

Review Essay: Britt Wray, *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Change*, 2022

Britt Wray, *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis*. New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2023. ISBN: 9780735280724

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Britt Wray’s award-winning *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis*¹ is written for readers experiencing deep emotional distress over data and experience that suggests a truly global climate crisis is upon the world. Holding a PhD from the University of Copenhagen and postdoctoral fellowships at Stanford University and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Wray investigates the emotional and psychological impact of ecological disruption, variously labeled, “eco-dread,” “climate-grief,” and “climate-anxiety.” Her book argues that raw, unprocessed eco-dread is detrimental to and can paralyze meaningful external activism to address the climate crisis, hence sealing off better futures (chs. 1-4). However, when properly understood and consciously harnessed, eco-dread can bring personal transformation as one *connects inward* (chs. 5-7) and leads to “the most environmentally connected, socially just, and fruitful world we could wish to build”² as one *connects outward* (chs. 8-11).

Wray’s book is intended both to challenge and inspire. Drawing upon other resources besides *Generation Dread*, this article will consider Wray’s description and analysis of climate crisis and the eco-dread it generates as well as asking pointed questions of her featured means of self-help and helping others.

Observations on Wray’s Characterization of Climate Crisis and Eco-Dread

Many consider the world to be in a stage called the Anthropocene, “a period during which human activity is the dominant influence on climate and the environment.”³ The patterning effects of climate change are more frequent

¹ Britt Wray, *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022). Wray’s book is now in a second printing that sports a brief foreword by film producer Adam McKay (*Don’t Look Up*) and a revised title, *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Eco-Anxiety*. Pagination comparison of the 2022 version with the 2023 suggests quite minor revisions of the text proper. The 2022 edition will be cited and is hereafter designated *GD*.

² *GD*, 11.

³ Steven Taylor, “Anxiety Disorders, climate change, and the challenges ahead: Introduction to the special issue,” *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 76 (December 2020) ad loc.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102313> (Accessed February 16, 2024.)

and severe weather events, more chronic climate conditions, and the kindling of increasingly broader and more damaging ecological impacts.⁴ Wray takes climate change to be a global fact beyond dispute, notwithstanding climate change deniers. Progressively more people too are becoming deeply disturbed by the increasing experience and reporting of it.⁵

In the introduction to *Generation Dread*, the bad actors whom Wray deems responsible for the climate crisis are, except for “a handful of powerful figures,”⁶ macro-aggregates (wealthy nations, elites and a culture),⁷ and various human logics which she lists as “imperialism, colonialism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, racial capitalism, industrialism, and extraction.”⁸ If there are faults in Wray’s list and her following examples of culpability, they are that the focus is almost exclusively on the West,⁹ her treatment is doctrinaire in ascribing causes,¹⁰ and she largely absolves the “average individual” from shouldering personal responsibility.

To be truly global, *the East*¹¹ should be fully featured as well. With that a new calculus would need to be employed to address different sets of unequal climate crisis consequences, a different agency to improve human (and climate) outcomes, and a different politics and history to set right for “a more

⁴ Taylor, “Anxiety Disorders,” ad loc.

⁵ Robert M. Ursano et al., “Position Statement on Mental Health and Climate Change,” The American Psychiatric Association, March, 2023 <https://www.psychiatry.org/getattachment/0ce71f37-61a6-44d0-8fcd-c752b7e935fd/Position-Mental-Health-Climate-Change.pdf> (Accessed February 17, 2024) states: “Half of young adults in America now state that the distress they feel about climate change is affecting their daily lives, and the majority of Americans now endorse feeling ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ worried about climate change.” Cf. Niranjana Rajalakshmi, “Does ‘climate anxiety’ belong in the DSM?” *Scienceline* (March 21, 2022), ad loc. <https://scienceline.org/2022/03/does-climate-anxiety-belong-in-the-dsm/> (Accessed February 19, 2024). Seventy-five percent of people living in Canada consider climate change a global emergency.” Mental Health Commission of Canada, “Understanding and Coping with Eco-Anxiety,” (April 21, 2023), ad loc. <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/understanding-and-coping-with-eco-anxiety/> (Accessed February 1, 2024.)

⁶ *GD*, 1 (*italics added*).

⁷ *GD*, 6.

⁸ *GD*, 1, 4.

⁹ The West would be North America, Europe, and Oceania and probably the associated regions of Latin America and the Orthodox world.

¹⁰ Time does not permit exploring Wray’s embrace of contemporary sociological theory (the work of theorists like Ibram X. Kendi, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Robin DiAngelo comes to mind) in framing the root causes of the climate crisis, its differential physical and psychological impact, and the recommended solutions. The impact of her approach on the discussion should be given careful consideration. Wray asserts: “We’re going to get this wrong if we *depoliticize* this pain” (*GD*, 4 [*italics added*]; cf. 7). See Jennie C. Stephens, *Diversifying Power: Why We Need Antiracist, Feminist Leadership on Climate and Energy* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2020).

