The Virtues of Gardening: A Relational Account of Environmental Virtues

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Environmental virtues have become an essential ingredient in an ethics of nature. An account of environmental virtues can contribute to this ethics of nature by exploring the virtues that the gardener displays in cultivating and caring for plants. An approach that relates to the virtues of gardening is helpful in explicating a more general approach in a certain domain of interaction with nature. Good gardeners get involved in processes of natural growth and decay, they are aware of their position within the garden, and they endure ambivalences in nature. This relational account of the virtues of gardening is also exemplary in processes of active co-designing of nature and in landscaping.

I. INTRODUCTION

What is wrong when a person buys a house with a garden, cuts down the flowers and the grass, and covers the yard with asphalt? In "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," Thomas Hill, Jr. argues that the answer to this question relates to another question: "What sort of person would do a thing like that?"[1] Hill then goes on to argue that even though non-destructive behavior toward nature might not itself be called a "virtue," there are character traits that provide the natural basis for a virtue of "proper humility."[2] Humility can be learned, and it corresponds to appreciating things for their own sake.[3] In addition to "humility,"[4] the range of often-cited environmental virtues includes the virtues of "respect,"[5] of "being disposed to feel the emotion of wonder,"[6] and "wisdom."[7] Yet, there are many more that have been argued.[8]

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[1] Thomas Hill, Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," in *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 104.

[2] Ibid., p. 112.

[3] Ibid., p. 113.

[4] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," in Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problem*s (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press): 155–71.

[5] Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[6] Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," p. 162.

[7] Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

[8] A list of about 170 environmental virtues can be found in Louke van Wensween, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), pp. 163–67.

In this contribution, we discuss the gardener's virtues as a specific, yet also paradigmatic case of environmental virtues. Authors who defend environmental virtues argue not only that nature deserves respect, wonder, or refrainment; they also defend the view that environmental virtues are appropriate attitudes in addressing nature and in profiting from nature.[9] Yet, environmental virtue is a concept that also relates immediately to a situation in which a person is already involved in shaping nature and in corresponding with nature. In order to explain the claims of good practices in such a situation, we explore the gardener's virtues. This approach serves to highlight aspects of environmental virtues and to apply virtue ethics to a certain domain of interaction with nature.

The gardener is a person who is trained in cultivating plants and who knows that action needs to be related to skills that rest on knowledge and experience; and he or she is aware of the limited capacities to regulate nature. In particular, the preconditions for being a competent gardener are not a position of distance, of wonder, or of appreciation of values in the garden. Instead, a gardener needs to endure the otherness that nature provides and simultaneously needs to get involved in nature throughout the process of cultivation in the garden.

Against the general reservation that the garden is a special place and that experiences of gardening differ from experiencing nature more generally, we argue that gardening represents important aspects of good practices in profiting from nature more generally.[10] Even though practices of gardening are shaped by human interests—e.g., aesthetic interests, or interests in the fruits of cultivation—the gardeners need to cope with two more general limitations in shaping nature: they need to rely on natural processes of growth and they need to respond to the needs of plants, respecting their flourishing, and the limits of their flourishing.[11] In these

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[9] Elaborated environmental virtue theories have been provided by Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics"; Ronald L. Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Wensween, *Dirty Virtues*; and Brian Treanor, *Emplotting Virtue: A Narrative Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2014). Many more contributions focus on specific environmental virtues, with specific areas of application, e.g., Jennifer Welchman, "The Virtues of Stewardship," *Environmental Ethics* 21, no. 4 (1999): 411–23; Isis Brooks, "The Virtues of Gardening," in Dan O'Brien, ed., *Gardening—Philosophy for Everyone: Cultivating Wisdom* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 13–25; or, drawing on Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949): Bill Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 19, no. 1 (1997): 53–67; or, including virtues of restoration, Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, *Ethical Adaption to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

[10] We take into account that *garden* serves as an umbrella term for a broad diversity of specific types of gardens, ranging from sustainable wildlife gardens with nature-like landscapes, primarily dedicated to native species that are encouraged to unfold, to the most artificial designs of plants (trimmed, controlled) and plant compositions. Yet, the approach we wish to present does not address one specific garden type or gardening style; rather, more generally, it applies to the practice of gardening in the context of all sorts of gardens that have the properties explained in section three.

[11] Flourishing refers to a plant's ability of actively striving for its own good, which makes it an important concept in plant ethics, see Angela Kallhoff, "Plants in Ethics: Why Flourishing Deserves Moral Respect," in *Environmental Values* 23 (2014): 685–700. Respecting and promoting the flourishing

respects, gardening is comparable to processes of what can be called "active co-designing of nature."[12]

The paper is organized in six sections. In section two, we prepare the discussion in highlighting some important aspects of the debate on environmental virtues. In section three, we explain our understanding of the garden. Different from approaches to the garden as a secluded area, we interpret the garden as a cultivated piece of nature, yet also highlight its continuity with nature. In section four, we outline virtues of the gardener. Among other things, good gardeners takes full account of the given environmental situation, they are patient and endure ambivalences in nature, and they are aware of their position as deep interrelatedness with nature in caring for the garden. In section five, we highlight specific traits of the gardener's virtues as a subclass of environmental virtues more generally. It provides the backdrop for proposing some applications in section six, the conclusion.

II. THREE WAYS OF ARGUING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUES

A virtue has generally been characterized as a trait of a person that qualifies as a "right attitude" in a specified context. In *virtue ethics,* one central object of philosophical analysis is an explanation of the right-making properties of the virtuous person's attitudes. This general approach has been specified in environmental philosophy in two important respects. Saying that a virtue is a good attitude within a certain context does not suffice here. Instead, contributions to environmental virtues have focused on answering the question of why a person should develop a certain attitude called "virtue." Moreover, a virtue cannot be specified without also taking into account characteristics of the relationship between nature as the object of concern and the virtuous person as the moral competent subject. In both respects, theories of environmental virtues have developed distinct perspectives.[13] We first recall three ways of answering the question of why environmental virtues should be learned. We then prepare our discussion of the gardener's virtues in outlining three limitations from which environmental virtue ethics suffers.

