

Title: Virtues, vices and place attachment

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Abstract: There is a virtue associated with forming and maintaining relationships to places. This virtue has not been recognised by philosophers, but it plays a role in indigenous cultures across the world. Hence, place attachment is one of many areas in which indigenous knowledge can contribute to the development of Western philosophy. After explaining what it means for a disposition to act in accordance with this virtue to be a Neo-Aristotelian virtue, examples from Māori culture are used to explain why the way that people form relationships to places can be a virtue in this neo-Aristotelian sense. Recognising this virtue reveals ways of interacting with the world that contribute to human and environmental flourishing, as well as revealing a new way in which indigenous people are harmed when dispossessed of their ancestral land.

Virtues, vices and place attachment

Mihi: Introduction - Who am I?

Tēnā koutou katoa
Ko Opuke te Maunga
Ko Ōtākaro te awa
Nō Ōtautahi ahau
Ko Parker tōku whānau
Ko Carolyn Mason tōku ingoa
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa

Hello to you all
Mount Hutt is my mountain
The Avon is my river
I am from Christchurch
The Parkers are my family
My name is Carolyn Mason
Greetings, Greetings, Greetings to us all
Kia ora tātou

This first introduction is a modified form of a traditional Maori mihi – an introduction that explains my relationship to the mountains, bodies of water, land, and places that surround us all. This form of introduction helps other people to understand who I am by explaining the environment that helps make me who I am. Maori tend to name the mountains, water and land that their ancestors are associated with, thus, in a sense, making the introduction a statement of their families' relationship to places as well as their own relationship to places.

Ko Te Poho-o-Tamatea te pukepuke te rū nei taku ngākau.
Ko Ōtākaro te awa e mahea nei aku māharahara.
Nō Ōtautahi ahau
E mihi ana ki ngā tohu o nehe, o Waitaha e noho nei au.
Ko Ngāti Pākehā te iwi
Ko Carolyn Mason tōku ingoa
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa
(Baxter, 2020)

Hello everyone
The Port Hills are the hills that speak to my heart.
The Avon is the river that alleviates my worries.
I am from Christchurch
I recognise the ancestral and spiritual landmarks of Canterbury where I live.
I am pakeha [my ancestors are colonisers of Aotearoa New Zealand]
My name is Carolyn Mason
Greetings to everyone

The second introduction is an example of a pakeha – an immigrant to New Zealand – playing with this traditional form of introduction to help it express his relationship to the places that surround us. His intent was to take account of Maori tikanga (cultural values) when he did this.

For Maori, this introduction is a way for people to understand the identity of the people they meet. But, although many people try to establish where a person comes from early in their interactions, the importance of place to identity is seldom acknowledged by people who are not indigenous. And, whether relationships to places matter to who we are as people is seldom discussed by philosophers.

What am I doing?

After the earthquakes, many people left Christchurch. Some felt a sense of loss when they left, and some people who remained in Christchurch felt as though the city and its people were betrayed by those who left when it wasn't clear that they had a good reason to leave. (Good reasons included things like having nowhere to live or extreme anxiety.) People who remained often expressed a commitment to, and sense of belonging to, the city that lasted long after the earthquakes ended.

For a long time Amy wanted to leave Christchurch, and join her mother and brother in Brisbane – she and her husband even put their house up for sale. But as the move drew closer, it felt wrong, says Amy – “like running away.”

Her husband is a builder: “Part of his healing was to fix the city.” But Amy realised that she wanted to be a part of that, too. “That was the point I committed to Christchurch... and weaving my recovery story into the rebuild.”

Now Amy loves the city in a way she never did before. She likens it to the Māori concept of kotahitanga, of feeling connected and acting collectively. (Hunt, 2021)

This led me to wonder about connections to places, and the values and ethics associated with our connection to places.

Maori culture teaches us the importance of a particular kind of connection to places – and I will say more about this later. Indigenous people from other, very different, places and climates also explicitly acknowledge the importance of their connections to places to who they are as individuals and as a people (Bhattacharyya et al., 2012). Moreover, research into the relatively new field of place attachment gives additional support to the importance of this relationship (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Tuan, 2012; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

What is a place?

Geographers sometimes use ‘place’ to refer to spaces to which people have a meaningful connection (Fullilove, 1997; Tuan, 2012). To use the word in this way here would beg the question; it would assume answers to some of the questions investigated here. When used here, ‘place’ simply refers to a place. That could be a room, a house, a boat, a forest, a lake, or a bay. A place is not just a location, it is also the things in that location. Place, in the sense it is used here, might not be able to be an island (unless it was small) or a country, because it is hard to have a relationship with, in the sense of interacting with, a large thing, whether that is a large group of friends or an ocean.

Do we value places?

