

## **Spiritual Exercises at the End of the World: Toward Solidarity as a Way of Life**

We face a polycrisis of disparate yet interrelated shocks: climate crisis, refugee crisis, economic crisis, and more, each magnified by their radically disproportionate effects upon those least responsible for causing them—a global structure of racialized precarity rooted in slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives. For anyone paying attention, despair looms. In the last few years, as I have written about ‘solidarity’ as an ethical framework of response to racial and climate injustice, I have noticed a question reemerging in our public life and my own. In the teeth of this polycrisis, how does one live? That is: How does one not just post online, not just anxiously analyze the news and the data, but actually embody a spiritual commitment to struggle, refuse the chic pose of fatalistic despair, and embody the sustainability one seeks in the world through a sustainable interior life?

It is an obvious question, yet I noticed emerging again and again as I read memoirs of seasoned activists: Dan Sherrell writes: “How do we live with ourselves, and what is incumbent on us to do?...We need narrative, and we need emotional sustenance...We should be scouring our cultural history [to] try to create the cultural and spiritual resources that will see us through the crisis.” From where will these resources for living emerge, these narratives which can sustain us emotionally and spiritually at the end of the world?

In this paper, I turn to find a surprising answer to this search for a lived moral philosophy in the ancient tradition of spiritual exercises, brought into contact with resources from recent Indigenous Studies work at the intersection of spirituality and political life. Ancient philosophy—as Pierre Hadot has argued—concerned itself not with “teaching an abstract theory – much less in the exegesis of texts – but rather in the art of living. [Philosophy] is a concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages the whole of existence.” Philosophy was about finding a way of life. To explore the spiritual dimensions of sustainable development, activists are beginning to link multiple struggles together—climate justice, racial justice, immigrant justice, and more—into an attempt to find in the virtue of solidarity itself a whole way of life: a way of reorganizing one’s whole existence, interiority, and practical activities in alignment with solidarity. Doing this requires not simply developing the correct analysis by reading the right articles online, nor even in advancing the right kinds of direct actions, but rather in cultivating the disciplines of attention which make solidarity, over the long term, possible.

Spiritual exercises, in the ancient tradition, include “research (zetesis), thorough investigation (skepsis), reading (anagnosis), listening (prosoche), attention (prosoche), self-mastery (enkrateia),” as well as meditation, memorization, and practical exercises for recreating habits of interiority. These at once resonate with and challenge recent trends toward spiritual practices among activists in justice work. By juxtaposing the tradition of the spiritual exercises (from the Stoics to Ignatius of Loyola to Michel Foucault) to the present struggle to find a form of life adequate to the polycrisis, we shed new light on both, while also underscoring the crucial spiritual dimensions of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).