

The Wisdom to Survive: Theology and Theodicy in Octavia Butler's Earthseed Chronicles

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Paper #3: Explore the theology and the theodicy of *The Earthseed Chronicles*. What do the characters and their scripture teach us about agency and connection, trauma and resilience?

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In her Earthseed Chronicles, *The Parable of the Sower* and *The Parable of the Talents*, Octavia Butler does what her character Reverend Olamina, father to protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina, recommends when he counsels: "It's better to teach people than to scare them, Lauren... If you can think of ways to entertain them at the same time, you'll get your information out. And all without making anyone look down... into the abyss" (*Parable of the Sower*, 65-66)¹. Butler has created two novels to teach about theology, theodicy, and survival, getting her information out through entertaining people with story. Although Butler was writing in the 1990s, contemporary climate and sociology studies have shown that she was right: if you ask people to look down into the abyss, they shut down. The truth and consequences of coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises is too much for the average human psyche to process. As will sound familiar to those of us whose work it is to preach the good news, the climate advocacy advice is to continually focus on hope, so people will be able to hear you and still function. While it would be a stretch to call the Earthseed Chronicles hopeful, Butler does package her prophecy in story, wrapping her warnings in entertainment to broaden and entice her audience.

Theology

The Earthseed Chronicles present a process theology in which God is a participatory process of unfolding change. Beings interact with one another and the world, constantly becoming. The first verse Butler shares in the Earthseed Chronicles is its central theological tenet:

All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God
Is Change. (*Sower*, 3)

¹ Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower*. Grand Central Publishing: New York, 1993.

This verse lyricizes the process theology supposition that God is the process of becoming through interactions among beings. Alfred North Whitehead, the founder of process philosophy, theorized that everything is part of process: all living conscious beings, as well as what we might consider non-living entities. Everything down to cells, atoms, and quarks are part of process, all vibrating in matter and wave, becoming in every instance of interacting with one another. The Earthseed Chronicles share this process theology that humans are but one of the entities enacting change and participating in the process of God: “We are all Godseed, but no more or less so than any other aspect of the universe, Godseed is all there is—all that Changes.” (Sower, 77). Bankole, Lauren Olamina’s beloved, writes that “her god is a process or a combination of processes, not an entity... Some of the faces of her god are biological evolution, chaos theory, relativity theory, the uncertainty principle, and, of course, the second law of thermodynamics.” (*Parable of the Talents*, 46)². For Lauren Olamina, God shows God’s face through the realities of the universe, some of which manifest in various religions that have attempted to make meaning of existence, as well as in the truths of science that have uncovered patterned realities in it. God lives in these relations and in their becomings.

The Chronicles put forth a panentheist process theology: Earthseed’s God is both all that is, and more. God is the universe, *and* God also interacts with the universe and is acted upon by the universe: “Why is the universe?/ To shape God./ Why is God?/ To shape the universe.” (Sower, 78) God is within and among Godseed in the process of its shaping, as well as being its own entity. Lauren Olamina calls this the “only paradox... or bit of circular reasoning” in Earthseed’s theology. However, she also believes it is the truest piece of the theology, and insists she cannot get rid of it. This is the core of Earthseed’s theology, and “all the rest of Earthseed is explanation.” (Sower, 79) This figure eight paradox parallels similar struggles in a variety of theological frameworks that push the edges of our perceptions.

However, the Earthseed Chronicles’ theology is content to let the paradox because it is much more interested in the question: how do we survive in this world of suffering and cruelty while retaining the best parts of our humanity? Butler shows through story that what humans believe about the world—our theology and theodicy—either aids and abets our twinned survival and humanity, or thwarts and subverts them. Lauren Olamina wants to know whether a belief system will help her people survive with their humanity intact. Indeed, the subtitle of Earthseed is “The Books of the Living.” They are the books of the people who choose to live and survive as a result of their theology.

² Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Talents*. Grand Central Publishing: New York, 1998.

Theodicy

Earthseed's theology challenges people to use their consciousness to adapt and survive by shaping a God unconscious and indifferent to them. If theodicy is the tension between "If God is good, then God cannot be God," and "if God is God, then God cannot be good," then Butler answers this question unflinchingly: God is not good, God is God: "Infinite/ Irresistable/ Inexorable,/ Indifferent." (*Sower*, 25)

In a conversation with a traumatized teenage boy who is learning about Earthseed's theology that God is Change, Lauren Olamina explains:

"Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe. To us, that makes it the most powerful reality, and just another word for God."

"But... what can you do with a God like that? I mean... it isn't even a person. It doesn't love you or protect you. It doesn't know anything. What's the point?"

"the point is, it's the truth," I said. "It's a hard truth. Too hard for some people to take, but that doesn't make it any less true." (*Talents*, 74)

Lauren Olamina does recognize human need, she just is not willing to lie about the nature of reality to meet that need. Earthseed's theology is blunt in its assessment of God's relationship to human suffering and need. In the same conversation with Dan, he asks her whether prayer works. She responds,

"Praying is a very effective way of talking to *yourself*, of talking yourself into things, of focusing your attention on whatever it is you want to do. It can give a feeling of control and help you to stretch yourself beyond what you thought were your limits."

I paused, thinking of how well Dan had done just that when he tried to rescue his parents. "It doesn't always work the way we want it to," I said. "But its always worth the effort."

"Even if when I pray, I ask God to help me?" he asked.

"Even so," I said. "You're the one your words reach and strengthen. You can think of it as praying to that part of God that's within you." (*Talents*, 77)

My own core operating system leads me to a different ultimate truth about God's nature and relationship to human morality. I believe the most powerful force in the universe is Love, and God is the creative force of life serving life. This is the God I choose to worship and to

whom I pray. Resting in the power of this Love gives me comfort and strength. Process theologians, while agreeing that God is process, can disagree on whether that process is creative love or unfolding change. Even Butler-ites disagree on whether the ground of being is Love or Change, including adrienne marie brown and other change leaders she cites in *Emergent Strategy*. Social change strategist Aisha Shillingford writes “we have to firmly believe that there are forces of justice and truth and love at play. We do our part and rely on the greater power of the Universe aka our collective intentions and efforts. Its relieving to know that it is not always up to us as individuals, but there is a complex interconnection of power at play.” (quoted in brown, 89)³ I, too, find it relieving and am grateful to rest in the larger Love when I need to do so. Lauren Olamina would tell me this is good practice if it enables me to find greater strength to survive, which it does. She just wouldn’t tell me it was the truth. In the Earthseed theology, serving life is a *human* choice for good, rather than an alignment with the most powerful force in the universe. “We will live / and we will serve life.” (*Talents*, 60)

Agency and Connection, Trauma and Resilience

Earthseed’s truth is too hard for Lauren Olamina’s brother Marcos to take. Marcos is deeply afraid and needs a God of order to feel safe. He also needs a God who loves and respects him. However, *human* connection and respect are even more important for Marcos. His theology is a projection of this need for human love, respect, order and control, even as Lauren Olamina’s theology is a projection of her strength and capacity to face hard truths. Although Marcos exhibits pain when he read’s Earthseed’s first sentence, “All that you touch/ You Change./ All that you Change/ Changes you./ The only lasting truth/ Is Change./ God/ Is Change,” he does not leave. He stays in relationship with his sister, and prepares to argue with her and her community to win their respect. It is when he fails to win that argument and feels publicly humiliated and disrespected by human beings that he is enraged and ultimately chooses to part ways with his kin. In Butler’s nuanced telling, patriarchy is alive in this schism, but so is trauma. Lauren Olamina writes,

“my brother needed to ‘go off on his own,’ to have his own turf where he was the one who said yes or no, and where everyone respected him. He needed that more than he needed anything, and he meant to have it all at once. But now, instead of feeling important and proud, he feels angry and embarrassed.” (*Talents*, 152).