One common way of justifying an environmental virtue goes back to Aristotle's approach to virtue ethics. In Aristotle's ethics, the recommendation to develop a virtue is closely connected to the insight that it contributes to the overall good life, the *eudemonia*, of a person. Yet, simultaneously, virtues are not just instruments for realizing a good life. Instead, they are also part of the good life. Following this Aristotelian interpretation of how virtues relate to *eudemonia*, Rosalind Hursthouse[14] has argued that humility in addressing nature is also part of the realization of a good

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of plants, as it is achieved by caring for it (for the virtue sense of caring, see section four), means to respect, and to act in favor of a "good life" for plants.

[12] This concept is derived from water management and denominates processes of long-term shaping of nature that cohere with natural exigencies and desirable states of nature; also see section six.

[13] See note 9.

[14] Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics."

life of persons. It is constitutive of human flourishing; simultaneously it responds to the acknowledgment of values in nature. Yet, it has also been argued that this relationship between the flourishing of persons and respect for nature as constitutive of human flourishing cannot be presupposed. Rebecca Walker addresses this challenge. She argues that persons cannot live a good life unless they also respect and support the good life of living beings more generally.[15]

The close tie between the flourishing of persons and environmental virtues that express respect for nonhuman flourishing remains controversial. In order to transcend the gulf between the good life of persons and respect for nature, authors have developed an approach that distinguishes both sets of values, but ties them together on different grounds. They say that virtues do not have to be ultimately tied to my own happiness. Instead, virtues might be tied to a rich diversity of existential experiences, as Martha Nussbaum argues.[16] As for the question of why persons should acquire environmental virtues, another answer can now be given. One of the experiences of confronting nature is the experience of nature as a realm of values—values that result from living beings tending to realize a good of their own.[17]

A third way to defend virtue ethics in environmental ethics deviates from both premises. Instead of arguing that virtues either react to value in nature or are tied to the good life of an actor, virtues are interpreted as relational entities. They explicate best practices in addressing nature for reasons that cover a broad variety of insights. In particular, a flourishing nature is essential to human flourishing in that persons need intact nature, and the environment is also valuable in itself.[18] Moreover, environmental virtue ethics also takes into account that societies are particularly endangered due to environmental degradation. Different from Aristotle's position, virtue ethics does not provide a picture of a harmonious character, but instead provides tools for realizing a vision of an ecologically sustainable society of the future.[19] This approach can be spelled out in various ways. Brian Treanor[20] argues that because of the experience of environmental decline in our times, including enormous population growth and the need to shift from a carbon-centered production toward carbon-reduced energy and production, virtue language as well as patterns of virtues have undergone dramatic change. In particular, a narrative approach to virtue ethics takes into account virtues as a multifaceted phenomenon.[21] Moreover, the loss of nature provides another set of reasons of why environmental virtues should be developed.

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[15] Rebecca L. Walker, "The Good Life for Non-Human Animals: What Virtue Requires of Humans," in Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 173–90.

[16] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds., *The Quality of Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 242–46.

[17] Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp. 60–70.

[18] Treanor, *Emplotting Virtue*, p. 48.

[19] Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*.

[20] Treanor, *Emplotting Virtue*.

[21] Ibid.

Even though the arguments for claiming environmental virtues vary, there is some common ground. The theories focus on excellences of persons that can be acquired and learned. They also set forward traits that respond to morally demanding experiences in human life. In particular, three recurrent themes run through the approaches in environmental ethics. First, in discussing environmental virtues, persons are considered as confronted with nature. Nature is interpreted in a variety of ways. Yet, virtue ethicists tend to highlight qualities of nature concerning the beauty of nature, the well-being of natural beings, or their vulnerabilities. In all three respects, nature is represented as separate from civilization and from social life. In particular, societies are not regarded as part of nature. Second, environmental virtues address habits that respond to the insight that nature deserves respect.[22] Nature is the bearer of values that correspond to individual well-being of living entities. At the very least, the fear of consequences of harmful effects on nature should be taken seriously.[23] Third, environmental virtues are realized by means of reducing (harmful) effects on nature and by addressing nature in a forward-looking way. Virtues help persons to reintegrate their lifestyle into nature in a way that also serves the interests and needs of living beings different from humans.

In the remainder of this paper, we argue that an exploration of the gardener's virtues gives more depth to this general account of environmental virtue. In particular, it helps to understand that in shaping nature, persons do not only need to respond to the needs of plants and animals; they also struggle with their own interests and attitudes, and they literally learn from nature—taught by nature—to be patient and to endure contingency. In order to prepare the discussion of virtues of gardening, we first explain our understanding of gardening and the garden.

III. THE CONTEXT: THE GARDEN AND GARDENING

Gardening provides a specified approach to nature: not merely a special *view,* but a way of *handling* nature hands-on. Before explaining virtues of gardening, it is important to clarify what gardening means, and what kind of human–nature relation it reveals.

The practice of gardening is bound to the garden. It basically means working on a garden, which entails activities "geared to the design, cultivation, and care of the garden."[24] As Isis Brooks writes, "Inherent in the idea of a garden is some kind of care or attention beyond the initial design. The action by a person to nurture plants, to shape and develop, or just to encourage what grows, we call 'gardening.'"[25] Important

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[22] An example in this case is given by Hursthouse: "Environmentally minded parents teach their children not only not to harm and kill the living but also not to despoil or destroy natural inanimate objects. . . . The spider's web, notwithstanding its being inanimate, is reconstructed as an object of wonder—so delicate and light but so strong, so intricately patterned—and not to be wantonly destroyed simply because it is such an object." Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," p. 166.

