

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminists focus on human beings' domination of the nonhuman world, or nature. Because women are culturally tied to nature, ecofeminists argue there are conceptual, symbolic, and linguistic connections between feminist and ecological issues. According to Karen J. Warren, the Western world's basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions about itself and its inhabitants have been shaped by an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework, the purpose of which is to explain, justify, and maintain relationships of domination and subordination in general and men's domination of women in particular. The most significant features of this framework are:

- *Value-hierarchical thinking*: "up-down" thinking, which places higher value, status, or prestige on what is "up" rather than on what is "down";
- *Value dualisms*: disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional (rather than as complementary) and exclusive (rather than as inclusive) and that place higher value (status, prestige) on one disjunct rather than on the other (e.g., dualisms that give higher value or status to that which has historically been identified as "mind," "reason," and "male" than to that which has historically been identified as "body," "emotion," and "female");
- *Logic of domination*: a structure of argumentation that leads to a justification of subordination.¹

Patriarchy's hierarchical, dualistic, and oppressive mode of thinking has harmed both women and nature, in Warren's opinion. Indeed, because women have been "naturalized" and nature has been "feminized," it is difficult

to know where the oppression of one ends and the other begins. Warren emphasized women are “naturalized” when they are described in animal terms, such as “cows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, pussycats, cats, bird-brains, hare-brains.”² Similarly, nature is “feminized” when “she” is raped, mastered, conquered, controlled, penetrated, subdued, and mined by men, or when “she” is venerated or even worshipped as the grandest mother of all. If man is the lord of nature, if he has been given dominion over it, then he has control not only over nature but also over nature’s human analog, woman. Whatever man may do to nature, he may also do to woman.

Similar to the manner in which radical-cultural feminists and radical-libertarian feminists disagree about whether women’s association with the work of childbearing and child-rearing is ultimately a source of power or disempowerment for women, “cultural,” “nature,” or “psychobiologicistic” ecofeminists disagree with “social-constructionist” or “social-transformative” ecofeminists about the wisdom of stressing women’s association with nature.³

Yet despite their sometimes divergent views on women’s particular responsibilities to the environment (must we live as simply as possible?), to animals (must we be vegetarians and antivivisectionists?), and to future generations (must we be pacifists and strict population controllers?), all ecofeminists agree with Rosemary Radford Ruether that women’s and nature’s liberation are a joint project:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological aims within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society.⁴

Some Roots of Ecofeminism

In her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson warned Americans that unless they began to take care of their environment, then “all man’s assaults upon the environment [including] the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials . . . [will undoubtedly] shatter or alter the very material . . . upon which the shape of the future depends.”⁵ As ecological concerns about global warming, ozone depletion, waste disposal, factory farming, endangered species, energy conservation, and wilderness preservation grew, an environmental movement took hold in the United States and throughout the world. Although all environmentalists believe human beings should respect nature, and give reasons for doing so, “human-centered” envi-

ronmentalists provide reasons that are based on furthering human interests, whereas “earth-centered” environmentalists provide reasons that are based on the intrinsic value of the earth itself.

Human-centered environmentalists emphasize that we harm ourselves when we harm the environment. If we exhaust our natural resources or pollute our skies and water, not only we but our progeny will suffer. If we want to have the material goods and lifestyles that industrialization makes possible, we must devise some means to handle the toxic wastes it produces as a by-product. If we want to have the benefit of bountiful and inexpensive energy, we must harness new sources of energy such as the sun and wind, lest we use the entire supply of oil and natural gas currently fueling our economy. If we want to experience the wilderness and see uncultivated vegetation and undomesticated animals, we must prevent commercial enterprises from transforming every piece of wild land into a Disneyland or Club Med. And if we want to preserve the rich diversity of nature and the treasures it might still hold for us, we must safeguard all life-forms, refusing to imperil their existence.

Viewing themselves as realistic or pragmatic about environmental concerns, human-centered environmentalists concede that from time to time, we may have to sacrifice the environment to serve our interests. In other words, sometimes a forest must be cut down so we can use the trees to build homes; sometimes the air must be polluted so we can continue to drive our automobiles; sometimes a predatory species of wild animals must be hunted or relegated to our zoos so our domesticated animals can graze safely. In short, the environment’s value is *instrumental*; its meaning, significance, and purpose depends on our needs or wants. The environment exists not for itself but for human beings.

It is not surprising that critics of human-centered environmentalism condemn it as “arrogant anthropomorphism,” generally faulting the Judeo-Christian tradition as one of the main players in the devaluation of the environment. They point, for example, to the biblical mandate that instructed *men* to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and every living thing that moves upon the earth,” as promoting the view that nature has instrumental value only.⁶ These same critics also stress how the metaphors and models of mechanistic science, which gained sway during the pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment periods, reinforced the Bible’s anthropomorphic view of nature. They claim that prior to the seventeenth century, we thought of nature organically, as a benevolent female or nurturing mother, as someone who gave freely and generously of *her* bounty to us, her children. After the scientific revolution, however, we reconceived nature mechanistically, as an inert, lifeless machine. As a result of this paradigm shift, we found it easier to justify not only our use but also our misuse and abuse of

nature. We reasoned that there is nothing morally wrong with treating a mere “object” in whatever way we wish.

René Descartes’s philosophy, which privileged mind over matter, further bolstered the mechanistic conception of nature, according to critics of human-centered environmentalism. His belief that our ability to think (“I think, therefore I am”) makes us special led to the view that things that think (*res cogitans*, or human beings) are meant to control things that do not think (animals [as was then believed], trees, and rocks). Gradually, we convinced ourselves that human beings are indeed the highest life-form: the center of the universe. As a result of our exalted self-conception, we took it upon ourselves to decide not only when to protect and preserve the environment for our use but also when to sacrifice it for our greater glory and good.

Human-centered, or anthropomorphic, environmentalism, sometimes termed *shallow ecology*, remained the order of the day until the late 1940s, when a new generation of environmentalists forwarded an earth-centered environmentalism they termed *deep ecology*. This post-Enlightenment view of nature repudiated the modern conception of nature as a machine, reverting to medieval and even ancient conceptions of nature as an organism that has intrinsic as well as instrumental value.

In his much-anthologized essay “The Land Ethic,” Aldo Leopold wrote that we should think about the land as “a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals.”⁷ Leopold believed the earth is a life system, an intricately interwoven and interdependent intersection of elements that functions as a whole organism. If one element of this system becomes diseased, the whole system is probably sick, and the only way to heal the system is to treat or cure the diseased part, whether that diseased part is an excessively flooded plain, a severely overpopulated herd of deer (or human beings), or a heavily polluted river. To be sure, a treatment or cure for the diseased element will not always be found, but that is to be expected. In fact, the ecosystem’s laws of death and decay *require* that its old elements be extinguished: The patterns of regeneration and life continually provide the space necessary for new elements of the ecosystem. It is not important for each particular *part* to continue, said Leopold, but only for the *whole* to continue.

From nature’s perspective, as opposed to what Leopold called man’s perspective, flows an environmental ethics best termed *biocentric* or *ecocentric*. He claimed “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise.”⁸ To illustrate his point, Leopold gave the example of a river sandbar, a very particular and small environmental system. Such a system has an identifiable integrity; it is a unity of interdependent elements combining together to make a whole with a unique character. It has a certain stability, not be-

cause it does not change but because it changes only gradually. An evolving river sandbar has a particular beauty in its harmonious, well-ordered form: a unity in diversity. When envisioned on a larger scale, this small environmental system interlocks with other small environmental systems, together constituting the very large ecosystem of which human beings are simply a part. This, the largest of all ecosystems, is none other than nature, wherein morality becomes a matter of conscious (or thinking) beings' preserving its integrity, stability, and beauty.