¹¹ See how much is left out if only the West is in view: Marcos Lu, ed. Bruno Venditti, “Visualizing All the World’s Carbon Emissions by Country,” *Visual Capitalist* (November 8, 2023). Source used: Global Carbon Atlas 2021. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/carbon-emissions-by-country-2022/> (Accessed February 16, 2024.)

sustainable, just, and equitable future....”¹² Beyond the East not being included, it seems that *individual fossil fuel consumers* who drive demand are largely left out of the responsibility equation. Readers will wonder why Wray bends such extreme effort in argument to give individuals a ‘free pass’.¹³

Wray’s black and white characterizations and her political and ideological avowals suggest that the identified culprits and the causes and motives espoused are straightforward and obvious. These characterizations and avowals, however, are belied by the pervasive fractiousness and division of public discourse and by indications that both heroes and villains do not easily stand where she inclines to put them. One might do better to embrace a more deeply considered and more deftly nuanced moral realism like that of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn:

... the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains...an unuprooted small corner of evil.¹⁴

Preferring this stance to Wray’s “us and them” approach would be more inclusive by far. There would be a more even-handed persuasion and dissuasion, believing better of humankind’s positive potentials but never at the expense of a clear vision of its perennial negative inclinations.

Wray sincerely believes that eco-anxiety can be a potential revitalizing power and asserts that there are resources to make it so— “self-care guides, climate-conscious therapists, and a cottage industry of coaches”¹⁵ Her comments that these are relatively new, not broadly available, and often cost-

¹² *GD*, 4.

¹³ Wray writes of the individual consumer: “Just as climate anxiety is a sign of compassion, feeling moral injury in the climate crisis is a healthy sign that your conscience is *sound* and your sense of *being transgressed* is alert.” (*GD*, 120, *italics added*) She goes on to say, “There is a crucial difference...between experiencing healthy levels of anger from moral injury and unhealthy degrees of guilt for being caught up in a system *that crosses one’s moral boundaries*.” (*GD*, 121 *italics added*) While we’re partly responsible, “tearing our hair out over the climate cost of each consumer decision is a massive energy drain, and it aims our weapons at *the wrong targets*.” (*GD*, 121, *italics added*) For Wray, corporate polluters and fossil fuel providers are the bad guys; consumers are the victims. “We need to learn *to stop judging ourselves*....” (*GD*, 121, *italics added*).

¹⁴ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956, an experiment in literary investigation*, vol. 2, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 615.

¹⁵ *GD*, 3.

prohibitive¹⁶ are serious understatements. In fact, readers will quail at the amount of upscaling required and the degree of consent to be won to rally “billions”¹⁷ to achieve some sort of climatic reversion. But then, this is the task.

The first section of Wray’s book (chs. 1-4) is an immersive primer on eco-anxiety that invites readers to “feel it all.” The Mental Health Commission of Canada indicates that climate anxiety “can stem from *direct experience* of extreme weather and environmental change ... or *exposure to climate change information* through news media and other sources.”¹⁸ Wray illustrates both in her account of watching video footage of a father’s and daughter’s fight to save their home from a wildfire in Goongerah, Australia and interacting with “Aussie” friends regarding the vast tracts of land scorched by and animals lost to wildfires in 2019/20.¹⁹

Eco-anxiety, according to the American Psychological Association, is “a chronic fear of environmental doom.”²⁰ Wray describes it as “an assortment of challenging feelings a person can have after they’ve woken to the planetary health crisis.”²¹ She argues that it is a normal and rational emotional response to climate crisis and not an expression of pathology, observing that:

Eco-anxiety isn’t listed as a medical condition in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, and many mental health professionals say it is important that it remains excluded.²² After all, the last thing we want is to pathologize this *moral emotion*, which stems from an accurate understanding of the severity of our planetary health crisis.²³

¹⁶ *GD*, 3-4.

¹⁷ *GD*, 11.

¹⁸ Mental Health Commission of Canada, “Understanding and Coping,” ad loc. (*italics added*). Cf. Csilla Agoston et al., “Identifying Types of Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Guilt, Eco-Grief, and Eco-Coping in a Climate Sensitive Population: A Qualitative Study,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19 (2022), ad loc. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042461> (Accessed February 12, 2024.)

Glenn A. Albrecht is identified as first attributed with the term by Caroline Hickman, “We need to (find a way to) talk about...Eco-anxiety,” *Journal of Social Work Practice* 34, 4 (2020): 414.

¹⁹ *GD*, 15-19.

²⁰ S. Clayton et al., *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and EcoAmerica, March 2017), 68.

²¹ *GD*, 22. See Hickman, “We need,” 421 for a much longer list of terms and her conviction that “it may not matter so much what we call this, it matters more how we understand and respond to the struggles, fear and suffering that is genuine and real.”

²² The account of interactions in 2022 (Niranjana Rajalakshmi, “Does ‘climate anxiety’ belong,” ad loc.) suggests that the APA does not act in response to letters or petitions, but only on receiving formal proposals that are accompanied by supporting documentation. The process will not be hurried.

²³ *GD*, 21 (*italics added*).

The Australian Psychological Society, UK Council of Psychotherapy, and Royal College of Psychiatry have produced guidance documents for their members and “none are claiming that eco-anxiety is a mental illness.”²⁴ This is not to say, however, that eco-anxiety does not need to be clinically addressed. Rather, the literature suggests that eco-anxiety falls within a range. At lower levels, eco-anxiety can be positively *adaptive*, leading to meaningful climate action;²⁵ on the other hand, where eco-anxiety is excessive and unremitting, or in the presence of co-morbidities (e.g., schizophrenia, depression), it can become *maladaptive*, leading to an inability to maintain normal psychological defenses (decompensation), resulting in pathology.²⁶

Wray’s thesis that climate grief is a globally experienced “*moral* emotion” stands unreconciled to her later observation that “it is in the United States [...] that the conversation about climate anxiety being an unbearably white phenomenon has really got off the ground.”²⁷ She draws heavily on a brief opinion piece in *Scientific American* by Sarah Jaquette Ray²⁸ who wonders why those who responded to her book entitled *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety* were “overwhelmingly white ... even whiter than the environmental circles I’ve been in for decades.”²⁹ Sarah Ray asks,

If people of color are more concerned about climate change than white people, why is the interest in climate anxiety so white? Is climate anxiety a form of white fragility or even *racial* anxiety? Put another way, is climate anxiety just code for white people wishing to hold onto their way of life or get “back to normal,” to the comforts of their privilege?³⁰

If the answer to Sarah Ray’s questions is “yes,” the racial freighting of climate anxiety really doesn’t allow for it to be called a “moral emotion” and her

²⁴ Hickman, “We need,” 415.

