

Responding to Ethical Dilemmas in the Anthropocene: Sven Böttcher's *Prophezeiung*

by

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**Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Misty Matthews-Roper, August 2016

## Abstract

This thesis examines Sven Böttcher's novel, *Prophezeiung* (2011), a climate change thriller. *Prophezeiung* does not call into question the reality of climate change or global warming; rather it seeks to come to terms with these issues. The novel explores a number of ethical dilemmas that arise due to a computer-predicted climate catastrophe. This thesis establishes a theory of ethics and then investigates key scenes from the plot as well as the actions of the characters to determine their ethical merit.

*Prophezeiung* is a mixture of three different genres: science fiction, thriller, and docufiction. The impending climate catastrophe in the novel constrains and changes some of the genre-specified roles of the characters. Analysing some of these changes reveals that the characters are used mainly to depict different outcomes of popular responses to climate problems in the Anthropocene. Böttcher appends to the novel a recommended reading list to provide some context to the positions held by the main characters. After establishing who the heroes of the novel are, this thesis explores that reading list to understand some of the novel's many references to the real world.

Finally, the novel is analysed using one such reading: Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. More specifically, *Prophezeiung*'s ambiguous conclusion is examined using Camus's philosophy of the absurd as outlined in this work. *Prophezeiung* concludes when the catastrophe is revealed as an elaborate hoax, leaving unresolved the real issues of climate change and global warming. Instead of allowing the reader to feel overwhelmed or despair that humanity is ultimately doomed to failure, *Prophezeiung* suggests facing these climate problems by relying on Camus's categories of revolt, freedom, and passion.

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## **Chapter 1: Global Warming, Climate Change? The Anthropocene and Cli-fi**

I grew up near Hamilton, Ontario, a city often referred to as Steel Town or Hammer Town in memory of its industrial past. Pollution was easy to notice: in the summer all I had to do was look towards Hamilton and see the hazy brown skies. Walking on the beach strip I knew not to swim in Lake Ontario. Words like global warming and climate change have long been a part of my vocabulary. I did not need the image of a polar bear on a melting ice cap to know it was hot; southern Ontario is notorious for its humid summers. I began my undergraduate studies at Trent University and as part of my degree studied for a year abroad at the university in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. Freiburg is often referred to as Germany's 'Green City' and when I arrived I was a bit overwhelmed by the contrast between Freiburg and Hamilton. Freiburg had a city centre without cars, it seemed like everyone rode a bike, and the recycling system took me months to understand. It was an eye-opening experience. In the course of that year I fell in love with the German language and began to think more seriously about environmental issues.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I became an English teacher in Dortmund, a German town that like Hamilton also has a long industrial past and is now coming to terms with the loss of that industry. Returning to university to complete a master's degree, I was convinced I would write a thesis about language and education. I felt almost ashamed of my interest in the environment. My shame stemmed partly from the discord I could see in my lifestyle and what little I knew about good environmental practice. I was also fearful of entering into a discussion that was largely science based. As a language major, science had always been a foreign realm. Luckily, I stumbled upon two seminars during my time as a graduate student that motivated me to consider research in ecocritical studies. The first was a seminar on animal studies and the other dealt with climate change novels.

Deciding to write on issues surrounding global warming and climate change has not been an easy one. It turns out the science is difficult to understand and I have often felt a certain amount of pessimism about the purpose of my research. Whenever someone finds out I am doing a master's the question invariably comes: what are you writing about? My answer sometimes receives polite interest, but mostly I get 'Why?' Don't we already know about that? What's the point of looking at ethical issues caused by global warming and climate change when things like racism and gender inequality still exist? Sometimes I do not know how to respond, especially once I began my research and I noticed that the discussions, which first began in the seventies and eighties, about global warming and climate change are ongoing. What is the point of my research if scholars, scientists, and governments alike have known about the negative effects of these environmental problems for at least as long as I have been alive and yet, it still seems that little has changed.

I empathise with people who claim apathy towards these problems, but my thesis is an argument against this apathy and pessimism. I will re-examine our thoughts about what is happening: is it global warming, is it climate change, do we live in the Anthropocene? I argue that the environmental crisis requires that we change not only how we live, but also how we are thinking about this crisis.

The terms global warming and climate change are often casually tossed around by the media, scientists, and lay people alike (Schumacher-Matos). Global warming or the older term greenhouse effect are mostly associated with the idea of human produced carbon emissions that have led to an increase in overall global temperature (Hulme xxxviii). Climate change is an even more difficult term to pin down. It is used to denote both climate change irrespective of human involvement, but also climate change due solely to human involvement (Hulme xxxviii). In 2011, National Public Radio published an article about the two terms and claimed that scientists often

prefer the term climate change over global warming. It was thought that the term climate change could better encompass the changes seen globally not only in temperature, but also the increase in extreme weather patterns: “the world is not just getting generally warmer, in other words, but climate is getting more extreme, with big temperature swings and more hurricanes and the like” (Schumacher-Matos). Favouring climate change over global warming is also intended as a means of countering climate change deniers. But climate change denial is not as simple as rejecting the science. Naomi Klein describes her own fight with climate change denial in her book *This Changes Everything* (2014), when she repeatedly told herself “the science was too complicated and that the environmentalists were dealing with it” (3). She reports that it was not until 2009 that she began to really see climate change not only as a real danger, but also as a catalyst to change how we live.

Two of the more well-known scholars who have done research in this area are the political scientist John Dryzek and climatologist Mike Hulme. Dryzek’s *The Politics of the Earth* (1997) first asserts that although environmentalism can be “positioned as a challenge to industrialism, it does not constitute a unified counter discourse” (22). Dryzek defines discourse as a “shared way of apprehending the world” (9) and those who adhere or live in a certain discourse make and understand their reality through that discourse. These discourses are often tied to issues of power and government. Accordingly, Dryzek discusses issues of governance when he outlines four environmental discourses as well as a fifth “Promethean Response” (52). He describes the four environmental discourses as dictating actions ranging along an axis of radical to reformist and differing in their approach to solutions as either prosaic or imaginative. The prosaic discourses view “environmental problems ... mainly in terms of troubles encountered by the established industrial political economy. They require action, but they do not point to a new kind of society” (14). On the other hand, imaginative discourses attempt to bring the environment “into the heart



of society and its cultural, moral, and economic systems, rather than being seen as a source of difficulties standing outside these systems” (15). The two reformist discourses are problem solving (prosaic) and sustainability (imaginative). Dryzek’s research also identifies two radical discourses: limits and survival (prosaic) and green radicalism (imaginative). The problem solving discourse proposes only small adjustments to be made through public policy in order to better cope with environmental issues. In contrast, limits and survival “seeks a wholesale redistribution of power within the industrial political economy, and a wholesale reorientation away from perpetual economic growth”, but it still only sees solutions “in terms of the options set by industrialism, notably, greater control of existing systems by administrators, scientists and other responsible elites” (16). Moving on to the imaginative discourses, the reformist discourse of sustainability attempts to do away with the problem of limits and instead seeks to simply merge environmental and economic values together. Contrastively, green radicalism seeks to reinvent society by rejecting “the basic structure of industrial society” (16). The Promethean response straddles a fine line between industrialism and environmentalism: “Prometheans have unlimited confidence in the ability of humans and their technologies to overcome any problems – including environmental problems” (52). Dryzek’s book is now in its third edition (2013) with only minor updates (such as a more detailed conclusion and suggestions for moving forward).

First published in 2009, Hulme’s *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* suggests that our disagreements on the meaning of climate change and on how best to respond to it stem from the fact that we are asking the wrong questions. Hulme’s research shows that climate change is more than a fact to be proved or disproved. In his preface, he restates the normal climate change question: “Rather than asking ‘How do we solve climate change?’ we need to turn the question around and ask ‘How does the idea of climate change alter the way we arrive at and achieve our

personal aspirations and our collective social goals?’ ” (xxviii). In his final chapter, Hulme revisits climate change as a mobilising idea and offers four myths that best represent our instinctual responses to climate change: lamenting Eden, presaging Apocalypse, constructing Babel, and celebrating Jubilee (341-58). Lamenting Eden is a form of nostalgia: a yearning to return to a time when humans and their environment were not separated. Presaging Apocalypse is based on a fear of the future. We are aware that our current way of life is detrimental to our continued existence, but we are also unsure as to how to fix it. Constructing Babel represents our “desire for mastery and control” (342), while also reminding us that our pride will prevent us from achieving our goal. The fourth myth is celebrating Jubilee and its underlying premise is that justice is a human instinct (358). Climate change both causes and reveals injustices that we feel compelled to answer. In attempting to fix them we realise how our current societal structures “hem us in, and how [our instinct for justice] reveals the limits of our individual moral agency” (358). From Dryzek’s environmental discourses to Hulme’s climate myths, it becomes clear that our ideas and responses to global warming and climate change transcend mere terminology. These are not just scientific facts, but they are also ideologically charged terms. Whether or not every prediction and hypothesis about the climate comes to pass, we can see that the ideas of climate change and global warming are changing our view of humanity and our connection to the environment.

Attempting to add new vigor to this debate is yet another term: the Anthropocene. British author Robert Macfarlane recently explained the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch, or age of the Earth “in which human activity is considered such a powerful influence on the environment, climate and ecology of the planet that it will leave a long-term signature in the strata record.” In other words, the influence of humanity is such that it has and will continue to leave marks on the Earth and its inhabitants. Atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen is often credited with coining the term

when he and diatom specialist Eugene Stoermer co-wrote an article titled “The ‘Anthropocene’ ” (2000), whose publication is thought to have sparked the formation of a working group of stratigraphers. In 2009, “The Anthropocene Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy” was formed in order to determine two things: (1) if we are living in a new epoch, the Anthropocene, and if so, (2) when it began (Macfarlane). Although the results of this study are not due to be released until late 2016, Macfarlane has already noted an acceptance of the term Anthropocene in popular discourse. He lists a number of art projects, non-fiction and fiction works that are making use of the term and eagerly awaits the results of the working group’s second objective. Macfarlane reports that the start date of the Anthropocene could range from the first use of fire by humanoids to the nuclear age in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with the latter being the more likely as it “coincides with the so-called ‘Great Acceleration’, when massive increases occurred in population, carbon emissions, species invasion and extinctions, and when the production and discard of metals, concrete and plastics boomed.”

Acceptance of the term Anthropocene is not without critics and objections. Most recently in a lecture delivered in May 2016, “Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World,” Naomi Klein cautioned against using the term Anthropocene as she believes it implies “human nature can be essentialised to the traits that created this crisis. In this way, the systems that certain humans created, and other humans powerfully resisted, are completely let off the hook. Capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy – those sorts of system [sic].” Klein is referring to a certain type of universalism, which ascribes blame to all of humanity equally for current climate problems. This is a misleading conclusion as it is widely acknowledged that Western countries and their culture bear the brunt of responsibility for current environmental problems. Consequently, it is other countries who suffer the most from the negative effects of the situation. In 2013, political

scientist Timothy W. Luke also noted the increased use of Anthropocene. He cautioned that use of this term could be simply a continuation of anthropocentrism, implying that humans have finally subdued both nature and the planet. Luke believes that the Anthropocene represents more than the hope to accurately chronicle natural history; instead, he sees it as a tool for “redirecting how human beings ought to act now.” Similar to debates about the truth of climate change that have clouded action on these issues, Luke sees the Anthropocene as a further way to confuse the issues in environmental debate. Furthermore, he suspects that use of this term will serve only certain political goals.

On the other side of the debate, Macfarlane sees the potential of the Anthropocene to jolt us out of our climate complacency. In *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015), Adam Trexler argues for the use of Anthropocene as he believes it could help us “move beyond the narrow questions of truth and falsity with regard to climate science” (4). Trexler uses the term Anthropocene to counter traditional climate rhetoric’s emphasis on the “power of individual choice” (4), which is to say that using the terms global warming or climate change create a false sense of control, for example, that through a few lifestyle changes we can fix or avoid the problems we have created. According to Trexler, use of Anthropocene “names a world-historical phenomenon that has arrived” (4) and that deferral or retreat is impossible. In order to move forward we need to acknowledge and attempt to understand our part in the changes happening in the world.

Due to the ongoing formation of what defines the Anthropocene I take a position similar to Macfarlane and Trexler’s, namely that the notion we are living in the Anthropocene can help snap us out of our apathy towards climate change and global warming issues. Further, I will use the term in my thesis to denote the epoch that we are currently living in. An epoch that is defined by

the influence of humans and the consequences of our actions including both climate change and global warming. I am joining scholars such as Trexler who advocate we learn how to live in the Anthropocene. This may include lamenting for what is lost or preparing for the next catastrophe. Acceptance of the Anthropocene, for me, means accepting we cannot escape what is happening.

To begin understanding our involvement in the Anthropocene, Trexler argues for the study of novels that are concerned with humanity and our environment. Specifically, he argues for the study of the new genre, “cli-fi”, which first appeared in 2013 in various articles about fiction novels that were concerned with global warming (12), although environmental journalist Dan Bloom claims to have coined the term in 2008. Bloom is reluctant to define the genre claiming that it needs to be allowed to “define itself more and more as time goes by.” His only real hope is that cli-fi might be “helpful in waking people up and serving as an alarm bell.” Trexler also notes this uncertainty, claiming there has been “significant confusion” (8) about the genre’s connection to other more well-established genres (such as sci-fi). As with works of sci-fi, many scholars question the validity of studying cli-fi novels as a great number are popular fiction. But their nature is exactly why Trexler advocates their study. In Trexler’s view, “the central question of [research at this time] is how climate change and all its *things* have changed the capacities of recent literature” (13). He believes we need to acknowledge the significance of the Anthropocene for human experience as well as the novel.

The study and interpretation of cli-fi novels is part of a larger field of study known as ecocriticism, a term first defined in the 1990s by Cheryll Glotfelty as the “study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). Since its inception, this method of literary criticism has gone through at least two major stages in its focus and is believed to be shifting towards a third. Prominent ecocritic Lawrence Buell describes these stages as waves. The first

wave was preservationist: “environmentalism [equalled] nature protection in thinly populated remote areas” (94). The second wave had a distinct activist edge. It was more sociocentric than ecocentric, looking at “public health environmentalism” (96) and the transformations occurring to landscapes due to urbanisation and industrialisation. Environmental scholar Scott Slovic proposes that the third wave of ecocriticism will reach beyond its predominantly Anglocentric outlook to include global and transcultural issues (Dürbeck and Stobbe 11). Scholars of ecocriticism have also begun to call for more cross-cultural scholarship shifting focus to works published in languages other than English (Trexler 10; Buell 107). Interestingly, although much of German culture and politics since the 1970s has been shaped by environmental thought, to date there has been little ‘ecocritical study’ of German literature (Goodbody, “Ökologisch” 123).