[23] Ibid.

[24] David E. Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 68.

[25] Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," p. 14.

to the notion of gardening we wish to explore here—as suitable for getting a hold of possible *virtues of the gardener*—is (1) that it is practiced on a small scale, in direct, personal contact and interaction with nature (embodied relation), which involves (2) learning about and learning from nature, and (3) goes beyond purely instrumental purposes, with regard to more than just the mere utility of plants.[26] In this regard, it is crucial to clarify "the garden" as the situation that frames, informs, calls for, even constitutes the practice of gardening, and to which the gardener responds by his or her actions.[27] Such analysis provides the framework to properly situate the virtues of the gardener.

In particular, a garden is a human space of nature; people who enjoy the garden and the gardener in particular want it to contain nature according or adapted to human desires: selected, protected, shaped, cultivated, inhabited, cared-for. In this regard, the garden appears as a "humanized landscape"[28] that would not exist without human interference and that cannot persist without continuous human involvement.[29] The characteristics of the garden can be spelled out in terms of spatial and temporal characteristics.[30]

Two fundamental *spatial characteristics* of the garden are (a) *continuity with nature* and (b) *enclosure*. (a) The garden is unsegregated from nature; even more, it embraces nature. It *is* a—culturally arranged or modified—natural environment, a living landscape in which to be lived. It consists in an ensemble of natural "items" most of which are living organisms, most prominent among them: plants. All natural processes of life, growth and decay are part of the garden.[31] Moreover, the garden is connected to its natural surroundings: located under open sky, it is subjected to

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[26] Purely instrumental cultivation practices that are just about the most economic exploitation of plants, mostly depersonalized, industrialized, highly technological, as in large-scale agriculture, alienate persons from nature and obviously do not entail the virtues in question. Also see Maria Schörgenhumer, "Good Home-Grown Food? A Relational Approach to Kitchen Gardening," in Anna S. Olsson, ed., *Food Futures: Ethics, Science and Culture* (Wageningen: Wagneningen Academic Publishers, 2016), pp. 547–61.

[27] While it is true that gardening is a plant-centered practice, it cannot be narrowed down to just "dealing with plants," as the above-mentioned definition by Isis Brook suggests; in doing so, one falls short of the whole context of the garden.

[28] Russell Page, *The Education of a Gardener* (New York: New York Review Books, 2007), p. 60.

[29] Even the idea of a "wild garden" where nature is wanted to develop "untouched" and free from human interference is still a human idea, and even if it is realized in a strong sense (without any compromises like moderate regulation of plant growth or human paths through the "wilderness"), it is based on an artificial selection: the radical exclusion of human beings, the radical seclusion of that "wild garden nature" from human life. However, such a kind of space is not the place to look for gardening virtues which are, quite oppositely, virtues of human–nature interaction.

[30] For an extensive spatial and temporal analysis of the garden, see Mara Miller, *The Garden as an Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 37–46 and 53–65. Also see Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (New York: Grove Press, 1991); Stephanie Ross, *What Gardens Mean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 1–24; Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, pp. 12–20.

[31] Pollan, *Second Nature*, pp. 37–53, highlights the "wild" natural processes that threaten to overgrow and destroy human space unless they are mediated through practices such as gardening.

the given climatic conditions. Most concretely, it is exposed to the weather that influences—among other things—what grows and flourishes in the garden, including the quality of human life in the garden: outdoor practices, embodied aesthetic experience, and bodily experience and well-being.[32] Furthermore, a garden is only partly secluded from wandering plants and animals that come from "outside." In all these respects, the garden is continuous with nature.

(b) However, a garden is a segregated space, demarcated by an *enclosure* that constitutes an inside set against an outside. This differentiation is fundamental to human dwelling—the inhabitation and creation of human space.[33] It entails a valuation, for it is "the purpose of enclosure . . . to exclude the unwanted,"[34] and to include and protect the wanted, the valuable, the good. Garden nature is desired to be emphatically *good,* beautiful, friendly, nourishing, agreeable, habitable, hospitable, beneficial, useful, etc.

The prevailing *temporal characteristics* of the garden are (c) *subjection to natural time* and (d) *open-endedness*. (c) The garden, and all life in the garden, is subjected to nature's own time: the seasons, weather phases, circadian rhythm, the different paces of development of the plants and other organisms in the garden—all that cannot be overcome by human ideas of when, how fast, or to which exact date and deadline a garden plan should work out.

(d) The garden is an ongoing, long-term project that is never finished. It does not simply "end" at the end of a year. Rather, a garden requires the gardener's continuous care both throughout the year *and* year after year in order to be sustained as the garden it is supposed to be.[35] To the extent a garden consists in living, developing nature, it is continuously changing. It is not so much a ready-made product but a *process* of human engagement with nature. To the gardener, it is work in progress, embedded in and oriented by reiterating natural cycles.

This concept of a garden provides the frame of our analysis of the practice of gardening and its virtues. Before starting this analysis, two additional presumptions need to be explicated. First, we presuppose that there is, of course, a broad variety of different types and styles of gardens. Yet, despite this diversity, the noted aspects of directly being entangled with nature in the garden and the fundamental spatial and temporal characteristics of gardens, by which the practice of gardening is bound, provide a constant learning situation for the virtues we wish to discuss—despite the diversity of garden styles, the basic situation in which the gardener finds himself or herself when encountering and cultivating nature is maintained. Second, we presuppose that the setting of a garden is exemplary for a range of activities of active co-designing of nature. This idea, which is explained in more detail in the conclusion, is coherent with a critique of "wilderness'" as a typical trait of nature; yet it goes

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[32] For an in-depth analysis of garden practices, see Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, pp. 62–85.