²⁵ Taylor, “Anxiety Disorders,” ad loc.; Hickman, “We need,” ad loc.; Elizabeth Haase, “Climate Change and Mental Health Connections,” May 2023. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/climate-change-and-mental-health-connections> (Accessed February 11, 2024).

²⁶ Taylor, “Anxiety Disorders,” ad loc.; Hickman, “We need,” 418; L. Van Susteren and W.K. Al-Delaimy, “Chapter 20. Psychological Impacts of Climate Change and Recommendations,” in *Climate Crisis and Creation Care: Historical Perspectives, Ecological Integrity and Justice*, ed., Christine Nellis (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021) ad loc.; Joseph Dodds, “The psychology of climate anxiety,” *BJPsych Bulletin* 45 (2021): 224 speaks of paranoid-schizoid anxiety and depressive anxieties. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8499625/> (Accessed February 19, 2024.)

²⁷ *GD*, 27.

²⁸ Sarah Jaquette Ray, “Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon.” *Scientific American*, March 21, 2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-climate-anxiety/> (Accessed May 26, 2023).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

cautions to the climate anxious against extremism, climate zealotry, xenophobia, and such³¹ seem inconsistent. Such characterization also runs counter to Britt Wray's assertions that eco-anxiety is a global, cross-generational, and cross-cultural phenomenon and a good thing. Can climate anxiety be both uniquely "white" and broadly "moral"? Might it be better to say that climate anxiety is more a *human*³² emotional reaction to the eco-crisis that's broadly "moral" in the sense of raising *powerful response potentials* for either good or evil?³³ In any event, readers will want to think through what they're being told here and why and then tease out what should be a more consistent sense of what "moral emotions" are and how they function ethically, particularly in relation to climate crisis.³⁴

Britt Wray also asserts that "global warming is not only a natural result of burning fossil fuels; it is an extension and outcome of colonialization as well."³⁵ However, she observes that *everyone* is caught up in its effects so that, oddly speaking, eco-dread is a potential right-setting emotional 'maladjustment' to all that is wrong with the world. Wray's observations, again, merit consideration but the issue of climate change would not seem quite as simple and there is a "stickiness" to the status quo;³⁶ e.g., First Nations groups seeking a material partnership interest in pipelines as a means of recapturing sovereignty over land and realizing a material benefit to them.

"Feeling it all" must admit that what people deny will indeed harm them, Wray avers (ch. 2). Humankind's long-learned preference has been "to overvalue immediate threats at the cost of discounting more far-off and abstract perils" by "playing dead."³⁷ Overwhelmed by the latter's *perceived* immensity, systemic complexity, and apocalyptic certainty, people fall into a sham sense of helplessness, experiencing "environmental melancholia" and "shut down."³⁸

³¹ Ibid.

³² *GD*, 29.

³³ *GD*, 29.

³⁴ See, for example, the more broadly contextualized Wikipedia discussion of "Moral Emotions" at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_emotions and the discussion of eco-guilt and eco-shame as moral climate emotions in Rikke Sigmer Nielsen, Christian Gamborg and Thomas Bøker Lund, "Eco-guilt and eco-shame in everyday life: an exploratory study of the experiences, triggers, and reactions," *Frontiers in Sustainability* 5 (2024): 15 pages at <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2024.1357656> (both accessed July 21, 2024) and the literature there cited. This will raise further questions to Wray's discussion of individual climate-guilt (*supra*, n. 13). Wray's further citation of Mary Annaïse Hegler's description of hope as "such a white concept" (*GD*, 153) should be subjected to similar critical scrutiny.

³⁵ *GD*, 29.

³⁶ See Amanda Stephenson, "Indigenous ownership of Trans Mountain must be 'material,' says prospective bidder," (October 20, 2023) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/trans-mountain-pipeline-expansion-indigenous-ownership-1.7003773#:~:text=Currently%2C%20a%20%241.1%2Dbillion%20deal,private%20company%20and%20Indigenous%20people>. (Accessed March 7, 2024.)

³⁷ *GD*, 39.

³⁸ *GD*, 42f.

Wray argues that people also transact climate crisis denial by buying into the *outright denial* of big lies, the *negation* of repressing big facts, and the soft denial of *disavowal* by deliberately zeroing out positive and negative data.³⁹ Some forms of denial are psychologically adaptive in the short term to survive the intolerable; others are merely perverse states of mind. Holding ourselves “special,” we feel entitled to forgive our climate irresponsibility and quietism.⁴⁰ Wray encourages walling off binary thinking that sets out exclusive choices (e.g., *either* hopeful/positive *or* negative/apocalyptic) in favor of a balancing response (*both/and*) to address the reality of eco-anxiety in productive ways. This seems wise counsel.