Leopold's thinking was at the forefront of the conceptual revolution that replaced the anthropomorphism of shallow ecology with the biocentrism of deep ecology. Arne Naess and George Sessions articulated the principal tenets of deep ecology:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.⁹

Critics of deep ecology fault both the theory underlying deep ecology and some of its tactics. They demand to know what the *source* of nature's intrinsic value is, rejecting the mere fact of nature's "is-ness" as an inadequate answer to their question. Just because something exists, they say, does not make it intrinsically valuable. In an effort to persuade these critics that nature is indeed

intrinsically valuable, Peter Wenz argued there is something intuitively wrong about destroying an ecosystem when there is no good reason to do so. He claimed that if the last surviving human being after a worldwide disaster had a choice between saving or not saving all the remaining plant and animal life on the earth, it would not be “a matter of moral indifference” whether the person chose to save these life-forms.¹⁰ Although critics of deep ecology agree with Wenz that the earth has value independent of us, they do not agree with the view that the earth’s interests are equal to or even more important than ours. For example, critic Luc Ferry vehemently objected to a proposal by some deep ecologists that if we fail or refuse to control the size of our population voluntarily, the government should force us to do so, so that *nonhuman* animals have enough food and space. Does this mean, asked Ferry, that to get the ideal human–nonhuman population ratio,¹¹ our government should do nothing to stop the kind of “massive human die backs” caused by famine, disease, and war?¹² Are we to be handled like an overpopulated herd of deer?

Ecofeminism: New Philosophy or Ancient Wisdom?

Ecofeminism is a relatively new variant of ecological ethics. In fact, the term *ecofeminism* first appeared in 1974 in Françoise d’Eaubonne’s *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. In this work d’Eaubonne expressed the view that there exists a direct link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. She claimed the liberation of one cannot be effected apart from the liberation of the other.¹³ A decade or so after d’Eaubonne coined the term, Karen J. Warren further specified four core assumptions of ecofeminism:

- (1) There are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (2) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (3) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (4) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective.¹⁴

In many ways, ecofeminism resembles deep ecology, yet ecofeminists generally fault deep ecologists for missing one crucial point. According to ecofeminists, deep ecologists mistakenly oppose anthropocentrism in general when the real problem is not so much or only the Western world’s *human-centeredness*, but its *male-centeredness*. Androcentrism, not anthropomorphism, is the chief enemy of nature.

Although she praised deep ecologists’ “concerted effort . . . to rethink Western metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics,” ecofeminist Ariel Kay Salleh

nonetheless found their rethinking “deficient.”¹⁵ Noting that most of deep ecology’s spokespeople are *men*, Salleh accused them of being afraid to confront the sexism as well as naturism causing our current environmental crisis. The “deep ecology movement will not truly happen,” she said, “until men are brave enough to rediscover and to love the woman inside themselves.”¹⁶ Salleh’s thesis, which is shared by many ecofeminists, is “that the hatred of women, which ipso facto brings about that of nature, is one of the principal mechanisms governing the actions of men (of ‘males’) and, thus, the whole of Western/patriarchal culture.”¹⁷

Carol Adams perhaps most significantly reshaped the debate between shallow and deep ecology with the publication of her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, in which she established a link between patriarchal culture’s oppression of both women and animals. One of the ways in which Adams illustrated her feminist vegetarian theory was to remind us of the Greek myth of Zeus and Metis, in which Zeus (“patriarch of patriarchs”) lusts after Metis (goddess of knowledge and prudence), pursuing, raping, and ultimately swallowing her alive. After these horrific activities, Zeus explains them by observing that Metis will always remain in his belly, providing him with counsel. According to Adams, this myth demonstrates how “sexual violence and meat eating are collapsed” into each other.¹⁸ Adams stressed that “an essential component of androcentric culture has been built upon these activities of Zeus: viewing the sexually desired object as consumable.”¹⁹ Animals, like women, are consumed as objects of pleasure in a cycle of objectification (animals = food), fragmentation (animal carcasses are dismembered so as to be turned into food), and finally consumption (on our dinner plates). Likewise, women are objectified (female body = sexual plaything), fragmented (into fetishized parts, such as breasts, buttocks, and vaginas), and consumed (via conquest, rape, pornography, etc.). In Adam’s estimation, the rights of women and animals are inextricably joined, placing vegetarian ecofeminists firmly in the corner of deep ecology.

Tensions in Nature: Ecofeminist Thought

Although ecofeminists agree that the association of women with nature is the root cause of both sexism and naturism, they disagree about whether women’s connections to nature are primarily biological and psychological or primarily social and cultural. They also disagree about whether women should de-emphasize, emphasize, or reconceive their connections with nature. According to Ynestra King, “The recognition of the connections between women and nature and of women’s bridge-like position between nature and culture poses three possible directions of feminism.”²⁰ The first direction is to *sever*

the woman-nature connection by totally integrating women into culture and the realm of production. The second is to *reaffirm* the woman-nature connection, proposing that female nature is not only different from, but also somehow better than, male culture. The third is to transform the woman-nature connection by using it to create “a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge . . . and create a free, ecological society.”²¹ Implicit in King’s understanding of transformative ecofeminism is the postmodern feminist belief that ultimately all forms of human oppression are rooted in those dichotomous conceptual schemes that privilege one member of a dyad over another (e.g., male over female, nature over culture, science over spirituality).

Severing the Woman-Nature Connection

Simone de Beauvoir. Among the feminists who have pondered women’s association with nature is existentialist feminist Simone de Beauvoir. As we noted in Chapter 5, de Beauvoir urged women to transcend their links to nature so as to overcome their status as the other, or second, sex. She believed woman’s identity as the other is derived partly from her biology—especially her reproductive capacity—and partly from her socially imposed child-rearing responsibilities. De Beauvoir did not view woman’s body as woman’s friend. On the contrary, she viewed woman’s body as fundamentally alienating, as an energy drain leaving women too tired to participate in the kind of creative activity men enjoy.²²

In addition, de Beauvoir stressed that human beings are cast in a *pour-soi/en-soi* dialectic. *Pour-soi* (being-for-itself) entails being a self, consciously aware of the possibilities for self-creation that the future presents; *en-soi* (being-in-itself) entails being the other, a thing without a future and therefore without any possibilities for transformation. Although all human beings are both *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, Western culture tends to view men as more likely to be mainly *pour-soi* and women as *en-soi*.

Sensing that they are as free as men, women nonetheless engage in bad faith by playing the role of the other. De Beauvoir noted that “along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing.”²³ If women are ever to be liberated from the status of the second sex, they must, she said, resist the temptation of the “easy way out.” By refusing to be the other—the “it,” the *en-soi*, the immanent one, the natural one—women will liberate not only themselves but also men. No longer will men be able to hide from their freedom in the bosom of “woman.”

Reflecting on de Beauvoir's suggested program for women's liberation, ecofeminist Val Plumwood reproached de Beauvoir for giving women who care about nature the wrong advice:

For Simone de Beauvoir woman is to become fully human in the same way as man, by joining him in distancing from and in transcending and controlling nature. She opposes male transcendence and conquering of nature to woman's immanence, being identified with and passively immersed in nature and the body. The "full humanity" to be achieved by woman involves becoming part of the superior sphere of the spirit and dominating and transcending nature and physicality, the sphere of freedom and controllability, in contrast to being immersed in nature and in blind uncontrollability. Woman becomes "fully human" by being absorbed in a masculine sphere of freedom and transcendence conceptualized in human-chauvinist terms.²⁴

Plumwood feared that by rejecting the *en-soi* realm, the world of immanence, women will gain not true personhood but merely the opportunity to become men's full partners in the campaign to control or dominate nature. The male-female dichotomy will not be bridged or healed into wholeness. Rather, the female member of this long-standing dyad will simply be erased into the male member. Moreover, the culture-nature dichotomy will not be eliminated, but instead will be worsened. Abandoned by woman, nature will find itself utterly defenseless against the forces of culture.

Sherry B. Ortner. According to another feminist, Sherry B. Ortner, it will not be easy for women to disassociate themselves from nature, because virtually all societies believe women are closer to nature than men are. There are, she said, three reasons for the near universality of this belief. First, women's *physiology* is "more involved more of the time with the 'species of life'; it is woman's body that nurtures humanity's future." Second, women's primary *place* remains the domestic sphere, where "animal-like infants" are slowly transformed into cultural beings and where plant and animal products are shaped into food, clothing, and shelter. Third, women's *psyche*, "appropriately molded to mothering functions by her own socialization," tends toward more relational, concrete, and particular modes of thinking than do men's psyche.²⁵

In Ortner's opinion, virtually every society's view of women as somehow existing *between* nature and culture has several consequences, each of them inviting a different interpretation of the term *intermediate*. First, *intermediate* can simply mean that women have a "middle status," lower than men's status

but higher than nature's status. Second, it can mean that women "mediate," or perform some set of synthesizing or converting functions between nature and culture—for example, the socialization of children. Unless children are properly socialized, no society can survive; it needs its members to conform to its rules and regulations. For this reason, hypothesized Ortner, societies seek to restrict women's sexual, reproductive, educational, and occupational choices. The more conservative women are, the more rule-following they and their children will be. Third, and finally, the term *intermediate* can mean "of greater symbolic ambiguity." Because society cannot quite understand the nature of women, it is not certain whether to associate women with life or death, good or evil, order or chaos.²⁶ Do women hold society together, or do they chip away at its margins?