[33] Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Mensch und Raum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963).

[34] Miller, *The Garden as an Art*, p. 56.

[35] "The true gardener is always 'the constant gardener.'" Robert P. Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 7.

beyond that.[36] In our view, gardening is a typical activity in which a distinct area of nature becomes "humanized," i.e., adapted to human wants and needs (be they aesthetically, spiritually, or intellectually interested, be they rather instrumental, focused on utility, or be they also quite existential), turned into a space of human dwelling, with nature to live in and live on.

IV. AN ACCOUNT OF THE GARDENER'S VIRTUES

Some virtues of gardening have already been suggested. We draw on those concepts in the following; yet, as we wish to highlight the environmental potency of the gardener's virtues, we are less interested here in how they improve one's character or contribute to the idea of the good life, but rather in how they shape good relations and practices toward nature.[37]

Michael Pollan's reflections on gardening depict the gardener as being "in control of his appetites, solicitous of nature, self-conscious and responsible, mindful of the past and the future, and at ease with the fundamental ambiguity of his predicament," and aware of nature's indifference to human fate.[38] David Cooper proposes an array of virtues that can be learned by growing food in the garden: care and respect, discipline and self-mastery through adapting one's life to what the garden needs and provides, humility, and hope. In stressing the aspect of "unselfing"—abandoning "one's selfish or self-centered desires"—in all of those virtues, he not only points at a way of human self-cultivation that is valuable for a good life (leading to peace of mind, happiness, serenity), but also opens up a horizon of virtuously realizing the "co-dependence" between humans and nature.[39] Isis Brook explicitly argues that gardening not only improves people's characters but also "the land": by contributing to the fertility of the soil, by caring for the flourishing of specific plants, and by developing the land with regard to the whole cultural-natural context.[40] This sets the stage for a more comprehensive environmental account of gardening virtues. Besides some social virtues of gardening, like the generosity of sharing, or respect for other people in the garden, Brook names virtues that are especially valuable in interacting and interfering with nature: patience, humility, respect for reality,

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[36] Emma Marris, *Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011); Pollan, *Second Nature*, pp. 176–201.

[37] Not all virtues that have been proposed in the context of the garden are actually virtues of gardening; garden virtues that are in fact independent of the practice of cultivating nature in the garden—such as awareness of time in the garden, conscious appreciation of nature, wonder/enchantment, etc. (virtues, by the way, for some of which the garden is not even the only, specific frame)—are not discussed in this paper. See, for example, Mara Miller, "Time and Temporality in the Garden," in Dan O'Brien, ed., *Gardening: Philosophy for Everyone* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 178–191, or Eric MacDonald, "Hortus Incantans: Gardening as an Art of Enchantment," in O'Brien, *Gardening: Philosophy for Everyone,* pp. 121–34.

[38] Pollan, *Second Nature,* p. 196.

[39] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, pp. 94–99.

[40] Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," pp. 14–18.

openness, "making space for the other," and "caring for the other."[41] Despite the different approaches—with shifting focus between self-cultivation and environmental relevance—result in different sets of virtues, they all share claims about a caring attitude toward nature and the recognition of human limits, as further discussed in the following.

What we are going to propose is no exhaustive list of gardening virtues, but a set of prevailing virtues for the fundamental situation of dealing with nature in order to create a *garden* as characterized in section two. They are no mere add-ons to gardening, no extra treats that a gardener would adorn himself or herself with, but learned by doing, *"induced"*[42] by the practice of gardening, as shown in the following. Of course, vices can be found in the garden as well, but it can be argued that the practice of gardening, if someone seriously engages in it, which involves not ignoring nature's part, does *not* call for these vices, does not induce them. Moreover, it is important to state, as Cooper does, that some charges against gardening—like a "vicious" spirit of dominion over nature that is thought to be found in more artificial, formal gardens—are derived from wrong premises: presuming an ideal of wild nature, "uncontaminated by human intervention,"[43] whereas what should be presupposed is a situation of human interference with nature.[44] Gardens are places made by and for humans, and gardening is about creating human space(s), matching human interests with nature.[45] The virtues discussed in the following fit this fundamental situation. They are, albeit analyzed one by one, closely interrelated.[46]

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[41] Ibid., pp. 20–24.

[42] On virtues being "induced" by garden practices, see Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, p. 91.

[43] Ibid., p. 107.

[44] We need and want to interfere with nature, alter it, live in/with/on it, in order to survive and flourish.

[45] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, pp. 99–107. It could actually be considered a vice of gardening to exclude humans/human interests from the garden and instead foster "uncontaminated" wilderness. This results in what Pollan refers to as "anti-gardens." Pollan, *Second Nature*, p. 191.

[46] The virtues can be found in the environmental virtue ethics literature as well—sometimes under different names, sometimes only named, but hardly explained, sometimes just remotely similar although under the same label. A sense of reality (a) can be linked to forms of ecological awareness and sensitivity as discussed in Taylor, *Respect for Nature*; Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," on Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*; Sandler, *Character and Environment*, names ecological sensitivity as a "land virtue" (pp. 82–83); yet, it is cast as an attitude of respect rather than the virtue we wish to address here, the virtue of "recognizing reality" (Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," pp. 23–24), in the sense of getting a realistic grasp of nature. Humility, or, as we put it, knowing one's place (b), in contrast to hubris, is often brought up in environmental ethics, e.g., in Sandler, *Character and Environment*, pp. 131–35; Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, p. 98; also see Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, p. 104, or Hursthouse, *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, as discussed in the introduction to our essay. Care (c) is often named, yet hardly explained in the sense of not just feeling committed to (e.g., "the environment"), but of actively doing something to enhance and protect the other's (e.g., a plant's) own good. Just to give a few examples, Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, p. 118, names care as one of the "core ecological virtues," yet does not provide a definition. Neither does Roger King ("Caring about Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment," in *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991): 75–89), who points to the "relevance of the vocabulary of an ethics of care to ecofeminism" (p. 75) and states a need of clarification for this concept. Yet he does not offer such an explanation that would go beyond the level of vocabulary. Patience and persistence (d) are, for example, emphasized in Philip Cafaro, "Less is More: Economic Consumption

