resources to people who suffer from environment-related death anxiety. However, this requires more reflection about spiritual care, co-operation with various actors, and wise application of ritual expertise.

A word about my own position is in order, because writing on death and the environmental crisis is very different if you are personally seriously threatened by extreme weather or other related problems. I am not, but neither am I undisturbed or totally undamaged by the environmental crisis. As I write this, my home country, Finland, one of the safest places in the world, is undergoing a massive and long heat wave. There have already been fatalities. In addition, the psychic effects are serious. Thus, while I write from a privileged standpoint, the boundaries between safe and not safe are eroding. But, for an article from an explicitly different perspective, and for discussion about injustice and eco-anxiety, see James (2011).

Death and the environment: What is the connection?

What are the feelings and emotions that people have as regards environmental destruction and environmental threats? The answer naturally depends hugely on contextual factors. People who are already affected, or are in a more vulnerable position, experience heavy emotional burdens.

For a vast number of people in the industrialized West, whose lives are not yet directly much affected by environmental problems (at least in ways in which they would perceive it), environmental problems are a kind of dark shadows in the background. For example, several young Finns have described climate change to feel like a gloomy monster, dark and vague, which from time to time appears on the horizon and takes joy of life away. They would wish it to go away. They

would even wish to do much themselves to make it go away, by finding more sustainable lifestyles, but they often feel that their actions are insignificant in comparison with the magnitude of the problems. As a result, they simply try to find ways to live with the shadows. Some face the clouds more directly, while others try more to escape them.

Various theories about human behavior can, and have been, applied to analyze people's reactions to environmental problems and threats. An article by Reser, Morrissey & Ellul (2011) is an excellent introduction into these studies, as it discusses several possible frameworks. One of the most often used is coping theory. People utilize various coping strategies in their efforts to live with environmental problems. As regards the well-being of both persons, communities, and ecosystems, there are better and worse forms of coping: often called adaptive and maladaptive.

Ojala (2016a, 2012ab) has studied the coping strategies that especially young people use as regards climate change. She has found evidence of both of the major coping strategies as originally developed by Folkman and Lazarus: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. However, Ojala finds the third option, developed later on especially by Folkman (2008), to be the most suitable: meaning-focused coping. Problem-focused coping works best if the problems can be solved, at least to a large degree. Because global environmental problems both can and cannot be helped by individuals and local communities, there is a need for coping strategies which enable people to live with problems which cannot be fixed (and the emotions connected with these kinds of issues).

But a major problem is that numerous people do not reach the stage of active consideration of coping strategies, or even the point of unconscious application of reasonably good ones. A crucial dimension of this problem and phenomenon, and its connections with death and mortality, is well captured by Dickinson et al.:
"While climate change is a dire problem, one that is threatening to people's lifestyle, health, and survival, there is evidence that framing it within the context of threats, a strategy known as 'fear appeals,' can have the opposite of the intended effect. One suspected reason for this is that **when asked to think about mortality people have a set of anxiety-buffering defenses that they subconsciously evoke** ..." (Dickinson et al. 2013, 147, emphasis mine)

Denial of death

The connections between fear, thoughts about death, and defenses have been explored especially by the so-called Terror Management Theory (TMT), which has provided ample empirical evidence of these dynamics. When the so-called "mortality salience" is raised, numerous people tend to look the other way. This may include the desire to seek strong support to overcome feelings of fear and helplessness. Thus, denial of death is connected to many kinds of social phenomena. (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon 1999.)

In the background of TMT are the famous theories of anthropologist Ernst Becker (1924–1974), whose book *The Denial of Death* (1973) raised much attention in the 1970s. Becker picked up a key theme of many influential psychological and social thinkers: denial of death as a universal human phenomenon. For example, Sigmund Freud, the founding figure of psychoanalysis, was famously keen to emphasize the human tendency to find it difficult to deal with death and mortality. Becker discussed the contributions of many thinkers and then built his own theory.