Society's view that women are intermediaries between culture and nature is, said Ortner, the product of women's "social actuality"—that is, women's physiology, domestic role, and feminine psyche. Thus, the way to alter this view of women is to change women's social actuality so that women as well as men are viewed as fully cultural persons capable of determining the course of history. Unfortunately, continued Ortner, women's social actuality cannot change unless society's view of women as intermediaries between culture and nature changes. Women will never escape this circular trap unless their situation is simultaneously attacked from both sides: from the social actuality side (women's reproductively special physiology, domestic role, and feminine psyche) *and* the conceptual or ideological side (women as occupying middle status, performing mediating functions between nature and culture, and carrying ambiguous symbolic baggage). Explaining her point at some length, Ortner claimed:

Efforts directed solely at changing the social institutions—through setting quotas on hiring, for example, or through passing equal-pay-for-equal-work laws—cannot have far-reaching effects if cultural language and imagery continue to purvey a relatively devalued view of women. But at the same time efforts directed solely at changing cultural assumptions—through male and female consciousness-raising groups, for example, or through revision of education materials and mass-media imagery—cannot be successful unless the institutional base of the society is changed to support and reinforce the changed cultural view.²⁷

Ortner believed that the effect of this two-pronged attack on women's situation would be to involve both men and women equally "in projects of creativity and transcendence." At last, women as well as men would be seen as "cultural," and women no less than men would participate "in culture's ongoing dialectic with nature."²⁸

Like de Beauvoir's line of reasoning, Ortner's led to the conclusion that women can be liberated without nature's being liberated. Had Ortner thought otherwise, she would have argued not only that women are just as "cultural" as men but also that men are just as "natural" as women. In other words, she would have aimed to change men's societal actuality and the ideology that supports it, as much as she aimed to change women's. If society needs to bridge women's "distance" from culture by involving women in "creative" and "transcendent" tasks, then it also needs to bridge men's distance from nature by involving men in "repetitive" and "immanent" tasks.

Reaffirming the Woman-Nature Connection

Mary Daly: *Gyn/Ecology*. In general, ecofeminists with a radical-cultural feminist background seek to strengthen rather than weaken women's connections to nature. Unlike de Beauvoir and Ortner, nature ecofeminists such as Mary Daly believe the traits traditionally associated with women—for example, caring, nurturing, and intuitiveness—are not so much the result of social constructions as the product of women's actual biological and psychological experiences. The problem is not that women have a closer relationship with nature than men do, but that this relationship is undervalued. Nature ecofeminists reject the assumed inferiority of both women and nature as well as the assumed superiority of both men and culture. Instead, they insist nature/woman is at least equal to and perhaps even better than culture/man, implying that traditional female virtues, not traditional male virtues, can foster improved social relations and less aggressive, more sustainable ways of life.

As Daly moved toward a lesbian separatist feminism perspective, she began to reject male culture as evil and to embrace female culture as good. She speculated that before the establishment of patriarchy, there existed an original matriarchy. In this gynocentric world, women flourished. They controlled their own lives, bonded with one another and with the nonhuman world of animals and nature, and lived both freely and happily. Thus, Daly saw the process of women's liberation as putting women back in touch with women's original "wild" and "lusty" natural world and freeing them from men's "domesticating" and "dispiriting" cultural world.²⁹

Daly contrasted women's life-giving powers with men's death-dealing powers. She claimed women have the capacity for a fully human life, a vigorous life lived in dynamic communion with animals, earth, and stars. Men, she maintained, lack this capacity. They are, she said, parasites who feed off women's energy to fuel their destructive activities and constricting thoughts. Because they cannot bring life into the world and are incapable of bonding with nature, men substitute artificial life for flesh-and-blood life and, in acts

of envious rage directed against women, seek not only to control and destroy women but also to control and destroy all that is natural. Male culture is everything female nature is not; it is about disease and death rather than health and life, said Daly:

The products of necrophilic Apollonian male mating are of course the technological “offspring” which pollute the heavens and the earth. Since the passion of necrophiliacs is for the destruction of life and since their attraction is to all that is dead, dying, and purely mechanical, the fathers’ fetishized “fetuses” (reproductions/replicas of themselves), with which they passionately identify, are fatal for the future of this planet. Nuclear reactors and the poisons they produce, stockpiles of atomic bombs, ozone-destroying aerosol spray propellants, oil tankers “designed” to self-destruct in the ocean, iatrogenic medications and carcinogenic food additives, refined sugar, mind pollutants of all kinds—these are the multiple fetuses/feces of stale male-mates in love with a dead world that is ultimately co-equal and consubstantial with themselves. The excrement of Exxon is everywhere. It is ominously omnipresent.³⁰

Daly linked men’s pollution of nature with men’s “pollution” of women, contrasting men’s *gynecology* with women’s *gyn/ecology*. Men’s gynecology is about segmenting and specializing reproduction as if it was just another mode of production; it is about substituting the fake for the real, the artificial for the natural; it is about cutting whole into parts. In contrast, women’s gyn/ecology is about “dis-covering, de-veloping the complex web of living/loving relationships *of our own kind*. It is about *women* living, loving, creating our Selves, our cosmos.”³¹ Whereas men’s gynecology depends upon “fixation and dismemberment,” women’s gyn/ecology affirms everything is connected.³² According to Daly, women must work hard to stop the patriarchal forces of necrophilia—that is, of death. Most women, she claimed, have been seduced into cooperating with the “phallocentric” system of “necrophilia”; they have become men’s “fembots,” permitting themselves to be drained of their life forces.³³ In the days of matriarchy, Daly said, women reproduced through parthenogenesis, their eggs dividing and developing independently of sperm. Now, in the days of patriarchy, men have persuaded women to exchange natural reproduction for artificial reproduction. Men have invited women to enter a world in which *male* gynecologists snatch women’s eggs from women’s wombs to hatch them in technology’s wombs, or artificial placentae. With this “advance” in science, said Daly, men move closer to achieving what they really seek—death—and unless women refuse to become men’s “fembots,” men will consume them together with nature.³⁴

Susan Griffin. Although Susan Griffin did not claim there are *biological* connections between women and nature, she did claim there are *ontological* connections between women and nature.³⁵ Specifically, Griffin wrote, "We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature."³⁶ In addition to implying women have a special way of knowing and perceiving reality because of their special connections to nature, Griffin suggested it is women who must help human beings escape the false and destructive dualistic world into which men, particularly male Western philosophers, have led us.

In particular, Griffin used poetry to challenge dualistic thinking, instrumental rationality, and unbridled technology. She countered the objective, dispassionate, and disembodied voice of male culture with the subjective, passionate, embodied voice of female culture. If men can identify with machines and wonder whether machines (e.g., computers and robots) have feelings as well as thoughts, then women can identify with animals and wonder whether animals have thoughts as well as feelings.