When Marcos decides to leave, Lauren Olamina surmises,

“He blames me for the failure of his Gathering Day sermons. He’s gained no followers. The Peraltas like him and sort of agree with him, but even they don’t see him as a

³ brown, adrienne marie. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press: Chico, 2017.

minister. They see him as a nice boy. In fact, that's the way most of the people here in Acorn see him. He thinks this is my fault." (*Talents*, 158)

Marcos needs to be respected as a man, not a nice boy; he needs to be respected as a leader and a minister. He is compelled to leave his sister's turf to gain respect and followers of his own. These intertwined needs to be in charge and respected as a man come from patriarchy's intersection with the trauma of slavery and sexual abuse. In this part of the story, Butler demonstrates how intersecting oppressions function in her characters' lives.

For her part, Lauren Olamina prioritizes the wholeness of the Acorn community over managing her brother's trauma, and thereby initiates the unfolding process of losing her family. She loses her brother, daughter, and beloved Bankole by choosing to follow her purpose and destiny in Earthseed. It is easy for her to refuse to leave Acorn to move with Bankole to the established town where he thinks they will be safer, but she is devastated when Bankole is killed at Acorn. It is much more painful for her to choose to let her brother fail in order to protect Acorn, knowing he is desperate for respect. However, she has no internal debate about this choice; we do not witness any internal dialogue debating what to choose. But when she realizes what her brother needs, and what she will have to do to protect her community as a result, she is exhausted, "all but sagging with weariness and dread," (*Talents*, 149).

Asha, Lauren Olamina's daughter, believes her mother chose Earthseed over her, calling Earthseed "her mother's favorite child," despite reading her mother's desperation and persistent search to find her. Perhaps Asha wishes her mother had chosen to go with Bankole and live as the doctor's wife in the established town, such that she would never have been taken and placed with the family that abused her. She wanted her mother to prioritize her, as Bankole did, to have her family's safety at the center of her life instead of a larger purpose.

Like Lauren Olamina, I have never hesitated in choosing to center God and purpose in my life, which currently means serving people in ministry. Reading Lauren Olamina's losses makes me wonder about the long-term consequences of this centering. I have no doubts about putting purpose at the center of my life, but I do have grief about what it has already and will surely continue to cost me. How many of us have juggled, harmed, or lost family in this negotiation between God, purpose, and loved ones' needs?

Marcos also chooses his own well-being over his connection with his sister. Instead of staying at Acorn and feeling inadequate and powerless, he leaves to find a way to survive and heal the parts of him broken by trauma and abuse. He finds refuge from his fear through a God of order that serves as a bulwark against the railing chaos that enslaved him and killed his family. He finds power and a place to lead in the community of Christian America. For Marcos, the pain of chaos and the trauma of its effects make him choose to shut out chaos at all costs,

including the cost of his relationship with his sister. Because Marcos believes chaos causes the kind of harm he suffered, he dedicates his life to order. “[Uncle Marc] was a man with a wound that would not heal until he could be certain that what had happened to him could not happen again to anyone, ever,” (*Talents*, 111). In wretched irony, Marcos’s drive to control chaos in order to protect people from the slavery and torture he endured led him to support the very organization that enslaved and tortured his sister.