Wray notes in ch. 3 that while there are broadly plottable elements to eco-anxiety, “feeling it all” will carry a unique signature of characteristics for the individual. She illustrates by featuring a woman (pseudonym “Chicken Little”) whom she describes as

clearly already suffering from mental health problems, including clinical anxiety and depression. Of course, if you have an anxiety disorder, the climate crisis is only going to make you more anxious. It gives you something very real to catastrophize about.⁴¹

Wray’s description of the adaptability/pathology nexus is informative.

Wray features Hickman’s work in developing a tool out of her psychotherapy practice and research to frame emotional responses to climate crisis across four degrees of intensity from mild to severe as a way of “helping people make sense of their experiences and feelings.”⁴² They are better able to ask, “Is what I’m feeling ‘normal’? Is it ‘helpful’? Should I be concerned? Do I need to consult a mental health professional?” Wray does readers the credit not only of describing others’ existential distress,⁴³ but also offering her own personal account of climate grief.⁴⁴

Unlike other kinds of grieving, eco-grief is “disenfranchised.”⁴⁵ It is without a history of rituals of mourning or the broad recognition of formal and informal supports. In fact, eco-distress can draw down harsh public criticism.

³⁹ *GD*, 45f.

⁴⁰ *GD*, 46-50.

⁴¹ *GD*, 55.

⁴² Hickman, “We need,” 417-18. *GD*, 56-59.

⁴³ *GD*, 60, 62-64.

⁴⁴ *GD* 65-69.

⁴⁵ *GD*, 69.

Wray illustrates the belittling dismissiveness in a recent setting⁴⁶ and reminds readers of the hostile reception Rachel Carson’s scientifically factual and deeply emotional book *Silent Spring* (1962) received for laying bare the devastating impact of pesticides on the environment. People must be both scientifically informed *and* emotionally energized to act, Wray argues.

Finally, Wray invites the reader to “feel it all” regarding reproductive anxiety (ch. 4). Would-be parents feel turmoil and uncertainty about bringing children into the world. Is it safe, meaningful, and affordable given earth’s “climate future” prospects? Wray foregrounds the dark history of violations of certain populations’ reproductive rights (e.g., Indigenous, Black, Latino, and the poor) and the resistance to those populations and their supporting organizations.⁴⁷ She rightly warns against studies and arguments that simplistically reduce the justification for having or not having a child to the measure of its lifetime carbon footprint.⁴⁸

Wray also introduces readers to climate action groups⁴⁹ that have weaponized their fertility by vowing not to have children in protest of bad or failed government climate policy. This may demonstrate earnestness and does receive media attention. Whether it can lever significant change is another matter. The broader dynamics that account for a declining birth rate in Canada, for example, probably commands more attention. Lyman Stone writes:

Housing costs, worries about the economy, having wages barely high enough to meet their existing needs, *and worries about climate change* all fall into this group of *moderately influential but widely shared concerns*. These concerns may not be most women’s top concern, but operate in the background for so many women that they remain socially important.⁵⁰

Wray briefly considers the ideas of those who have advocated setting aside the nuclear family for more climate friendly “alternative family structures and broader support networks,”⁵¹ offering, effectively, more communal care to

⁴⁶ See *GD*, 71-74.

⁴⁷ *GD*, 84-90.

⁴⁸ *GD*, 90-91.

⁴⁹ Climate Future, Birth Strike/Grieving Parenthood, Extinction Rebellion and Climate Strike Canada. *GD*, 92-95.

⁵⁰ Lyman Stone, “She’s (Not) Having a Baby: Why Half of Canadian Women Are Falling Short of Their Fertility Desires,” *Cardus* (January, 2023): 24 (*Italics added*.) See on declining birth rates for China Farah Masters, “China’s population declines for a second year, with record low birth rate,” Reuters (January 20, 2024). <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-population-drops-2nd-year-raises-long-term-growth-concerns-2024-01-17/> (Accessed March 7, 2024.) China has joined Japan and South Korea in this trend.

⁵¹ *GD*, 102. See Wray’s discussion of Donna Haraway’s “kinnovation” and Matthew Schneider-Mayerson’s “networks of care and support.”

a smaller number of children. Such bold social re-engineering raises many questions—How few/many children? Who would have them? Who would decide? What is a “multispecies” family? The restructurings seem more likely to founder because they call for a more controlling social compact and run up against longstanding, powerful cultural defaults to genetic affinity (e.g., the nuclear and extended family) and already-existing communal alternatives (e.g., the *kibbutz*).

The Challenge of Self-Help for Personal Transformation

Generation Dread is a self-help book.⁵² In fact, it was judged a particularly good example, being one of the Indigo Top Ten Best Self-Help Books in 2022. The self-help task in the second section of *Generation Dread* is for readers to connect inward to transform themselves to address their climate emotions for better climate action. While readers are resourced to engage the task, self-help is essentially a “bottom up” process that invites readers to analyze arguments, compare options on offer, sift data, draw conclusions, and make personal applications. The challenge is that there is considerable variability in what readers bring to the self-help task and how they will help themselves.