Griffin sought to overcome dualism by providing what David Macauley has termed an "antidote to Plato's epistemological hierarchy." In his *Republic*, Plato led Western man out of what the philosopher regarded as an inferior sensory realm, the world of appearances, into what he regarded as a superior intellectual realm, the world of forms. In this latter world supposedly reside such *ideas* as beauty, truth, and goodness. However, in book 1 of *Woman and Nature*, Griffin suggested Plato led us astray by his incorrectly insisting that spirit is superior to matter and by prompting us to view man as mind and woman as body. Plato's dualistic hierarchy, stressed Griffin, is behind Western society's view that women are men's inferiors.³⁷

Emphasizing the links between men's ideas about nature and their attitudes toward women, Griffin saw similarities between men's domestication of animals and domestication of women. She also noted ways in which women have either actively participated in or passively accepted their own "taming." For example, in a chapter entitled "Cows: The Way We Yield," Griffin suggested that the words used to describe a cow can be used equally well to describe a woman:

She is a great cow. She stands in the midst of her own soft flesh, her thighs great wide arches, round columns, her hips wide enough for calving, sturdy, rounded, swaying, stupefied mass, a cradle, a waving field of nipples, her udder brushing the grass, a great cow, who thinks nothing, who waits to be milked, year after year, who delivers up calves, who stands

ready for the bull, who is faithful, always there, yielding at the same hour, day after day, that warm substance, the milk white of her eye, staring, trusting, sluggish, bucolic, inert, bovine mind dozing and dreaming, who lays open her flesh, like a drone, for the use of the world.³⁸

Asked why she chose to describe women in terms of domestic rather than wild animals, Griffin responded that her two-year experience as a housebound wife and mother caused her to identify with domestic animals, whom she viewed as well taken care of but decidedly unfree.³⁹

Viewing Western thought's decision to privilege culture (man) over nature (woman) as a disastrous one, Griffin proceeded in book 2 of *Woman and Nature* to discuss all the conceptual rifts that Platonic philosophy generated: mind-body, intellect-emotion, city-wilderness, knower-known. She also critiqued scientific knowledge, ridiculing the importance men attach to numbers, in particular how men quantify everything in the universe and in their possession. Everything is reducible to a sum, a statistic, a cost-benefit ratio, said Griffin. Horrified by the thought of a world ruled by and reduced to numbers, Griffin urged women to journey out of culture—the labyrinth of dualistic thinking—back into nature, the cave where matter and spirit merge into one, the true habitat of human beings who are more than mere “ideas.”

Finally, in the third and fourth books of *Woman and Nature*, Griffin claimed we can overcome the kind of thinking that belittles nature, materiality, the body, and women, but only if women learn to speak for themselves and for the natural world. She insisted we need to replace “his certainty”—quantity, probability, and gravity—with “her possibility”; his “land” and “timber” with “this earth” and “the forest”; and his reason with her emotion. Nature has a value that cannot be reduced to its usefulness to culture, and woman has a value that cannot be reduced to her usefulness to man.

In some of her later work, Griffin revisited the nature-culture dichotomy, depicting pornography as culture's revenge against nature as well as men's revenge against women. “We will see,” said Griffin, “that the bodies of women in pornography, mastered, bound, silenced, beaten, even murdered, are symbols for natural feeling and the powers of nature which the pornographic mind hates and fears.”⁴⁰ Commenting on Griffin's analysis of the pornographic mind, David Macauley urged us to ask ourselves

whether there now exists . . . a kind of earth pornography, since the gendered planet, the “mother of life” or “our nurse” as Plato referred to it, is not only violated literally by strip mining, deforestation, and radioactive

waste but subjected increasingly to the circulation of a voyeuristic media—as the image of a bounded, blue sphere is re-placed (away from natural context) on billboards or commercials in order to sell computers, hamburgers, or candidate's positions.”⁴¹

Just as women's violated bodies are used to sell all sorts of commodities, such as cars, boats, and designer jeans, so, too, is nature's violated “body” used similarly. Women, implied Griffin, must refuse to let themselves and nature be exploited in such ways. Reform, indeed revolution, begins with saying no to what *is* and instead seeks what *might be*.

Spiritual Ecofeminism

Closely allied to radical-cultural ecofeminists are a variety of so-called spiritual ecofeminists.⁴² Inspired by Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* and Rosemary Radford Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth*, they insist that no matter which theology, religion, or spirituality women adopt, it must be an embodied rather than a disembodied way of relating to the ultimate source or deepest wellspring of meaning. Implicit in the thought of most spiritual ecofeminists is the view that unless patriarchal religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, can purge themselves of the idea of an omnipotent, disembodied male spirit, women should abandon the oppressive confines of their synagogues and churches and run to the open spaces of nature, where they can practice any one of several earth-based spiritualities.

Although spiritual ecofeminists draw strength from a variety of earth-based spiritualities, these thinkers tend to gravitate toward ancient goddess worship and nature-oriented Native American ritual. They believe cultures that view the female body as sacred also view nature as sacred, honoring its cycles and rhythms. Spiritual ecofeminists often draw an analogy between the role of women in biological production and the role of an archetypal “Earth Mother” or “birth-mother” (usually referred to as “Gaia”) in giving life and creating all that exists.⁴³ Because women's role is analogous to Gaia's role, women's relationship to nature is privileged over men's relationship to nature, according to spiritual ecofeminists.

Starhawk

Among the best-known spiritual ecofeminists who stress the woman-nature link is Starhawk, a Wiccan priestess, social activist, and psychotherapist. In one of her poems, she wrote that nature's and women's work are one and the same:

Out of the bone, ash
Out of the ash, pain
Out of the pain, the swelling
Out of the swelling, the opening
Out of the opening, the labor
Out of the labor, the birth
Out of the birth, the turning
*wheel the turning tide.*⁴⁴

Through their uniquely female bodily experiences—their monthly menses, the demanding symbiosis of pregnancy, the pain of childbirth, and the pleasure of breast-feeding their infants—women supposedly come to know, in a way men cannot, that human beings are one with nature.

Starhawk claimed that the kind of earth-based spirituality she practices as a witch—that is, a woman charged with the task and possessing the skill to “bend” and “reshape” Western culture—provides a good deal of the energy in the feminist movement.⁴⁵ In her estimation, earth-based spirituality has three core concepts. The first is *immanence*. The Goddess is *in* the living world, in the human, animal, plant, and mineral communities. Therefore, each being has value, and each conscious being also has power. Understood not as power over but as power from within, this power is “the inherent ability . . . to become what we are meant to be—as a seed has within it the inherent power to root, grow, flower, and fruit.”⁴⁶ We grow in this kind of creative power, claimed Starhawk, when we take on responsibility for everyone and everything to which we are related and also when we strive to achieve personal integrity by prioritizing our needs and those of our entire relational network. Spirituality is not an “opiate”; it is an energizer and stimulus to action. She explained: “When what’s going on is the poisoning and destruction of the earth, our own personal development requires that we grapple with that and do something to stop it, to turn the tide and heal the planet.”⁴⁷

The second feature of earth-based spirituality is *interconnection* and the expanded view of self it encourages. Not only are our bodies natural, but so, too, are our minds. Starhawk stressed: “Our human capacities of loyalty and love, rage and humor, lust, intuition, intellect, and compassion are as much a part of nature as the lizards and the redwood forests.”⁴⁸ The more we understand that we are nature, she wrote, the more we will understand our oneness with all that exists: human beings, natural cycles and processes, animals, and plants. We will make the mistake neither of allying ourselves with human beings against nature nor of allying ourselves with nature against human beings, as some environmentalists do when they engage in extreme forms of so-called

ecoterrorism. Killing animal-research scientists in the name of animal liberation is no better than killing animals to find cures for the diseases threatening human beings. There is, implied Starhawk, almost always a way to serve the interests of one and all. Our own interests "are linked to black people in South Africa as well as to forest-dwellers in the Amazon, and . . . their interests in turn are not separate from those of the eagle, the whale, and the grizzly bear."⁴⁹

The third and probably most important feature of earth-based spirituality is the kind of *compassionate lifestyle* many women lead. Starhawk claimed that unless all people adopt this type of lifestyle, which requires them to care for one another, we can forget about "reweaving the world" or "healing the wounds." Thus, she faulted deep ecologist Daniel Conner for suggesting "the AIDS virus may be Gaia's tailor-made answer to human overpopulation," as well as deep ecologist Dave Foreman for opposing the provision of famine relief to starving African nations: "When environmentalists applaud the demise of Africans and homosexuals, they ally themselves with the same interests that are killing people of color, gay people, women, and other vulnerable groups. Those same interests are destroying the earth's ecosystems and raping the wilderness."⁵⁰ According to Starhawk, spiritual ecofeminists—especially those who regard themselves as witches—bring to the environmental movement a compassionate perspective that permits them "to identify powerlessness and the structures that perpetuate it as the root cause of famine, of overpopulation, of the callous destruction of the natural environment."⁵¹

The nature-culture dichotomy, indeed all dichotomies, must be dissolved so we can appreciate the "oneness" of reality. Starhawk implied, however, that it is not a matter of indifference how this oneness is achieved. Culture ought to be subsumed into nature rather than vice versa, for unless we all live more simply, masses of people will not be able to live at all. Like Rosemary Radford Ruether, Starhawk viewed the present distribution of the world's wealth among people as shockingly unjust.⁵² She urged people committed to world justice and ecological sustainability to engage in direct action movements such as the massive anti-World Trade Organization protests that started in Seattle in November 1999 and have continued to this day. She also recommended that social justice activists use communications media, in particular the Internet and cell phones, to make visible and audible to people the sights and sounds of human poverty.