A Sense of Reality

Gardening induces a virtue that might be called a sense of reality or, as Isis Brook puts it, "recognizing reality," "respect for reality."[47] Gardeners cannot afford to be naïve or romantic about nature; neither can they take their preconceived ideas about nature, or about how the garden should turn out, for granted. Proven by practice these ideas might turn out wrong: as unrealistic views of nature, including notions of "harmony with nature," e.g., when insisting on a garden without a fence because one rejects the idea of conflict in and with nature,[48] and "mastery of nature," e.g., in assuming that everything is feasible—that any garden wish can be *made* to come true. Both prove wrong by what is experienced as natural reality in the practice of gardening. The gardener learns that nature does not bend to human will as desired, and that there is much conflict, struggle, ambivalence in how we relate to—and *depend on*—nature, striving to get the good out of it whereas nature plays by its own rules, indifferent to what we want, powerful, resistant, and autonomous, not entirely but ultimately beyond human influence. This is learned hands-on, learned by experience; it is a recurrent theme in gardeners' reflections on their practice.[49] An experienced gardener, in contrast to a gardening beginner or a mere dreamer or spectator of gardens, has a good, realistic—in the sense of non-illusory, non-idealistic—grasp of how nature works, and how to deal with it.

Realism Regarding Position—Knowing One's Place

This down-to-earth sense of reality goes hand-in-hand with a *proper humility*.[50] Gardeners, by experience of nature's resistance and autonomy, know their limits—they know what they can and cannot do, and they know that even in what they *can* influence and achieve in the garden they remain dependent on nature's "grace."[51] This is experienced not exclusively, but most concretely regarding the weather that the gardener is constantly struggling with, that rules the garden and determines its fate. When things turn out well in the garden and we can reap what we sow or hoped for: beauty, amenity, abundance of life, a rich harvest, etc., it can

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and the Good Life," *Philosophy Today* 42 (1998): 26–39; or Sandler, *Character and Environment*, p. 49, yet in a different context, as virtues of sustainable consumption (Cafaro) or of environmental activism (Sandler), not as virtues in relation to/interference with nature. Prudence (e) is highlighted, e.g., in Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*; or Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic."

[47] Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," pp. 23–24.

[48] Pollan, *Second Nature*, p. 39.

[49] Ibid.; Karel Čapek, *Das Jahr des Gärtners* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2010).

[50] By the term *proper humility*, we seek to point out a sense of understanding and accepting the limits nature sets to human endeavor. The gardener's humility has little to do with awe, or with an awareness of human insignificance in the big picture of nature and the universe. Instead of being meek and petty, it means knowing one's place in relation to nature. As a virtue of gardening, humility is discussed by Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardening*, pp. 95–96, p. 157; Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," p. 21.

[51] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens,* p. 96.

be considered a "gift,"[52] which highlights the gardener's awareness of dependency on something larger, more powerful than human life and beyond human control—be it called "the heavens," "the gods," or "nature," something that calls for and calls us to humility. This virtue is the antidote to hubris, an old vice that has been revisited and revised in ecological discourse: "The main concern is no longer that humans may be usurping God's place in a hierarchical order of being, but rather that humans do not keep their proper place within a web of earthly relations."[53] Hubris in relation to nature is not far-fetched. The attitude of superiority, and mastery of nature, closely related to technological progress, rests upon a dissociation of nature, which is brought forward by many cultural practices, ranging from building artificial structures and environments of dwelling to theorizing nature or gazing at nature from a safe distance without being directly involved, as, for instance, through a window, on a screen, from a touristic viewpoint, or with disinterested aesthetic pleasure. Hubris entails the assumption that nature is at our command, and that by the right means, we can overcome natural impediments, do as we please, and get what we want. The gardener in turn learns to take nature into account not only as an enabling, but also as a limiting force. Good gardeners know their place in nature, which does not mean they must give up on their anthropocentric dreams of the garden as a "better place," or that they cannot or must not achieve anything in cultivating nature. On the contrary, properly humble gardeners garden well by acknowledging nature's own terms and acting in certain agreement with them. Furthermore, humble gardeners know that in success and failure they are dependent on nature, and even when they try their best, nature has the final say.

Caring for Nature: Vigor, Attention, and Commitment to the Flourishing of the Other

Although *care* or *caring for the garden/the other* is recurrently named as a gardening virtue,[54] it is no simple virtue, or no virtue at all. Rather, it has been argued that care can more accurately be understood as a relation.[55] We propose that a good caring relation entails different virtues. Basic to the notion of caring is what we would like to call a *commitment to the flourishing of the other:* caring for another living being means wishing and striving for this other being's good.

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[52] Pollan, *Second Nature*, p. 145.

[53] Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues,* p. 98.

[54] E.g., Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens,* pp. 72–74, p. 95, pp. 157–60; Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," pp. 23–24; Matthew Hall: "Escaping Eden: Plant Ethics in a Gardener's World," in Dan O'Brian: *Gardening: Philosophy for Everyone—Cultivating Wisdom* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 38–47, p. 45.

[55] Nel Noddings, "Caring as Relation and Virtue in Teaching," in Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 41–60.