Chapter 5 extensively features the account of a 20-something musician whose professional aspirations are shut down by COVID-19 and an ‘epiphany’ that the rest of his life will be dominated by “increasingly dire crises”⁵³ and that every aspect of his (and everyone else’s) life is predicated on the planet-killing consumption of fossil fuels. He plunges into climate grief and anxiety, obsessing over media featuring climate crisis, abandoning a music career on the cusp, and withdrawing from family and friends. A climate-aware therapist advises that he “be very careful about his digital diet and find others to speak with who ‘get it’.”⁵⁴ He partially follows the advice. Later he gets in touch with Wray, who suggests, based upon John Fisher’s *Personal Transformation Curve*, that this young man has rushed to climate action before processing his eco-grief. He eventually moves in with his 94-year-old aunt, offering her company and care in her declining years as a response to the ecological crisis. His reflection to Wray is revealing:

Whether I decide to keep doing music or not or go learn organic agriculture almost doesn’t matter to me anymore...I just want to do what brings me joy, instead of caring for the Earth out of some

⁵² *GD*, iv.

⁵³ *GD*, 106.

⁵⁴ *GD*, 109.

lofty feelings of morality or this ‘we’re going to starve or die in armed conflict if we don’t all change our way of life ASAP’ mindset that was plaguing me.⁵⁵

Does this quote look like the emergent internal and external climate activism Wray is hoping for in her readers? She writes that he has “found meaning in a much quieter act” which she surmises is “the first step in an endless march towards living more comfortably—more meaningfully—in his awakened state. His tale is far from over, more emergent actions await.”⁵⁶ Wray’s muted affirmation suggests no.

Chapter 6 relates Wray’s experience of attending a ten-week-long eco-grief support group sponsored by the *Good Grief Network (GGN)* established by LaUra [sic] Schmidt and Aimee Lewis Reau. It points to the same vulnerability of self-help. Closely modelled after *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the ground rules for sessions make clear that it is self-regulated. Participants are told to “respect one another, don’t try to convince anyone that their perspective is wrong, take what you want from these meetings and leave the rest if you don’t agree with what another person says.”⁵⁷ In this environment, how is it then possible for a community to hear an individual’s uncertain life narrative and *sincerely* “value it, co-author it, or fold parts of our story into their own lives and vice versa”,⁵⁸ thus validating it and making it more coherent?

Climate activist readers will likely be frustrated by the non-directive approach. Wray’s own response to the tenth step in the *GGN* sequence to “Reinvest in Meaningful efforts” was to do post-doctoral work on the impact of the climate crisis on youth mental health and to co-publish the results.⁵⁹ This makes excellent sense as strategic internal and external climate activism. However, not all the step 10 responses of the other 15 members of her group achieved that degree of lift. Wray notes that they committed to “reinvesting in community groups, volunteer work, activism, self-care rituals, children, art, beauty, dancing, cooking, health, and fitness.”⁶⁰ The variability is likely a function of the non-directive aspect of self-help.

⁵⁵ *GD*, 115

⁵⁶ *GD*, 115.

⁵⁷ *GD*, 140.

⁵⁸ *GD*, 146.

⁵⁹ *GD*, 144f. See notice of Wray’s participation in Caroline Hickman et al., “Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey,” *The Lancet Planetary Health* 15, 12 (December 2021): e863-e873. <https://www.sciencedirect.com.twu.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S2542519621002783?via%3Dihub> (Accessed February 22, 2024)

⁶⁰ *GD*, 145.

Self-help also throws upon readers' shoulders the task of assessing whether and to what degree the tools and resources proffered are helpful or not. Wray's chapter (ch. 6) entitled "Good Grief," offers that "most people don't know how to grieve for something as abstract as a sinking coastline or the idea that they might not have children or grandchildren. This kind of grief requires specialized support."⁶¹ She considers two models of how people grieve, setting aside the work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross by telling the reader it is "based on the experiences of terminally ill people—an inevitable and final process—which isn't perfectly suited to this context."⁶² Wray opines that embracing a model that recognizes "the mobilizing power of grief as more central than the finality of death"⁶³ would be more appropriate.

Several observations might be made. First, given Wray's reason for dismissing Kübler-Ross' work, it is curious that chapter six begins with the inspirational story of Jeremie Saunders, a cystic fibrosis sufferer whose death will certainly be much sooner than later, yet who has translated his grief into a positive determination to fill each day with remarkable purpose and productivity. The focus on purposeful living in the face of death/dying, far from disqualifying Kübler-Ross' model, suggests it is directly relevant. Second, Kübler-Ross' work may not be "perfectly" suited, but neither is it irrelevant. It is true that the original research was based upon people who were dying.⁶⁴ But its implications for grief work generally are shown in a following volume jointly published by Kübler-Ross and Kessler in 2005 entitled, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*.⁶⁵

Kübler-Ross expanded her model to include any form of personal loss, such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or income, major rejection, the end of a relationship or divorce, drug addiction, incarceration, the onset of a disease or an infertility diagnosis, and even minor losses, such as a loss of insurance coverage. ... In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kessler applied the five stages to responses to the virus, saying: "It's not a map but it provides some scaffolding for this unknown world."⁶⁶

⁶¹ *GD*, 135.

⁶² *GD*, 137.

⁶³ *GD*, 137.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

⁶⁶ "Five Stages of Grief," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_stages_of_grief (Accessed Dec. 3, 2022).