Starhawk had an ambitious program for achieving social justice. She insisted that, starting in their own local communities, activists must take the five following steps to achieve a sustainable economy: (1) They must shift away from oil and coal to renewable, clean forms of energy (solar and wind); (2) they must stop relying on machines to do their work for them and start relying on their

own muscle power; (3) they must get serious about recycling the waste side of consumption and production; (4) they must resist the forces of “monoculture,” instead affirming and strengthening different cultures; (5) and they must learn to do more with less resources.⁵³

Starhawk admitted that, initially, it would be difficult for people to forsake the creative comforts and luxuries of today’s high-end, unsustainable economies. Still, she believed that as people started to lead simpler lives, they would discover there is more to life than possessing things. Starhawk urged women to take the lead in the save-the-earth movement, bringing as many men into it as possible:

*The labor is hard, the night is long
We are midwives, and men who tend
the birth and bond with the child
We are birthing, and being born
We are trying to perform an act of
magic—
To pull a living child out of a near-corpse of the mother we are
simultaneously poisoning, who is also ourselves.*⁵⁴

With Mary Daly, Starhawk declared her absolute opposition to the forces of death (necrophilia) and her wholehearted affirmation of life.

Carol Christ

Like Starhawk, Carol Christ is a “pagan” spiritual ecofeminist. Christ consistently sought to replace the God of patriarchy (omniscient, omnipotent, and immutable) with a Goddess of humanity (learning, fallible, and constantly changing). She wanted people to practice Goddess religion, that is, the effort to imaginatively reconstruct the egalitarian harmony between humans and nature that existed in supposedly nonhierarchical, prepatriarchal times. For Christ, hierarchical thinking and its alienating dualisms have been our undoing. By tapping into the power of the Goddess in ourselves—a “Goddess” she defined as the lure to goodness—we can help one another overcome the alienated and hostile relations that characterize our power-hungry world.

Interestingly, Christ did not guarantee us success in our efforts to become more egalitarian and loving. She saw the web of good human relationships, including good human relationships with nature, as a fragile one in continual need of repair. But rather than despairing at the thought of people endlessly trying to fix faltering human relationships, Christ embraced this thought as providing us with our meaning and purpose. She suggested we rise each

morning with the following greeting to the sun: “As this day dawns in beauty, we pledge ourselves to repair the web.”⁵⁵

Like spiritual ecofeminists in general, Christ believed that by connecting to nature—its beauty, mystery, complexity—we can be inspired to be better (i.e., more loving) people. We do not need an all-powerful rule giver, armed with laws and punishments for rule breakers, to force us to be good. On the contrary. We need only the Goddess—that is, the energy of human creativity and transformation within themselves—to want to be good.

Diann Neu

Although most spiritual ecofeminists are pagan, not all are. Diann Neu, co-founder of the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) claimed that even though kyriarchal liturgies (i.e., those that value the domination of some beings over others) are disconcerting to ecofeminists, ecofeminist liturgies are not. She said that “ecofeminist liturgies are designed to reconnect participants with nature, women, and the divine. They invite participants to feel the depth and sacredness of this relationship.”⁵⁶ For example, the mandate in Ephesians that wives submit to their husbands undermines the purity of worship; whereas praise for the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31, which values and respects women’s personal autonomy, conveys an ecofeminist message. Neu outlined seven ecofeminist liturgical principles intended to replace traditional patriarchal systems of worship that tend to subvert the roles of both women and nature:

1. Ecofeminist liturgies value women’s bodies and nature as holy vehicles of Divine revelation, and honor women and nature in all their diversity as imagining the Divine and as enjoying Divine activity.
2. Ecofeminist liturgies use symbols and stories, images and words, gestures and dances, along with a variety of art forms that reflect the interconnectivity of creation.
3. Ecofeminist liturgies use language that reflects the inherent goodness of women and the Earth.
4. Ecofeminist liturgies use music that identifies with the Earth community.
5. Ecofeminist liturgies are celebrated in environments that reflect the sacredness of the Earth.
6. Ecofeminist liturgies image the Divine as the source of life that sustains all creation.
7. Ecofeminist liturgies motivate participants to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community, to resist its oppressors, and to lament the violence and abuse that has been done to it.⁵⁷

Transformative Ecofeminism

Unlike nature ecofeminists and spiritual ecofeminists, transformative or social-constructionist ecofeminists sought to transform the nature-woman connection. They claimed that women's connection to nature is socially constructed and ideologically reinforced. Because this is so, women can help transform the meaning of their connection to both nature and culture.

Dorothy Dinnerstein

Western dichotomous thought, said Dorothy Dinnerstein, must be exploded if there is to be an end to the oppression of everyone and everything currently devalued. This explosion must begin with the deconstruction of the male-female dichotomy, for it is the fundamental source of “the silent hatred of Mother Earth which breathes side by side with our love for her, and which, like the hate we feel for our human mothers, poisons our attachment to life.”⁵⁸ Dinnerstein claimed that as a result of our nearly exclusively female practice of mothering, all infants (be they male or female) come to view women as responsible for both their most positive *and* their most negative feelings. At times, mothers meet their children's needs immediately and completely, totally satisfying and soothing their offspring. At other times, however, mothers fail to meet their children's needs, thereby discomforting, frustrating, or angering the children. As it is with mothers—that is, women—so it is with nature, the realm of reality with which women are identified. Mother Nature can bestow blessings on human beings, but she can also mete out harms and hardships to them: hurricanes, volcanoes, floods, fires, famines, disease, death. Thus, the only way for human beings—especially men, who do not bodily resemble the mother in the ways women do—to deal with “the mother” or “nature” is to seek to control her, to separate her from all that is male or identified as masculine, including culture.

Dinnerstein asserted, however, that the attempt to exclude women and nature from men and culture has caused us (she includes women as complicit in this psychopathological arrangement) not only to “*maim and exploit women, and stunt and deform men*” but also to proceed “*toward the final matricide—the rageful, greedy murder of the planet that spawned us.*”⁵⁹ Borrowing an idea from Lewis Mumford, she observed that most of us are firm believers in the “megamachine” myth. This myth espouses the view that human beings can use their mind and tools not only to extend control over nature and everything identified with nature—woman, the body, life, death, and so on—but also to make huge monetary profits in doing so. According to Dinnerstein, this myth will continue to rule our thoughts and actions unless we end the

present division of the world into male and female (culture and nature) and the assignments of women to nature (child-rearing as well as childbearing) and men to culture (world building). Women must bring nature into culture (by entering the public world), and men must bring culture into nature (by entering the private world). Then and only then will we see that men and women (culture and nature) are *one* and that it is counterproductive for half of reality to try to dominate the other half. A reality, divided and at war with itself, cannot and will not survive. Thus, Dinnerstein proclaimed, “The core meaning of feminism . . . lies, at this point, in its relations to earthly life’s survival.”⁶⁰ Unless men and women get their act together and start behaving like adults instead of infants, the human species can expect a rapid demise.

Karen J. Warren

Like Dinnerstein, Karen J. Warren emphasized that the dualisms threatening to destroy us are social constructions. In a capitalist, patriarchal society, women and nature, men and culture, have certain meanings, but these meanings are far from necessary. They would be very different in the kind of socialist, non-patriarchal society Marge Piercy posited in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, a work of fiction in which people rejected all dualisms, beginning with the male-female dichotomy (see Chapter 2). Persons are both masculine and feminine; society is both natural and cultural.⁶¹

Wanting very much to reconceptualize nature and culture as well as man and woman, Warren claimed feminists must be ecofeminists—without insisting, as Piercy did, that women must forsake their special role in biological reproduction.⁶² Warren argued that, *logically*, feminism is just as much a movement to end naturism as it is a movement to end sexism:

- (C1) Feminism is a movement to end sexism.
- (C2) But sexism is conceptually linked with naturism (through an oppressive conceptual framework characterized by a logic of domination).
- (C3) Thus, feminism is (also) a movement to end naturism.⁶³

All forms of oppression are interlocked and intertwined. Oppression is a many-headed beast that will continue to exist and regenerate itself until human beings manage *completely* to behead it.