Gardeners who care for their plants may do so for purely anthropocentric reasons (for instance, because they want to reap and finally eat the fruit of their labor); yet, in caring they are not concerned with what is good for themselves but with what is good for the plants so that they can flourish properly.[56] Crucial to this endeavor is *attention for the other.* Gardeners need to "listen" to their plants in order to know what they need. This attention can never be replaced (only enhanced) by theoretical knowledge, for caring is a practical, actual here-and-now relation to another living being that requires reading the needs expressed by that being in a specific context (sensitivity for the other plus context sensitivity). Knowing everything about a plant does not suffice for knowing the specific needs of *this plant* in *this context*—this soil, this place, this weather, this plant neighborhood, etc. Moreover, good care starts from a deep openness for the other and the other's own good (it cannot be I who masterfully knows best what is best for the other without paying any regard to the other). Yet, care is more than mere attention and wishing the other well: a caring person is *active, vigorous*, does something for the other, and takes action to support the other in realizing its own good. This can mean preventing it from harm, actively promoting its flourishing by nourishing it, or providing it with the best possible living conditions.[57] It can even mean not doing anything but letting the other be and develop on its own terms. As paradoxical as that may sound, this kind of caring action: refraining from action, is an active—and often tough—choice of the engaged carer; in contrast to neglecting the other, it stands out due to continued attention and commitment to the flourishing of the other.

Patience and Persistence

There also are prevalently temporal virtues of gardening, complying with the temporal conditions of the garden as explained above. First, there is patience, a prominent gardening virtue.[58] Patience refers to the ability to wait for something that takes its time. "Waiting is an important part of gardening: waiting for the fruit to ripen, waiting for better weather, waiting for the right time to plant, prune, etc., waiting for the return of spring. . . . In this respect, in awaiting something good or better, patience is linked to hope."[59] The gardener's patience is closely related to

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[56] The good of the plant can be understood in terms of flourishing. The good of the plant cannot be—and in a relation of care, it is not—reduced to the good of the gardener or consumer. However, the two sides coincide in important ways: a well-flourishing plant is beautiful, provides good food etc., and even if harvested and consumed, it is likely to be propagated for further flourishing.

[57] Care is selective. Defending and promoting the good of the cared-for goes hand in hand with fighting what threatens it. One of the fundamental ambivalences of gardening is that caring for one can mean killing the other, "like in weeding one's garden to make possible more fertile growing." María Puig de la Bellacasa, "Ethical Doings in Nature Cultures," *Ethics, Place and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2010): 151–69, p. 166.

[58] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*; Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening".

[59] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, p. 96; Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, p. 78; Brook, "The Virtues of Gardening," p. 20.

humility and a sense of reality as it involves acknowledging that the garden develops in time and on its own (nonhuman) terms, for it is subjected to the weather and inhabited by a variety of living beings with different life cycles and paces of development that cannot be timed according to human schedules. Rather, the gardeners' schedule—and in fact, their life—needs to be adapted to the course of nature. Patience helps to accept and withstand periods of waiting while not foolishly trying to accelerate things that are beyond one's influence. It prevents the gardener from acting too soon and helps finding the right moment for, say, actions of care. In short, it is a virtue that matches "human time" with "nature's time."

Another important temporal virtue stems from the long-term perspective that is established with a garden. A garden is not made in one day, and it is made to persist for longer than a day, even longer than a year, and more. This requires the gardener's *persistent engagement*. Without continuous effort, a garden is lost—overgrown by "wilderness" or turning into wasteland. Good gardeners do not give up and abandon the garden, they carry on and stay engaged, even in the face of major adversity, setbacks, failures, and frustration.

Prudence

A good gardener knows, and is willing to learn (1) how nature works, (2) what works best under the given circumstances, (3) what it takes to make things work in the garden (how much effort, time, resources)—and *uses this knowledge to his or her advantage*. Doing so involves the right choice of plants, places, and horticultural measures, which is not only a question of flourishing and good care, but also of minimizing effort, failure and frustration, and of making the garden sustainable. *Right* in this context means appropriate, with a good prospect of success if one takes into account (1) nature, (2) local circumstances, and (3) time and resources available to the gardener. The prudent gardener knows how to "play the hand he's been dealt": how to deal with nature under the given conditions to succeed in creating and keeping up a garden.[60] Prudence is needed for making the right choices in order to reach this aim, as well as for deciding on what to aim for in the first place. A prudent gardener would not aim for growing delicate tropic plants in a rough climate, sun-hungry flowers in a shadowy backyard, or an ever-clean garden when having not enough time and no one to look after it. These are, of course, very obvious examples; in many cases, things are not that evident at first glance, and often enough, due to situational-environmental complexity, they need to be tried out. Experimenting and learning by doing is immanent to the practice of gardening, especially when it comes to fine-grained choices. Although it may seem trivial, it cannot be overemphasized that the prudent gardener learns from his or her mistakes. Even the most experienced gardener, if prudent, will revise an idea or strategy that fails to work out.

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[60] Pollan, *Second Nature*, p. 191.