Becker argued that in response to fear of death, humans seek "immortality projects", things in which they can find meaning despite the fact that they will die. He pointed out to the danger that fear-based denial of death often causes people to follow authoritarian movements and leaders; such

an in-group provides kind of immortality, a larger frame of reference in which the individual finds meaning.

Becker's thinking finds support from psychotherapist and scholar Erich Fromm's (1900–1980) thought. Using the experiences of the Second World War and the preceding rise of fascism, Fromm argues that in times of anxiety people tend to "Escape from Freedom", to quote the title of his influential book (1941). He delineates three major forms of such escaping: authoritarianism, destructiveness, and "automaton conformity". By the last, Fromm means the tendency for people to try to be and look like everyone else, and not to stand out from the crowd. A similar phenomenon as regards climate change has been explored by McIntosh (2008). It is connected to psychosocial mechanisms such as "socially constructed silence" and "shooting the messenger", which are typical in relation to climate change (for these mechanisms, see Norgaard 2011; Marshall 2015).

Janis Dickinson (2009) has explicitly applied Becker's thought and TMT into climate change, and Matthew Adams (2016) has applied Dickinson's theorizing of proximal and distal defenses into a wide psychosocial approach about people's reactions to climate change (and other environmental problems). These reactions are both psychologically and socially conditioned. In this scheme, proximal defenses are more conscious and include for example projection of blame and/or responsibility to others. Distal defenses are more unconscious and include, for example, outgroup antagonism, idealization of charismatic leaders who support denial, and heightened pursuit of problematic behaviors such as addictive consumption or substance abuse.

Existential Anxiety

In the light of the theories and research discussed above, it becomes clear that underneath such practical reactions to climate change, such as minimizing the significance of a person's own actions, are profound existential questions about death, mortality, and the meaning of life. Several thinkers argue that a person's relationship with the natural world is in a key position as regards these themes. In childhood and youth, the emergence of self-awareness and awareness of death causes anxiety. Because bodily and material things remind the person of mortality, people can easily shy away from such things, or at least have a very complicated relationship with them. (Clinebell 1996; Fromm 1941; Adams 2016.)

Theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich (1886–1965) captured the breadth of these phenomena in his famous scheme of "existential anxiety". Tillich (1952) delineated three types of it: anxiety of fate and death, anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, and anxiety of guilt and condemnation. He saw the anxiety of death to be the most fundamental: "certainly the anxiety of death overshadows all concrete anxieties and gives them their ultimate seriousness. They have, however, a certain independence and, ordinarily, a more immediate impact than the anxiety of death" (p. 43).

Thus, death and the environment are connected on this deep level in two ways. First, there is the universal task of dealing with death as part of growing up, developing a healthy self-awareness, and developing a healthy relationship with the world around oneself. But, second, in the era of the environmental crisis, nature and the environment become linked with concrete death-producing or threatening matters. This deepens and complicates the existential anxiety. (Cf. Searles 1972; Pihkala 2018.) Some researchers in sociology and social psychology, such as Adams (2016), have applied Anthony Giddens' concepts of "ontological security" or "ontological insecurity" to the situation. The environmental crisis threatens ontological security, and ontological insecurity produces various kinds of problematic behavior.

In research on climate change and other sources of environmental distress, there is evidence of all three kinds of anxiety as delineated by Tillich. It seems that most often the existential anxiety and crisis related to environmental problems manifests itself as anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness. (For examples, see Bodnar 2008.) There is also evidence of profound feelings of guilt and shame (Norgaard 2011; Randall 2013; Harrison & Mallett 2013), which would require further study. (Note: I have discussed these emotions in my Finnish work, Pihkala [2017], and Dr. Sarah Fredericks from the University of Chicago is preparing a monograph on environmental guilt and shame.)