In 2015, the anthology *Ecocriticism: Eine Einführung* was published to create a theory of ecocriticism for students, teachers, and researchers of German literature (Dürbeck and Stobbe 15); the volume is comprised of articles written by 20 authors from a variety of disciplines. In their introduction, the editors outline a brief history of German literary criticism that was concerned with literature written about humans and their relationship with the environment. This includes critiques informed by the phenomenology of Heidegger, the critical theory of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, the *Gesellschaftstheorie* and *Verantwortungsethik* of Erich Fromm and Hans Jonas, the *Naturästhetik* of Gernot and Hartmut Böhme, and the more recent turn towards issues of *Wetterereignissen* and *Naturelementen* (11-12). Ecocritical scholar Axel Goodbody also observes this trend when he notes an increase in German novels pertaining to issues of global warming since the 1990s (“Melting” 94). Issues like global warming, climate change, or other issues that have been created in the Anthropocene are interrelated. They connect nations, ecosystems, and time periods. Trexler believes ecocriticism needs to become aware of the

limitations and expansions occurring to novels in the Anthropocene. In his research Trexler noticed a rupturing in genres, which he believes makes it difficult to define these novels by their genres (14). These novels attempt to represent a massive shift in human existence and as such, tend to change, borrow, or combine different genres. Observing changes in the genre can be one way to better observe the issues that these novels are trying to convey.

Published in Germany as a thriller, Sven Böttcher's *Prophezeiung* (2011) is one such novel. It has a fairly standard thriller plot: a conspiracy is uncovered and the protagonists have to work to save the world from disaster. However, *Prophezeiung* has an eco-twist that distinguishes it from the thriller genre. For example, thrillers often make use of so-called flat characters that are simply good or evil (Dürbeck 249), but in *Prophezeiung* the antagonist attempts to withhold knowledge of an imminent climate catastrophe. The complexity of the climate catastrophe in turn blurs the line between actions that are simply right or wrong. The protagonist, Mavie, discovers the scheme and the novel follows her actions as she attempts to warn the world before it is too late. In her attempt to give warning, Mavie is subsequently hindered and aided by a variety of groups and people. The actions of the protagonists only indirectly help to avert the catastrophe. Some of their actions even lead to more problems, leaving the reader unsure what the most ethical solution is. A human antagonist is uncovered, and his actions could be labelled evil, but his plan's success hinges on an uncontrollable climate. *Prophezeiung* presents the climate catastrophe as an "imaginative resource" (Hulme xxxviii) to inspire readers, rather than a debate about the possibility of such a catastrophe. It does not debate the reality of the Anthropocene (every character acknowledges that climate change or global warming is aggravated, if not directly caused, by humans); instead it offers a critique of our responses to environmental issues. *Prophezeiung* prompts readers to act

ethically despite the conflicting realities of modern life. In short, *Prophezeiung* raises questions about our ethical responsibility to others.

Sven Böttcher is a prolific author, having written over twenty *Krimi*-novels since 1989. In 2007, he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and after a remarkable recovery in 2009, he began his research for *Prophezeiung*. After *Prophezeiung*, he wrote *Quintessenzen: Überlebenskunst für Anfänger* (2013) and co-wrote *Die Ganze Wahrheit über Alles: Wie wir unsere Zukunft doch noch retten können* (2016) with journalist and author Mathais Bröckers. From the titles alone, it is apparent that Böttcher has an interest in humanity's future. Westend, the publisher of *Die ganze Wahrheit über alles*, describes it as an attempt to combat the feelings of apathy that arise from the complexity of modern life. Each chapter covers a different topic to help readers better understand the world they live in, e.g. capitalism and conspiracy theories. By dispelling the uncertainty and complexity of these topics the authors hope to inspire change. *Prophezeiung* can be viewed as bridging the gap between climate science and popular fiction in a similar fashion

After its original publication in 2011, *Prophezeiung* was re-published in 2015 by *Die Zeit* in a collection of *Wissenschaftskrimis* that also included popular thriller authors Sebastian Fitzek and Bernhard Kegel. The criteria for this collection was to offer a summer reading list that combined suspense and intelligent entertainment (Spanier). Moreover, in a review for Deutschlandfunk, Florian Weyh describes *Prophezeiung* as connecting real scientific thought and entertainment. In the same article Sven Böttcher is quoted as saying that he hoped to start a discussion about what he sees as an overconfidence in climate science, the scientists who conduct research as well as in technology's ability to solve climate problems. Weyh's article further labels *Prophezeiung* a *Gedankenspiel*, an 'intellectual game,' allowing insight into possible consequences of current trends in environmental and scientific thought. According to a 2013 article



titled “Literatur und Klimawandel: Der Held und das Wetter” published by the Goethe Institut, the plot of *Prophezeiung* is summarised as taking a critical look at the financial aspects of climate change and climate research. In a review of novels written in response to climate issues, Milner et al. label *Prophezeiung* “a special kind of climate denial that calls into question the scientist rather than the science” (18). Thus, through its underlying critique of current moral, scientific, and environmental trends, *Prophezeiung* joins ranks with other cli-fi novels. These include such notable English examples as Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Science in the Capital* trilogy (2004-2007); Steven Andersen’s *Things We Didn’t See Coming* (2009); Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012); and Thomas King’s *The Back of the Turtle* (2014). Some notable German examples are Dirk C. Fleck’s *GO! – Die Ökodiktatur* (1993) and its prequel *Maeva*-trilogy (2011-2015); Frank Schätzing’s *Der Schwarm* (2004); Liane Dirks’s *Falsche Himmel* (2006); and Nele Neuhaus’s *Wer Wind sät* (2011).

Cli-fi prompts its readers to reconsider how they live. Goodbody summarizes the message of these novels as promoting a ‘right’ way to live that

starts with the recognition of what is physically sustainable in the longer term, but is also a matter of the balance between material goods and aesthetic/spiritual benefits, and of that between individual freedom and self-realisation on the one hand and the welfare of others (including future generations) on the other. (“Framing” 23-24)

*Prophezeiung* is a cli-fi novel that enables the reader to reflect on this rightness. It demonstrates the difficulty of ethically responding to environmental problems, such as a climate catastrophe. Bringing the consequences of the climate catastrophe to life, *Prophezeiung* highlights our current inability to settle questions of ethics. It makes the complex and interconnected issues of the Anthropocene accessible for any reader and suggests humanity’s hope lies in collective action. *Prophezeiung* requires its reader to acknowledge and accept the reality of life in the Anthropocene. Trexler summarises the problems of the Anthropocene: “on a geological scale, our emissions *are*

us, though they persist far beyond our individual circles of influence, experiences, and lifetimes” (5). There is no going back to some ideal time left untouched by climate change. The problems that have arisen in the Anthropocene are vast and potentially unsolvable: How do we accept the reality of life in the Anthropocene and not become overwhelmed, or give into despair?

Using conclusions drawn from Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, my thesis demonstrates that the climate catastrophe in *Prophezeiung* can be likened to the tale of Sisyphus and his rock. In Camus’s interpretation of this Greek myth, he claims that Sisyphus is happy because he has accepted the rock as his own. Camus names this acceptance absurd and says there are three consequences that come with it: “my revolt, my freedom, and my passion” (Camus 64). Sisyphus lives in revolt despite the futility of his existence. Acknowledging the futility of his existence Sisyphus is free to live a life without meaning. Living in revolt and freedom, Sisyphus lives in passion, which is to say he is actively engaged in his life. Applying these notions to *Prophezeiung* we see that the novel challenges its readers to accept an absurd philosophy towards the problems of the Anthropocene. The novel illustrates how we might approach environmental problems in revolt, freedom and passion; accepting the ultimate futility of our existence paradoxically frees us to live in the present.

*Prophezeiung* is both a cli-fi novel and an ecothriller. As such it follows a standard format for its characters and plot. Due to its environmental focus some of these aspects also break out of their standardised forms. My methodology will be based on a literary analysis of the characters and plot to uncover these discrepancies. In chapter two, I will analyse some of the ethical issues presented in *Prophezeiung*. I will first define ethics as outlined by ethicist Wolfgang Huber, whose recent book *Ethics: The Fundamental Questions of Our Lives* (2015) focuses on responsibility and sustainability: “new scientific and technical possibilities are accompanied today by far-reaching

and sometimes utterly unforeseeable consequences for the future ... The dominant trait in contemporary ethics is that it is becoming an ethics of responsibility. Sustainability is one of its most important themes” (viii-ix). Although Huber does not use the word environment, his focus displays an underlying concern for environmental issues, making his conception of ethics useful in interpreting *Prophezeiung*. Through analysis of the plot one main theme of *Prophezeiung* is revealed to be how to respond ethically to the climate catastrophe. The predicted catastrophe is ultimately a hoax, but the conflicting responses of the characters allows the reader to consider how they might respond to such a situation. Keeping my focus on ethics, I will establish which of the characters pursue ethical choices (Mavie, Beck, Edward, Philipp, and the eco-group Gaia) and those whose actions are, comparatively, less ethical (Millet and Eisele). *Prophezeiung* establishes what living ethically means: learning how to balance the actions of our present life against our responsibility to others.

True to the novel’s sustained mixing of fact and fiction, Böttcher has included a “Dank & Empfehlungen der Weggefährten” (489-92), providing further readings based on each character’s motivation. I believe the characters’ actions are in line with their designated readings, thus the novel explores some possible consequences of these mindsets. In chapter three, I will use Böttcher’s suggestions to take a closer look at the characters’ motivations. My focus will be on the actions of the two main protagonists (Mavie and Beck) and their recommended readings, that is, *The Life You Can Save* (Peter Singer) and *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Albert Camus) respectively, as I believe Mavie and Beck are the heroes. I will also briefly review the motivations of the supporting characters Edward, Philipp, Gaia and Millet. My analysis will reveal that the underlying solution to the problem of ethics offered by *Prophezeiung* relies on existentialist thought.

*Prophezeiung*'s ending is ambiguous and could lead to feelings of despair and pessimism about humanity's future and our ability to act ethically in the Anthropocene. However, in chapter four, I discuss Albert Camus's interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus and how its accompanying absurd philosophy can be applied to *Prophezeiung*. I propose that *Prophezeiung* points to a solution that accepts the futility of our situation and in spite of this prompts us to live. To support this conclusion, I address references to Camus's work that are threaded throughout the novel. *Prophezeiung* acknowledges the precariousness of our situation, but challenges the reader to live and act ethically.

Chapter five brings these elements together: ethics, the recommended readings, and Camus's absurd. It concludes with a brief discussion of Camus's notion of passion and how that could be a launching point for further research of cli-fi novels.

## Chapter 2: Technology, Globalisation, and the Future: Ethical Action in *Prophezeiung*

As with global warming and climate change, the terms ethics and morals are often used interchangeably. James Fieser brings ethics and morals together: “the field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour.” Fieser further divides ethics into three areas of study: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Briefly, Fieser defines metaethics as answering questions such as where do ethical principles come from and what they mean. Normative ethics involves habits or duties we should acquire and the possible consequences of our actions for others. Finally, Fieser states that the study of applied ethics is the application of meta- and normative ethics to specific controversies or situations. From these definitions we can conclude that when we talk about ethics or morals we have reached an area of study that attempts to classify what we mean when we declare something is right or wrong. Further, discussions about environmental concerns are an issue of applied ethics, and more specifically how to make the right choice in the face of the complications that are occurring due to the consequences of humanity’s actions.

Delving a little deeper, ethicist Dieter Birnbacher claims that the terms ethics and morals are often used interchangeably in daily conversation, but most philosophers will agree that “ ‚Ethik‘ als die philosophische *Theorie der Moral* gilt, ‚Moral‘ dagegen als das komplexe und vielsichtige System der Regeln, Normen und Wertmaßstäbe, das der Gegenstand der Ethik ausmacht” (12). Expanding on this Birnbacher says that the area of study for ethics is morals, much as the heart is the area of study for cardiology. In the introduction to his book on ethics, Wolfgang Huber cites Habermas’s 1991 distinction of ethics as being an individual matter and morals as how the individual relates to others socially. Huber also makes reference to the work of Ronald Dworkin, who, in an essay from 2011 titled “What is a Good Life?” explains his interpretation of

moral and ethical standards. Dworkin describes how ethics and morals are often used in ways that obscure their distinction, but he claims this distinction is important, especially, when we consider how morality was originally connected to happiness in the works of Plato and Aristotle (often named the first philosophers of ethics and morals). Dworkin defines two standards: “moral standards prescribe how we ought to treat others; ethical standards, how we ought to live ourselves ... happiness ... [is then] to be achieved by living ethically; and this [means] living according to independent moral principles.” His subsequent discussion of morality is reliant on questions of ‘what we owe others.’

Dworkin’s concern for what we owe others is echoed in Huber’s conception of ethics. Huber begins his discussion of ethics by considering three questions posed by Immanuel Kant: “what can I know?, what ought I to do?, and what may I hope?” (2). Huber believes all three questions are interrelated, which leads to a fourth question: “what is the human being?”(2). In order to answer this question, Huber begins with the premise that humans are first and foremost social beings in pursuit of freedom (3). Our freedom is only absolute in so far as we are able to accept limitations on it. These limitations should be acceptable because they enable and encourage the freedom of others. According to Huber, part of the controversy surrounding ethical (or moral) questions stems from debates concerning these limitations: “what is moral defines the conditions of the ethical. Human self-determination does not entail a claim to unlimited implementation. On the contrary, if it is to be morally justifiable, it must keep within the boundaries of what is right” (8). Thus, Huber believes ethics are both existential and political.

Despite the continuing debates about how best to separate morals and ethics, I define moral as what is right (that is what we owe one another) and ethical as what is good (that is how to pursue individual fulfillment). I also agree to the implicit hierarchy proposed by both Dworkin and Huber

that to act ethically one must act morally. Or in other words, concern for others comes before, or at least in tandem, with concern for oneself. Furthermore, much like Huber, I use the term ethics as the generic, all-encompassing term for “reflection on human conduct” (9). In his preface, Huber describes three modern paradigm shifts that have influenced contemporary thought and ethics: life as project, feeling at home in the globalised world, and the future as the field of ethics (vii-iii). These shifts are used to orient my discussions about questions of ethics in the novel.

*Prophezeiung* is set in a not too distant future Germany and Europe. As the main character Mavie makes her way from Hamburg, where she works as a climatologist, to the fictitious International Institute for Climate (IICO) in La Palma, an island in the Canaries, she encounters CO<sub>2</sub> protesters, at the airport, whom Mavie dismisses as foolish. An enforced carbon tax limiting how much carbon individuals are allowed to use per year reveals Germany and the European Union have had to take strict measures to bring their emission levels under control. Mavie is convinced that this governmental rationing of carbon makes the world a safer place, but the severe weather in the novel undermines this belief. Shortly after arriving at IICO, Mavie’s co-researcher, Thilo Beck, shows her his latest project, Prometheus. Prometheus is a powerful computer program that combines world-wide historical weather data and climate formulas that will, according to Beck, allow it to one day accurately predict the weather. Believing Beck is hiding something, Mavie hacks into Prometheus and discovers the program is already making forecasts. Reading through the forecasts she sees that Prometheus has predicted a severe drought in the Southern Hemisphere and extreme flooding in the north. She also notices that Prometheus can predict the number of human deaths that will accompany these weather patterns: somewhere between 200-800 million deaths. Unable to keep this information to herself, Mavie confides in her old mentor, Professor Fritz Eisele, and her best friend, a journalist from Hamburg. Unbeknownst to Mavie, Prometheus’s

prediction is nothing but a simulation, which Professor Eisele is falsely using to further his own interests. The next day, Mavie is fired on suspicion of corporate espionage and returns to her father, Edward's home in Hamburg. There, Mavie compares Prometheus's prediction with the actual weather and although there are some anomalies, she becomes convinced of Prometheus's prognostic abilities. Shortly thereafter, her apartment is broken into and her journalist friend dies under mysterious circumstances. These two actions affirm Mavie's belief in Prometheus and win over her father's support, a man already paranoid about the actions of the government and industry. Together with her late friend's macho millionaire brother, Philipp von Schenk, Mavie sets out to warn the world.