Even though the roots of Marcos’s choices are grounded in a desire to reduce harm, they cause harm due to his unwillingness to grapple with hard truth. In the *Earthseed Chronicles*, theology’s accuracy and effects are more important than a character’s intentions. By participating in Jarrett’s Christian America organization, Marcos gives legitimacy and support to people who murder, rape, steal, and torture those with whom they disagree. He does not allow his belief in a God of order, and Christian America as the community that enacts that order, to be challenged by the reality of Christian America’s contributions to chaos. He simply shuts out the negative information. When Lauren Olamina tries to share the more brutal truth of Christian American’s work in the world, Marcos’s response is consistent with his response to the hard truths of *Earthseed*. He closes himself off and walks away, just as when Lauren first shared *Earthseed* with him, “He shut the book and closed his eyes. ‘I’m not sure I want to read your book, Lauren,’ he said.” (*Talents*, 147)

While Butler is clear this is a survival strategy born of trauma, she is also clear that it causes deep and unforgivable harm. The chapter in *Parable of the Talents* in which Marcos leaves begins with the following *Earthseed* verse:

To make peace with others,
Make peace with yourself:
Shape God
With generosity
And compassion.
Minimize harm.
Shield the weak.
Treasure the innocent.
Be true to the Destiny.
Forgive your enemies.
Forgive yourself. (*Talents*, 153)

Butler opens the chapter of the schism between the siblings with the verse that instructs people to live in right relationship with one another, and forgive one another when they fail to do so. And yet at the end of the *Earthseed Chronicles*, Lauren Olamina tells us she did not even try to forgive her brother for stealing her child. She lived her life with generosity and

compassion, minimizing harm and shielding the weak, but she could not follow Earthseed's teaching and forgive this harm. While the stories in the Earthseed Chronicles express deep empathy for the many people who experience trauma, Earthseed's theology does not let people off the hook for the harm they cause, or the good they fail to choose, as a result of their traumas. Empathy can help human beings understand other people's choices, but Earthseed's theology still requires responsibility for choosing well and shaping God in ways that minimize harm.

Empathy plays a complicated role in the Earthseed Chronicles. Butler gives her protagonist an empathy disorder so Lauren Olamina feels other peoples' experiences deeply—their traumas and their joys, their thoughts and fears. Lauren Olamina sees her empathy disorder as a weakness, and is astounded that anyone would think of it as a gift. But she also wishes she could give it to people, or could live among only those who have it. "One good thing about sharing pain," she says, "is that it makes us very slow to cause pain to other people," (*Talents*, 34). Even though she hates it, this disorder is both her weakness and her power. It makes her vulnerable and increases her suffering dramatically. But it also gives her wisdom. In process theology, empathy is a way of partnering with God, a way to connect with the God in all beings. Through her empathy disorder, Lauren Olamina participates in God, she experiences the process of becoming through co-suffering, becoming more like God by experiencing reality more broadly. Because she is very slow to cause other people pain, she is a careful and fair leader, and because she feels her people so deeply, she is a powerful leader.

Theology's Function: The Wisdom to Survive

Like Earthseed's God, Earthseed's theology is agnostic on the nature of power: power *is*, change *is*. Human beings' work is to use power to partner with God to shape the change with generosity and compassion, minimizing harm. We can either choose to cause harm in chaos or to use the chaos to, in the words of *Emergent Strategy*, "harness the shocks and direct the slides" that characterize the instability of our times "towards achieving the systemic, cultural, and psychic shifts we need to navigate the changes with the greatest equity, resilience, and ecological restoration possible" (Dayaneni quoted in brown, 77). Power, like God and Change, is value neutral. Human choice around how to use power, God, and Change is what matters.

To harness change for survival and thriving, Butler advises partnership with God and other human beings. Year 2033 of *Parable of the Talents* begins:

Partnership is giving, taking,
learning, teaching, offering the
greatest possible benefit while doing
the least possible harm. Partnership

is mutualistic symbiosis. Partnership
is life.