Anxiety of death is not often discussed explicitly in connection to the environmental crisis, which is logical, since it is a very difficult topic, and often hides beneath repression and other psychological dynamics. However, when a safe space and wise incentives are provided, the very close connections between death and the environment soon arise. A telling example is the small group work that psychotherapist Sally Gillespie organized for environmentally active people on themes related to emotions. Gillespie (2016) writes that soon there surfaced “existential fears about impermanence, death and non-existence”. Others, such as Ojala (2016b) and Marshall (2015, 205–10), have noticed similar phenomena.

I argue, along with several of the aforementioned scholars, that there is a need to develop means to address questions related to death and mortality, so that people’s resilience and wellbeing could be strengthened. Naturally one can have another kind of view of death and mortality salience: some people believe that it is best to try to avoid thinking too much of these themes. Killilea (1988) provides an insightful discussion of these various positions and, in my view, argues convincingly for the need to find ways to process death in joint and open ways.

Eco-anxiety and death

The deep angst that many people feel nowadays because of environmental destruction is increasingly called “eco-anxiety” (Clayton, Manning & Hodge 2014; Clayton et al. 2017). The term is rather catchy and has spread, in addition to research articles, through newspaper articles and blogs. (For a brief history and insightful observations, see Cossman 2013.) Most often eco-anxiety is discussed as chronic feelings of anxiety, worry, and fear. The explicit connections with death anxiety are not always discussed. However, a major developer of terms related to psyche and environmental destruction, Glenn Albrecht, discusses the existential dimensions of eco-anxiety and calls for “eco-existentialism” (2012). Nevertheless, it is not yet commonplace to integrate discussions on existential anxiety and eco-anxiety, which is something that I have sought to do (Pihkala 2018).

While a growing number of authors use the term eco-anxiety, some of the most profound writings on the topic apply other terms (such as plain anxiety). Such is the case with Shierry Nicholsen’s *The Love of Nature and the End of the World* (2002), which charts the deep existential questions related to environmental problems and explicitly discusses the connections with death. Nicholsen draws from writings of the eminent psychologist Robert Jay Lifton and especially his framework of “symbolic immortality”. Lifton conducted field research about people’s relations to death and mortality, also among some special groups of people such as the survivors of the Hiroshima atomic strike. He delineated various ways in which people seek visible symbols which would allow them to feel that their lives will continue to have meaning even after they themselves will have died.

A prevalent form is search for “biological” (Lifton’s term) symbols, especially offspring, or children close by. Another major form is “creative”, the effort to seek lasting importance through legacy in work or arts. Then there is a “theological” form, but Lifton notes that less and less people

seek symbolic immortality through (traditional) religions. Fascinatingly, Lifton discovers that the natural world itself acts as a symbol: people find relief through believing that at least the natural world will continue living. Lifton has written of these in several of his works; a useful summary and discussion is provided by Killilea (1988, Chapter 3).

Lifton's categories of various forms of symbolic immortality are insightful reading for anyone interested in death and mortality. However, as Nicholsen (2002) noted, they also have a special significance in the era of environmental damage. People feel that all of the forms of symbolic immortality are under threat, which easily results in strong hopelessness. There are science-based threats to the well-being and even survival of biological offspring, and even fertility rates are decreasing because of pollution (and because of hopelessness which leads young people to decide that they are not ready, or even justified, to bring more children into the world). The threats to the existing social order mean that symbolic immortality in the form of legacy of work, or creative work, is threatened. And even the continuity of the natural world itself seems to be under threat.

Thus, Lifton's insights lead theologians and pastors to a common theme, albeit from a rather uncommon direction: the comfort that natural settings bring to people who are grappling with grief, bereavement, and death (cf. Clinebell 1996, 112). For example, in the Lutheran tradition, numerous hymns have comforted the dying and their close ones by using nature imagery, often related to the changing seasons. Many popular burial chapels have large altar windows into natural settings, and the ecosystems of graveyards have brought comfort (cf. Stewart 2011). Now, in the time of the environmental crisis, this legacy must be critically re-envisioned and applied in a way which suits the present situation of unpredictable seasons.