Tenacity in Enduring Ambivalences

Gardening is not a picnic. As a practice concerned with getting what we desire from nature by fostering "good nature" and working against "unwanted nature," it is messy and caught up in irresolvable ambivalences. The gardener accepts that nature does not *per se* comply with human needs and desires, and that in order to survive and live well, we need to get our hands dirty—both literally and in the sense that living in and on nature has destructive aspects, as well as there are competing and destructive forces in nature itself, which the gardener is constantly confronted with ("cruelty, aggression, suffering"[61]). Our relationship with nature is—as much as we want it to be one of harmony, as suggested by the idea of the garden as a paradise—basically a *struggle*. In a real garden, the impression of a paradisiac nature that we can picture or even sometimes find ourselves at peace and in harmony with is owed to an underlying struggle with nature (carried out by the gardener, not always visible to the idle spectator). A good gardener endures these ambivalences, not denying them, not taking them lightly, but not despairing of them either, and is "at ease with the fundamental ambiguity of his predicament."[62] Is this serenity, at last?[63]

Although it is part of the concept of virtue *per se* that a virtuous person acts with sensitivity to a specific context, we would like to particularly stress this aspect in relation to gardening. A good gardener takes full account of the given environmental situation: the climatic conditions, ranging from overall climate to microclimatic awareness of the lighting conditions, humidity, temperature, wind direction in every corner of the garden, the quality (or different qualities) of the soil, the local communities, and interdependencies, of plants/wildlife inside and outside the garden, interrelated with anthropogenic imprints on the landscape, the cultural-natural foundations and surroundings of the garden. The practice of gardening is (a) an environmental practice, which means, a practice of shaping, modifying, interacting with the local environment, and (b) its success relies on environmental conditions, or more precisely, it relies on the ability of the gardener to appropriately answer to these conditions in what he or she does. Without such context-sensitivity, the gardener is likely to plant the wrong plants in the wrong places, and it will either be at great expense (of resources and gardening work) or impossible to sustain a naturally "incompatible" ensemble in the long run.

This is one important aspect of what distinguishes gardening virtues from vices (e.g., hubris, impatience, striving to override nature by all means): they lead to failure, and/or come at great expense, (a) at the expense of the garden, for it does

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[61] Ibid., p. 192.

[62] Ibid., p. 196.

[63] Drawing on Heideggers term of *Gelassenheit*, Cooper argues that serenity means letting something (the other—nature as the other) be, appear, become present, without trying to force it to comply with one's own norms/ideas, Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens,* pp. 158–61.

not work out, (b) at the expense of flourishing/resources,[64] and (c) at the expense of the gardener, in terms of frustration when facing the limits that he or she refuses to accept.[65] Gardening vices imply and implement a significant mismatch between human endeavors and nature's ways. It is, however, wrong to assume, as sometimes claimed, that vice is tied to anthropocentrism—that any anthropocentric endeavor in the garden, or the attempt to create a garden for human purposes altogether, be vicious; "anthropocentrism is not a sin, but a pre-condition of human existence,"[66] as the virtuous gardener knows.

V. SPECIFIC TRAITS OF GARDENING VIRTUES

The gardener engages in a personal, embodied relation toward nature in a challenging setting. In particular, the gardener cannot do as he or she pleases, but is bound to work with a natural reality; nature is the ultimate corrective for the gardener's actions. The virtues learned and practiced by gardening are, therefore, "nature-proof."

This model of accepting nature and simultaneously working on nature serves as a model of cultivating nature for the following reasons: (1) it entails different evaluations of the environment, including aesthetic, symbolic, and nature-centered values; (2) the garden is not restricted to concepts of food production, not even to plant cultivation, but can comprise different kinds of nature in relation to a wide range of human–nature practices. It even allows for thinking about an alternative notion of "wild" nature in the context of human life world (as long as this does not exclude human claims to habitable space and nature at all).[67] (3) An account of gardening virtues also gives an exemplary picture of some aspects of the place of humankind in nature more generally. Nature frames our lives; by building and dwelling on Earth, we create human space, which means we inescapably need to interfere with nature, inhabit and change it in order to survive and live well. The garden is a place of human dwelling that does not exclude nature like isolated interiors, buildings, or areas of sealed asphalt wasteland do, but embraces it, matching

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[64] E.g., if someone rebuys and replants a plant that does not thrive for lack of knowledge/context sensitivity/care, over and over again, because he or she just wants this plant in this very place at any price, this is counterproductive in terms of flourishing, and it is a waste of resources.

[65] We take into account that some types of gardens result from practices that might be judged as hubris, e.g., planting species that do not fit the environmental conditions of the garden or of their place in the garden, just because they are wanted to adorn the garden like another piece of precious furniture. Yet, this is not the paradigmatic case of gardening that this essay is about. (Furthermore, the garden in our example is not going to work out well, for the plants will not flourish properly; such failures of gardening are, in the long run, only possible if somebody does not listen to nature at all and enforces an idea by all means, repeatedly, at great cost; a good gardener would learn that he should change something.)

[66] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, p. 102.

[67] Gilles Clément, *Le Jardin Planétaire: Reconcilier l'homme et la nature* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999).

nature with human life in a prevalently non-destructive way, for gardening aims at flourishing.[68] This is not to say that the whole world should be humanized and turned into a garden; humanized nature is not the only kind of nature worth fostering and preserving.[69] It does say, however, that wherever we need to interfere with nature (to survive, to live, and live well, to make ourselves at home), and we do, the virtues of gardening help to define good practices of human–nature interaction.

Before rendering the areas of application more precise, we wish to go back to the discussion in section one and explain three more general lessons that can be learned for environmental virtue ethics. Therefore, we are going to discuss three crucial points in environmental virtue ethics that are challenged by our findings concerning the virtues of gardening: (1) the justification of environmental virtues in terms of answering the "why be virtuous" question; (2) the concept of "relational virtues" in terms of addressing nature; and (3) the question of whether environmental virtues are primarily linked to constraints or to commands.

(1) In addressing the gardener's virtues, the question of why a person should learn the virtues of gardening is answered straight-forwardly. Virtues are skills of the gardener that are much needed in order to reap the fruit of the garden. A gardener is virtuous not in order to be recognized as a person of moral excellence, but primarily in order to succeed in cultivating his or her garden.[70] We call this aspect of environmental virtue ethics its *"down-to-earth" characteristics*.