Any entity, any process that
cannot or should not be resisted or
avoided must somehow be
partnered. Partner one another.
Partner diverse communities. Partner
life. Partner any world that is your
home. Partner God. Only in
partnership can we thrive, grow,
Change. Only in partnership can we
live. (Talents, 135)

In both *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren Olamina partners with people from diverse backgrounds to build multicultural communities that survive. As the text of the living, Earthseed aims to equip its people with the greatest possibility of survival. Even though mixed groups face greater hostility and violence, Lauren Olamina recruits people from diverse backgrounds. When she is first planning to walk north in *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren discusses resources with Harry and Zara. Zara fears she has nothing to offer the fledgling traveling group, but Lauren cites Zara's knowledge from growing up on the streets as the asset she can offer, explaining that Zara's different experience and resulting knowledge will help the trio survive. Throughout the Earthseed Chronicles, people with different experiences in life pool their knowledge to innovate in difficult and dangerous situations and generate the wisdom to survive. The greater diversity in the partnerships, the more resilient and successful the resulting solutions and change-shaping capacity will be. Each new member of the group that walks north together in *Parable of the Sower* brings a different background and knowledge, and each one helps the group survive.

In *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne marie brown advocates Collaborative Innovation and Collaborative Ideation from combining different approaches to problems arising from different epistemologies of people of different cultures, identities and experiences. New studies in innovation and complexity show that diverse groups of people, and individual people who have deep cross-cultural experience, are more creative and innovative. However, it is not simply difference that births innovation. According to a 2012 social psychology paper on bi-culturalism and creativity⁴, it was *integrative complexity*, not simply difference, which enabled greater

⁴ Tadmor, C. T., Galinsky, A. D., & Maddux, W. W. (2012, July 23). *Getting the Most Out of Living Abroad: Biculturalism and Integrative Complexity as Key Drivers of Creative and Professional Success*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0029360 <https://faculty.insead.edu/william-maddux/documents/JPSP-biculturalism-paper.pdf>

creativity and success. Integrative complexity is an information processing skill that enables people to consider and combine multiple perspectives, facilitating novel ideas and solutions. In the Earthseed Chronicles, the various people who join the Earthseed community combine and integrate their knowledge to survive and make the communities work. Integrative complexity is the community's resilience.

Our work to build a multicultural Unitarian Universalism isn't only work to save our souls; it is also work to save our bodies, to build a faith capable of Collaborative Innovation and Ideation, a faith of differing epistemologies that will enable truly innovative responses to the reality of 21st century life on earth. However, we will need more than difference if we are to have the wisdom to survive, we will need the capacity for integrative complexity, the skill of bringing those differences together in changing integrative and innovative solutions to the ways racism, white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy will mix with the consequences of climate change.

Butler's concept of partnership is more complicated than consenting collaboration among people who choose to survive. The Earthseed verse on partnership opens the chronicle of the year during which Christian America invades and enslaves the community at Acorn. The second half of that verse begins "Any entity, any process that cannot or should not be resisted or avoided must somehow be partnered... only in partnership can we live." Lauren Olamina knows they cannot resist the invaders of Christian America, and so she studies them, learning as much as she can that will enable their survival and eventual escape from rape, torture, and slavery. She means to survive and to make sure as many of her people as possible also survive.

Not everyone makes the same choice. Gray and Emery Mora choose not to live rather than to live in slavery. Lauren Olamina respects them and understands them, but wishes they made a different choice: "For her sake and the sake of her daughters, I wish she [Emery] had chosen to live. I knew she was depressed and I tried to encourage her to endure... But the truth is, if Emery had to die, she chose the best possible way to do it. She's let us know that we can kill our captors," (*Talents*, 210). Every situation is an opportunity to survive, an opportunity for adaptation to change, including deep grief and devastation. This is how Lauren Olamina partners with Christian America. She learns from them how to escape from them. When Harry says, "Olamina, we've got to kill these bastards!" she responds, "First we've got to get rid of these collars. Then we have to find out what happened to the kids... Gather information. Seek weakness. Watch, wait, and do what you have to to stay alive!" (*Talents*, 218).

Purpose

I notice my own rage when reading the *Parables*: grief, disgust and rage. I want to sharpen it into a point and use it to cut the causes of the pain. I also see it when I witness the roiling rage and grief in our country. Butler writes,

When vision fails

Direction is lost.