Surely the model would be relevant for those experiencing eco-grief. Third, Caroline Hickman, a climate-aware psychotherapist extensively cited by Wray and with whom Wray has worked, writes, “I have observed similarities to the Kubler-Ross [sic] model of change (Kubler-Ross [sic] & Kessler, 2014) with a journey through shock, denial, frustration or anger, depression, experimentation, decision and integration.”⁶⁷ Hickman says of Kübler-Ross’ model and others (including Fisher’s *Change Curve*, also featured in Wray),⁶⁸ they “should be used lightly and flexibly, I have found them helpful in practice when talking with young people about the emotional rollercoaster they are riding in response to becoming aware of the climate crisis.”⁶⁹

Rosemary Randall’s work which Wray commends is newer and overtly pointed to eco-grief, but Wray gives no evidence of having assessed its strengths and weaknesses for the reader nor canvassed whether it is used by other climate-aware therapists. Readers interested in directly and personally engaging their eco-grief would do well to test the tools offered *as well as* those set aside in *Generation Dread*.

The final chapter of this section (ch. 7) argues for the strategy of balancing hope and fear in the face of shocking weather events. Wray lays hold of Robert Jay Lifton’s concept of the “prospective survivor” who is sustained by the vision of imagining how they might perish as a way of cultivating an “existential resilience” *and* “robust hope,”⁷⁰ that resists falling into narrativizing based upon naïve optimism or deterministic pessimism regarding the future.⁷¹ She invites readers to jettison distorting monocular views in favor of a binocular vision⁷² that achieves stereoscopic realism in balancing fear and hope by maintaining an openness to the creative potential of unforeseen developments in either lens.

The Challenge of Helping Others for World Transformation

The general theme of chapter 8 is that “The world has been ending throughout history for many different cultural groups; the losses are ongoing and disproportional, but so too is proof of resilience and survival.”⁷³ Wray’s refusal to give up on humanity’s capacity to “sensitize ourselves to do better at preventing our worst fears going forward”⁷⁴ is certainly hopeful, as is her call

⁶⁷ Hickman, “We Need,” 416.

⁶⁸ *GD*, 111.

⁶⁹ Hickman, “We Need,” 416.

⁷⁰ *GD*, 152, 154, 167.

⁷¹ *GD*, 153,

⁷² See Wray’s discussion of Wilfred Bion’s initial work on binocular vision and the later applications to climate change at *GD*, 160-166.

⁷³ *GD*, 189.

⁷⁴ *GD*, 174.

for communal action at the largest possible scale over doing nothing. The reader will be aware that Wray's litany of empires and cultures (the number could be greatly multiplied) that have experienced "world endings"⁷⁵ can also be read in demonstration of a distressingly consistent pattern of slippage into catastrophic failure to reach critical mass for cooperation in problem solving.⁷⁶ Perhaps this is another place for binocular vision: Is the historical glass half full (Wray), half empty (Hegel), or both?

A second featured discussion in chapter 8 advocates for an enchanted view of the world and true partnership. Wray agrees with Eisler and Fry that there is "a duality in the character of all cultures, which are either domination or partnership orientated."⁷⁷ The West is thoroughly domination-oriented with commitments to anthropocentrism, hierarchy, and exploitation. Many Indigenous societies, on the other hand, follow the partnership-oriented model that sees the earth as an "interconnected web, and values egalitarian, life-sustaining structures and mutually supportive systems."⁷⁸ Wray argues that before Western systems can change, beliefs must change and this means throwing off the emphatically unenchanted prevailing view of contemporary Western culture in its alienation from nature to embrace a view of earth that sees it as "a sacred being in and of itself."⁷⁹

Kyle Powys Whyte, a member of Citizen Potawatomi Nation and Professor of Environment and Sustainability at Michigan State University, whom Wray interviewed for the book, describes what choosing partnership means. Indigenous societies themselves have been damaged by, are recovering from and continue to resist the very assimilating culture that now asks for 'partnership' with them. Risks and dangers of continuing harm to them abound if 'partnership' for the dominant/assimilating culture is merely utilitarian and self-interested. Authentic partnership, Whyte asserts, takes time, perhaps even generations of time to build 'kinship,' by which he means "the attachments of integrity, including reciprocity, accountability, and trust."⁸⁰ Wray notes Whyte's comment that "the idea that Indigenous people have something to give to other

⁷⁵ *GD*, 173f.

⁷⁶ Hegel wrote: "What experience and history teach is this — that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it." G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, trans., H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), 21. "Was die Erfahrung aber und die Geschichte lehren, ist dieses, daß Völker und Regierungen niemals etwas aus der Geschichte gelernt und nach Lehren, die aus derselben zu ziehen gewesen wären, gehandelt haben." G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Die Vernunft in der Geschichte, Bd. 1* (Hamburg: Johannes Hoffmeister, 1994), 19.

⁷⁷ *GD*, 178.

⁷⁸ *GD*, 179.

⁷⁹ Charles Eisenstein quoted in *GD*, 179.

⁸⁰ *GD*, 187.

people in terms of possible solutions and answers, I actually just think that's the wrong approach...."⁸¹ She writes, presumably continuing to cite Whyte,

That's because Indigenous wisdom is not knowledge one should think of as a 'valuable good' that has been overlooked by today's dominant system. Any community that has survived through everything Indigenous peoples have endured must have relied on *a number of different types of knowledge*. It doesn't mean that they've made all the best decisions, or that they know everything; rather, it implies that their survival has been supported by a portfolio of wisdom that includes ancient knowledge, intellectual tradition, *as well as contemporary science*.⁸²

It would have helped readers to hear further from Whyte on this both/and approach through more direct quotation and summative aspects of his own extensive scholarship.⁸³ There is a growing body of collaborative or partnering research that demonstrates the mutual benefit of combining Indigenous Knowledge and ecological/evolutionary understanding.⁸⁴

As to embracing an "enchanted" view of the world, this reviewer does not believe that Christians should feel in any way pressured to move to the conception of a divinized earth, populated by a broadly elevated animate life, with a 'demoted/decentered' humankind in it as described in *Generation Dread*. The reason is that the Christian conception—or, more accurately, the biblical record from which it must be formed—is entirely sufficient to appreciate the world and humankind's harmonious place and function within it as well as the proper relationship to be sustained with its Creator. But is it "enchanted?" Is its embrace a "re-enchantment" of the "dis-enchanted?"