Focusing on the kind of ethics currently informing environmentalism, Warren noted there are within it many sexist elements, or male biases, that undermine its ability to “save the earth.” Only an ecofeminist ethics—an ethics free of androcentric as well as anthropocentric distortions—can overcome naturism once and for all. Such an ethics, said Warren, must be a “care-sensitive ethics.”⁶⁴

In elaborating her preferred ecofeminist ethics, Warren claimed it had eight “necessary” or “boundary” conditions. First, an ecofeminist ethics is a theory-in-process that evolves together with people. Second, an ecofeminist ethics is entirely “opposed to any ‘ism’ that presupposes or advances a logic of domination.”⁶⁵ No thread of sexism, racism, classism, naturism, or other ism may be woven into the ecofeminist quilt. Third, and very important, an ecofeminist ethics is a contextualist ethics that invites people to narrate their relationships: to specify *how* they relate to humans, nonhuman animals, and nature. Fourth, if it is anything, said Warren, an ecofeminist ethics is an inclusivist ethics that acknowledges, respects, and welcomes difference. Unlike an exclusivist ethics, an inclusivist ethics is empirically unbiased; that is, it passes the “R-4 test” for *good* generalizations about different sorts of human beings, nonhuman animals, and nature.⁶⁶ By making sure that its empirical claims are based on data that is (1) representative, (2) random, (3) the right size, and (4) replicable, continued Warren, an inclusivist ethics avoids the biases that characterize an exclusivist ethics. Fifth, an ecofeminist ethics does not aim to be “objective,” even though, as we just noted, it does aim to be unbiased.⁶⁷ To be unbiased is not to be neutral. Rather, it is to be eager to incorporate all perspectives, particularly perspectives that might otherwise not get voiced, into its consciousness. Sixth, an ecofeminist ethics, according to Warren, views the values of care, love, friendship, and appropriate trust as the core values of all ethics. Seventh, an ecofeminist ethics aims to redefine both what it means to be a truly human person and what it means to make a decision ethically. Eighth, and most important, an ecofeminist ethics is not based on reason to the exclusion of emotion but on an *intelligence* that requires reason and emotion to work together and to be recognized as equally important in ethical decision making.⁶⁸

By working within the framework of the kind of ethics just described, claimed Warren, ecofeminists can learn to relate to nonhumans in ways that overcome the nature-culture split. In one example, intended to illustrate this type of overcoming, Warren contrasted rock climbers who climb to conquer mountains and rock climbers who climb to know mountains (and therefore themselves) in new ways. When an ecofeminist climbs a mountain, said Warren, the climber assumes he or she has a genuine *relationship* to it. The person’s concern is not in showing the mountain who is boss by conquering it but in becoming its friend, someone who cares about it. Thus, an ecofeminist does not look at the mountain with an “arrogant eye,” viewing it as a hunk of inert matter trying to exhaust, and thereby get the best of, her or him. Rather, an ecofeminist sees it with a “loving eye,” viewing it as a unique reality with much to tell the climber about his or her strengths and weaknesses.⁶⁹

In another example, Warren told the story of a young Sioux boy sent by his father to learn “the old Indian ways” from his grandfather. Among other things, the boy’s grandfather taught him how to hunt by instructing him

to shoot your four-legged brother in his hind area, slowing it down but not killing it. Then, take the four-legged’s head in your hands, and look into his eyes. The eyes are where all the suffering is. Look into your brother’s eyes and feel his pain. Then, take your knife and cut the four-legged under his chin, here, on his neck, so that he dies quickly. And as you do, ask your brother, the four-legged, for forgiveness for what you do. Offer also a prayer of thanks to your four-legged kin for offering his body to you just now, when you need food to eat and clothing to wear. And promise the four-legged that you will put yourself back into the earth when you die, to become nourishment for the earth, and for the sister flowers, and for the brother deer. It is appropriate that you should offer this blessing for the four-legged and, in due time, reciprocate in turn with your body in this way, as the four-legged gives life to you for your survival.⁷⁰

The lesson the Sioux grandfather taught his grandson about hunting is clearly far more ecofeminist (antinaturist and antisexist) than the lesson the typical “great white hunter” would teach his grandson about hunting for the fun or sport of it, for the pleasure of the kill. The Sioux hunting lesson is one that informs us how people whose conceptual schemes are not oppositional see themselves in *relationship* to nonhuman nature. Nevertheless, the Sioux hunting lesson is not fully ecofeminist, for it does not proceed from a gender analysis. Moreover, it arose in a culture that treats women as less than men’s equals. This last observation suggests, contrary to what Warren asserts, that even in a culture where women are no more identified with nature than men are, sexism might still exist.

According to Warren, we need a feminism more comprehensive than all other forms of feminism taken together. We need, she said, an entirely transformative feminism, a feminism that has six features.⁷¹ First, it recognizes and makes explicit the interconnections between all systems of oppression. Second, it stresses the diversity of women’s experiences, forsaking the search for “woman” and her unitary experience. Third, it rejects the logic of domination. Fourth, it rethinks what it means to be a human being, courageously reconsidering whether humans should view consciousness (and rationality) as not only that which distinguishes them from nonhumans but which somehow makes them better than nonhumans. Fifth, it relies on an ethic that stresses those traditional feminine virtues that tend to weave, interconnect,

and unite people. And sixth, it maintains that science and technology be used only to the extent they preserve the earth.⁷²

Given Warren's analysis of transformative feminism, it would seem to constitute a "thinking space" where men and women from all over the world can gather together to mix and match multiple feminist insights.

Global Ecofeminism

Among the ecofeminists who have adopted a global perspective are Maria Mies, a sociologist known for her work on development economics, and Vandana Shiva, a physicist known for her interests in spirituality. Mies and Shiva stressed that because women, more than men, are engaged in the work of sustaining daily life, women, more than men, are concerned about the elements: air, water, earth, fire. To be able to bear and rear healthy children and to provide their families with nourishing food, adequate clothing, and sturdy housing, women need fertile soil, lush plant life, fresh water, and clean air. In addition, Mies and Shiva lamented Western culture's obsession with the idea of "sameness"—the universal "I," the overarching "one." Capitalism and patriarchy, they observed, are systems that stamp out difference, doggedly cloning themselves, their ideas, and their salable goods wherever they go. Finally, like many Marxist and socialist feminists, Mies and Shiva observed how people in capitalist patriarchies tend to be alienated from everything: the products of their labor, nature, each other, and even themselves. As a result, human beings in capitalist patriarchies often engage in some fairly bizarre behavior to reduce their alienation.

In an essay entitled "White Man's Dilemma: His Search for What He Has Destroyed," Mies described in detail some of the mind-boggling ways all people, but particularly white men in capitalist patriarchies, aim to connect with nature—the very nature that their lifestyle and patterns of consumption threaten to destroy.⁷³ First, she said, the white man attempts to run away from the confines of his urban office "into 'Nature,' the 'wilderness,' the 'underdeveloped' countries of the South, to areas where the white man has not yet 'penetrated.'" Tourist agents in the developed countries promote excursions into undeveloped nations with trip descriptions such as the following one: "European tourists can live in villages in close contact with the 'natives' in African-style huts with minimum comfort, African food, no running water and where European and African children play together. The 'real' Africa to be touched!" Second, continued Mies, rather than trying to unite with the "mundane" nature right in his backyard, the white man seeks to experience a more "exotic" type of nature: nature as "colony, backward, exotic, distant and dangerous, the nature of Asia, Africa, South America."

Those who yearn for this kind of nature do not desire to relate to it productively by working on it or tending to it; rather, by absorbing it or consuming it—by locking it in the chambers of their cameras or by marketing it to others as souvenirs. Third, she says, the white man longs for yet another kind of nature, the space known as a woman's body. It, too, is wild terrain, the "dark continent," so the white man relates to a woman's body as he relates to nature: as object of his gaze, as commodity, as a form of play to liberate him, if only for a moment, from his relentless workday:

The growing sex-obsessing apparent in all industrial societies is . . . a direct consequence of alienation from nature, the absence of a sensual interacting with nature in people's work life. Sexuality is supposed to be the totally "other" from work: it should not interfere with work, but should be strictly separated from the work life. Sexuality is the "transcendence" of work, the "heaven" after the "valley of tears and sweat" of work, the real essence of leisure. . . . The tragedy is, however, that this "heaven" is also a commodity, to be bought like any other. And like the acquisition of other consumer goods, ultimately, it disappoints. . . . Therefore, the constantly disappointed striving to attain this "heaven" transforms need into an addiction.⁷⁴

Reflecting on Mies's comments, we may find it easy to view Mies and her coauthor, Shiva, as socialist-*transformative* ecofeminists. Shiva, as well as Mies, believed there are enough similarities among women to motivate women to work together against capitalist patriarchy and the destructive isms it spawns. As evidence that all women share similar interests in preserving nature, Mies and Shiva provided numerous examples of Third World and First World women struggling against ecological destruction and deterioration. Women, they noted, have led the battle to preserve the bases of life wherever and whenever military and industrial interests have threatened them.