When direction is lost

Purpose may be forgotten.

When purpose is forgotten

Emotion rules alone.

When emotion rules alone,

Destruction . . . destruction. (Talents, 219)

In Earthseed theology and theodicy, purpose is salvific. As discussed, Lauren Olamina puts it at the center of her life to the detriment of her safety and her family. But Earthseed's ultimate Destiny is the most unusual part of Earthseed's theology, and the most dissonant with Unitarian Universalism. When I first read *Parable of the Sower* fifteen years ago, I simply ignored the Destiny, much like most of Lauren Olamina's early converts in the novel. The rest of the theology is both familiar and compelling, so I was untroubled by the weird and distant Destiny. However, in *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren Olamina grows up, and with her, Earthseed's theology gets more serious about its Destiny. In Lauren Olamina and Bankole's conversation about Earthseed's future, Bankole, who both helped her build Earthseed's house and also represents the older generation's attitudes and skepticism, presses Lauren Olamina about the Destiny. Finally, she honestly unfolds its purpose: for humanity itself to have purpose and to mature into a species that will outlive the finitude of the planet that birthed it. In this conversation, Olamina experiences her theology on a personal level, realizing she might die before the Destiny is realized, and her dream might live through her genes alone, through her daughter Larkin. Once again, Butler shows as she tells: the Destiny's purpose is to give humanity a chance to outlive our parents, both human and ecological, through our children. Its purpose is to give humanity an immortality it can trust, an immortality that is real. Writing in the dawn of understanding about climate change, in the midst of ecological devastation and the growing environmental justice movement, taking root among the stars is Butler's hope for a humanity already consuming the natural resources that sustain it on an earth already tumbling down the slope of climate change.

The World Is Always Ending Somewhere: Earthseed’s Wisdom for Surviving Today

Rather than predicting the future, a prophet is someone whose job it is to speak the truth about the present. “I’m not a prophet,” Margaret Atwood said, when asked about *The Handmaid’s Tale*. “Let’s get rid of that idea right now. Prophecies are really about now. In science fiction it’s always about now. What else could it be about? There is no future. There are many possibilities, but we do not know which one we are going to have.”⁵

Last month, the International Panel on Climate Change published devastating new estimates that global temperatures will most likely rise 1.5 degrees Celsius above average (relative to 1850-1900) by 2030-2050.⁶ As Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International, said, “1.5 degrees is the new 2 degrees,” meaning that scientists estimate that a 1.5 degree rise is the highest tolerable increase in average global temperature, and will still have devastating effects for civilization. It will also be intolerable in some parts of the planet, creating more climate refugees than there are today.⁷ It will only stop there if the world stops producing carbon in the next ten years, phasing out coal entirely, shifting to renewable energy, and initiating large-scale negative emissions programs, replacing land being used to produce food with forests.

In the Earthseed Chronicles, the pox, shorthand for “the apocalypse” lasted from 2015-2030. But when Bankole reflects on it, he writes, “It began well before 2015, perhaps even before the turn of the millennium. It has not ended. I have also read that the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises. It would be more honest to say it was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas. We caused the problems, then we sat and watched as they grew in to crises.” (*Talents*, 8)

Today, we are watching a group of thousands of climate, economic, and war and societal violence refugees make their way north from Central America towards the Mexican / United States border. A picture of a little girl who was three asleep on her father’s back made me think of little Justin traveling north with band of travelers who came together in the stream of people walking north on highway 101 in *Parable of the Sower*. In her essay, “After the Apocalypse,” Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker argues that far from being on the brink of the

⁵ Interview with Lisa Allardice in *The Guardian*, Jan 20, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/20/margaret-atwood-i-am-not-a-prophet-science-fiction-is-about-now>

⁶ International Panel on Climate Change, Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 Degrees Celsius (SR15): Summary for Policy Makers, 2018, http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf

⁷ Mooney, Chris and Brady Dennis, “The World Has Just Over a Decade to Get Climate Change Under Control, UN Scientists Say,” Washington Post, Oct 7, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/energy-environment/2018/10/08/world-has-only-years-get-climate-change-under-control-un-scientists-say/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.dd21aaa5a070

apocalypse, we are living in its aftermath, “a postslavery, post-Holocaust, post-Vietnam, post-Hiroshima world. We are living in the aftermath of collective violence that has been severe, massive, and traumatic. The scars from slavery, genocide, and meaningless war mark our bodies. We are living in the midst of rain forest burning, the rapid death of species, the growing pollution of the air and water, and new mutations of racism and violence,” (Parker and Hardies, 20)⁸. She was writing 15 years ago.

In the book, *Scale: The Universal Laws of Life, Growth, and Death, in Organisms, Cities, and Companies*, Geoffrey West explores the science of complex adaptive systems and their implications for human life on earth. West argues that “all socioeconomic activity, from innovation and wealth creation to crime and disease—whether good, bad, or ugly—is quantitatively interrelated, as manifested in the universality of scaling laws,” (West, 412).⁹ West critiques current approaches to sustainability as insufficiently multidisciplinary, thus missing the nature of the complex adaptive systems upon which life depends. Because resource consumption and pollution, and innovation and wealth creation, *all* scale with population growth, there is scientific reason to critique both the Neo-Malthusians who fear human civilization will collapse with population growth, and the open-ended exponential growth economists who believe the innovations of capitalism will save humanity from this fate. West shows consumption, innovation, wealth, and destruction are all exponential functions of population growth, which itself is growing exponentially.

In this growth, technological innovation has multiplied with the human population, sustaining the growing population. However, the increased consumption of resources by that population has consequences, as our experience with climate change and environmental devastation has shown. The wealthiest people consume the most resources, making any Malthusian or Neo-Malthusian population growth arguments inaccurate as well as racist, classist, and imperialist. Still, the earth’s resources are finite and the consequences of the environmental devastation caused by climate change and resource extraction disproportionately affects people with less power. Just as the rates of change in wealth, innovation, violence, and disease are interrelated in the complex adaptive system of human cities, so are the systems of interwoven oppressions interrelated in human civilization. In white supremacy, this means black and brown people are disproportionately affected by adverse change, in patriarchy, it means women are disproportionately affected by adverse change, and in capitalism it means poor people are disproportionately affected by adverse change. In kyriarchy, it means the effects are themselves interrelated according to multiple axis of power

⁸ Hardies, Rob, and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now*. Skinner House Books: Boston, 2006.

⁹ West, Geoffrey. *Scale: the Universal Laws of Life, Growth, and Death, in Organisms, Cities, and Companies*. Penguin Books: New York, 2017.

at work at once in any given situation. The second law of thermodynamics is at work, and entropy—the chaos which Marcos seeks to control and Lauren Olamina seeks to shape—is more devastating the less power and therefore capacity one has to control or shape it. However, as Spenta Kandawalla wrote, “In the destruction of something lies a whole new world of possibility—a place where patterns can finally become unhinged and there’s space for something new to take its place.” (Kandawalla quoted in brown, 126).

In *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, co-editor Walidah Imarisha claimed that all organizing is science fiction. She wrote, “Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction... Organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world, or many other worlds—so what better venue for organizers to explore their work than science fiction stories?” (brown and Imarisha, 3).¹⁰ I hope Unitarian Universalism will be part of imagining how to and then harnessing the shocks and directing the slides of the change riding in on the back of apocalyptic climate change. How can we participate in redirecting resources from the most comfortable to the most marginalized? How can we adapt and prepare for coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises? How can we be of use at this moment in history, as we watch the next waves coming, knowing we are already in the midst of a post-apocalyptic world?

¹⁰ brown, adrienne marie, and Walidah Imarisha. *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. AK Press: Oakland, 2015.