⁸¹ *GD*, 185.

⁸² *GD*, 185. (*Italics added*.)

⁸³ See the 187 entries of his work recorded in Google Scholar. <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=xRBh4VIAAAAJ&hl=en> (Accessed February 23, 2024).

⁸⁴ See, for example, Tyler D. Jessen, Natalie C. Ban, Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton, and Chris T. Darimont, "Contributions of Indigenous Knowledge to Ecological and Evolutionary Understanding," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 20/2 (2022): 93-101 and the literature there cited. <https://esajournals-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.twu.idm.oclc.org/doi/epdf/10.1002/fee.2435> (Accessed February 23, 2024).

Jason Crawford's review of the new wave of literature on re-enchantment,⁸⁵ including significant Christian contributions,⁸⁶ and his canvas of the language of enchantment, dis-enchantment, and re-enchantment, if not the specific vocabulary, demonstrates a history and ideological baggage that goes back at least centuries and probably further than sociologist Max Weber's formulations on the "elimination of magic from the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*). What can be learned serves caution, as do the qualifications and actual retreats from the vocabulary by Christians in the very process of using it.⁸⁷

For all of that, there is a problem to be addressed. It seems to this reviewer that the functional worldview of the great majority of Christians is simply the secular Western view (anthropocentric, Enlightenment rationalism) pressed onto the biblical narrative by a false hermeneutic and baptized as 'Christian.'⁸⁸

If the above is accurate, the secular 'Christian' view must go and there is need of a conversion to a biblical exegesis that accurately traces and unfolds the guiding record's account. It will include a dynamically personified heavens and earth, purposefully created by and absolutely responsive to God. It will faithfully relate the binding of creation due to human sin (including the secular Western view and its 'Christian' adoption) from which unsaved *and* saved humanity should readily repent. And it will explore the groaning of that creation for its rightful participation with saved humankind in the full, cosmic liberation of gospel promise.

That said, not enough biblical thinking and reflection has gone into exploring the part that the cosmos—and the earth in particular—plays in the drama of redemption presently. There is enough at the surface of the narrative to assure that the cosmos is *not* a mere sideshow to the "main event," an apologetic weapon, or a piece of detritus from which we will all 'fly away' to be with Jesus. Heaven came down to earth and it will come down to earth again. Earth—indeed all of creation—on that account, should matter greatly to humankind generally and to right-thinking Christians everywhere especially.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Jason Crawford, "The Trouble with Re-Enchantment," *Los Angeles Review of Books (LARB)*, September 7, 2020. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-trouble-with-re-enchantment/> (Accessed August 27, 2024).

⁸⁶ Crawford discusses Alister McGrath, *The Re-Enchantment of Nature* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002) and James K.A. Smith, *After Modernity?: Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-Enchantment of the World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008).

⁸⁷ See Crawford, "Trouble with Re-Enchantment," *passim*.

⁸⁸ See, for example, the discussion of this matter across several chapters in Francis A. Schaefer and Udo Middleman, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970; Wheaton; Good News Publishers/Crossway Books, 1992).

⁸⁹ See N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking heaven, the resurrection, and the mission of the church* (New York: Harper One, 2008).

Wray's reflection on wise communication with others about the environmental crisis (ch. 9) is well crafted and compelling. She begins with an account of a forty-five-minute talk she gave to a group of energy executives. Deeply aware of the challenges that this event posed, Wray carefully prepared her presentation. It was received politely enough, but the following Q and A was a "blowout," and the moderator hastily adjourned the meeting.

Wray asked in a debrief with Caroline Hickman, "*What can I do to fix this?*"⁹⁰ Hickman's counter gave insight: "What if it is perfect?" If it is, the task is to "get better at sitting with the discomfort—holding space for the emotions" on both sides.⁹¹

Wray agrees. There is certainly room for improvement related to content and delivery in informal/personal and formal/public discourse. But the greater need is for climate communicators to demonstrate emotional intelligence by "staying with the trouble" and adopting the role of empathic guide rather than adversarial director.⁹² Speaking out of her own research and experience, Wray argues that the balance to be struck for fruitful communication is especially critical when parents and professionals must have climate conversations with vulnerable youth and children.

Chapter 10 argues the potency of publicly mourning ecological losses. Wray asserts that externalizing personal climate-grief through acts of corporate, public mourning carries transformative potential because mourning is infused with ethical and political weight and makes visible the truth that what has been lost ecologically and what stands under threat of loss matters greatly and should matter to everyone. Public mourning helps healthfully to focus, articulate, and mobilize climate emotion for sustained climate action.

Wray's statement that "mourning rituals are specifically well suited to drawing out the interconnections between social and environmental injustice"⁹³ raises the question, "In what do the interconnections consist, and how are they made?" Wray's comment looks to be emergent from a blog piece by Persephone Pearl and several others who founded Remembrance Day for Lost Species (RDLS)⁹⁴ in which they note that

Rather late in life we realized that our brand of environmentalism was a product of racial and class privilege—and worse, that its

⁹⁰ *GD*, 192.