Theology, religion, and coping with mortality

It is notable that Lifton calls one of the categories of symbolic immortality "theological". There is keen insight here: religion has brought numerous people comfort as regards death and mortality. However, in a more careful theological analysis, a theological (or religious) approach would be one which is related to all of the other categories. Religion, and theology as part of it, is a way of seeing the significance or insignificance of various things in life. And a theological form of symbolic immortality is also profoundly linked with material things and creatures. Christian hope and a sense of meaning is, in practice, evoked by things in nature, children, objects such as crosses, and built spaces such as churches, to name a few.

This is naturally (sic) an interpretation of what theology means, and of what the (material) world means for theology. My own theological standpoint is close to those Lutheran and ecumenical positions developed by Joseph Sittler and H. Paul Santmire. (For an overview of such position, with an emphasis on spirituality, see Santmire 2014.) *Dialog* also has a long and prestigious history of writings on the subject; for my own take on Lutheran theology and eco-anxiety, see Pihkala (2016).

I firmly believe that a meaningful theology in our times has to seek to do justice to the significance of the material world and the depth of people's angst as regards its condition. The social conditions are also in a crucial position, and eco-anxiety is profoundly linked with other sources of anxiety, for example as regards community justice, economic justice, and meaningfulness (or lack of it) in work life and education. I will here focus more on themes explicitly related to nature and the psyche, but the dimension of "eco-justice" is elementary (see Moe-Lobeda 2013; Jenkins 2013; James 2011).

Because of the connections between death and eco-anxiety, any work that helps people to better grapple with mortality helps in environmental efforts. It is clear that many kinds of actors are needed in this work, but this is a special task for religious communities and leaders, including

Christian congregations and theologians. Questions related to meaning of life and mortality are in the core of faith issues, and religious communities have lots of expertise of processing them. Congregations and practitioners of spiritual care have helped people to cope with difficult life events and themes, and now this should be applied to environmental themes.

There are two levels in this effort. First, the general work that religious communities do in "education in mortality" may implicitly benefit environmental efforts by helping people to encounter grave issues. But, second, more attention is needed to explicit treatment of the topics of environmental issues and death. This is at the same time a way to process eco-anxiety.

However, it should be noted that Christian churches and congregations have at the moment a mixed situation as regards education in mortality. Especially churches in industrialized countries have been effected by the death-denying cultural phenomena. I will use as an example the church that I know the best, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. This church has lots of expertise about pastoral care, but much less attention has been given to encountering death and mortality before someone is in a situation where he or a close one is dying. In other words, there is education and public resource materials for periods of palliative care and for persons in bereavement, but there is hardly any materials for educating young people and adults in "the art of dying". There are some resources (in Finnish) in books on Christian spirituality, such as the death meditations provided by spiritual writers such as Ignatius Loyola and Anthony de Mello, but these materials are not very widely used in congregations.

Thus, in Finland, and in many other places, there is a need for revival of ancient Christian wisdom about the art of dying. After all, the Christian tradition does hold vast materials for this. Many practices have been crafted during the centuries, but they need to be re-found, and the new environmental situation must be creatively brought into these kinds of practices.

Insights from literature

There is yet not much literature on theology and eco-anxiety, and even less about death and these themes. However, I will next discuss several books which provide important insights.

The most explicit theological volume (in my knowledge) about encountering death as regards eco-anxiety is *Nature as Spiritual Practice* (Chase 2011). Steven Chase, a Jesuit and a nature-oriented person, has produced a two-volume book of texts and spiritual practices. The books provide a deepening spiritual journey into a kind of liminal darkness, an area of transformation, where death and suffering can (and must) be encountered. The spiritual practices and the accompanying texts help the reader to engage in a personal process, which can then be later on applied to public work by offering similar activities to others. Chase discusses explicit death-related subjects such as extinction, the role of death in ecosystems, and the difficulties and benefits for the human psyche in dealing with death.