Their first stop is a conference in Rotterdam where Professor Eisele is the guest speaker. After warning Eisele, Mavie and Philipp return to the hotel. Philipp is unconvinced of Eisele's innocence pointing out that Eisele was one of the few who knew of Prometheus when his sister was killed. Philipp goes to the bar to get drunk and Mavie goes alone to the hotel room, where Beck is waiting for her. Mavie confronts Beck about his choice to not reveal Prometheus's prediction to the world and he discloses his concern about the validity of the prediction. To show his good faith, Beck has brought some of Prometheus's data to be verified, but then a bomb suddenly explodes in the hotel room and, in the resulting chaos, Mavie and Beck are separated.

Once Mavie recovers from the explosion she becomes even more determined to warn the public. To this end, her father, suggests enlisting the reclusive two-time Nobel Prize winner, Leland Millet to inform the world's leaders. While Mavie is attempting to convince Millet to help her, Beck wakes up in his sister's care at the base camp of the eco-group Gaia. Beck returns to consciousness only to find out Gaia is now in possession of Prometheus's data. Once again, Beck's pleas to further scrutinise Prometheus's data are ignored as Gaia reacts to the prediction as if it



were fact. Gaia's leader decides to warn the world through social media, using the data to create a series of sensational YouTube videos that go viral and lead to global unrest. Gaia's videos finally convince Millet to help and he then uses the fear of the catastrophe to become a global leader. At an emergency meeting of European leaders in Geneva, Millet proposes exploding a volcano, Emi Koussi in Chad, to resolve the catastrophe. After failing to convince Millet (and the rest of the European leaders) of the recklessness of this solution, Mavie returns to Hamburg with Philipp to save his family.

While Mavie has struggled to bring Prometheus's warning to public attention, extreme flooding has occurred in Hamburg. The rising water has transformed Blankenese, where Philipp's family lives, into a river. As authorities struggle to respond to the overwhelming distress calls, opportunistic gangs of youth have taken over the city. Mavie's father Edward is en-route to the von Schenk villa to bring Philipp's wife and children to safety, but when Mavie and Phillip arrive the would-be-rescue mission is attacked by one of the gangs. During a scuffle to prevent Phillip's daughter from falling into the water, Mavie also falls into the river. As Mavie struggles to stay afloat, she watches as her father and Phillip appear to be succumbing to the violence of the gang. Just as she gives up hope a third party enters the fray: refugees from a ship in the Port of Hamburg come to the protagonists' aid and save their lives.

At the last minute, in true thriller-style, Gaia, led by Beck, are able to prove that Prometheus's predictions are a mix of luck and simulations. It is revealed that the chaos and resulting near-disastrous solution have all been orchestrated by none other than Professor Eisele. His late wife had previously worked for a social justice group in China. Following protests against the construction of a dam that would have destroyed a few villages, demonstrators were forcibly removed from the site. Some were beaten and the leader, Eisele's wife, was tortured and then

killed. After her death, Eisele began to plot his revenge against the Chinese. Blaming the entire country for his wife's death, he decides to attack using economic means. In typical villain fashion, his plan works almost perfectly: Prometheus's prediction reaches the world and the only solution appears to be to blow up a volcano. This would lead to an increased need for wind energy (whose production he owns almost exclusively) as the resulting volcanic ash cloud would block the sun's rays. Consequently, the Chinese economy would topple owing to their recent production and investment in solar power. Through a new series of videos by Gaia this information reaches the world in the nick of time and Eisele's plan is thwarted. Before he can be brought to account for his actions, Eisele commits suicide. Confronted with Eisele's suicide and the new Gaia video, Millet decides not to explode Emi Koussi. Shortly after, it is also revealed that Eisele's suicide may have been faked. The novel concludes with a party at Millet's villa for his birthday, where he gives a speech about the Western world's apathy towards environmental issues.

The main plot of *Prophezeiung* is framed by a related tale presented in myth-like fashion. The prologue concerns Djamal, a Tuareg or nomadic Berber from the Sahara Desert. Djamal has recently heard a prophecy, which foresees the appearance of a silver lake that no one can drink from, a signal for his people to leave the desert. Finding the aforementioned lake, Djamal rushes to his family to tell them they have to leave. The epilogue revisits Djamal's story; during the confusion of Prometheus he and his family attempted and failed to migrate to Europe. The novel concludes with Djamal vowing to one day return to Europe and see its destruction.

Returning now to Huber's three paradigm shifts, the first, "life as project" (vii), he describes in two parts: (1) that modern life is now heavily influenced by our reliance on technology and scientific invention; (2) this reliance creates more freedom for certain groups of people and simultaneously increases their responsibility to those who do not share in this freedom. Huber sees

science and technology as being directly related to our life choices and ethics. Not only is scientific research unable to help us avoid problems, but *Prophezeiung* also portrays how it can potentially exacerbate situations.

Mavie's unwavering belief in the truth of Prometheus's prediction is one obvious example. Mavie and the others are convinced of Prometheus's infallibility through its reliance on complex and convoluted equations, data, and high-tech modems (37-39). The possibility of a program that can perfectly predict a catastrophe raises the ethical question of what to do with this knowledge. On the one hand, revealing this knowledge too soon or without a proper contingency plan could lead to mass hysteria. On the other hand, not revealing it makes the information holder liable for potentially avoidable deaths. *Prophezeiung* does not dictate an answer, but rather allows the reader to decide which choice would be the most ethical.

A brief look at the setting and plot of *Prophezeiung* reveals the influence of technology and scientific invention. Almost all characters own multiple pieces of technology including an *iAm* (similar to a smartphone, but more advanced) and are comfortable discussing cutting edge science (or have it explained to them). At IICO, Mavie is introduced to other research groups developing projects to help humanity survive the rising global temperatures. She only catches a glimpse of one of the projects, but its implications are interesting. It is an experiment conducted in a desert with kilometer-sized pieces of aluminum that could reflect the rays of the sun and possibly lower the overall temperature of the Earth. Curiously, when Mavie finds out about this experiment she does not question where this desert is (does IICO own this land?). A careful reading of the prologue suggests this experiment takes place in the Sahara Desert and the aluminum strips are most likely the silver lake Djamel discovered. There is no mention of agreements between Djamel's people and the IICO or any governmental body to experiment there. Conducting experiments in an area

without asking permission of its inhabitants implies that the scientists at IICO, including Mavie, believe their research is more important than the Tuareg's land rights. The continual reliance and acceptance of technology in *Prophezeiung* raises questions about privilege. Although Mavie does not object to these experiments at this time, as the novel progresses she becomes less assured of science's (and the Western world's) high-handedness.

Huber's second paradigm shift is 'feeling at home in a globalized world'. Here he lists three "hallmarks" of globalisation that add new challenges to the ethical debate: universal human rights, world-wide communication, and interdependent global economies (viii). Huber believes the first hallmark, universal human rights, is potentially the most problematic because although these rights are said to be universal they are often not. According to Huber, this is because these rights are based on Western philosophy and they frequently only protect Western interests. The previous example of IICO's experimenting in the desert is one such example and this problem comes up again at the emergency meeting where only European nations are represented. It is said that the USA tacitly supports the council and every effort is made to keep China and India out of the negotiations. Although the council is making decisions that will affect life globally, they do not attempt to find a more equitable solution.

Millet's volcano solution is risky. But the risks are acceptable because it will mostly be non-Western countries taking on the brunt of the consequences. The first country to suffer from the solution will be Chad, where Emi Koussi lies. In order to assure Chad's cooperation, Millet calls the French president fully expecting the president to offer Chad's government a bribe. Millet's solution and the European leaders' reaction to the predicted catastrophe exemplify a reasoning where the rights of some trump the rights of others. Millet and the European leaders might argue that they are saving lives through their solution, but their actions are not justified. They are

unethical because the freedom afforded by universal human rights comes with the price of ethical responsibility to those who do not possess the same rights.

Leaving aside universal human rights for a moment, Prometheus's prediction only reaches the world due to worldwide communication: first through Gaia's YouTube videos, and second through Millet's press conference. Gaia's actions, although motivated by a desire to warn the unsuspecting world, create civil unrest. The civil unrest stems not only from the fact that there is no solution offered, but it also covers up two important aspects of Prometheus's prediction: (1) the unconfirmed data that the prediction is based on, and (2) Gaia's videos leave the reason for the catastrophe open to conjecture. After Millet's press conference, the media begins to speculate on the cause of the catastrophe listing China as the most likely suspect. Philipp wonders why China is being blamed and Millet explains that due to mass media most people are aware that the production of CO<sub>2</sub> is to blame for the rise in global temperatures. He further explains that it is an easy step to then blame China for global warming as they produce the most CO<sub>2</sub>. Through the ease of worldwide communication the blame for the situation is unfairly given to China, thereby giving the West a scapegoat for the catastrophe and seemingly a *carte blanche* to resolve the situation.

After the announcement of Prometheus's prediction, Millet is called to an emergency meeting of nations in Geneva. At the meeting Millet plans to announce his solution to the problem: blow up Emi Koussi and fill the atmosphere with ash, thereby lowering global temperatures. Millet's solution is a daring, but not unheard of geoengineering solution to global temperature rise based on the 1991 eruption of the stratovolcano Mount Pinatubo on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Global temperatures dropped significantly after the eruption, which has led to new research in the viability of causing a similar eruption (Klein 259). Recent conclusions reveal that this action could produce serious consequences including droughts in both Africa and Asia (259-

60). Other consequences of Millet's solution are outlined by Beck when he uncovers Eisele's revenge plan. Beck discovers that Eisele is the owner of Solunia, a wind energy company, which has proposed building the world's largest wind turbine project in the North Sea. At the same time, the USA, China, and several African countries have been working on an agreement for solar panels in the deserts of Africa. If Emi Koussi explodes, then not only will hundreds of people in the area die, but solar panels will become an uncertain power source for at least two years, rendering investments in solar energy made by China and the United States worthless. Beck summarises what Eisele will accomplish with the explosion of Emi Koussi: "Er kriegt alles. Seine Rache, Macht und sehr viel Geld" (Böttcher 392). The crux of Eisele's revenge plan hinges on the manipulation of both climate research projects such as Prometheus and the global market.

Mavie appears to be the only one willing to speak for those who will be victimized by Millet's plan. At the emergency meeting, she speaks against Millet in the hopes of appealing to other governmental representatives. Unfortunately, her appeal is muddled by an accusation made by Professor Eisele. He accuses her of acting inappropriately in the face of the catastrophe: "Was haben Sie und Ihre Freunde geglaubt, was Sie mit einem solchen Kassandraruf erreichen – was, außer Panik!? Sie richten die Welt zugrunde! Sie handeln nicht nur verantwortungslos, Sie betreiben aktiv Völkermord!" (369). Ignoring Professor Eisele's own ethically dubious conduct, we can see the element of truth in his accusation. What was supposed to happen through Gaia's videos, or even through issuing a warning to the world? Neither Mavie nor Gaia can provide a solution and the news reports following Gaia's videos show only suffering, death, and war across the globe. In this way, the characters' responses and the global consequences neatly display how globalisation compounds the problems of a climate catastrophe. Of course, most of the horror

stories come from the non-Western world, and so readers must acknowledge the inequality generated by the interconnectedness of the global community.

Returning to ethical responsibility, *Prophezeiung* attempts to tackle the issue of climate refugees. Climate refugees are introduced at the beginning of the novel: as they sail to Europe most are turned back by the French military except for one boat, the Eastern Star, which sails to Germany and is welcomed into the Port of Hamburg. The Eastern Star and its occupants are part of the setting used by the protagonists to explore different views on the ethical merit of allowing the refugees to dock in Hamburg. Mavie, of course, argues for giving them sanctuary. Edward labels them armed pirates and reminds Mavie that Hamburg is facing its own crisis. He agrees with Mavie, but he also believes the government is not adequately controlling the intake of the refugees. According to Edward, the refugees are armed and allowing them to enter the port will add to the problems they are already facing: “Wir befinden uns spätestens seit heute in einer neuen Epoche, und wir werden uns nicht nur mit der Natur auseinandersetzen müssen” (Böttcher 291). Philipp is also negative towards the climate refugees, labelling them terrorists: “... und diese Terroristen wollen nicht in Hochhäuser fliegen, die wollen dummerweise bei uns landen” (329). The controversy is settled when refugees from the Eastern Star save Mavie and the other protagonists from a gang of youths who have been looting in flooded Hamburg. The introduction of climate refugees brings to light the timely issue of what happens when climate problems make living in one part of the world impossible: forced migration. In this case, these refugees move from one severe climate (drought) to another (flooding). The rescue of the protagonists demonstrates that allowing refugees access to safety is the ethical choice. Acknowledging responsibility to others is the only way to survive the dangerous situations created by the changing climate in *Prophezeiung*.

Huber's final paradigm shift, "the future as the field of ethics," (viii) encourages us to consider our responsibilities beyond the present moment. According to Huber, contemporary ethics must take into account the unforeseeable consequences of our actions, especially as they are compounded by our reliance on science and technology. He believes the traditional orientation of ethics towards values, principles, rules, and law is no longer valid. The realities of modern life make it impossible to say for certain what types of behaviour will create the most positive outcome (ix). The overwhelming number of possible choices can quickly lead to a desire to, at best, ignore the future. In order to combat this apathy, Huber proposes developing an ethics centered on responsibility and sustainability. An example of actions driven by ethical responsibility is found in Mavie's reaction to Prometheus's prediction. Mavie looks at the prediction, watching as weather patterns grow more severe and the projected death tolls climb. Her knowledge of the prediction and acknowledgement of her relative freedom compels her to take action. She feels responsible for these lives because she understands her freedom to live and act is dependent on others being allowed to do the same.

Huber develops his ideas about responsibility and sustainability in his chapter on "Intergenerational Justice," which is mostly concerned with the ethics of nuclear power. However, some of his arguments can be adapted to interpret *Prophezeiung* as it is concerned with the viability of future life. The predicted catastrophe in *Prophezeiung* and the proposed solution creates a situation for the characters to think beyond themselves. Not only to think beyond national borders, but also to consider what Huber refers to as the ethical need to preserve "conditions that will make life possible for coming generations" (188). Throughout the novel Mavie's desire to save the world is questioned, not only in terms of the catastrophe, but also in regard to her environmental outlook. Millet asks her if she has children and he is astonished by her negative answer. He tries to



understand her conviction, asking: “Woher das Interesse für andere Menschen – woher das Interesse für die Welt in fünfzig Jahren? ... Was stimmt mit Ihnen nicht?” (Böttcher 210). Millet’s surprise is not unwarranted as his questions are in line with social developments Huber observes, specifically how the majority of people think about their responsibility to future generations. Huber notes the relationship between generations can be described either as synchronous or diachronic (188). He describes the synchronous view as being focused solely on the three generations that are alive currently: the young, the middle and the older (188). A broader view is diachronic, which is an attempt to understand the relationship between successive generations who will never meet (188). Philipp represents a very clear example of the synchronous view of responsibility as he is motivated by concern for his family. Edward exemplifies a continuation of this view by agreeing to rescue Philipp’s family. Finally, both Mavie and Gaia reflect a responsibility beyond a synchronous view of their family or even communal needs. Even though they may not have a solution, their actions and lifestyles demonstrate a concern for what is right globally both for the present and the future.