⁹¹ *GD*, 192.

⁹² *GD*, 193-198.

⁹³ *GD*, 215.

⁹⁴ Persephone Pearl, Rachel Porter and Emily Laurens, "On racism and environmentalist practice – reflections on a journey," October 22, 2019, <https://www.lostspeciesday.org/?p=1458> (Accessed July 25, 2024).

‘colour blindness’ colluded in the ongoingness of white supremacy. Privilege had led us to assume it was acceptable to focus on biodiversity loss without building this work on a foundation of solidarity and anti-racist practice.⁹⁵

The whole blog merits a careful read-through to understand RDLS’ social and structural evolution in taking on the new ideological conception. These are the marrow of RDLS just as much as *Generation Dread*.

The final chapter of *Generation Dread*, titled “Stronger Communities for a Better Future” (ch. 11), features at length the devastating impact of hurricane Dorian in 2019 upon those living on the island of Grand Bahama and what was learned in its aftermath as communities tried to recover.⁹⁶ Wray also links these findings to research done in Goa (India), Queensland (Australia), rural Nova Scotia (Canada), and New York City (USA). Wray identifies the following strategies and insights for building better resilience and survival prospects for communities in a future that will include greater climate catastrophes and more severe general climate change:

1. Those who experienced loss, more quickly recovered from their physical and emotional distress if they reached out to help neighbors and friends.
2. Naomi Klein writes: “In highly unequal societies with deep injustices reliably tracing racial fault lines, disasters don’t bring us in one fuzzy human family. They take preexisting divides and deepen them further....”⁹⁷
3. The social capital⁹⁸ and connectedness of communities should be increased *before* catastrophes strike for better readiness.
4. Trauma care that is pushed out of the clinical setting and into the community, consisting of trained and managed lay-counselors working under primary healthcare personnel is more efficient, less threatening, and

⁹⁵ Ibid. and *GD*, 211.

⁹⁶ Wray notes it was a category 5 hurricane with 185 mile per hour winds, gusts to 220 miles per hour, and storm surges of 20 feet. (*GD*, 216)

⁹⁷ Cited at *GD*, 218. Bahamian nationals were evacuated to safe official shelters and moved quickly out of them to the care of family and friend networks. Many undocumented Haitians who lived in less safer locations and who refused evacuation, fearing deportation, perished. Haitians who had lost Bahamian citizenship documents and work permits to the storm, found themselves at risk of detention and deportation. Others fell into further trauma for refusing counseling because they feared being labeled mentally ill.

⁹⁸ Social capital: “The interpersonal networks and common civic values which influence the infrastructure and economy of a particular society; the nature, extent, or value of these.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “social capital (*n.*),” December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8920395326> (Accessed February 26, 2024).

predicts for a higher percentage of recoveries from depression and anxiety.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Wray's *Generation Dread* is an engaging, well-written introduction to the emotional impact of climate crisis. It argues with heart and intensity for readers to address their own climate emotions as prelude to external activist undertakings and as a way emotionally to sustain themselves through future climate and ecological rigors.

While Wray blames the global climate crisis on the West and its macro-aggregates and logics, it has been suggested that the blame should realistically and without excuse be shared by the East and by individual fossil fuel consumers. The characterization of eco-dread as an adaptive, "moral" emotion rather than a pathology is well struck but may need more nuancing than Wray offers. Readers will find helpful Wray's call to resist climate crisis denial, to take the measure of their own climate emotions, and not be surprised if their climate grief is undervalued. They should rigorously test the warrants for reproductive anxiety and recourse to reproductive protest and radical family reengineering to which Wray has introduced them.

Given that *Generation Dread* is a self-help book, when readers are tasked to connect inward for self-transformation in Part Two, the benefit of the transformation will be proportional to the level of their personal investment and capacity. Examples in the chapters of this section well illustrate that the onus for performance in this "bottom up" approach is on participants, whether they are personally processing their climate grief, participating in a peer support network, or evaluating and working with the tools on offer from Wray's book.

The same self-help dynamics must also be kept in mind in the pursuit of community connection for external transformation which is the task of Part Three. Readers need to make informed choices as to how to read the history of community cooperation at various "world ending" points, whether optimistically, pessimistically, or in some creative combination. They should ask whether societies and communities under discussion have been adequately characterized with sufficient nuance to their functions and dysfunctions to make fair and meaningful comparisons and engage good collaborations. They must decide whether the recommended strategies and priorities in communication are wise and serviceable to them and whether public mourning rituals and emergency support networks at great environmental inflection points will offer sufficient spread and strength creatively to sustain, comfort, and support the

⁹⁹ *GD*, 226.

greatest numbers in societies and their communities for survival and flourishing as they stand on uneven ground.

The last sentence of Wray's final chapter carries a caution: "The sooner we realize that no one is coming to save us, and that we must do it together ourselves, the better off we will all be."¹⁰⁰ Wray's notices of religious and/or spiritual scaffolding throughout *Generation Dread* are generally respectful, whether referencing First Nations religion, Gaianism, Buddhism, or something else, and this would necessarily include Christianity. But she understands them to be offering serviceable metaphors and not salvation. Salvation, Wray avers, is the business of humanity. It is self-help all the way.

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Brian Rapske, review of *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis*, by Britt Wray, Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research. www.nimer.ca, (November 19, 2024).

¹⁰⁰ *GD*, 232.