Howard Clinebell (1922–2005), an important developer of pastoral care, ventured deeper into nature-related themes in his late years. Clinebell's *Ecotherapy* (1996) is still a very insightful read. Clinebell provides a wide discussion of various related fields, theories, and methods. He engages the then-recent field of ecopsychology and it is regrettable that his seminal book did not generate (yet) a wider integrative field. Clinebell discusses deep existential themes and the relation of death and environmental themes. His main thesis is that by helping the environment, people will at the same time be helping themselves. Deeper well-being and resilience is found by realizing and cherishing the connections between humans and the rest of nature.

Alistair McIntosh probes deep into the mental landscape of living with climate change in his *Hell and High Water* (2008). He emphasizes the need to "face death" and provides an insightful parable of the environmental situation by discussing his personal experiences of dealing with death and loss. McIntosh argues (2008, p. 190):
"facing the possibility of death is a re-grounding in ecological reality… it can re-ground our humanity … I believe that one of the competences we therefore need to develop today is to become what I would call 'planetary hospice workers'."

Douglas Christie's *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind* (2013) provides a profound discussion of both the ancient monastic practice of *memento mori*, the art of living by remembering that we die, and the current challenges of encountering environmental devastation. Environmental grief is discussed in thoughtful ways. Christie seeks theological insights from kenotic theology and ways of encountering suffering without trying to explain it away. Similar themes have been explored by Lutheran theologian Robert C. Saler (2013, 2016).

These writings provide Christians, theologians, and pastors with insights which can then fertilize practical ways of encountering death, the environmental crisis, and eco-anxiety. I will conclude this article by pointing out several possible ideas for such practical work.

What can – and should – be done?

Application of theories of loss into environmental themes

The first step is to think about other forms of grief and loss: what kind of tasks and phases are included? What kind of procedures help those who grieve? Then the reflection should move into another level: how does this apply into environmental grief and eco-anxiety? What could I, in my personal life, and in my tasks in the community, do to help myself and others to better encounter environmental grief?

I have written more extensively about encountering environmental grief and loss in my Finnish monograph (Pihkala 2017a), which is currently under translation into English. For the time being, I only point out that I believe William Worden's theory of the tasks of grief to be very useful also as regards environmental grief (cf. Eaton 2017).

Organizing education and peer groups

Several religious leaders have organized peer groups and other small group work on eco-anxiety, most notably Joanna Macy. The feedback from such groups, including from those I have personally led in Finland, is usually very positive. People yearn for situations in which they could open themselves to feeling. The materials provided by Macy and her colleagues offer much practical help (Macy & Brown 2014; Macy & Johnstone 2012). Christie (2013) provides explicitly Christian practices for peer group work.

In the peer groups and other small groups, people shape each other; there is education and interaction. In addition, it would be wise to select people to be specially educated in these themes, so that they could spread their insights. Courses and materials in ecopsychology are useful in this, and several spiritual communities provide relevant education.

Death meditation

Some pioneers, such as Clinebell (1996, 261–3) and Macy & Brown (2014, 273–4), have explicitly used death meditation in relation to these themes. In the practice provided by Clinebell, the person

imagines his or her death by focusing on the perspective of the future generations. The practice of Macy and Brown focuses on the mortality of another being, at the same time evoking consideration of one's own mortality. There are also many practices from the point of view of the future generations (Chapter 9). Chase (2011, chapters 9–10) provides many meditations on death, such as one focusing on extinct species.

It is evident that care must be taken in guiding death meditations: the situations must be safe enough, and support must be offered. However, there is also unnecessary fear of these meditations, for numerous people have been relieved after them.