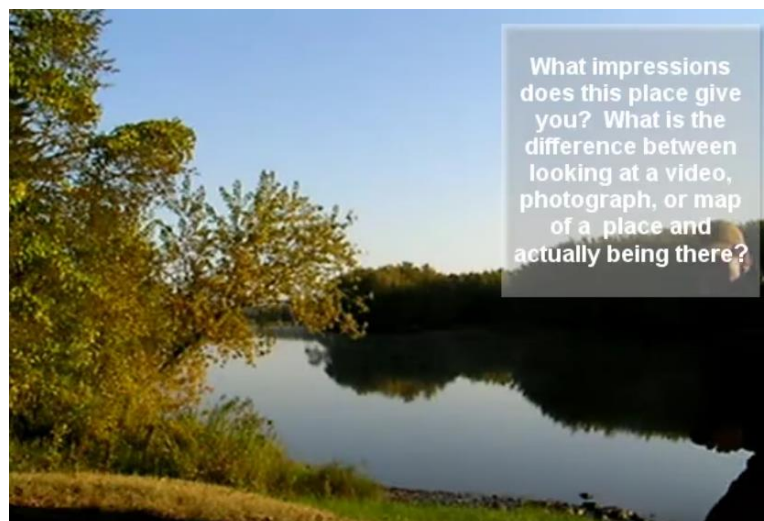
We clearly do not, and I have just suggested, cannot value all places. But, the answer to the question “Do individuals sometimes attach value to some places?” is clearly “yes”.

The video by geographer Joseph Kerski, transcribed below, explains the concept of place and love of place and it expresses his experiences of valuing a place.

Hi there let's chat for a moment about something called topophilia it's what geographer Yi Foo Tuan called the love of place and this particular place [a riverside surrounded by trees,

shrubs and grasses] I definitely have topophilia for. Think about the places that you love. What are the sights, the sounds, the smells, the memories, the climate, the vegetation, the landforms, the people around you, or the lack of people around you? What are the things that make it special? Well geography has lots of facets to it, but one of the key facets is a keen interest in place. Now I don't mean just location when I say place. What I mean is all the things that I described the things that give it its unique characteristics that we as humans can appreciate. The animals, the plants, the water, or lack of water. In this case, I've got this beautiful Saint Croix River behind me that gives this particular place lots of distinctive characteristics. Let's just pause for a moment and listen. You ... can hear birds, you can hear this this stream running into the main river from a spring that's up the hill, a bit anyway. All of these things combine to give it a unique character and these are the kinds of things that draw us to the concept of place. And in geography we can actually study place, not just as how they exist now and how we feel about them, but how - there' some geese coming over – but how they change over time and also how we can protect special places that we love through action. So topophilia, it's a great concept.... (Kerski, 2012)

Figure 1. The Saint Croix River (Kerski, 2012)



What is “place attachment”?

When I speak about valuing places I am, of course, referring to attaching positive value to places. The terms “topophilia” and “place attachment”, which are commonly used in geography, refer to this kind of attachment to a place. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan devised the term “topophilia”, which literally means, love of place, to refer to a strong positive affective bond with a place (Tuan & Winchell, 1974). Place attachment has been described as “a positive affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to such a place” (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001, p. 274). Others, however, suggest that place attachment may sometimes be a negative affective bond, and may be a bond between groups and their environment as well as between individuals and their environment (Low & Altman, 1992).

Should we value places?

That we value places and become attached to them is interesting, and we need to take into account when investigating our relationship to places, but it says nothing about whether we should value places. People do sometimes attach value to things that make their lives worse, and sometimes they

value those things even when they understand that they are detrimental to them, whether that is because what they value has bad consequences for them or others, or because what they value has bad effects on their actions or character.

The claim that we should value a place means, at its most basic, that places should matter to us. “Mattering” can mean as little as that we accept that there is a prima facie reason to consider the effect of our actions on the place and accept that in some circumstances our actions should not harm that place.

It seems clear that there are instrumental reasons for us to value places. (Some environmental ethicists have argued that there are also intrinsic reasons for valuing places, but this position is stronger than needed for the arguments made here about virtues and vices, so arguments for this position are not discussed here.) The image and quote below are one blatant example.

Figure 2. The winner of the 2010 New Zealand “Smells Kitchen” Competition



Speaking from under a mountain of dishes, Turnbull said the house now had a seventh flatmate, a friendly rat. A hole had also developed in the roof of his bedroom that had leaked, destroying his laptop and disabling the lights. The house could get cold in winter, with only the oven used for heating, he said. (Cowlshaw, 2010)

These university students do not have a lot of money. Caring for the place they live in would save the cost and educational consequences that follow from a destroyed laptop. Caring for the house will also benefit their health. So, if we assume that their health or their education do, or should, matter to them, then the place they live should matter enough to them for them to “take out the trash”. So, they have an instrumental reason to value the place they live.

Should we value our relationships to places?

For there to be a virtue associated with place attachment, it needs to be the case that people should both value some place or places, and that they should value their relationships to places. Asking whether we should value our relationship to some place or places is not the same as asking whether we should value some places, just as asking whether we should value our relationships to people is not the same as asking whether we should value some people.

If “valuing a place” means accepting that one has a prima facie reason to consider how one’s actions might negatively affect that place, a person can value a place without valuing their relationship to that place. For example, the university student in the last example could have an instrumental reason to value the flat he lives in without having a reason to value his relationship to that flat. He

would presumably be happy to move into a flat next door if someone did all the work for him and the conditions there were the same. And, perhaps there is no good reason for him to value his relationship to the particular place in which he will live for a year or two.