Gaia’s lifestyle choice represents a counter-culture and sustainable way of life: living in an off-grid commune in the German countryside. They also use social media platforms like YouTube to create sensational videos in order to incite social change and warn the world of the perils of modern life. Their videos become the catalyst for Millet and different governments to finally acknowledge the catastrophe. But Beck, Mavie, and even Millet, do not agree with Gaia’s methods. They see Gaia’s videos as too sensational and panic-inducing. Before Gaia’s videos went viral, Mavie had been striving to bring this very information to the world. Yet, watching the videos, Mavie realises that informing the world is not synonymous with acting ethically. Knowing about

environmental problems and taking action does not inherently lead to ethical choices. Through Gaia's actions Mavie realises she has been naïve and that acting ethically is more complicated.

Mavie's belated realisation reflects Huber's second shift, the acknowledgement of our involvement in a globalised world. After Mavie discovers the prediction and the intended cover-up, she feels obligated to share her knowledge. She knows that the catastrophe is a global concern that will affect more than just Europe, yet she initially fails to realise the unequal distribution of power inherent in the situation. I have already touched on this briefly in my previous discussions about the consequences of Millet's solution, but I believe this issue is worthy of further discussion. Not only do Millet's actions reflect a European bias, but they also fail to acknowledge the earth's ecosystems. Mavie makes reference to the possible consequences facing the earth: "Wir haben absolut keine Ahnung, welche Folgen das hat, zum Beispiel für die Ozeane, die sind nämlich schon übersauert" (Böttcher 312). Our involvement in a globalised world reflects equally interconnected ecosystems that are not solely ours. These ecosystems are not owned by any one person or country. They are to be shared by all beings alike, including future generations. Exploding a volcano, such as Emi Koussi, would create unpredictable consequences. Mavie does not regret informing the world, but she does begin to fear the actions of the governments and scientists in charge.

Throughout the novel Mavie's erstwhile co-worker, Thilo Beck, also has doubts about the actions of those in charge. Beck is introduced as the environmental scientist at IICO working on Prometheus. When he first meets Mavie, he is standoffish and not immediately forthcoming about Prometheus's prediction. Eventually, it is revealed that Beck did not talk about Prometheus's abilities because he was asked not to: "Ich bin nicht der Retter der Welt. Ich bin Wissenschaftler. Ich mache meinen Teil. Und wenn mein Boss und dessen Bosse meinen, man müsse erst noch ein

paar Testreihen laufen lassen, bin ich nicht dagegen, sondern dafür” (160). Beck’s reluctance to talk about the prediction leads Mavie to distrust him. She believes his argument to blindly continuing his testing, despite possible casualties, is the wrong choice. Later in Rotterdam, Beck agrees with her and admits it was wrong to wait so long. This admission prompts him to take action and actively search for the truth about Prometheus’s prediction. Even after he wakes up in Gaia’s camp, Beck continues to argue for checks as he is no longer satisfied to sit back and allow even well-meaning others to manipulate Prometheus’s data.

After Gaia’s videos go viral, Mavie begins to doubt that Beck is just an obtuse scientist. She also begins to question Professor Eisele’s part not only in the death of her friend, but also in the catastrophe unfolding around her. Eisele is introduced as a leading professor of climatology, who regularly calls out oil companies for their environmental crimes (115-16). However, Eisele’s actions show a total disregard for the present and future of humanity, not to mention the Earth. Eisele’s revenge plan is a twisted form of sustainable energy reform. With the contract to build the wind towers in the North Sea he will effectively solve the sustainable and renewable energy debate. The volcano solution will force the West to back the project if they want energy. As a climatologist who understands the probable consequences of his own actions, Eisele concocts a plan that is reprehensible.

Even Millet does not support Eisele’s plan. Millet is touted as a two-time Nobel Prize winner: his first award was for literature after he wrote his novel “*Oil, Sodomy, and The Lash*” (181) in 1991 and the second as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change committee, which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. The fact that he received these two prizes demonstrates his work to further environmental concerns, but his volcano solution is both Euro- and anthropocentric. It demonstrates a disregard for the rights of other countries as well as the

Earth's non-human inhabitants. The negative responses of the other characters to his solution reflects *Prophezeiung*'s focus on making the ethical choice now and for the future. When Eisele's plan comes to light, he fakes his own death and leaves a note urging Millet to continue with the volcano solution. Realising he has been Eisele's puppet, Millet ultimately does not order the explosion of the volcano. Millet's initial error in suggesting blowing up Emi Koussi further underscores the fallibility of environmental scientists to always make ethical decisions.

In the epilogue, Millet uses his birthday speech to summarise the catastrophe and the role the West has played in it. He declares that despite this near destruction of life, which is a direct result of Western lifestyle, he does not believe people living in the West will change their behaviour. Millet acknowledges that this behaviour is bad, but he does not encourage his audience to change nor does he believe that they will: "Wir werden keine Vernunft annehmen, wir alle werden unverändert zuerst an uns selbst denken und dann an den unbekanntem anderen, erst recht an den unbekanntem anderen in ferner Zukunft ... Stehen wir zu unserer Schlechtigkeit" (484). His pessimistic, cynical assessment goes unchallenged by Mavie and her companions. It is left to the reader to decide how to answer the underlying provocation: are we really so greedy as to be unwilling to change our ways?

The seemingly accurate prediction of Prometheus led to global chaos and millions of deaths, but Millet's prediction will lead to millions more. Questions concerning our lifestyle choices and the consequences for the future also involve questioning our reliance on science and technology. Huber addresses this issue through the "precautionary principle" (Huber 196), which asks us to act in such a way as to avoid harm even when "there is no final scientific certainty about these potential effects" (196). Scientific research and those who disseminate it are not infallible. The unfortunate situation created through Prometheus's prediction does not suggest we ignore

scientists who are sounding warning bells about climate catastrophes. Instead, I argue *Prophezeiung* is urging us to make ethical decisions about the future, which means erring on the side of caution. Furthermore, it prompts the reader to take responsibility for the future, which I plan to address more thoroughly in the coming chapters.

In the previous paragraphs, I have discussed how ethics are concerned primarily with complications associated with human conduct. Relying on Huber's three paradigm shifts I have explained that the catastrophe in *Prophezeiung* and the characters' reactions to it bring ethical questions to the forefront. Huber's first paradigm shift, life as a project, highlights the ethical problems of living with so much science and technology. In *Prophezeiung*, the plot is driven by the characters' reliance on and faith in climate scientists and technology. The reaction to Prometheus's prediction is the most notable example of this by forcing us to reconsider just how much faith in technology is acceptable. How do we balance our knowledge with ethical concerns?

These questions are further complicated by issues of Huber's second paradigm shift: globalisation. In order to save at least the Western world from the catastrophe, Millet puts forth blowing up Emi Koussi. Although Mavie attempts to prove Millet wrong, her objections are ignored. Her warning has already created mass chaos in the global community. Of course it is not just her warning that has moved people: climate refugees have already arrived in Hamburg presumably to escape the environmental hazards unfolding at home. Their actions bring a partial solution to light whereby accepting our ethical responsibility to others may be the best way to survive the catastrophe.

Huber's final paradigm shift is the future as the field of ethics, which again highlights the need to base our ethical choices on responsibility and sustainability. Mavie's reaction to the catastrophe is motivated by a responsibility to act ethically beyond her life. Mavie's reaction is

motivated by a diachronic view of the future and Huber argues that this view is a more ethical response than a synchronous view. Mavie's view allows her to begin questioning the rightness of governmental and scientific actions alike.

*Prophezeiung* encourages the reader to be sceptical of the seemingly altruistic intentions of scientists. It reminds us that science and technology are created by humans and so can be manipulated for various reasons. Not all of which are always helpful even when the survival of the planet is at stake. Millet's birthday speech could be read as a challenge to the readers: if all of this can happen despite our technology and awareness of the problem, how should we act?

### Chapter 3: The Characters of *Prophezeiung* and the Recommended Readings

Gabriele Dürbeck characterises an ecothriller as a mix of genres borrowing mainly from science fiction, thriller, and docufiction (Dürbeck 246). She also gives some concrete examples that illustrate how ecothrillers often include a global catastrophe – much like the drought and flooding depicted in *Prophezeiung*. Ecothriller plots are also often action-driven and rely on conventional plot devices. These plot devices include the use of established narratives (e.g. conspiracy, espionage, etc.), which are seen in *Prophezeiung*. The novel also exhibits a number of settings: Hamburg, La Palma, Rotterdam, among others. Beyond plot and setting, Dürbeck describes thriller characters as so-called ‘flat characters’. These characters are often scientists or journalists, who exist in a good-bad schemata of protagonist/antagonist. The antagonists are often unscrupulous scientists using either technology or military operations for the purpose of endangering one or more Western nations. In *Prophezeiung* Eisele and to some extent Millet, fulfill this function. She also describes how a sympathetic group frequently appears to aid the protagonists in their quest to save the world and in the novel this role is played by Gaia.

In my introduction I stated that I do not believe the characters of *Prophezeiung* exemplify a simple good-bad dichotomy. For example, in a cli-fi novel, the protagonists are typically represented by scientists as in Robinson’s *Science in the Capital* trilogy, and unchecked industry is represented by the antagonists as in Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior*. In *Prophezeiung*, however, this is not as clear because even though Professor Eisele is easily marked the antagonist, he does not so much control the catastrophe as manipulate responses to it. His actions are unethical, but the real problem in *Prophezeiung* is what is happening to the climate due to human action. If the climate issues were as under control as Mavie originally thought with her dismissal of CO<sub>2</sub>

protestors, then the severe weather that drives the plot would not have occurred. The true villain of *Prophezeiung* is human activity and its consequences.

The good-bad dichotomy also falls apart when applied to Millet, who appears to be an ambiguous character. At times his actions appear more fitting for an antagonist and then, at other times, he appears to be acting from an environmental if not ethical standpoint. In the following analysis I will show that he dares the reader to consider one of the more extreme solutions to the climate problems and the subsequent ethical dilemma, which I described in chapter two. In terms of protagonists for the novel, the reader is convinced from the beginning of Mavie's position as hero, but I believe she shares this position with Beck. Before establishing Mavie and Beck as the heroes, I first examine the other main characters in order to prove why they are not in fact the heroic characters of *Prophezeiung*.

Beginning with Edward, his denial of climate change is a one that discounts the severity of climate problems wholesale. He created a fully sustainable home to outlast the end of the world. He did not, however, build his house out of fear of a climate apocalypse: "nicht die Rettung der Welt vor irgendwelchen Treibhausgasen hatte er als seine Aufgabe begriffen, sondern seine eigene Rettung im Fall der Fälle ... das Ende des Öls. Das Ende des Geldes. Das Ende des Stroms. Das Ende das Wasser ... Der dritten Weltkrieg. Den zusammenbruch der staatlich Ordnung" (Böttcher 80-81). Edward is a typical conspiracy theorist, but believes that society will fall apart on its own with no help from the climate. While explaining to Mavie that all real conspiracies are based on money, he tells her how he believes there is a "CO<sub>2</sub>-Legende" (96), which exists to take the global middle class's money. At this point Mavie interrupts him saying, "Es stimmt eben nicht. Es ist nur ein bisschen komplizierter als deine Weltwirtschaft und die paar Jahrhunderte, in denen du dich so hervorragend auskennst" (96). Edward's skepticism is not supported by Mavie or the novel as a



whole. In the end, even though there was indeed a conspiracy, the reader is left without a doubt that the true problem is climate change and humanity's reaction to it. Edward is not convincing as a cli-fi hero as he fails to inspire change.

Similarly, Philipp does not incite change because of his frequent teasing of Mavie's concern for the environment. An example of this occurs when Philipp orders a steak at a restaurant and while eating, he complains to Mavie, who is a vegetarian, that she is ruining his appetite by frowning at him. Mavie launches into a lecture on the environmental consequences of meat consumption and Philipp's apathy becomes apparent. She first argues that the production of his steak costs as much CO<sub>2</sub> as their drive from Hamburg to Rotterdam. To which Philipp flippantly replies: "Da bin ich erleichtert. Ist der Porsche also gar nicht so schlimm" (131). Mavie responds by citing more facts about the meat industry's CO<sub>2</sub> production and its consequences, but to no avail: Philipp remains glib and defiant. He claims that by eating the cow it will no longer produce methane and that he plans to go to India to kill all of their sacred cows. When Mavie suggests kangaroo as an alternative, Philipp says there will be no market for it in North America: "Ab demnächsten Jahr. *Kang Kong* ist Pixar, Disney. Wird supercool. Supersüß. ... Und glaub bloß nicht, dass danach noch ein einziges Kind zwischen hier und Tokio Kängaru isst" (133). Philipp's remarks reveal his apathy towards environmental concerns. He does not take them seriously and he believes humans are in full control of nature.

While paying for his meal Philipp tells the waiter something that causes Mavie to reassess his apathetic attitude: "... Sie sollten mal an den Hersteller weitergeben, dass er die bei der Produktion entstehenden Gase abfackeln möchte. Die Chinesen heizen mit so was demnächst ganze Städte" (134). Mavie is taken aback by this disclosure. Philipp tells her he is not stupid and that he understands environmental problems exist, but he likes the taste of steak. He also states

that if there are still people in the world who will unscrupulously kill others then he will continue to eat steak. Although he acknowledges environmental concerns Philipp remains apathetic. In Philipp's opinion, environmentalism means lifestyle changes that he cannot agree to and that do not align with his personal needs. Instead of realising that fast cars and a jet-setter lifestyle are not sustainable, Philipp attempts to get around the idea of limits. When they start their journey he tries to assure Mavie that he is eco-friendly. He has a "CO<sub>2</sub>-Fänger" (124) for his Porsche and he tells her he had a lot of trees planted to offset his other lifestyle choices (125), but Mavie is unimpressed by these actions. She does not question Philipp directly, but wonders to herself what type of tree Philipp had planted considering certain trees are better suited to cooling than others (125). Mavie may appreciate his misguided attempts to offset his carbon use and she may even find amusement in his humorous comments, but she does not agree with his outlook on the situation. Philipp's function in the novel is to underline some current opinions on the environmental crisis, most of which hamper effective change.

Gaia is comprised of a group of characters who do not incite effective change. There is no denying that Gaia is aware of environmental problems and actively tries to address them. Yet, in producing horrifying YouTube videos and warning the world about Prometheus's prediction without a plan of how to deal with the catastrophe, Gaia employed ineffectual means to bring about change. Instead their videos bring about chaos and death: "Die Botschaft hatte die Welt erreicht, ohne Frage, und nur die wenigsten schienen mit Millet der Meinung zu sein, der Norden, der Westen werde schon alles richten" (362). Instead after Gaia's videos reach the world, reporters around the world display the consequences: "... spektakuläre Bilder von Elend, Krieg und Tod" (363). Beck attempts to explain the consequences of the videos to Diego, the leader of Gaia, and his response is hard to contest: " 'Die Folgen?', fragte Diego ... 'Die Rettung Unschuldiger? Ist

das was dir missfällt?’ ” (241). Beck acknowledges the difficulty of waiting, essentially allowing innocents to die, but insists that acting rashly is equally dangerous. Gaia is done waiting for scientists and politicians to sort out the problems of the world, but in their desire to take action their methods become questionable. Their YouTube videos are terrifying and do not provide a solution to the problems they reveal, which leads to the problem Mike Hulme mentions when discussing his climate myth ‘Presaging Apocalypse’: “Many studies – and not only in relation to climate change – have shown that promoting fear is often an ineffective, even counterproductive, way of inducing behavioural change. ... If such change really is what deployment of this myth is seeking to accomplish, then it may be self-defeating” (Hulme 348). Gaia creates their videos in an attempt to inspire change and awareness, but Beck rightly decries their videos as too fear-inducing.