Encouraging encounters with nature

As mentioned above, natural settings are often relieving for many kinds of sorrow and loss, and they may help in grappling with mortality. City parks and riversides have this function also, if wilder areas are out of reach or not desired. There are various possible levels of activity as regards this theme. First, simple encouragement to go outdoors may help. Second, many practices may be held outdoors, which enhances them. Third, special places for encountering eco-anxiety and related themes may be designed. Examples of this include the plans for "Mass Extinction Memorial Observatory" in Britain, the significance of the Monument for the Passenger Pidgeon in the US, and memorial places for animals who have died because of medical tests.

Rituals and worship

Rituals are holistic means to deal with difficult issues. They engage both our bodies and minds. There is a need to develop new kinds of rituals in order to process eco-anxiety, death, and environmental damage. Examples of such activity have taken place in various places around the world (examples are found in Macy & Brown 2014; Weller 2015; Johnson 2017), but there is a need for more communities which would practice co-design for such events.

One way to process death and mortality is to organize rituals for dead animals. As environmental educator Russell (2016) suggests, an "environmentally sensitive death education" may have profound impacts.

The traditional elements in Christian worship and spirituality offer many possibilities for the integration of these themes. Chase (2011) encourages creative writing of nature laments and Stewart (2011) provides insights of how nature and worship life are connected (for ideas, see also Santmire 2008; Habel, Rhoads & Santmire 2011).

Engaging with the arts

Rituals, performance, and the arts are closely connected. Generally speaking, the arts offer crucial opportunities for processing the themes of this article. I have personally encountered deep treatments of death and eco-anxiety more often in art events than in churches, but hopefully there will be more examples (and more combinations) of this in the future. A fine example of the possibilities of art is the work done for encountering ecological grief as presented in the pioneering book edited by Cunsolo & Landman (2017), such as the extinction art works by Gwen Curry. There are also numerous possibilities for organizing community art on relevant themes or including art-based methods as part of, say, peer group work on eco-anxiety in congregations. For insights on how art-based environmental education can help in relation to eco-anxiety and death anxiety, see van Boeckel (2009).

Practicing mental and spiritual skills

Finally, the practice of mental and spiritual skills is important. I suggest that the art of *memento mori* (or *carpe diem*) should be complemented by at least two new skills: the "skill of seeing two levels" and the skill of realizing the seasons of the soul. Because of complex cultural (and psychosocial) factors and structures, many people feel that they have failed if they feel miserable in the face of the environmental problems of the world (cf. Ehrenreich 2009). The truth is the opposite: these kind of people have bravely retained their ability to feel. The skill of realizing the seasons of the soul (cf. Stoknes 2015) means the active practice where we keep in mind that it is natural that we have various feelings and emotions. The natural world has seasons and so does the human mind (these two are also profoundly connected, but that is a theme for another article).

The skill of seeing two levels is required because often people do not see the various dimensions of our situation. Because of overwhelming and unprocessed eco-anxiety (often linked with death anxiety), many people do not notice the many good things and signs of hope which do exist (cf. Dunnivant 2017; Pihkala 2017a). Then there are people who have fallen into over-optimism and do not see the gravity of the problems, often because of their position of privilege. Practicing the skill of seeing two levels (cf. "binocular vision" as developed by Wilfrid Bion and applied by Nicholsen [2002]) means that we consciously, on a regular basis, focus our attention on both the good and the bad.

End notes: tragic hope

In the face of death and "the forces of death", in these times of absurd (or perverse) world politics and amidst a growing environmental catastrophe, simple optimism will not endure. But hope can. Not pessimism, not optimism, but hope. Not wishful thinking, but radical hope – or authentic hope, or tragic hope (Pihkala 2017b). This is the philosophy and theology of hope as championed by several of the writers, including myself, whose texts have been cited in this article (Christie 2013, 311; Clinebell 1996, 72; McIntosh 2008). Into such theology, and action, the Lutheran tradition has much to contribute.

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