Similarly, it is possible to value one's relationship to a place without valuing that place. Landowners who value what they can get out of a place rather than valuing the place itself, for example, the Rio Tinto mining company in Australia, should value their relationship to that place, for without that relationship, they will not be able to access the resources that they need to survive as a company. (I am, perhaps, being unwise here to discuss a company valuing a place rather than individuals valuing a place, but the argument that individuals should value their relationships to some places would be the same.)

One of the aims of the next sections of this presentation is to show that we should value our relationships to at least some places.

Virtues and vices

The aim here is to give a neo-Aristotelian account of a virtue of place attachment. This task is more difficult and more controversial than it may seem. When writing about virtues and environmental ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse comments that “the introduction—or discovery—of a new virtue is a formidable task” (Hursthouse, 2007, p. 160). One reason the task is formidable is that which characteristics are virtues has been debated for thousands of years.

Figure 3. 'Pallas Expelling Vices from the Garden of Virtues' by Andrea Mantegna



However, my arguments here assume that there are virtues that are not on any list, because they are not yet recognised as virtues. The virtues most commonly considered within philosophy are those from the Greek philosophical traditions or Christianity. This reflects where academic theories developed. This project involves looking outside those dominant philosophical traditions. This does not mean that this is a work of comparative philosophy. Rather, the discussion of place attachment draws on indigenous knowledge to help reveal the importance of our relationships with places to our flourishing, and uses information from Maori cultural practices to help reveal what a virtue of place attachment would include.

What is meant by “virtue”?

On a neo-Aristotelian account, virtues are character traits, ingrained dispositions that affect what a person believes and desires and the way a person perceives, experiences, and acts towards the world (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 11-12). Being an ingrained disposition is not sufficient for a character trait to be a virtue. Vices are ingrained dispositions too! However, unlike vices, virtues reliably contribute to a person’s flourishing (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 9-10, 167-170; McKinnon, 1999, pp. 26, 153). Being virtuous contributes to flourishing because acting virtuously increases the chance of having positive experiences, but acting virtuously is also part of what it is to live a flourishing life, just as playing the piano well is can be part of what it is to music. Being virtuous is not, however, a guarantee that a person will flourish, because external conditions also affect people’s ability to flourish.

For a character trait to be a virtue, children need to be born with an ability to develop that character trait (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 251; 2007, pp. 160-161). However, even though people learn virtues from others, being virtuous involves choosing to develop and maintain a character trait because it will help you become who you want to be (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 136). In other words, being virtuous involves valuing the virtues.

To illustrate what it is for a character trait to be a virtue, consider the virtue of generosity. Someone with this virtue will have a number of characteristics. First, it will be a reliable character trait. The generous person can be relied on to act with generosity when this is appropriate. The generous person will believe that there are circumstances where people should act generously. But they will have other beliefs, for example, they will not believe that those towards whom they act generously are lesser people or believe that generosity must be repaid. The generous person will also want to act generously. And they will have desires that relate to any person they act generously towards. For example, they will want to improve the lives of the hungry. The generous person will also experience emotions that will help them identify when generosity is called for and what generosity requires. For example, they may empathise with another person’s situation, empathise with another person’s feelings about being the beneficiary of a generous act, and feel good about being generous, or feel annoyed when they think about giving more than they can give and still flourish. The generous person will perceive when generosity is called for and when an act of giving is not a virtuous act. When the generous person acts, these different aspects of their disposition to be generous will help them determine what generosity requires, and that generosity will contribute to the virtue-holder’s flourishing, for example, by helping them develop good relationships with others, and through the increase in wellbeing that has now been shown to flow from certain kinds of acts of giving (Marks & Shah, 2004).

My claim is that the features of the disposition of generosity that make it a virtue are shared by a virtue of place attachment.

Ahikā: virtuous place attachment

The Māori term “ahi kā” literally means keeping fire burning; it refers to the continuous occupation of a piece of land by an iwi (tribe) or hapu (kinship group). “Continuous occupation” does not mean constant occupation; it means consistent occupation, reliably being at and interacting with a place over a period of time. For Māori, as for many other indigenous people, continuous occupation of a piece of land by gave that group the right to use that land.

Te Horetā Te Taniwha commented about one area of land: “Our tribe was living there at that time. We did not live there as our permanent home, but were there according to our custom of living for some time on each of our blocks of land, to keep our claim to each, and that our

fire might be kept alight on each block, so that it might not be taken from us by some other tribe. (John White, 1887, cited in Meredith, 2008).

But, as will be mentioned soon, being the occupiers of the land meant more than living there.

I use “ahikā” as the term for virtuous place attachment. In this I somewhat follow Acushla O’Carroll, who writes, “ahikā has become a term used for the people who keep the metaphorical and literal home fires burning; those who are keeping things functioning at the coalface of hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi [tribe] communities” (O’Carroll, 2013, p. 442). It is this disposition and practice of working to “keep the metaphorical and literal home fires burning” that I argue is a virtue.