Gaia’s videos are ineffectual because they inspire fear. The group also funds their camp by backmailing grocery stores. Gaia replaces Kinder Egg toys with a chemical mix that if shaken will explode. When Beck condemns these bombs calling them sick, a Gaia member responds: “Ich hab dir doch gesagt, wir warnen die Leute vorher” (296). Gaia’s bottom line is that change has to happen and they are not concerned with how. Once they have informed people, Gaia believes they are absolved of responsibility; for example, when Beck asks what happens if the grocery store does not listen the only answer is “Selber Schuld?”(269). Beck’s disagreement with Gaia demonstrates that saving the world from the catastrophe is not as simple as disseminating the truth to the public. Gaia’s actions raise an important issue, specifically that climate problems will eventually reach a breaking point where they must be acted upon. On the one hand, their initial failure demonstrates that it is extremely difficult to decide when or if this point has already been reached. On the other hand, the ultimate success of Gaia along with the two heroes could suggest that scientific research tempered with action could be a way to engender effective change.

Mavie had hoped that Millet would be able to galvanise world leaders to work together and solve the catastrophe; however, with the announcement of his volcano solution Mavie realises that this is a false hope. Millet's character is difficult to establish as either good or bad. He is aware of ecological and global problems that the world is facing, but his solution is cynical. In order to better understand his actions, I will demonstrate how his outlook is partly motivated by James Lovelock's Gaia theory and his book *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* (2009). This choice was influenced by the list of recommended readings found at the end of *Prophezeiung* that have been curated to the views of each main character. Each suggestion advises readers about different books they can read to become more informed on the issues presented in novel. For example, if readers are interested in what motivates Mavie's character then they are advised to read Peter Singer's *The Life You Can Save* (2009), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* (2009), Fred Pearce's *The Last Generation* (2007), and Wally Broecker and Robert Kunzig's *Fixing Climate* (2008). Lovelock's book is included in the list for Millet, and will be useful in uncovering his true character. For example, during the course of the novel one can clearly see the parallels between Millet's and Lovelock's philosophy and Millet often refers to the Earth as Gaia. Millet's function in the novel is to spur readers to rethink their actions.

Despite his posturing and egotistical speeches, Millet plays an integral part in the resolution of the novel. He is not the hero, but compared to Eisele he is also not a clear antagonist. Millet's ambiguity is apparent from the moment he is introduced to Mavie and Phillip. He brusquely greets them and Mavie launches into her story about her discovery of Prometheus's prediction. She finishes with the distressing fact that Prometheus is predicting somewhere between 200-800 million deaths and Millet's emotional detachment surprises her:

‘... na und? Was wollen Sie [Mavie] hier? Und wieso erzählen Sie mir das?’ ‘Weil Sie uns helfen können ...’ ‘Die Welt zu retten? Sehen Sie mich an.’ Er drehte die Handflächen nach

oben und präsentierte sie leer, mit belustigtem Blick. ‘Trage ich ein Cape? Oder mache ich mich auf eine andere Weise verdächtig, über Superkräfte zu verfügen?’ (Böttcher 195).

This is a character who has worked to further both environmental and philanthropic concerns, but he reacts indifferently to the news of a predicted catastrophe. He explains his reaction by reminding Mavie of the problem of overpopulation and the affect this has on “*Gaias Wohlergehen*” (196). Calling the earth Gaia is a reference to Lovelock’s Gaia theory, which is a view of the earth as a self-regulating system, whose goal is “the regulation of surface conditions so as to always be as favourable for contemporary life as possible” (Lovelock 166). In Millet and Lovelock’s opinion, the current human population threatens the stability of this system. Millet admits that as a philanthropist he does not enjoy sitting idly by while millions die, but that in the end it might be beneficial for the planet. At this point, it is unclear if Millet is an evil antagonist, who is denying his ability to help or if he is a protagonist feeling just as helpless as Mavie.

Eventually, through a combination of lies and luck, Mavie is able to convince Millet to help. Philipp then reveals that Fritz Eisele is involved in the plot to hide Prometheus’s prediction and Mavie observes that once Eisele is mentioned Millet becomes more interested in helping: “Die drohende Katastrophe interessierte Millet immer noch nur mäßig, ganz offensichtlich war es die Aussicht auf seine persönliche Vendetta, die ihn elektrisierte” (Böttcher 219). Millet explains that Eisele is the reason for his withdrawal from the political sphere. He reveals that in 2005, while he and Eisele worked at the IPCC, Millet was informed that Eisele was on payrolls for different energy companies. It is insinuated that Millet may have attempted to call Eisele to account for these actions. Then, according to Millet, he was unable to do so due to Eisele’s unspecified, influential connections (217). This revelation shakes Mavie’s faith in both Eisele and Millet, and at the press conference Millet’s true colours are revealed: “fast alles, was Millet sagte, diente der Beruhigung der Menschen im wasserbedroheten Norden, als vertrauensbildender Vortrag und, wie [Mavie]

vermutete, als Vorbereitung eines Maßnahmenkatalogs, den er sich offenbar bereits größtenteils zurechtgelegt hatte – aber wo blieb der Süden?“ (284). Listening to Millet’s announcement about the prediction Mavie realises that Millet is using this information to gain control in the West. His speech only really addresses the concerns of the Western nations. Mavie believes Millet may have a solution, but that it will not help those truly in need, the southern African countries. Through Millet *Prophezeiung* reminds the reader that politicians and the media are able to manipulate data.

The Western world’s response to Millet’s speech is exactly the outcome that Mavie feared: Millet is given free rein to fix the problem. As discussed in chapter two, Millet’s volcano solution is not the most impartial or even helpful solution. So why does Millet even suggest it? Jean-Baptiste Reveilliere (JB), one of Millet’s entourage of advisors, offers one reason, namely that Millet’s idea was actually first put forth by Paul Crutzen in 2005 as a viable way to cool the earth. According to JB, Millet has forgotten that Crutzen really only suggested it “um zu verdeutlichen, wie Ernst unser Problem ist” (306). JB believes Crutzen put forth the idea of exploding a volcano, only to try and highlight how serious climate problems are or could become. At the best of times, it is challenging to predict consequences of our actions, but Millet’s choice is unethical because his choice will only be effective for Europe. The catastrophe portrayed in *Prophezeiung* requires immediate action and Millet’s acceptance of an idea that was never meant to be enacted underscores the difficulty of weighing the merits of solutions in a crisis.

The logic behind this volcano solution is also outlined in James Lovelock’s *The Vanishing Face of Gaia*, which as previously mentioned is listed for Millet in the recommended readings. In his opening chapter, Lovelock discusses how climate change will eventually lead to only certain areas of the earth being habitable and that these will mostly be confined to the Northern Hemisphere. If he is correct in his prediction, then the explosion of a volcano and the potential

loss of the Southern Hemisphere's water supply could be viewed as a natural progression. If such a solution could fix immediate climate concerns, why would we not choose this option? Lovelock discusses the merits of exploding a volcano: "I agree with this analysis but think that amelioration of this kind should be regarded as equivalent to dialysis as a treatment for kidney failure. It is valuable as a way to buy time, to survive until something better is available. Who would refuse dialysis if death is the alternative?" (94). He does mention the ethical concerns, but in a choice over humanity's survival he claims he would choose dialysis. Furthermore, Lovelock believes humans are motivated by an ingrained selfishness that is unchangeable: "We cannot alter our natures, and as we shall see the bred-in [sic] tribalism and nationalism we pretend to deplore is the amplifier that makes us powerful. All that we can do is to try to temper our strength with decency" (150). Millet appears to share this same bleak view of humanity and disregards Lovelock's admonition to temper it: "Wir wollen eine bessere Welt, natürlich, aber nur, solange das nicht bedeutet, dass *unsere* Welt schlechter wird. ... Und nicht ist widerwärtiger als ein kaltblütiger Mörder, der sich als Gutmensch geriert. Das sind wir" (Böttcher 203). I will address this aspect more fully in the coming sections, but for now it is enough to say that Millet's solution effectively removes him from the hero position. He fails as a hero because of his disregard for non-Western nations and the health of the planet.

The back-cover synopsis of *Prophezeiung*, describes Mavie as the hero: "während Europa in den Wasserfluten versinkt, versucht die junge Klimaforscherin Mavie Heller die Welt zu warnen." However in "Frau rettet Welt?: Ontologisierung des Weiblichen im Ökothriller," an article comparing Mavie to Dirk C. Fleck's main character Maeva, Katrin Özbek-Schneider appears to cast doubt on Mavie's hero status. Her research on ecot thrillers reveals that their characters often adhere to gender stereotypes. The female characters are usually given the

stereotypical role of the Cassandra or *Mahnerin*. She further states that female protagonists are portrayed as inferior to their male counterparts. Due to their femininity, female protagonists are often given a certain affinity to nature or life, while males are juxtaposed as producers of various negative technological consequences. In her research, Özbek-Schneider has found that female protagonists in ecothrillers are also generally unable to complete their goals without either male knowledge or the physical strength of male characters (Özbek-Schneider 156). Özbek-Schneider's analysis and Gabrielle Dürbeck's subsequent commentary on *Prophezeiung* (Dürbeck 255) cast doubt on Mavie's effectiveness as a hero.

Interestingly, in her analysis of male and female characters in *Prophezeiung*, Özbek-Schneider does not address the character of Thilo Beck, focusing rather on the characters of Philipp and Professor Eisele. I believe this leads to a misinterpretation as it is my opinion that Mavie and Beck together are the central heroic figures of the novel. Their cooperative actions, despite differing motives, represent one of the underlying themes in the novel: working together as the only way to overcome the climate catastrophe.

Both Dürbeck and Özbek-Schneider observe that Mavie, a competent scientist, appears unable to accomplish her goals without turning to the other male characters. In this way, Mavie could be discounted on account of her stereotypical nature, but I disagree. Mavie's actions and motivations represent themes repeated throughout the novel, which I believe contradicts this conclusion. In an attempt to look beyond this superficial representation I again use Böttcher's recommended readings to unpack Mavie's underlying motivation. For example, listed for Mavie are books from Peter Singer and Jonathan Safran Foer. Both of these works pose questions regarding cultural behaviours and attempt to explain why they are viewed as normal. Singer's *The Life You Can Save* deals with questions of global poverty. He is concerned with why Americans



generally seem unwilling or uninterested in helping those less fortunate than themselves. In his introduction to *Eating Animals*, Foer explains that the motivation behind his book came as a response to his son's question of why humans consume meat. Each author outlines arguments for these behaviours and offer tentative solutions. After establishing the why of these behaviours, each author leaves the reader to decide how they will respond. In analysing Mavie, it becomes clear that Peter Singer's arguments align well with her underlying motivation, as well as the overall message of *Prophezeiung*.

Mavie describes her ultimate motivation as follows: "Du sollst immer Leben bewahren, wo immer du kannst" (Böttcher 207). Her conviction is similar to Singer's central question in *The Life You Can Save*: In the face of suffering and injustice, which is greater than any single individual, how do we ethically respond as individuals? Although Singer is addressing the issue of global poverty, I believe this question is one of the central themes in *Prophezeiung*. How can we ethically respond to a global climate catastrophe? In the previous chapter it was established that ethical action implies consideration beyond the self. Not only beyond oneself, but beyond family, friends, and even the present moment. A diachronic view of humanity would imply that our ethical responsibility extends further than the generations who are presently alive. The ethical value of Mavie's actions have already been discussed and the following, will demonstrate how her motivation reflects the arguments laid out by Singer.

In his chapter "Why Don't We Give more?" Singer critically reviews six psychological factors that are said to complicate the action of giving aide, namely the identifiable victim, parochialism, futility, the diffusion of responsibility, the sense of fairness, and money, all which lead to a seventh factor he calls the inevitable conclusion: "It's just not in our nature" (59). Returning to Mavie's attempt to warn the world, it is possible to observe how her actions are also

affected by these factors. Both Philipp and Millet are astounded by Mavie's concern for other people. Although Mavie is concerned for these others, the catastrophe's victims are mostly invisible to the main characters and neither Philipp nor Millet try to connect. This is further underscored by Philipp's parochial attitude when Mavie tries to remind him that the situation in Hamburg is not as bad as in Africa: " 'Hey, *breaking news!* Es sterben *immer* überall Menschen.' ' ... hast du die Bilder aus Lagos gesehen, verdammt?!' 'Ich wohne nicht in Lagos, ich weiß nicht mal, wo das *ist*'" (Böttcher 329). Philipp is only concerned with the problems facing his family. He refuses to see that the catastrophe is affecting the world in such a way that it will become something from which even his money cannot save them. His attempts to be self-sufficient fail, when the situation in Hamburg becomes critical and he is forced to rely on aide from other people, namely Mavie and her father. When they themselves fail, they all must rely on the climate refugees from the Eastern Star. In this way, *Prophezeiung* demonstrates the need to combat the feelings of self-sufficiency that arise from a focus on money. In order to survive a climate catastrophe, *Prophezeiung* advocates action defined by concern for others no matter where or who they are.

Mavie also has to work against the other factors listed by Singer, namely feelings of futility, diffusion of responsibility, and a sense of fairness. Again Philipp's commentary provides an example of these factors. On the way to Geneva he and Mavie talk about his daughter, Hannah, and Philipp hopes she will develop Mavie's unwavering conviction even in the face of such obvious indifference from the rest of the world. He tells Mavie: "Du wirst verlieren. Du wirst fürchterlich auf die Fresse fallen, man wird dich auslachen, und am Ende ... [hören] nicht mal die Pfleger ... dir mehr zu, wenn du von einer besseren Welt fantasierst. Aber du bist ja nicht blöd, im Gegenteil. Du weißt das alles. Und machst es trotzdem" (344). Throughout *Prophezeiung* Mavie works against the feeling of futility and despite major setbacks (such as surviving an explosion in

Rotterdam), she continues on her mission. Mavie transfers her responsibility to warn the world to Millet, but his unethical volcano solution compels Mavie to take further action. Unwilling to assume others will take care of the problem, she travels to Geneva to appeal to other politicians and stop Millet's plan.

In Geneva, Mavie attempts to denounce Professor Eisele in front of the emergency council, but he and Millet have her thrown out. She then travels to Hamburg with Philipp to help him and her father rescue Philipp's family. During the rescue operation they are set upon by a gang with guns. In the ensuing chaos Mavie reflects on the unfairness of the situation: "Sie wusste, was sie zu tun hatte, aber es kam ihr falsch vor. ... Sie hatte Edward in diese Situation gebracht. Es war ihre Schuld. Nicht sie gehörte in das Boot, das sich aus der Schusslinie entfernte, sondern er" (450-51). This scene mirrors how Mavie's repeated attempts to act ethically have been thwarted. Although she has been working to find a global and fair response to the catastrophe, Millet's solution is only for Western countries. Her main goal was to help the world, but in the process she may have inadvertently exacerbated the situation. Not only that, but she will not have to deal with the consequences of her actions as she lives in Germany. Germany and other Western countries may suffer minor consequences from the explosion of Emi Koussi, but African and Asian countries stand to lose the most. Throughout the novel Mavie's actions frequently lead to unforeseen and negative consequences, however, she does not give up. Her tenacious spirit is an underlying theme in *Prophezeiung*: even though the problems of the Anthropocene are irreversible, causing unforeseen and negative consequences, humanity must not give up.