Among the case studies Shiva presented to demonstrate why, for example, water, is an ecofeminist issue and not simply an ecological issue, is the 2002–2004 women's movement against a Coca-Cola plant in the small village of Plachimada, located in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Commissioned in March 2000, the plant was to produce over 1.2 million bottles of Coca-Cola products daily. The local government issued Coca-Cola a conditional license to install a motorized water pump. However, according to residents, the plant began extracting 1.5 million liters of water daily, causing water levels—initially 150 feet below the ground—to drop to a staggering 500 feet below ground. According to tribals and farmers, the sharp decrease in water was due in part to Coca-Cola's installing haphazardly placed bore wells to tap

ground water. The water shortage threatened crop cultivation, drinking water, and waterways. Additionally, what water Coca-Cola wasn't taking, it was polluting, dumping waste material outside the plant, which ran into wells, canals, and fields during the rainy season. Consequently, 260 publicly funded local wells became dry, and by 2003, Plachimada's district medical officer declared the local water unfit for drinking. Meanwhile, in April 2002, the women of Plachimada began a sit-in at the gates of the Coca-Cola plant, an act of nonviolent resistance that stretched into September 2003. In December 2003, the Kerala High Court supported the women's demands and ordered Coca-Cola to stop thieving the local water, stating: "The public trust doctrine primarily rests on the principle that certain resources like air, sea, waters, and the forests have such a great importance to the people as a whole that it would be wholly unjustified to make them a subject of private ownership. The said resources being a gift of nature, they should be made freely available to everyone, irrespective of their status in life."⁷⁵ By January 2004, the women of Plachimada had attracted the attention of global activists who arrived in solidarity with the World Water Conference. Ultimately, in February 2004, Kerala's chief minister ordered the closure of the Coca-Cola plant, due to pressure from the burgeoning antihydropiracy movement and the worsening drought crisis. The movement of women against the Coca-Cola plant's water theft and pollution was less about environmental aesthetics or corporate politics and much more about preserving the holistic health of the community by living simply, with respect for the earth, and faulting a business that was taking far more than its fair share of natural resources. The feminist ethics of care, interconnectedness, and sharing resources had prevailed for the citizens of Plachimada.⁷⁶

If life is a theme for socialist-transformative ecofeminists, so, too, is freedom. The freedom to which Mies and Shiva referred is not the kind of Marxist freedom that requires man to master nature and therefore woman's body. Rather, it is the kind of freedom that asks all of us to recognize and accept our naturalness, our physicality and materiality, our carnality and mortality. Because nature is an exhaustible good, we must learn to conserve it by living as simply as possible and by consuming as little as possible. If we care about our descendants' lives, we must develop a so-called subsistence perspective.

It is not surprising that Mies and Shiva proposed a subsistence perspective as the key to dissolving all the practices and systems that threaten to destroy the earth. These women are, after all, *socialist*-transformative ecofeminists for whom transformation must be material as well as spiritual. Mies claimed people in capitalist patriarchies need to take ten steps if they are serious about developing a subsistence lifestyle:

1. People should produce only enough to satisfy fundamental human *needs*, resisting the urge to produce “an ever-growing mountain of commodities and money (wages or profit)” in a futile attempt to still people’s endless and insatiable wants.
2. People should use only as much of nature as they need to, treating it as a reality with “her own subjectivity”; and people should use each other not to make money but to create communities capable of meeting people’s fundamental needs, especially their need for intimacy.
3. People should replace representative democracy with participatory democracy so each man and woman has the opportunity to express his or her concerns to everyone else.
4. People should develop “multidimensional or synergic” problem-solving approaches, since the problems of contemporary society are interrelated.
5. People should combine contemporary science, technologies, and knowledge with ancient wisdom, traditions, and even magic.
6. People should break down the boundaries between work and play, the sciences and the arts, spirit and matter.
7. People should view water, air, earth, and all natural resources as community goods rather than as private possessions.
8. Men as well as women should adopt the socialist-transformative ecofeminist view, the subsistence perspective. Specifically, men must stop focusing on making as much money as possible and focus instead on making their families as loving as possible.
9. Men as well as women should cultivate traditional feminine virtues (caring, compassion, nurturance) and engage in subsistence production, for “only a society based on a subsistence perspective can afford to live in peace with nature, and uphold peace between nations, generations and men and women.”
10. Most important, people should realize that in order for each person to have enough, no person can “have it all.”⁷⁷

Kamla Bhasin, an Indian feminist, captured the essences of the “sustainable development” model well:

The standard of living of the North’s affluent societies cannot be generalized. This was already clear to Mahatma Gandhi 60 years ago, who, when asked by a British journalist whether he would like India to have the same standard of living as Britain, replied: “To have its standard of living a tiny country like Britain had to exploit half the globe. How many globes will India need to exploit to have the same standard of living?” From an ecological

and feminist perspective, moreover, even if there were more globes to be exploited, it is not even desirable that this development paradigm and standard of living was generalized, because it has failed to fulfill its promises of happiness, freedom, dignity and peace, even for those who have profited from it.⁷⁸

Vegetarian Ecofeminism

Although the relationship between vegetarianism and ecofeminism has been mentioned earlier, this relationship deserves more consideration not only because of the large role that animals play in nature, but also because of the amount of suffering and pain inflicted upon animals worldwide. According to Carol Adams, “From the leather in our shoes, the soap we use to cleanse our face, the down in the comforter, the meat we eat, and the dairy products we rely on, our world as we now know it is structures around a dependence on the death of the other animals.”⁷⁹ Many ecofeminists are vegetarians or vegans. Vegetarians do not eat meat but use animal by-products. For vegans, the abstention from animal flesh is insufficient, because animals used for by-products are also reduced to their instrumental value and are subjects of extreme suffering within, for example, dairy farms, egg hatcheries, and experimentation laboratories. Vegetarian and vegan ecofeminists tend not to be absolutist in their moral stances; rather, they are often contextual moral vegetarians, as opposed to universal moral vegetarians.⁸⁰ In general, contextual moral vegetarians concede that there are societies in which using animal flesh or bodily products is necessary for human survival. One of these societies may be the Native American tribe Karen Warren described, which could not survive unless it hunted. Such societies are exceptional, however. According to many contextual vegetarian feminists, eating meat or even eggs or dairy products is not necessary for survival for most people living in developed societies. On the contrary, developed societies have readily available a surplus of economic protein and calcium options, such as beans, whole grains, nut milks, and soy-based cheese and meat alternatives, as well as a variety of synthetic materials for clothing and other commodity needs.

According to Grace Kao, there are three sorts of criteria that vegetarian ecofeminists use to make their case for contextual moral vegetarianism. The first is based on the “moral standing of animals”; the second, on an “ethics of care” toward animals; and the third, on “the larger sociopolitical context of contemporary meat production and consumption.”⁸¹

Two philosophers who have taken the moral standing of animals seriously are Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*, 1975)⁸² and Tom Regan (*The Case for An-*

imal Rights, 1983).⁸³ According to Singer, utilitarianism demands that the interests of each sentient being (that is, any being able to feel pleasure and pain) must be taken into account in moral decision-making. Reasoning in a different way, Regan posits that the reason we must reject and certainly not kill a sentient being is that the being has the capacity and/or actuality of some form of thinking, calculating, reasoning, and consciousness. Because most nonhuman animals—especially large mammals, such as whales, dolphins, elephants, and great apes—seem self-aware and to have the ability to engage in some form of thinking and communication, human beings must not violate these animals' most basic rights by abusing or killing them. When critics protest that the interests of nonhuman animals are not as important as human beings' interests or that the kind of thinking nonhuman animals engage in is not as advanced as human thought, Singer and Regan proclaim these critics "speciests," unfairly biased toward members of their own species.