Developing ahikā

If there is a neo-Aristotelian virtue associated with ahi kā, then that virtue can be, and ought to be, developed in children and adults. Aristotle points out that virtues are product of nature and nurture: “the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them and reach our complete perfection through habit” (1985, 1103a24-25). Human beings have the capacity to form the attachments necessary for a virtue such as ahikā: we know that people, including children, commonly come to feel emotionally connected to particular places (Chawla, 1992, pp. 66-69, 83; Marcus, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2017, p. 359). Nurture can help develop such connections. First, the standard approaches to teaching and learning virtues will also succeed with ahikā: exhibiting the kinds of desires, affect, and perceptions explained here, and making apparent the ways in which the virtue supports flourishing. Children and adults learn by example. The practice of burying a child’s placenta in a place that is special to the family, and raising the child to know that their placenta lies in that place, teaches a child that there is a link between that place and their family as well as strengthening that link (Abel et al., 2001, p. 1142; Jones & Kay 2003, p. 112). In Aotearoa New Zealand, school children are taught to introduce themselves as I did at the start, by identifying the mountain, river or lake, and place to which they are affiliated or to which they feel they belong. This practice encourages children to think about their relationship to the environment that is part of their personal history as well as giving them the ability to verbally express a place-identity.

Figure 4. Mihimihi template for primary school children in Aotearoa New Zealand



However, more than this connection to a place is necessary for developing ahikā. Kenneth Olwig argues that for children to develop a sense of place, they must: “[understand] the processes shaping ... [their] environment, and [develop a] ... sense of personal concern ... [that will lead them to take] an active interest in the future of ... [their] environment (Olwig, 1982, cited in Chawla, 1992, p. 83). Elements of this understanding and active interest are discussed later, and these can be developed through parenting, education and involving children in socio-cultural practices. For example, research on education and the environment shows that listening to stories can help children understand nature (Tooth & Renshaw, 2009, pp. 99-101; Yilmaz et al., 2020). Place-based education has also been shown to improve children’s understanding of, attachment to, and sense of responsibility for their local environment (Sobel, 2004).

Of course, showing that place attachment can be learnt does not show that ahikā is a virtue, but it does show that if there is such a virtue, it can be developed.

Ahikā, perception and action

Ahikā affects people’s perceptions of the places to which they are connected, their perceptions of themselves (that is, their self-identity), and their perception of their responsibilities. Ahikā could involve many different kinds of relationship to a place, and the nature of the relationship with a place will affect the perceptions a person with ahikā has of that place and affect the actions that will count as virtuous. So, the perceptions and actions associated with ahikā will be context dependent, just as the perceptions associated with generosity are affected by variations in the situation, relationships, and people’s roles.

Relationships that people with ahikā could have to places include connections to a place that one’s family has lived in or holidayed at for a long time, connections to a regularly visited forest or place of worship, or a connection to a place that one has come to as an adult immigrant with the intention of making one’s home. Each of these different relationships will generate different perceptions and actions.

Ahi kā, the practice from which I have adopted the term ‘ahikā’, is associated with a continuous connection to a place where one’s family has lived for generations. If a consistent and significant link between family and place has been maintained for generations, this land will have been cared for by family members and have been a source of sustenance to their family for generations. Those with the virtue of the ahikā will perceive the land to be an important part of their identity. Those without a deep connection to a place may fail to understand the nature or importance of this relationship.

People may also form virtuous attachments to a place that their extended family or community has not been associated with. Someone with ahikā who has gone hunting in an area since childhood will feel a close bond to the area and be able to see aspects of the place that most others will not. For example, they may detect environmental damage to the area that others lack the knowledge to identify. Similarly, someone with the virtue of ahikā who has lived in a town for years will see valuable features of that town that others may not be able to see. They may, for example, see beauty, interesting features and interesting information in the local cemetery that enables them to give cemetery tours to help others see ways in which the place is special.

Someone with the virtue of ahikā will see themselves as having a responsibility to care for the place with which they feel a bond because they value that place and are aware of its characteristics and its state. For example, social psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove argues that “place attachment” involves a “mutual caretaking bond between a person and a beloved place” (Fullilove, 1997, p. 1516). This aspect of ahikā is consistent with indigenous relationships to land and consistent with place attachment. For example, the Māori concept of ahi kā, of maintaining one’s connection with a place,

is associated with kaitiakitanga, guardianship or stewardship of that place (Kawharu, 2000; Moorfield, 2011; Simmonds et al., 2016, p. 82; Warne, 2018).

Te ahi kā is about valuing the land and having the right kind of relationship with the land as well as about having authority over the land. The Māori concepts of “mana whenua”, authority over land and “kaitiakitanga”, guardianship or stewardship, are closely tied to ahi kā (Moorfield, 2011). Tina Ngata, claims that “kaitiakitanga is inseparable from ahi kaa” (Warne, 2018). Merata Kawha draws similar links: “Maintaining *ahi ka* assured (*mana whenua*) rights of a particular kin group to implement all forms of *kaitiakitanga* within a designated territory”(Kawharu, 2000, p. 362, italics in original; see also Simmonds et al., 2016, p. 82). Kaitiakitanga involves valuing the land, not just accepting that one has a responsibility to care for the land (or air or water). The Tsihqot'in also take their relationship with the lands where they keep fires burning to incorporate guardianship. In “It's who we are: Locating cultural strength in relationship with the land”, the authors write: “The relationship that people have with the land in the present is an expression of their past and future in that place” (Bhattacharyya et al., 2012, p. 216). Those interviewed describe themselves as “caretakers” and discuss the importance of protecting the land (pp. 215-216) and treating the land with respect (Bhattacharyya et al., 2012, pp. 216-218). There are differences in attitudes and actions between these cultures, but the core ideas overlap, and it is these core ideas that are associated with the virtue of ahikā.