Throughout the novel Mavie is not only working to warn the world of oncoming disaster, but is simultaneously combatting the idea that "It's just not in our nature" (Singer 59) to care for those not directly connected to us. Singer unpacks this notion by demonstrating that it gives moral

value to an evolutionary trait. He argues that this is a false conclusion as “evolution has no moral direction” (61). Singer furthers his argument by discussing our ability to create a “culture of giving” (63). He suggests that the idea that ‘it is not in our nature to help’, or in other words that humans are innately selfish, is nothing more than a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (78). For the remainder of his book, Singer goes on to explain what we can give and how we can improve our giving in order to effect the most change. *The Life You Can Save* sets out to change the way we think about giving to the poor. In much the same way, Mavie embarks on a mission to warn the world about Prometheus’s prediction and then realises she must also attempt to influence others’ reactions to the prediction.

Mavie is fired from IICO after being falsely accused of corporate espionage. In truth she is fired because she had unknowingly stumbled into Eisele’s plot. She returns home and tells her father of the prediction, but he remains unconvinced until the mysterious death of Mavie’s journalist friend. Realising that Mavie must be on to something big, Edward helps her to approach Millet. Mavie goes to Millet in hopes of finding an ethical solution to the prediction, but Millet’s cynical outlook on life is in direct conflict with Mavie’s goal. He agrees to warn the world, but on his terms. At the press conference, Mavie realises the extent of her misplaced trust in Millet. From this point she works to change Millet’s decision. When he refuses to talk or listen to her, she travels to Geneva in hopes of appealing to other politicians. The surprise appearance of Eisele and Mavie’s subsequent dismissal from the emergency council would appear to be the end of her mission. However, one of Eisele’s bodyguards gives Mavie information that leads to a final Gaia-video outlining Eisele’s part in the catastrophe. In turn, this causes Millet to rethink his volcano solution and become the hero, at least according to the politicians and media. The success of Beck and Mavie’s efforts demonstrate that *Prophezeiung* does not support Millet’s cynical outlook on life.

Instead the novel supports Mavie's attitude towards the climate catastrophe, which is to attempt to act ethically despite challenges.

Another stubborn character, who also rethinks some of his decisions, is Thilo Beck. At the beginning of the novel Beck agrees with the IICO not to reveal Prometheus's prediction. His reasoning is that without absolute assurance that the prediction is correct, a premature warning will result in more deaths rather than save lives. However, he experiences a change of heart after he helps the IICO fire Mavie and realises that it is unethical to withhold the information. In a Rotterdam hotel he tells Mavie: "Wir hätten vielleicht nicht so lange warten dürfen" (Böttcher 160). At this point he begins to explain to Mavie why they need to ascertain whether or not Prometheus's prediction is correct. He is still unsure if the world should be warned, but Mavie's conviction motivates him to take action. Beck's change of mind and his actions are integral to the truth being uncovered. Through Beck, Gaia becomes aware that their videos are unintentionally playing into mass hysteria. Soon afterwards Beck and Gaia are finally able to warn the world about Eisele's plot. In an epilogue that borders on the cliché, Mavie and Beck are reunited and become a couple. Their burgeoning love and the seemingly successful effort to avert catastrophe reveals them to be the heroes of *Prophezeiung*.

Readers interested in learning more about Beck's character are advised to read, among other works, Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, an essay that is referenced numerous times in the novel. *Prophezeiung*'s conclusion reflects an acceptance of Camus's interpretation of this myth. The first reference to Camus occurs while Mavie and Beck are still working at IICO together. Mavie tells Beck that despite her looks she is actually quite intelligent and can be trusted with more than analysis work. When he continues to ignore her request she asks: " 'Hab ich irgendwas verpasst? Kennen wir uns von früher oder aus einem früheren Leben? Und hab ich dich

unwissentlich verletzt oder schwer beleidigt? Was habe ich gemacht? Deine Katze überfahren? Deine Sartre-Sammlung versehentlich ins Brand gesetzt?’” (34), Beck’s only reply is “ ‘Camus’ ” (34). From this interaction and the knowledge that Beck gave Prometheus its name Mavie is able to deduce Prometheus’s password: *Sisyphos*. More references to Greek mythology are threaded throughout *Prophezeiung* and also throughout Camus’s work. Camus associates Prometheus with acts of rebellion and revolution, which is precisely what the computer program in the novel represents. A rebellion not against the gods, but against the chaos that is climate and weather patterns. For these reasons and others I will address in the next chapter, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and its interpretation are essential in understanding *Prophezeiung*’s underlying message.

Classifying *Prophezeiung* according to its genre reveals that it is cli-fi and more specifically an ecothriller. Ecothrillers are comprised of a mixture of three different genres: sci-fi, suspense, and docufiction. These types of novels often make use of a good-bad dichotomy for characters. Although *Prophezeiung* makes use of this dichotomy, it also breaks down when the characters do not act according to our expectations. In its continual mixing of fact and fiction, a key characteristic of docufiction, the novel refers to climate science and theory. These are then explained in such a way so that the reader is able to understand the underlying issues. There is also a reading list appended to the novel that encourages readers to delve deeper into these issues on their own.

A closer look at Edward and Philipp reveals that they are in no way the heroes of the story, but are rather utilised to examine attitudes of climate denial and apathy respectively. Gaia’s actions establish them as sidekicks, but not heroes. To better understand Millet’s, at times, unclear motivations and actions, it was useful to read his actions against the recommended reading from James Lovelock. An interpretation of Mavie’s actions and one of the key themes of the novel is

found in Peter Singer's recommended reading. Comparing Mavie's actions with aspects of Singer's argument reveals her underlying way of thinking about climate problems. Her approach to the ethical dilemmas created by the catastrophe parallel Singer's approach to global poverty.

Mavie is not a singular hero because she needs help from those around her. This includes not only Philipp, but also Beck, who reveals himself to be a hero when he proves Professor Eisele has orchestrated much of the chaos from Prometheus's prediction. This revelation is what finally convinces Gaia to alter their videos and actually help the world. Throughout *Prophezeiung* there are numerous references to Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The next chapter will more thoroughly address these references and explore how Camus's work can be applied to the novel as a whole.

#### **Chapter 4: Revolt, Freedom, and Passion – Consequences of Camus’s Absurd**

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a French writer and journalist who is generally accepted as a key existentialist philosopher despite his unwillingness to be labeled as such: “no, I am not an existentialist” (Bowker 32). There are numerous reasons why Camus did not wish to be known as an existentialist. These range from a personal dispute between Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre (Bowker 33) to some of his ideas being at odds with other conceptions of existentialism. David Simpson writes that the decisive difference between Camus’s writings and those of other existentialists “is that Camus actively challenged and set himself apart from the existentialist motto that being precedes essence” (23). Camus believed that by necessity human life had value, which preceded any action. Even in this rejection of a major existentialist thought, Camus’s philosophical questioning reveals itself to be existentialist in nature.

According to Thomas Flynn’s *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, there are five themes that inform most existentialist philosophy: (1) existence precedes essence; (2) time is of the essence; (3) humanism; (4) freedom/responsibility; (5) ethical considerations are paramount (8). The first asserts that life is about choice. That is to say you exist, but who you are is constantly created by the choices you make. Although Camus rejects this first theme, his work reflects the existentialist notion that humans are “fundamentally time-bound beings” (8). Camus and other existentialists are interested in what it means to be human, in particular how awareness of our mortality may influence our lives. The third theme listed by Flynn is that existentialism is a human-centered philosophy. In other words existentialism attempts to understand and find the individual despite societal pressure to conform. According to Simpson, Camus’s philosophy also reflects this theme as he is often associated with notions of “individualism, free choice, inner strength, authenticity, personal responsibility, and self-determination” (22). Furthermore, much



existentialist thought deals with notions of freedom and responsibility. Many existentialists hold that humans are free to do anything and are also simultaneously aware of this freedom. In this way, humans are always responsible for what they choose to do. In chapter two, I argued that responsibility is often the basis for ethical considerations. Existentialists are frequently interested in questions of ethics, but as with most existentialist thought, they are understood and valued differently by each philosopher. Flynn states that “the underlying concern [of existential ethics] is to invite us to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and of our society” (8). Matthew H. Bowker describes how Camus was also interested in this fifth theme: “Camus was not shy about discussing morality. One may even say that moral philosophy was his true intellectual home” (121).

*The Myth of Sisyphus* opens with a question: is there meaning to life and if not, is suicide a legitimate solution? Camus comes to the conclusion that life is indeed meaningless, but he does not legitimise suicide or accept nihilism. In its place he concludes that life is absurd: it must be lived despite the fact that we will die. For Camus, any premature death would be tantamount to succumbing to the absurd. Rather Camus rejects suicide, insisting that we embrace a life characterised by action and participation (Burnham and Papandreopoulos 25). Camus’s argument begins by demonstrating that human nature is defined by a constant need to know and understand. He says these impulses are good, but that they are destined to remain unfulfilled: “I realize that if through science I can seize phenomena and enumerate them, I cannot, for all that, apprehend the world . . . And you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure” (Camus 20). In this confrontation of what is knowable and reality, Camus introduces the absurd. He states that the absurd appears when

we are confronted with reality and things that are unknown. It is absurd to realise we have no certainty but uncertainty, and yet it is from this point that Camus begins.

In acknowledging the absurd Camus claims one also stops living for the future and begins to live in the present. Claiming the only certainty in the future is our eventual death. Camus asserts the need to live in the present. Embracing the absurd requires one to accept despair and be conscious of one's life now. This idea of living in the present is not easy, Camus describes it: "This hell of the present is [humanity's] Kingdom at last" (52). Living in acceptance of the absurd brings one to the conclusion that life is about persisting (52) and that in this persisting one wishes only to know if "it is possible to live *without appeal*" (53). At this point, Camus says he can finally begin responding to the issue of suicide. A person who is aware of the absurd will experience three consequences: revolt (living despite imminent death), freedom (from meaning), and passion (the refusal to disengage) (63). Camus concludes this chapter on absurd reasoning with the simple statement "the point is to live" (65). The answer to the absurd is to reject suicide. In the following two chapters "Absurd Man" and "Absurd Creation", Camus continues to expand on his ideas of a life lived in awareness of the absurd. The arguments he presents are, however, most clearly seen in his following chapter and interpretation of the Greek myth of Sisyphus.

Camus begins by providing a brief summary of the myth: "the GODS had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight" (119). Sisyphus is punished for his attempt to outwit death; despite his efforts he is found out and sentenced to rolling a rock. For a human who is constantly searching for meaning this futile and hopeless labour is a most appropriate punishment. Every time Sisyphus succeeds in getting the rock to the summit it rolls down and he must go back to start again. Camus is interested in what is happening in Sisyphus's mind as he descends. Sisyphus is Camus's absurd

hero because as he returns for the rock it becomes his rock. It is his rock, Camus says, because Sisyphus is conscious of his fate: “The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn” (121). Sisyphus’s ‘scorn’ demonstrates Camus’s three consequences of embracing the absurd: (1) it is a rebellion against the gods’ punishment; (2) it provides him the freedom to accept his meaningless existence; (3) and concluding his interpretation, Camus proposes that “the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (123) – accepting his fate Sisyphus experiences passion and is happy.

Before applying Camus’s absurd philosophy to the novel there are a few more references to *The Myth of Sisyphus* that support my use of this work to interpret *Prophezeiung*. The first is a reference to the famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy from Hamlet, which is uttered by both Beck and Mavie, albeit in modified form. Beck thinks to himself “sterben ... Schlafen. Vielleicht auch träumen” (Böttcher 341) and when Mavie believes she will die the reference appears again: “Sterben, dachte sie. Schlafen. Aufhören zu sein” (465). In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus frequently references Hamlet and one of the themes in Shakespeare’s play is suicide. Camus also makes frequent use of Greek myths to illustrate his thinking; I have already mentioned Prometheus and Sisyphus, but more allusions appear throughout *Prophezeiung*. Not only is each section of the novel titled after a Greek character, but both Mavie and Beck are compared to these characters.

Mavie’s mission to warn the world starts in the second chapter titled “Kassandra” (75), an allusion to the prophetess who was cursed by Apollo to tell true prophecies and never be heeded (Ferry 170). During the press conference Millet calls her a *Kassandra* “die auf obskuren Wegen [versucht], diese Welt in den Abgrund zu reißen” (Böttcher 283) and in the emergency council session Eisele accuses Mavie of having a “Kassandraruuf” (369). Comparing Mavie to Cassandra

is not a simple one to one comparison. At first she is a reverse Cassandra: her initial warning about Prometheus's prediction is heard, by Millet and the world, but is ultimately incorrect. Then, her warning about Millet's volcano solution goes unheeded, although it is in fact true. Her final warning against trusting Eisele is also eventually heard, but not due to her own efforts. Further references to Greek mythology also appear in relation to Beck, for example when he awakens in the Gaia-camp after the explosion his sister says "du bist Hermes, der Bote der Götter!" (233). In this manner, *Prophezeiung*'s preoccupation with Greek mythology could be interpreted as making reference to Camus's work.

Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* demonstrates a need to recognise the limits of human existence to accept the absurd, and to live a life defined by this acceptance. How can this be applied to the problem of climate change and more specifically to *Prophezeiung*? To start, Camus comes to his conclusion after he establishes that suicide is not a legitimate answer to the meaninglessness of life. Political scientist Raymond L. Bryant suggests that the current way of life in Western countries can be characterised as a "slow collective suicide" (183). Continuing to ignore the warnings of climate problems either through denial or apathy is equivalent to doing nothing. Bryant reads Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* as an "admonition ... that we should all 'live life' " (183), which requires action and rejects the inaction of denial and apathy. Comparing these thoughts to the underlying themes in *Prophezeiung*, it is possible to conclude that the novel suggests facing the climate catastrophe much like Sisyphus. *Prophezeiung* reminds the reader of the limits of both humans and our technology. It is only when the characters learn to accept these limits that they are free to put a stop to the global chaos created by Prometheus. The novel ends once Millet has chosen not to destroy Emi Koussi. The heroes are together and in love and happiness appears to reign. The heroes feel accomplished at the end of the novel, but they have

not created a utopia or been able to fully resolve the problem of climate change. Comparing the problem of climate change to the rock of Sisyphus, it can be argued that even if steps are taken to fix what has been broken it may not be enough. In this way, the reader is reminded that climate change is a potentially insurmountable problem and our best responses may be futile.

Sisyphus, Camus claims, continues in his existence despite the utter futility of his situation and Camus's absurd philosophy can be applied to environmental problems. Uncertainty that includes the possibility of failure does not permit us to continue as if our actions do not matter or have no impact. This would be representative of the nihilism that Camus rejects. In his 1955 preface to *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus refers to this nihilism as a desert and summarises his essay as "a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert" (Camus n.pag.). As the opening and closing scenes of *Prophezeiung* occur in the desert, it can be said that plot of the novel occurs in the middle of a metaphorical desert. For this reason, it could be argued that *Prophezeiung* offers a Sisyphean solution in the midst of a culture of nihilism. The novel advocates for life lived in awareness of and in spite of our eventual fate. To say that this is a hopeful outlook is a stretch, but it is also not entirely without hope. Camus's philosophy shows that by accepting our limits we become free to live our lives now and with passion.

