### Apocalyptic Rhetoric only way to solve

#### Apocalyptic discourse is the only meaningful way to influence societies ability to create change- and therefore avoid extinction through environmental ignorance

Veldman ‘12

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Outside of human minds exist billions of interacting events and processes— atoms, humans, animals, plants, microbes, and so on—whose ultimate trajectory is uncertain, if not in many cases impossible to predict. I have suggested that the apocalyptic ending is one solution to the problem of how to convert this impersonal complexity into a meaningful story that draws and holds peoples’ attention for long enough to influence their actions. It does so through a story that simply and succinctly tells listeners that there is a problem, that it may have disastrous consequences, and that certain kinds of actions therefore must taken in order to avoid them. And while it is always in this space between the tangible present and the imagined future that the opportunity for moral engagement with the world arises, I argue that it is especially when the connection between the two feels tenuous that such an opportunity comes to be experienced as an obligation. Certainly the apocalyptic mode has its shadow side. Paranoia, selfrighteousness, and feverish hope skirt the edge of disappointment, leading many both within and outside of the environmental movement to view it with suspicion. Indeed, many environmentalists would do well to heed Catherine Keller’s call for a more self-critical discourse of “counter-apocalypse” (1996), rather than falling prey to the temptation to demonize the anti-environmental other. But this should not prevent scholars from attending to the important role apocalypticism plays within the movement. As much as some in the movement try to disclaim such discourse, it is clear that many adherents draw inspiration from it. So much so that they are moving to distant communities where they believe they will be able to live more ecologically sensitive lives; they are teaching their neighbors to grow their own food because transporting it from other parts of the country has too large of a carbon footprint; and they are “paper monkeywrenching” in Washington, D.C. and in courtrooms around the country in order to ensure that the environment is legally protected to the greatest extent possible. They are putting environmental values into practice, and many are doing so because they seriously believe that if they do not, disaster will follow. Even if observers of the movement disagree with their conclusions about what constitutes ethical behavior or worthwhile activism, this demonstrated willingness to make substantial sacrifices seems to make the project of understanding their motivations worthwhile. With the environmental and sustainability movements in full swing, further empirical research examining how people determine what is right and wrong behavior with regard to the environment could serve as an important complement to the work already completed in meta- and normative environmental ethics during the past several decades. Such work would be of vital interest to anyone concerned with the real world implications of ethical theories, potentially yielding insights about what constraints and limitations humans face as they attempt to draw moral meaning from the environmental situation. What further insights might be gleaned from the study of how ethics are practiced in tandem with the study of how ethics should be practiced? With the present study serving as an example, I would submit that exploring how people negotiate, reformulate, and resist making ethical choices relating to the environment in their everyday lives can yield valuable insights about the important question of how environmental values become environmentally valuable practices. In the end, it is possible that such work will be valuable not only for scholars, but for the Earth.

#### Apocalyptic rhetoric is the only means to solve- morals cannot be formed without a clear consequential ending to the narrative

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To analyze environmental apocalypticism as a type of narrative is not to suggest that apocalyptics’ claims about the future are fictional. Rather, it is to highlight that the facts to which environmentalists appeal have been organized with particular goals in mind, goals which have necessarily shaped the selection and presentation of those facts. Compelling environmental writers do not simply list every known fact pertaining to the natural world, but instead select certain findings and place them within a larger interpretive framework. Alone, each fact has little meaning, but when woven into a larger narrative, a message emerges. This process of narrativization is essential if a message is to be persuasive (Killingsworth and Palmer 2000, 197), and has occurred not only in the rapidly expanding genre of environmental nonfiction, but in much scientific writing about the environment as well (Harré, Brockmeier, and Mühlhäusler 1999, 69). What defines narratives as such is their beginning-middle-end structure, their ability to “describe an action that begins, continues over a well defined period of time, and finally draws to a definite close” (Cronon 1992, 1367). Here I will focus on the last of these elements, the ending, because anything we can learn about how endings function within narratives in general will be applicable to the apocalypse, the most final ending of all. An ending is essential in order for a story to be complete, but there is more to it than this. Endings are also key because they establish a story’s moral, the lesson it is supposed to impart upon the reader. In other words, to know the moral of the story, auditors must know the consequences of the actions depicted therein, so there can be no moral without an ending. To take a simple example, when we hear the story of the shepherd boy who falsely claims that a wolf is attacking his flock of sheep in order to entertain himself at his community’s expense, what makes the lesson clear is that when a wolf does attack his flock, the disenchanted town members refuse to come to his aid. By clearly illustrating how telling lies can have unpleasant consequences for the perpetrator, the ending reveals the moral that lying is wrong. As Cronon explains, it is “[t]he difference between beginning and end [that] gives us our chance to extract a moral from the rhetorical landscape” (1992, 1370).