Figure 5. Know my place: Kaitiakitanga, Galatea School Poster



The perceptions and actions associated with ahikā are strongly related to desires and emotions associated with ahikā, just as the perceptions and actions associated with generosity are strongly related to desires and emotions associated with generosity. Consider trying to feel proud of, rejoicing in, or wanting to maintain a connection to a place that one has not taken care of, that one has, for example, polluted or allowed to become polluted. People with the virtue of ahikā will, therefore, see ways in which the place to which they have a bond needs to be altered or protected. They will reflect on the ways in which their actions and the actions of others could, or have, affected a place. They will, for example, be wary of acting in a way that will harm a place for the sake of short-term profit.

Environmental psychologists Proshansky et al., call this kind of perceptiveness towards a particular environment “environmental understanding” and “environmental competence” (1983, p. 72). According to Proshansky et al., people with environmental understanding and competence “[know] what’s ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ with the physical setting and what has to be done to bring about change in it” (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 70). Although Proshansky et al. are not discussing ahikā, this understanding of a place has the same form as the understanding that comes with this virtue.

Needless to say, someone could be able to see that a place is being destroyed, say through erosion, without knowing how to protect land or water affected by that erosion. However, someone with ahikā will notice the erosion and be motivated to learn whether it is harmful or a natural feature of a place and learn how to protect that environment.

Ahikā affect and desires

As mentioned above, place attachment is an affective bond, so, like other virtues, ahikā will be associated with certain kinds of emotions and desires (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Low & Altman, 1992). People with the virtue of ahikā will have first- and second-order desires to maintain the physical and psychological connection they have to the place with which they have a bond, that is, they will want to maintain a connection to that place and want to want to maintain a connection to that place. If people with the virtue of ahikā do not have the opportunity to maintain a physical and psychological connection to a place to which they have clear and meaningful ties, then they will want to identify a place to which they can form a meaningful connection and form and maintain a connection to that place. They may, for example, want to develop a connection to a place associated with another family member, a religious group, their past experiences, a shared community space, or a place that has environmental value.

If ahikā is indeed a virtue, then those with the virtue will want children who are part of their family or community to share this desire to be connected to a particular place, and may feel grief and the virtuous may feel a sense of loss when children or community members do not choose to maintain this connection. This grief will arise not just because the virtuous want to maintain a connection to the next generation and want their community to flourish, but also because they believe that those without ahikā lose something important for flourishing.

As a virtue, ahikā will bring with it a certain set of affective responses. These affective responses are consistent with the place-attachment mentioned above, but involve more than “a positive affective bond” (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001, p. 274). As for other virtues, affective responses will be context dependent, varying with changes in the situation and the nature of the relationship between the person and the place (Giuliani, 2016). For example, ahikā associated with land to which one’s family has been linked for centuries will produce different affective responses than ahikā associated with a place with which one is building a new relationship. These affective responses may include fondness, pride, distress when a place is harmed, feelings of responsibility or guardianship towards a place

As time went by, I also realized that the particular place I’d chosen was less important than the fact that I’d chosen and focused my life around it. Although [where I live] has taken on great significance for me, it’s no more inherently beautiful or meaningful than any other place on earth. What makes a place special is the way it buries itself inside the heart.... Every place, like every person, is elevated by the love and respect shown toward it, and by the way in which its bounty is received. (Nelson, 1989)

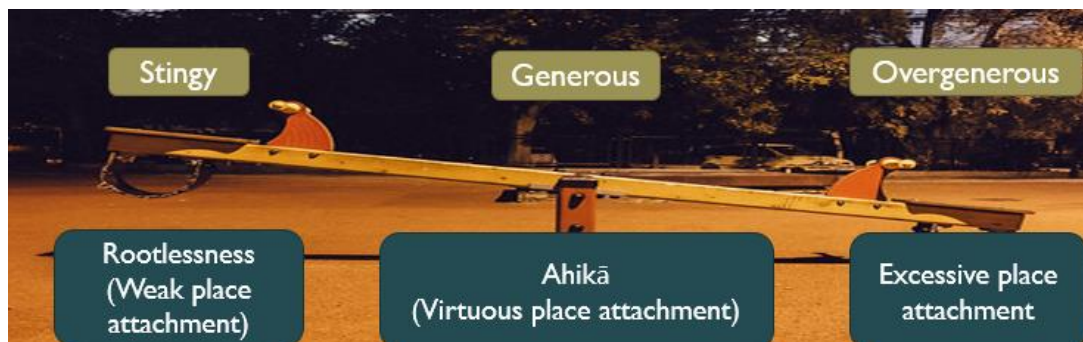
and perhaps also those in that place. It may involve a feeling that this place is, in a rich sense of the word, home; a sense that this place is one's tūrangawaewae, the place in which one feels one belongs, a feeling of being connected to the land, supported by the land, and empowered by that connection (Brown, 2014). Just as the virtuous person's perceptions and beliefs will affect their emotions and desires, the virtuous person's affective responses will alter their perception of the land and what they feel called to do in response to events on the land.