The theme of human limitations and technological limits occurs throughout *Prophezeiung*. Mavie's belief in Prometheus causes the situation to, unintentionally, get out of hand. In an argument with a Gaia member, Beck explains how the catastrophe is compounded by everyone's belief in an imperfect machine with a limited capacity: "Ihr glaubt einfach zu viel. Ihr glaubt den Maschinen zu viel ... weil ihr nicht wisst, was Rechner sind. Und was sie eben nicht sind" (Böttcher 299). Beck reminds the reader that climate science is not static and unchanging. In the 1960s mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz proved that climate is a chaotic system

constantly in flux (Hulme 27). This makes it incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to predict exactly how the climate changes. In attempting to uncover the truth about Prometheus, Beck tracks down Gerritsen, Prometheus's original programmer. Gerritsen reveals that its prediction is not only partially based on the movement of celestial bodies, but that the prediction could be off by a decade or two. Furthermore, he says he never claimed that Prometheus could predict the weather: "Ich habe lediglich gesagt, dass dieses Modell zukünftig präzisere Klimaprognosen erlaubt, möglicherweise" (Böttcher 401). Gerritsen's confession reveals the limits of Prometheus; even if the equations are correct he is unable to say with absolute certainty when the catastrophe will occur. Moreover, Prometheus was never meant to accurately forecast the weather. It was only meant as a model to potentially help with future predictions.

Admitting that there are limits to science and technology is only half the battle. In order to begin to live Camus's premise we must also come to the same realisation as Camus that the only certainty is uncertainty. Throughout the novel Mavie is constantly confronted with this truth. The first time she becomes unsure of what she knows occurs after she tells Professor Eisele of her discovery. She is subsequently called to account for hacking into Prometheus, but she does not make the connection between Eisele and her firing. She only sees that the IICO leader is not reacting to the news of Prometheus's prediction in the way she expected. Then she tells Millet about the prediction, expecting he will react ethically, but he does not. Eventually, she becomes aware of Eisele's part in the chaos and wants to denounce him in front of the emergency council. Again her confidence in how the world works is shaken, she is the one dismissed from the council, not Eisele. Removed from the council room, she realises has done all in her power to stop Millet's solution and she returns to Hamburg with Philipp to rescue his family. The certainty Mavie had at the beginning of *Prophezeiung* – that she could warn and save the world – has been continuously

challenged. Travelling to Hamburg, Mavie feels like a failure, and she has still not understood the second half of Camus's realisation.

During the rescue mission, Mavie helps to save Hannah and finally, fully understands Camus's realisation. In the process of saving Hannah, Mavie falls into the water and begins to drown. As she sinks, Mavie begins to blame herself for her imminent death. She tells herself that her death is punishment for the chaos unleashed by Prometheus's prediction. If she had seen through Eisele in the first place, then none of this would have happened. Mavie's self-accusation leads her to wish for death: "Sterben, dachte sie. Schlafen. Aufhören zu sein" (465). In her fear and despair Mavie becomes certain her death is imminent and justified. After sinking to the bottom of the river Mavie jumps up one last time. When she breaks the surface she sees someone pointing a gun at her: "Sah den Gewehrlauf direct vor sich, auf ihre Stirn gerichtet ... Dahinter zwei weitere kalte schwarze Augen in schwarzer Haut. Ein ausgemergeltes Gesicht, wütend, ein schwarzes, kantiges Kinn auf Eisen ... *Weshalb*, fragte sie sich. *Weshalb willst du vor dem Lauf sitzen? Ist das nicht dumm, Pirat?* ... Sie tastete nach dem Schaft. Mit beiden Händen" (466). Mavie is once again convinced she understands the situation. One of the climate refugees, or pirates according to Edward, has come to shoot her. Despite feeling like her fate is sealed and she will die, Mavie grabs hold of the gun. When she grabs the gun, Mavie is embracing uncertainty and potentially hastening her own death. If she had ignored the gun, she would have drowned. Her subsequent rescue proves that embracing uncertainty and the knowledge of her mortality, without succumbing to them, is exactly how to live.

Embracing uncertainty and recognising technological limits are helpful ways to come to understand the absurd. Another way is to become aware of your personal limits. Beck is particularly mindful of the fallibility of computers and wary of Prometheus's prediction. He is also

uncomfortable with Paulina, his sister and a member of Gaia, naming him a messenger of the gods because he does not want to be made into something more than he is. Beck is aware of his own limitations as an individual scientist. Knowing his limits in this role, he acts within his freedom as a scientist and continues to research and look for answers even while everyone else tells him he is wrong. After Millet's press conference, Paulina again admonishes Beck to stop acting like a scientist and instead help to warn the world. Beck compares his situation to driving on a highway and hearing that a *Geisterfahrer* is coming. The driver (Beck) exclaims there is not just one wrong driver, but thousands. He concludes: "Aber auch wenn alles dafür sprach, dass er der Geisterfahrer war, konnte er nicht aus seiner Haut. Er war und blieb Wissenschaftler" (300-01). Through embracing his limits Beck chooses life in the present. Choosing the present means that Beck is free to take an active role in his own way. Using his skills as a scientist and researcher he uncovers Eisele's secret and convinces Paulina that Gaia has been duped by Eisele's scheme. Paulina, in turn, convinces Diego to remake their third video in order to denounce Eisele and stop Millet from destroying Emi Koussi.

Acting in the present Beck is also able to remind Gerritsen of his own limitations. Beck believes that Gerritsen should no longer remain silent and passive, thereby allowing Eisele to manipulate Prometheus's data. Gerritsen claims he told Eisele that Prometheus was only a model, which, to Gerritsen, absolves him of any blame for Eisele's misuse of the information. This is unacceptable to Beck and he interrupts Gerritsen: "Haben Sie [Eisele] auch gesagt, dass Sie Wissenschaftler sind? Dass Wissenschaft und Experiment immer nur einem Ziel dienen, nämlich Thesen zu *widerlegen*? Nicht einfach irgendwas zu glauben, weil es einem gerade in den Kram passt, und alles andere zu ignorieren? Dass man nicht aufhört, wenn einem Ergebnis gefällt, sondern genau da erst *anfängt*?" (402). In Beck's eyes, Gerritsen is acting outside of the limits of



what is right for a scientist. His accusation underscores the ethical side of the freedom found in Camus's three consequences. The realisation that we are free to do anything reveals the paradox that we are actually not free to do everything. Beck reminds Gerritsen of his duty as a scientist to report what he knows. Gerritsen's subsequent video confession that explains the faults in the prediction adds weight to Gaia's videos denouncing Eisele.

Wolfgang Huber's believes that humans are first and foremost social beings in pursuit of freedom, but this declaration contains an ethical caveat, which is that we are only free when everyone else is as well. The freedom Camus proposes is no different: " 'Everything is permitted' does not mean that nothing is forbidden ... Likewise, if all experiences are indifferent, that of duty is as legitimate as any other" (Camus 67). Matthew H. Bowker states that Camus's definition of the absurd "emphasizes the limits of freedom and asks how to arrive at a definition of what we must *not* choose" (34). Beck's insistence that they could not just act based on an untested computer program is one example of a choice that should not have been made. In different ways, Beck, Gaia, and Mavie have all attempted to not choose silence in the face of the coming catastrophe. The ethical dilemmas that arise from our freedom to act as if 'everything is permitted' help reveal which actions are not supported. The actions of the heroes, Beck and Mavie, who attempt to support the freedom of other characters by warning them first of the catastrophe and then of the conspiracy, demonstrate an ethical way to live.

Using this lens to examine Millet exposes what occurs when we ignore this ethical caveat. He lives as though 'everything is permissible' and misunderstanding his freedom makes choices that are unethical. Overall Millet's actions display a lack of ethical character that would embody a life lived in freedom and in acceptance of the absurd. For example, Millet misinterprets the meaninglessness of life by wishing to be a god: " 'Nennen Sie mich Ra', sagte Millet versonnen

und lächelte sein kaiserliches Lächeln. ‘Nennen Sie mich Manco Ca’pac, Helios, und glauben Sie mir, auch die Sonnengötter der Vorzeit waren nur außergewöhnliche Sterbliche’ ” (Böttcher 255). In contrast, the heroes Mavie and Beck reject being labelled as Greek mythological characters, acknowledging their limits as humans. Mavie shows her disdain for Millet’s actions by comparing him to Thor: “Ja, Millet selbst, als Thor. Schöne Idee. Zumal er sich offenbar selbst so sieht” (310). Millet’s inflated sense of self reveals that he has fallen into the trap of freedom. Believing that there are no gods and that humanity is responsible only to itself does not give an individual unlimited rights. Nor does it mean that as humans we should recast ourselves as gods. Camus discusses the negative consequences of giving god-like qualities to ourselves. He argues that “if God exists, all depends on him and we can do nothing against his will. If he does not exist, everything depends on us” (Camus 108). Humans shy away from truly experiencing the freedom that living without gods would give us. Instead we constantly create gods or set ourselves up as gods, according to Camus, and this is a false conclusion drawn from the absurd. Millet’s decision to destroy Emi Koussi demonstrates his belief that he is a god. He ignores the limitations of his freedom and proposes an unethical solution that would lead to the death of thousands of others.

Throughout *Prophezeiung* Millet gives a number of speeches revealing how he believes the world works. As was previously discussed, Millet is convinced of humanity’s inherent selfishness, in particular the egoism of Western culture. Before revealing Eisele’s part in Millet’s withdrawal from politics, Millet claims he left his position at IPCC because: “Die Erklärungen des IPCC sind Konsens-Erklärungen und dienen bestimmten Zwecken, im Kern dem Erhalt unseres imperialen Lebensstils und der Schaffung neuer Absatzmöglichkeiten” (Böttcher 202). Millet is aware that Western lifestyle is not sustainable, and he claims if the IPCC would admit they were actively part of the problem, then he would come back to world politics. Furthermore, Millet

acknowledges that he is equally as guilty as the IPCC, but the difference is he willingly admits his guilt. Millet believes his awareness of his guilt is enough to cleanse him of responsibility, but according to Camus this awareness is just the beginning. Camus argues that truly embracing the absurd will be characterised by choosing to live (revolt), acting responsibly (freedom), and engaging in our feelings (passion). Millet's false interpretation of the absurd demonstrates his lack of understanding of these three consequences, particularly the third: passion.

According to Camus, passion is the ability to engage in the world, to feel – a state he describes as the “purest of joys” (Camus 63). In realising that life is meaningless, Millet advocates for a life of disengagement, which is not supported by Camus's theory of the absurd. Essentially, Millet believes if humanity is doomed to die, then everyone should choose to live well. According to Millet, the best life is the one represented by rich Westerners and he also believes everyone would choose this life: “Dagegen spricht nichts. Wir alle sind Egoisten. Kein Afrikaner verhielte sich anders, säße er hier, wo wir sitzen” (Böttcher 202). In other words, Millet is arguing for the suicidal lifestyle that Bryant condemned. His apathy may be different than that of Philipp's, but it is just as destructive. Millet has chosen to live a life of habit and in doing so, does not live actively and freely in the present. He is aware that the only thing certain about the future is humanity's eventual end, but unlike Camus this conclusion does not inspire him to live responsibly. During his final speech Millet urges his listeners to admit to their wickedness: “Stehen wir dazu, dass wir nicht teilen wollen. Dass wir nicht verzichten wollen. Dass wir, vor die Entscheidung gestellt, gut zu leben oder gut zu *sein*, immer das gute Leben wählen werden” (484). Millet has misunderstood the ethical aspect of a good life. Camus's absurd demonstrates that the good life is not characterised solely by hedonistic joy, but it also depends on the ability of others to enjoy their own freedom.

Throughout the novel Mavie consistently rejects the content of Millet's speeches, but the only time she confronts Millet directly is when he puts forth his volcano solution. Otherwise she mostly provides silent censure to his words: "*Schwachsinn, lag sehr weit vorn und abschlussbereit auf Mavies Zunge, totaler, kompletter Schwachsinn*" (201). Then in response to Millet's final speech: "Mavie bedauerte für einen Augenblick, dass Paulina abegesagt hatte. Sie hätte garantiert nicht geschwiegen" (485), but Mavie herself does not denounce Millet. Beck turns to her during the speech and the two jokingly plot: "'Der Mann muss gestoppt werden.' 'Wir klauen ihm nachher seinen ganzen Rotwein', flüsterte [Mavie] zurück, 'versteigern das Zeug bei eBay und spenden den Erlös.' 'Deal', flüsterte Thilo" (485). The heroes of *Prophezeiung* do not take active action against Millet even though they obviously do not agree with him. They claim he must be stopped, but their response is frivolous. These parting remarks by Mavie and Beck are anticlimactic. The reader might have expected they would be like Paulina: stand up against Millet, denounce him and finally change the world. It is important that the heroes are not given the opportunity to fix all the problems. The fact that they do not create a perfect happy ending, leaves open the possibility that readers' confidence in such heroes can be shaken. Instead of viewing this as a depressing and despairing situation, doubting the heroes could also be seen as inspiring, a challenge to the readers to do something for themselves, to choose to live in this absurd world.

The plot of *Prophezeiung* is based on a catastrophe that is unrealised; predicted by Prometheus, but that never comes to pass. Eventually, both Mavie and Beck realise that the problems created by the prediction arise from human reactions and not the prediction itself. Mavie tells Philipp on the way to Geneva: "Selbst wenn sich am Ende erweist, dass *Prometheus* einige Details falsch berechnet hat, die Meldung ist in der Welt, die Prognose ist in der Welt, und wir handeln" (342). Here, Mavie expresses doubt about Prometheus and explains the limits of what

can be accomplished now that the world knows about the prediction. Similarly, Beck pleads with Diego to stop making videos until they know more about Prometheus: “Ich weiß nicht, ob wir das alles noch aufhalten können, aber ich sehe nicht tatenlos zu, wie lauter Gutmenschen aus einer gut erlogenen Prophezeiung eine mache, die sich selbst erfüllt” (356). This plea displays Beck’s understanding of the freedom Camus discusses. Beck may be unsure of the limits to what he and Gaia are able to accomplish, but he asks Diego to at least stop the unhelpful videos. He wants Diego to use their freedom to make sure that innocent people do not die for a false prediction. The only thing that Beck and Mavie could influence was their own reactions and the reactions of others to the prediction. The weather itself was never influenced or controlled by any outside force. *Prophezeiung* demonstrates that in the Anthropocene the only thing humanity can control is its own reaction to the problems of climate change and global warming. In order to truly live in acknowledgement of the absurd, humanity will have to accept the limits of our ability to resolve these climate problems. In *Prophezeiung* the heroes do not create a utopian world, but once they accept their limitations they are able to act ethically and live.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus questions the meaning of existence and weighs the pros and cons of suicide. He proposes that the underlying human condition is the need to know and understand. He does not condemn this impulse, but he does suggest that there are things that humans can never know or understand. For example, no one knows what occurs after death and no one can control when or how they will die (outside of suicide). Camus also rejects the idea of God – believing humans create gods in order to not face the anguish or loneliness of our existence. He comes to the conclusion that existence is essentially meaningless and there is nothing beyond what we can see and do in the present. According to Camus, the meaninglessness and reality of life come into conflict in the human mind. This conflict is called the absurd by Camus and true

acknowledgment of the absurd leads to three consequences: revolt, freedom and passion. From these three consequences Camus argues that suicide is not allowable. Instead he promotes a life lived in spite of its meaninglessness (revolt). Acknowledging that one is choosing to live despite the futility of that choice allows us to live as we choose (freedom). Choosing life means being fully engaged and feeling all that life has to offer (passion).