This does not say that the prudential aspect is the only aspect in claiming environmental virtues. They are also based on the idea that the good life of persons and the "flourishing" of plants in the garden are intertwined. Moreover, aesthetic ideals do play an important part in shaping the gardener's practices. Yet, we wish to argue that the general distinction between an either anthropocentric or an ecocentric approach to an ethics of nature can be overcome in addressing virtues of the gardener.[71] In particular, the realistic side in answering the question of why a person should be virtuous is—in this very specific context—based on a range of prudential answers. One central category is "success in cultivating nature," which cannot be reduced to either the good life of persons or the good life of living beings as part of the garden.

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[68] For our interpretation of flourishing that has been developed in the context of plant ethics, see Angela Kallhoff, "Plants in Ethics: Why Flourishing Deserves Moral Respect," *Environmental Values* 23 (2014): 685–700.

[69] For an aesthetic argument why it is wrong to reduce nature to a garden see Martin Seel, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 128–32.

[70] Such success cannot be measured in absolute terms since the gardener is only partly in charge of how the garden turns out. Developments of nature can neither be completely foreseen nor controlled by the gardener; not all of them, by the way, are bad surprises.

[71] What is, however, similar to the justification of virtue in ancient philosophy is the insight that effective gardening in terms of expense and success is also pleasurable for two reasons: because effective, successful gardening is more rewarding, and because even in the case of unrewarding situations and unpleasant experiences in dealing with nature, the virtuous gardener is well-equipped to cope with difficulties, and capable of enduring.

(2) Two contrary, yet closely linked conceptions of a person's relation to nature are, on the one hand, the tendency to separate the human realm from nature (as expressed in ideologies of wilderness, or "untouched" nature), and on the other hand, that human beings are embedded in nature, if not part of nature (communion, (re-)union with nature). Our approach to environmental virtues in the context of gardening highlights that either of these directions needs to be rejected. Nature is presented as a realm of human dwelling: influenced and altered by human dwelling all along. As Heidegger points out, dwelling means *building*—in a twofold sense: cultivating nature/tilling the soil/"tending the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord," and building up artificial structures (different from, and "against" nature), making artificial things. He emphasizes dwelling/building as the fundamental mode of human existence. "Both modes of building—building as cultivating, Latin *colere, cultura,* and building as the raising up of edifices, *aedificare*—are comprised within genuine building, that is, dwelling."[72] In gardening, both ways of "building" are realized, and the virtues it entails are fit to accommodate the ambivalent situation of human dwelling: with and against nature. We call this second trait of environmental virtue ethics its *relational grounding*, yet relational in the very sense of being in touch with nature by means of forming it all the way.

(3) Finally, this approach strengthens one aspect of environmental virtue ethics that might be overlooked. The crucial point is the insight that environmental virtue ethics has to start out from the acknowledgment of an already extensive "humanization" of the natural world: of building and dwelling, of modifying, cultivating the environment(s) we live in. Regarding the entanglement of human beings with nature, it seems wrong to make the separation of human life from nature, or nature's separation from human business, a priority. Why should we assume that nature necessarily suffers from human touch, that setting our hands to nature means diminishing, harming, destroying it, which is implied if it is considered best—virtuous—to stand back and keep out? The gardener's virtues, by contrast, are virtues of taking action in confronting nature. We call this final aspect that we can learn from an ethics of gardening the *"command aspect"* of an environmental virtue ethics.

VI. CONCLUSION

The thorough exploration of the gardener's virtues takes the entanglement with nature all along the process of cultivation seriously. Even though "gardening" is a specific approach to cultivation, it can be argued that it is helpful in also shaping further practices of cultivation that share some traits with gardening. Considering that living in and on nature means interfering with it and changing it all along, we have proposed a set of gardening virtues in the context of an approach to environmental virtues. Good gardeners have a realistic grasp of nature and know their place

[72] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), p. 147.

in it; they take full account of the particular environmental situation as well as of the limits that nature sets to their human endeavors. Their caring for the garden requires openness for "the other" and the capability to endure the ambivalences of their entanglement with nature. Basically relational, and down-to-earth regarding the place of humankind in nature, this approach is fit to apply to non-ideal environmental contexts and messy human–nature situations—not only in the garden, but in any case of cultivating nature and "humanization" of natural space.

One area of application are scenarios in which societies and groups of people develop projects of "active co-designing with nature."[73] This concept is derived from an approach to the management of landscape that takes into account the deep dependency on the piece of nature which will be shaped, as for instance plans for reshaping rivers. A wise landscape designer is aware of a situation comparable to the situation of a gardener: he or she is dependent on the continued integrity of the resource; yet, simultaneously, processes of landscaping will not only change the physical appearance of the piece of nature, but its functions and its responses. Wise landscape designers wait for the answers and endures failures; they are prudent and cautious and possesses a sense of reality in that they work on their continued experience with landscapes and water systems. In particular, they know that shaping a landscape also means caring continuously for it.

A second area of application is agriculture. Our approach to the gardener's virtues does not necessarily include that agriculture is best when practiced in a "down-to-earth" fashion. Further arguments are needed for supporting environmentally friendly types of agriculture. Yet, our account of the gardener's virtues supports the view that the gardener's experiences are not only important for learning the appropriate virtues in cultivating plants. Instead, it is a practice that also teaches the cultivator to be patient and enduring and to care about nature when cultivating it. In such a way, a realm of ethical experience provides an alternative and perhaps a necessary supplement to practices of plant cultivation that are highly artificial and technical. In our view, the plant engineer and the manager of plant factories should also learn humility and prudence—and practicing gardening is a good way to do so.

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[73] For this concept, see Jerome Delli Priscoli and Aaron T. Wolf, *Managing and Transforming Water Conflicts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 121.