Virtues are sometimes described as involving the proper regulation of particular affective states. For example, courage involves the proper regulation of and response to fear (Aristotle & Irwin, 1985, 1115a6-10) and temperance involves the proper regulation of and response to pleasure (Aristotle & Irwin, 1985, 1117b21-26). It might be claimed that this shows that ahikā is not a virtue, as ahikā does not involve the proper regulation of and response to a particular emotion. However, not even all Aristotelian virtues have this association with the regulation of easily identified, distinct emotions. Although there are emotions associated with, for example, generosity, justice and proper ambition, associating these virtues with distinct emotional states would fail to capture what they involve emotionally and cognitively. Similarly, ahikā can be a virtue without being associated with the proper regulation of a particular affective state.

Vices associated with ahikā

Aristotle claims that virtues are often the mean between a vice of excess and a vice of deficiency. For example, for generosity, there is a vice of deficiency, where you give too little, and a vice of excess, where you give too much. Like most Aristotelian virtues, there are two vices associated with the virtue ahikā, a vice of deficiency and a vice of excess.

Figure 6. Virtues as a mean between two vices



For ahikā, the vice of deficiency involves a failure to form and maintain the right kind of relationship with the land, this may be failing to form a relationship with a place, forming a relationship with a place that is too weak to promote flourishing. (The lack of an easily accessible name to refer to the virtues and vices associated with ahikā is not a reason for doubting that there are such virtues and vices. Aristotle had the same problem when he searched for names to associate with virtues and vices. See, in particular, the unnamed virtues in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book IV (Aristotle & Irwin, 1985).) For ahikā, the vice of excess involves forming a relationship with a place that is too strong or rigid to be conducive to flourishing. Or a vice of excess could involve forming a relationship with the wrong place, just as it would the vice of being overgenerous involves giving generously to the wrong person.

Synonyms for the term “rootless” are typically negative. Those who lack ahikā cannot flourish because they lack the engagement, meaning and self-esteem that, I argue below, comes from virtuous place attachment. Of course there are other ways that engagement, meaning and self-

esteem can occur, but place attachment has been shown to be one important contributor to these things.

Figure 7. Synonyms for “rootless”



The vice of deficiency associated with ahikā damages relationships with people as well as limiting the life of the person who lacks the virtue. A post on Facebook for Ruataniwha Marae illustrates, first, the expectation that one person has about a situation where someone fails to have a sufficiently strong relationship with a place and, second, the way in which a deficiency of ahikā can harm relationships.

Something to think about... there are 3 types of Ahi...

Ahikaaroa - those living at home keeping the home fires burning at the marae

Ahi tere - those who live away from home but go home to help at the marae when possible

Ahi Mātao - those who have left home and don't return to put a wood on the fire every now and then so their flame has gone cold.

Which one are you? It's interesting to see whānau when we have tangi at the marae and our marae doesn't have many working at the back, sometimes it's been lucky to be 10 people... yet the day of the tangi.. wow.... heaps have come home to be manuhiri and expect to be treated like manuhiri!! LoL

(Ruataniwha Marae Wairoa Hawke's Bay, 2015)

‘Manuhiri’ are guests, people given access to a place and provided with food and shelter. People who are not expected to care for the place, help with the provision of food and shelter, or in any other way act as hosts. In this example, the failure of people who have a family connection to a place to incorporate that connection in their actions leads to resentment from those who accept that their relationship to the place comes with associated responsibilities. Arguably, this post also supports the claim that some people believe there is a virtue of ahikā. If there was no belief that people should develop such a virtue, a failure to exhibit the virtue would be less likely to harm relationships.

.A vice of excess associated with ahikā could be an obsession with carrying out acts that tie one to the land, trying to force others to maintain a connection to the land which they do not (and ought not) feel, unreflectively excluding others from land to which you have ties, or attempting to control land to which you have ties by excluding others who have ties to that same piece of land from acting as guardians of that land.

Clearly, the vice of excess can also damage relationships with people as well as harming the person who lacks the virtue. This damage is somewhat analogous to the harm caused when someone is too possessive in a relationship with another person and prevents that person from forming other valuable relationships and limits their own ability to flourish through forming other relationships, or when someone works hard to form a relationship with the wrong person, again harming their own and the other person's ability to flourish.

A vice of excess may also lead a person to form – or try to form – relationships with too many places, which will lessen their ability to properly maintain their links to any place. The person will lack a depth of understanding of the place to understand how to care for it well, and will lack time to properly invest in the place and the relationship with the place.