To illustrate what he means by his absurd reasoning, Camus reinterprets the myth of Sisyphus, which is generally understood as a myth dealing with the hubris of humanity and subsequent punishment by the gods. Instead of punishment Camus suggests that Sisyphus is happy with his existence. Camus argues that Sisyphus accepts the limits of his existence, makes the rock his own, continues, and is happy. In this way Sisyphus is the absurd hero and his life reflects Camus's three conclusions. The utter futility represented by Sisyphus's condition can be compared to the current situation in the Anthropocene. Climate change and global warming are a real and present threat to humanity. There are limits to what we are able to do in terms of changing that fact. *Prophezeiung* highlights some of these limits through the false prediction of Prometheus. The novel highlights the problems of a program that can predict a climate catastrophe: namely that knowledge about the future does not mean we can respond to it adequately or ethically.

In Camus's theory of the absurd these limitations of both humanity and technology should be embraced. This is shown in the novel through Prometheus's ultimate failure to accurately predict when the catastrophe will occur. To embrace the absurd Camus believes we must also understand that the only certainty is uncertainty. Mavie is confronted repeatedly by this truth. First, when IICO does not react as she expects to Prometheus's prediction and she does not grasp this concept until the end. In Hamburg, Mavie almost succumbs to despair when she falls into the water after saving Philipp's daughter. She then accepts the absurd premise that although life is futile she

should still live and is rescued by a climate refugee. Not only should we embrace uncertainty, but like Beck we must embrace our personal limits. Beck understands his limits as a scientist and this allows him to uncover Eisele's plot. He uses the freedom afforded him in his role to persuade Gerritsen to reveal Prometheus's limitations and Eisele's conspiracy. In this way the main characters remind us that our freedom must be tempered with ethical action. Consideration for the well-being for others must be a part of our freedom.

Millet does not understand the consequences of the absurd and believing himself a god, he forgets the ethical caveat of his freedom and acts beyond his limits. His actions and words throughout the novel reflect his disengagement in life, which demonstrate a lack of passion. Although Mavie does not agree with Millet, she rarely challenges him and at the end of the novel does not rebuke his final speech. Her lack of action is a challenge to the readers to become engaged. Furthermore, the plot is based on an unrealised catastrophe. The problems that afflict the planet, climate change and global warming, are unresolved. The lack of resolution suggests that action alone cannot fix these problems.

## Chapter 5: Sisyphus's Rock and other Conclusions

*Prophezeiung* begins with a dedication to future generations: “Gewidmet denen, die nach uns kommen und sich etwas Orignelleres werden einfallen lassen müssen, als nacheinander alles abzufackeln. Versucht uns nachzusehen, dass wir nicht mehr für euch übrighatten” (Böttcher n.pag.). Starting with this dedication, Böttcher’s sets a tone of absurd hope for the novel. It is not simply hopeful, but instead is also aware of its own futility. The dedication assesses our present situation as one in which humanity sees no other solution but to gradually set everything aflame (*nacheinander alles abzufackeln*). Simultaneously, as a dedication to ‘those who will come after us,’ it implies there will be a future for humanity. In seeking absolution (*nachzusehen*), the dedication implicates us in any future consequences. Furthermore, it demonstrates our awareness that our present actions endanger life as we know it.

This thesis set out to show that it is imperative we change not only our actions, but also our thoughts about the climate problems of the Anthropocene. It examined the cli-fi novel *Prophezeiung* by Sven Böttcher, which explores ethical dilemmas created from a computer-predicted climate catastrophe. Due to the scope and nature of the catastrophe, a number of climate-related responses are explored by the main characters. Finally, the underlying message of the novel was illuminated by applying the notion of the absurd outlined by Albert Camus in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

*Prophezeiung* is set in Europe and as such, has a Western focus. It takes a critical look at Western lifestyle choices and their current technological focus. After establishing that climate change is a real and present danger to the characters, the novel explores the consequences of the Western mind-set. Specifically, the idea that technology and science can save the world from disaster. The foreknowledge provided by Prometheus is dangerous and responding to the



catastrophe is more complicated than just giving the knowledge to the public. Unscrupulous characters, namely Millet and Eisele, manipulate the prediction to further their own interests. Millet uses it to become a world leader and Eisele to further his revenge plot against China. Even ‘good’ characters who make up the eco-group Gaia become suspect when at first they refuse to admit that their YouTube videos are creating more problems than they are solving. Beck’s actions appear unethical as he refuses to act on the prediction until he is assured of Prometheus’s validity. His cautious approach is eventually validated when Eisele’s conspiracy and Millet’s cynicism come to light. In contrast, Mavie takes action to warn both European and non-Western countries, but these frequently lead to unexpected and unethical situations.

The novel provides glimpses of what is occurring across the globe despite the fact that the plot and all the main characters of the novel are located solely in the West. In the prologue the reader is introduced to Djamal, a Tuareg from the Sahara desert. Through Djamal the novel suggests that scientific research may overstep the bounds of universal human rights. Djamal finds aluminium strips in the desert, which are part of an experiment, conducted without the permission of the Tuareg. These strips convince Djamal that danger is coming and he needs to leave Africa for Europe. Millet’s solution to the coming catastrophe – exploding a volcano in an African country – again privileges Western interests. Not only is Millet’s solution not guaranteed to solve the problem, but Mavie and Beck believe it will create its own set of problems, especially for non-Western countries. In the last chapters, news reports show people in refugee camps around the world who are fighting over food and water, displaying the chaos created by Prometheus’s prediction. Back in Hamburg, climate refugees rescue Mavie and Philipp, suggesting that a solution to problems caused by climate change could lie in recognising our ethical responsibility to others.

The novel explores a variety of responses to the catastrophe and climate problems in general. Edward and Philipp respond to climate issues with apathy and denial. Gaia, although motivated by a desire to save lives, also responds incorrectly to the catastrophe. First, the group unwittingly misinforms the world about the catastrophe as Prometheus's prediction is uncovered to be only a model and not a real prediction. Secondly, the group believes their ethical responsibility ends once they have informed the public of problems. This conclusion is unsupported by both Mavie, and Beck, the heroes of the novel. Warning people about possible danger should be accompanied by a solution, which is what Millet attempts to do. His cynicism, however, blocks his ability to find an adequate and ethical solution to the catastrophe. Instead he chooses to ignore the obvious flaws in his plan in order to be the hero who saves the day. He lacks concern for future generations or people outside of Western nations and his actions reflect a pessimistic outlook on life. Millet's cynical attitude is in direct conflict with the philosophy that motivates Beck: Camus's concept of the absurd.

Beck's connection to Camus's absurd philosophy is revealed early on in *Prophezeiung*, and the novel sustains an awareness of this philosophy throughout. It illustrates the Sisyphean nature of our current lifestyle choices and the subsequent environmental consequences that arise from these choices. *Prophezeiung* acknowledges humanity as the creator of climate problems in the Anthropocene. The novel then establishes that responses to such problems are much like Sisyphus's punishment: humanity must eternally push our rock up the mountain, only to have it insistently roll back down. Despite this knowledge the reader is encouraged not to succumb to despair. Exploring the problems presented by *Prophezeiung* through Camus's theory of the absurd reveals that the three consequences of the absurd can be applied to environmental problems. Revolt allows us to take up the challenge to live despite feelings of futility and the very real truth that we

will all die one day. Freedom permits us the autonomy to live our lives because of the accompanying awareness that there is no meaning beyond life. In a limited sense, we choose how we live. Passion is that which gives us the motivation to keep going. Camus describes Sisyphus as happy, but this is not what he meant by passion. Rather, when he discusses passion Camus was describing a consequence that encompassed all feelings. According to Camus, life is about feeling and being engaged in those feelings. In contrast, death is an absence of these feelings and the moment we disengage in life, we are in fact committing suicide. Camus argues in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that suicide is not a legitimate answer to the meaninglessness of life. He proposes instead to embrace life and the three consequences of the absurd, namely revolt, freedom, and passion.

Living in acknowledgement of the absurd and its three consequences enables us to live ethically. In this way we can achieve happiness, pursuing individual fulfillment while being aware of what we owe others. This awareness allows us to truly live the second consequence of Camus's absurd. The freedom to live as we choose must be complemented by a desire to see others live in freedom as well. Millet's character exhibits a life lived under incorrect assumptions about the absurd. He determines that his freedom from a meaningful existence grants him the right to be a god. Although he believes he is truly living in revolt, he is not, as is he denying the third consequence of the absurd – passion. Camus's absurd philosophy prompts us to live a life of engagement despite our futility. By denying our feelings or succumbing to feelings of futility, despair, or in Millet's case, cynicism, we lose sight of the only real thing in life — our emotions. In Camus's absurd philosophy, these feelings are passion, which enable us to truly engage in our lives. In a world where the climate and future of humanity is unpredictable, Camus's philosophy argues against a mind-set that would lead us to inaction. Rather, acknowledgment of the absurd means living despite the knowledge of impending death and it encourages us to feel.

In the dedication, *Prophezeiung* asserts that climate change and global warming are fact. The novel does not question whether or not humans have changed the planet, but rather raises questions about how to live ethically in spite of these changes and their accompanying consequences. There is no concrete solution offered by *Prophezeiung* and readers are not allowed to think that a hero will come along and save the world. Confidence in technology, science, the government, or politicians to solve climate problems is discouraged. Instead these problems are presented as persisting despite the best efforts of the characters, further underscoring the use of Camus's absurd philosophy in interpreting the novel. Although life is meaningless, Camus argues that we should reject suicide and choose to live. Mavie and Beck are the heroes of the novel because they choose life. They reject suicide by embracing their limits and the ultimate futility of their actions. Unlike Millet, neither Mavie nor Beck give into feelings of pessimism or cynicism, they instead choose to engage in life. In the end they are rewarded for their ethical choices; not only have they survived the chaos of the prediction, but they are happy.

The happy resolution of *Prophezeiung* is undermined by two things: (1) Millet has not changed his attitude and (2) the end of Djamal's story. The bulk of the epilogue is taken up by one of Millet's infamous speeches where he simultaneously denounces and approves of Western culture. He advocates for a life lived characterised by disengagement. He believes he is enjoying his life, but his inaction demonstrates a lack of passion that accompanies true understanding of the absurd. Millet's final confidence in his own cynicism, as well as Mavie and Beck's happiness, are challenged by the final sentences of *Prophezeiung* concerning Djamal: "Er würde zurückkehren ans Ufer des heißen Meeres, dessen Wasser sich nicht trinken ließ. Und würde es in flammen sehen" (Böttcher 487). In this scene, Djamal has been forced back to Africa after leaving the desert at the beginning of the novel to migrate to Europe. Djamal vows to return to the ocean and see the

shoreline burn. This could be interpreted as a return to Europe to see its destruction. *Prophezeiung* ends abruptly here, and with this scene the fragile happiness found in Mavie and Beck's humorous reaction to Millet is gone. The reader is reminded of the uncertainty of the future, of the unresolved issues: not only is Millet still actively encouraging a suicidal lifestyle, but climate refugees who may only be visible on the periphery do exist and they cannot be ignored indefinitely.

The uncertainty and ambiguous ending of *Prophezeiung* helps underscore the realities of life in the Anthropocene. Staying within the confines of the metaphor provided by Camus, the climate can be pushed by humans, but it will reach a point when it will do what is in its nature and roll down the mountain. In *Prophezeiung* the characters can only attempt to control their reaction as well as the reactions of others to the catastrophe; no human plays a role in stopping the weather. Similarly, the dedication of the novel sets a tone of absurd hope. Realising the potential futility in staving off problems of the Anthropocene calls into question our feelings of control and reminds us of our fallibility. The ambiguous conclusion of the novel suggests we rethink our positions on the current climate crisis; to not focus solely on solutions, but maybe to allow ourselves to feel. Accepting our limits as humans and choosing to live freely within them, we can embrace Camus's 'purest of joys': passion.

Accepting Camus's third consequence would require humanity to engage in our feelings about climate change. In a similar manner, Mike Hulme's four climate myths reveal that our climate responses are often motivated by different emotions about the climate. Lamenting Eden can be likened to nostalgia, Presaging Apocalypse depicts fear, Constructing Babel demonstrates the problems of actions motivated by pride, and Celebrating Jubilee motivates us to not only feel the injustices in the world, but to act on them. Further research on cli-fi novels, could begin uncovering the emotional responses such novels portray concerning climate problems. For

example, at the beginning of this thesis, I mentioned Adam Trexler, who, along with Lawrence Buell, advocate for more transcultural ecocritical studies. An interesting comparison might be *Prophezeiung* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* trilogy. In Robinson's trilogy, scientists work together not only with the government, but also a religious group to ultimately resolve climate problems. Throughout Robinson's trilogy the Western and rational thoughts of the scientists are challenged by the presence of these Buddhist monks. It could be useful to compare the main characters' reactions to the climate problems in Robinson's novels with those of *Prophezeiung*. This would contrast both German and American perspectives on climate issues, as well as explore conclusions drawn from a religious perspective, which is lacking in *Prophezeiung*. Robinson's trilogy ends on a hopeful note and it could be interesting to contrast the emotions evoked in this novel with those of *Prophezeiung*.

*Prophezeiung's* at times fumbling attempts to address climate issues demonstrates that even popular fiction can be useful in ecocritical research. Moreover, if emotional responses are present in even these novels, then this could represent an attempt to undermine the systems of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy that Naomi Klein mentioned in her May 2016 lecture, all of which, are arguably direct results of a rational, Western worldview. These systems and their accompanying problems are examples of the limits to reason that led Camus to his absurd philosophy. Camus acknowledges that his conclusion concerning limits to reason is not an original idea, but he believes that awareness, which comes afterwards, must be engaged: "At the end of the awakening, comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery" (Camus 13). Recovery here could mean accepting the hope provided by an absurd philosophy, which is a hope that is lived in spite of the problems facing it. Ecocritical research into emotions that appear in cli-fi novels could prove useful in understanding different ways of approaching problems in the Anthropocene.

Potentially this could, in turn, lead to new solutions and not just those proposed by Western rational thought.

*Prophezeiung* gets us to think about a climate catastrophe and then prompts us, like Mavie and Beck, to not give in to despair, not get overwhelmed by our knowledge, not deny our knowledge like Edward, not become apathetic like Millet and Philipp, but rather to choose life. In choosing to live we must also accept the tension of what is known and unknown and the resulting absurd realisation that our actions are futile. Accepting this futility, and choosing life despite it, provides an option beyond a rational solution. Choosing to emotionally engage in the problem does not mean we discount the problem, putting off change until some future point. Nor does it mean we should continue in a lifestyle that undermines the very life we are living. Truly living out an absurd hope frees us to experience life passionately now, and maybe to even change our world.

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