Tragedies have resulted from people exhibiting behaviour that resembles ahikā, that is, from people fighting to maintain their connection to a place to which they have a bond. Whatever position you hold on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the cost in death, disability and restrictions on life are incompatible with flourishing. And, however numerous the causes of this conflict, it would be disingenuous to ignore the importance to those involved of their historic connections to the land. Similarly, attempts to protect ones' lands from immigrants could be partially driven by the same sense of authority over, personal relationship with, and commitment to the land. These cases where a failure to possess the virtue of ahikā is a barrier to flourishing can be explained within the Aristotelian tradition without giving up the notion that ahi kā is a virtue.

Figure 8. A cartoon published in the New Zealand Truth showing hostility towards immigrants
(Cited in Te, 2021)



Ahikā and flourishing

I argue that, like other neo-Aristotelian virtues, ahikā reliably and nonaccidentally contributes to flourishing. To recap, ahikā involves the formation, maintenance and renewal of a particular kind of place attachment, where this place attachment is valuable for instrumental and non-instrumental reasons.

When a virtue contributes to flourishing instrumentally it is because exercising that virtue reliably creates an environment where people are able to access something needed for well-being in a way that does not undermine well-being. For example, ahikā contributes to flourishing instrumentally by providing an environment that supports the provision of life-sustaining goods and the formation and maintenance of relationships. Historically, people who consistently lived on and cared for a piece of

land maintained their, and their families, access to food, water and shelter. Among Māori, those who took on the roles that sustained ahi kā maintained their family's relationship with a place, enabling their ability to enjoy and use that land's resources (Sinclair, 1977). A study of the forcible removal of Cheslatta T'En people from their ancestral lands reported that the removal was associated with instrumental harms, for example, the loss of access to resources, to the ability to hunt, or the ability to live without state support (Windsor & McVey, 2005, pp. 156-157). For many people in New Zealand and across the world, maintaining access to resources that came from stewardship of a place still contributes to flourishing.

As with access to resources, virtuous place attachment has historically, and still does, instrumentally contribute to the development and formation of personal and community relationships. Whether people form a relationship with each other is affected by their proximity and their pursuit of joint projects. Ahikā involves a consistent relationship with a place, which often has, as a by-product, a consistent relationship with others who are also consistently associated with that place or nearby places. But, this is not the only way on which ahikā fosters human connections. Ahikā facilitates community building because it contributes to the establishment of groups with a shared concern for a place or neighbouring places. It helps one develop an understanding of oneself as part of a group, whether large or small, working together for a goal that has joint meaning. When your actions and the actions of those with whom you feel a bond have contributed to the maintenance and development of a place, this can contribute to a sense of identity, belonging and community.

Non-instrumentally, acting with ahikā contributes to flourishing through the maintenance of culture, fostering a sense of belonging and meaningfulness, and supporting positive self-esteem and autonomy. For example, Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford explore ways in which positive place attachment is related to "belonging, control [autonomy], self-esteem, and meaning", each of which fosters well-being (Scannell & Gifford, 2017, p. 362). The information I gave you in the introduction about my connection to a mountain, water, and place is part of my 'pepeha'. A pepeha is a narrative expressing the places and people a person is connected to, and when a person knows their pepeha, this may improve their wellbeing. For example, Māori who know their pepeha are significantly less likely to feel isolated than those who do not, and feeling isolated is "an important factor in mental distress" (Russell, 2018). Research on the people's relationships with places show that disruptions to such relationships are correlated with a decline in wellbeing and, conversely, developing place attachments is correlated with improved wellbeing. Disruptions to place attachment are associated with physical health problems, psychological distress, disruptions to personal identity and personal relationships, and poor school and work performance.

As with all virtues, possessing the virtue will not guarantee that a person flourishes. Even if ahikā reliably and nonaccidentally contributes to flourishing, external factors may still interfere with a virtuous person's relationship with a place and, hence, with their flourishing.

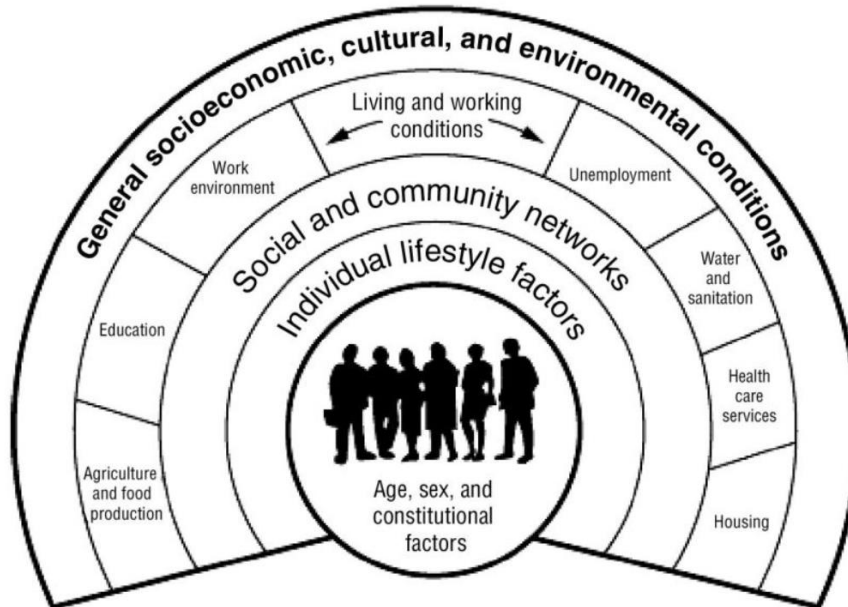
Does it matter whether there is a virtue associated with place attachment?

If there is a virtue associated with place attachment, this has numerous consequences. Most obviously, it follows that we should care about our relationship to at least some places, and we should also care about other people's relationships to places. However, it also affects where we should look when someone is not flourishing, the processes put in place to help new migrants to a region or country, the harms associated with dispossessing indigenous people of ancestral lands, and it adds a virtues useful for environmental ethics.

The biomedical model of health primarily explains a failure to flourish in terms of an individual's psychological or neurophysiological state. The approach taken by the new public health broadens

the areas recognised as affecting a person’s health to include social, cultural, environmental and other factors. This is illustrated well by the rainbow model of health developed by Göran Dahlgren and Margaret Whitehead (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991).

Figure 9. The Dahlgren-Whitehead rainbow model of health



However, when environmental effects on health are considered by those who adopt the Dahlgren-Whitehead model, those effects are usually direct rather than associated with relationships. For example, population health experts recognise that cycleways increase people’s willingness to cycle, and hence improve their physical and mental health (Gutiérrez et al., 2020). However, this is not the same as recognising that people’s relationship with particular places can improve their mental health. If the claims made here about ahikā are correct, then if we find that we or those we associate with are not flourishing, we should consider their relationship to places as well as, for example, the way their environment is affecting them, their relationships to other people, mental health diagnoses, or their brain chemistry.

Although the virtuous contribute to their own flourishing by their possession of the virtues, as mentioned above, external factors also affect whether the virtuous will flourish. Consider one example. When the connection to a place is broken, people lose more than just access to resources, they may also lose one source of their personal identity, a form of connection to their extended family, their ancestors and their culture, all of which support wellbeing. When the Mayagna community sued the Nicaraguan government to retain land rights, the Judges overseeing the case commented on the relationship between flourishing and retaining connections to ancestral land, one judge mentioned the “unique bond” indigenous communities have with “ancestral lands”, mentioning not only its role in survival, but also its importance for “moral fulfillment” (*Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community v. Nicaragua*, 2001, Concurring Opinion of Judge Hernán Salgado Pesantes, para 3). Other Judges stated that if the community were dispossessed of their historic land, they “would be deprived of practicing, conserving and revitalizing their cultural habits, which give a meaning to their own existence, both individual and communitarian” (*Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community v. Nicaragua*, 2001, Joint Separate Opinion of Judges A. A. Cançado Trindade, M. Pacheco Gómez, and A. Abreu Burelli, para 8). Examples such as this support the claim that

relationships with land contribute to flourishing in more ways than by providing sustenance. However, they also help illustrate the harm caused by dispossessing people of their ancestral lands.

It might be thought that those who possess the virtue *ahikā* will be able to form new relationships to new places, just as someone who is generous can be generous to a new person when they can no longer be generous to someone who has died. However, even if those with the virtue *ahikā* are able to form relationships to new places, their wellbeing will be harmed. First, and least important, forming new relationships takes time. The period during which they are establishing a relationship and developing their understanding of the new place, will have reduced opportunities to flourish. More importantly, if they have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands, then they have lost a relationship that cannot be replaced with anything else. The same area of land with almost identical flora and fauna cannot restore the original relationship, nor can any sum of money. This is not surprising, nor is it a reason to believe that *ahikā* is not a virtue. It is an example of the way in which differences in context affect virtues mentioned above.

Whether or not someone possesses the virtue *ahikā*, communities and states can act in ways that will support the development of *ahikā* or the development of new relationships with places. Researchers have demonstrated that there is a correlation between migration and mental health problems (Virupaksha et al., 2014). If *ahikā* is indeed a virtue, then supporting migrants to develop a relationship with places near their new residences may improve their flourishing. The support offered could be as simple as providing a community garden and supporting migrants to the area to become members (Galuszka, 2020).

Figure 10. “Vanessa Witt, who helped start the Feilding community garden, says getting involved is a great way for people to share ideas and make friends” (Galuszka, 2020).



Community gardens help people form the kind of relationship mentioned above, where working together on a piece of land helps give a sense of community and joint achievement, but where the relationship to the land itself offers the possibility of enriching one’s sense of belonging and identity.

It has been argued that if we want to change the way that people treat the environment, we need to do more than show people that some ethical theories say that they ought to live sustainably (Hursthouse, 2007; Jordan & Kristjánsson, 2017) Being told that you ought to act in some way will not on its own develop in you the kind of motivation or habits required for you to act in that way. Karen Jordan and Kristján Kristjánsson, for example, criticise other virtue ethics approaches to environmental ethics for considering the “human-nature relationship and worldview, [in a way] which fails to encompass interconnectedness and the interrelatedness of environmental and social issues; or ... not [extending] the implications of such a conception to include a more holistic view of human flourishing as necessarily situated within nature” (Jordan & Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 1207). I am

not doing that – I am opening the door to a recognition of, and deeper investigation of, ways in which we can relate well to the environment.

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