Vegetarian ecofeminists are not entirely happy with Singer's and Regan's arguments on behalf of animals' interests, owing to what they see as Singer's and Regan's "sole reliance on reason and their exclusion of emotion."⁸⁴ They stress the importance of sympathy for nonhuman animals, which are to be viewed as individuals with the capacity to feel. Although some feminists may be persuaded to become vegetarian ecofeminists through rationalization alone, many come to vegetarian ecofeminism because they have an intolerance for animal suffering.⁸⁵

An "ethics of care" toward animals is an extension of the sympathy argument in favor of vegetarian ecofeminism, according to Kao.⁸⁶ A good way to understand Kao's point here is to reflect on how much some people care about their pet dogs and cats. Many people view their pets as members of the family: They feed them, enjoy recreation with them, tend to their health-care needs, and suffer immense distress upon the death of an animal companion. Moreover, most people cringe at animal cruelty if it involves dogs, cats, horses, great apes, dolphins, or other large, culturally familiar animals. So, the argument goes, if we can and should sympathize with a beaten and starved dog, then why can't we or shouldn't we sympathize with a hen stuffed into a battery cage (unable to spread her wings or enjoy the sunlight), or a beaten and sickly piglet lying forgotten on the concrete floor of a factory farm? It is worth considering that something like Carol Adam's "absent referent" must be at work.⁸⁷ Adams explained,

We live in a culture that has institutionalized the oppression of animals on at least two levels: in formal structures such as slaughterhouses, meat markets, zoos, laboratories, and circuses, and through our language. That

we refer to meat eating rather than to corpse eating is a central example of how our language transmits the dominant culture's approval of this activity.⁸⁸

When we are singing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" or reading *Charlotte's Web*, we block from our consciousness the individual pigs, cows, chickens, lambs, and so forth, that wind up as so-called meat on our platters. These animals are "absent referents." On this view, the term *meat* hides from us the fact that we are eating a cow or pig we saw last week in a feed lot. If we focus on the individual animal, we become conscious that we are eating a sentient being and not an object. Within the larger sociopolitical context of using animals for food are found two primary concerns: environmental denigration and the impact on human health. Vegetarian ecofeminists find allies in environmentalists because breeding, raising, and slaughtering herds of animals contributes to extreme natural resource depletion. Marti Kheel, author of *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, elaborated:

The livestock industry is "one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global. . . . The impact is so significant that it needs to be addressed with urgency."⁸⁹

In other words, for Kheel, the environmental cost of producing and consuming animal products is threatening to the entire natural world that perpetuates a culture of oppression that devalues all life. Vegetarian ecofeminists also find allies in holistic health advocates, believing that meat- and dairy-based products contribute to a variety of ailments, including heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and cancer. According to T. Colin Campbell, author of *The China Study*, for example, "the more animal protein you eat, the more heart disease you have," and likewise, the higher your cholesterol levels.⁹⁰ Campbell also points out that vegetarians and vegans are generally "five to thirty pounds slimmer than their fellow citizens," suggesting that a plant-based whole foods diet helps combat obesity.⁹¹ Similarly, both type 1 and type 2 diabetics have shown dramatic improvements in managing and/or reversing their disease when placed on a plant-based diet.⁹² Concerning cancer, according to a 2001 Harvard report on prostate cancer research, dairy intake is "one of the most consistent predictors for prostate cancer in the published literature";⁹³ and increased consumption of animal protein is linked to both breast cancer⁹⁴ and colon cancer.⁹⁵ These facts suggest to vegetarian ecofeminists that a society in which eating animal products is taken for granted

is a society in which our bodies are suffering. Martha Nussbaum has developed perhaps one of the most compelling and robust theoretical strategies in support of vegetarian ecofeminism. Calling animals “beings entitled to a dignified existence,” Nussbaum writes:

Dignified existence would seem at least to include the following: adequate opportunities for nutrition and physical activity; freedom from pain, squalor, and cruelty; freedom to act in ways that are characteristic of the species (rather than to be confined); freedom from fear and opportunities for rewarding interactions with other creatures of the same species and of different species; a chance to enjoy the light and air in tranquility.⁹⁶

Nussbaum suggests the “capabilities approach” she developed in the 1980s with economist Amartya Sen—though initially established for human application—is better suited to address the question of the ethical treatment of animals than is either utilitarianism (e.g., the interests-based approach taken by Singer) or contractarianism (e.g., the rights-based approach taken by Regan). For many vegetarian ecofeminists, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach has the added feature of avoiding the anthropocentric tone of most approaches to establishing the moral considerability of animals. For Nussbaum, each animal entity is worthy of moral consideration in itself, and as such, its similarity to the human species is irrelevant. Moreover, for vegetarian and vegan ecofeminists, a political focus on animal capabilities and resulting human responsibilities for care could be the nudge needed to eventually liberate animals from human oppression. Because vegetarian ecofeminists believe all forms of oppression are linked, for these feminists, movement away from an anthropocentric society that subjugates nonhuman species is also a move away from a society that subjugates all.

Critiques of Ecofeminism

Critiques of Nature Ecofeminism

The critiques raised against nature ecofeminism are similar to those raised against radical-cultural feminism. In the estimation of Janet Biehl, nature ecofeminists err when they “biologize women as presumably uniquely ecological beings” who are able to relate to and understand nature in ways men simply cannot, and who are caring and nurturing in ways men, try as they might, can never be.⁹⁷ There is, says Biehl, too much willingness among nature ecofeminists either to reduce women into mere bodies or to limit women’s

potentialities and abilities to those associated with their supposedly “caring nature.” As Biehl sees it, nature ecofeminism is reactionary rather than revolutionary. Quoting Simone de Beauvoir, from whom many nature ecofeminists borrow their basic concept of women’s and nature’s otherness, Biehl stresses that women celebrate the nature-woman connection at their own peril, for “that’s the formula used to try and keep women quiet.”⁹⁸ Biehl insists that nature ecofeminists, such as Mary Daly, misled women by suggesting women can by fiat “reclaim” the meaning of the nature-woman connection as an entirely positive one. In reality, Biehl points out, the nature-woman connection has been “enormously debasing to women,” and centuries of negative cultural baggage cannot be cast off by passionate “reclaiming” alone.⁹⁹

Critiques of Spiritual Ecofeminism

Critics fault spiritual ecofeminists for substituting religion for politics and for spending too much time dancing in the moonlight, casting “magic” spells, chanting mantras, doing yoga, “mindfully” meditating, and giving one another massages. Defenders of spiritual ecofeminism concede that some spiritual ecofeminists might have mistaken New Age or “spa” spirituality for genuine ecofeminist spirituality, but they insist such mistakes are the exception, not the rule. Goddess worship is not, according to Mies and Shiva, “luxury spirituality,” “the idealist icing on top of the material cake of the West’s standard of living.”¹⁰⁰ It is not about turning the East’s spiritual and cultural treasures into commodities for sale as exotica to privileged and pampered Western people who lack “meaning.” Rather, Goddess worship is an attempt to break the culturally constructed dichotomy between spirituality and materiality and to recognize everything and everyone as worthy and deserving of respect. Spiritual ecofeminists, observes Ynestra King, are not otherworldly dreamers; they are this-worldly activists. Spiritual ecofeminists use such “community-building techniques” as performance art, kinesthetic observations (dancing and chanting), and ritual to enable people “to establish and maintain community with one another in contentious and difficult situations of political engagement in the public world.”¹⁰¹ Some spiritual ecofeminists may indeed choose to restrict their political activities to their local communities, insisting “theirs is the politics of everyday life, the transformation of fundamental relationships, even if that takes place only in small communities.”¹⁰² They claim so-called everyday politics is “much more effective than countering the power games of men with similar games.”¹⁰³ But just because some spiritual ecofeminists refuse to play power games with men does not mean these feminists should be dismissed as crystal gazers. Not everyone who cares about the earth and works to safeguard it needs to move to the Women’s Peace

Camp at Greenham Commons in England; there is work to be done in one's own backyard as well as in faraway places.

Critiques of Transformative Ecofeminism

Social-constructionist ecofeminists deny that women are naturally caring and nurturing. Instead they claim that women's feminine characteristics are the products of enculturation or socialization. For example, Carolyn Merchant repeatedly emphasizes that "any analysis that times women's supposed special qualities to a biological destiny thwarts the possibility of liberation. A politics grounded in women's culture, experience, and values can be seen as reactionary."¹⁰⁴ Women are no more "natural" than they are "cultural." But critics of social-constructionist ecofeminism point out that it may be a mistake to delink women and nature.

Deemphasizing the connections between women's and nature's life-giving capacities may, these critics say, "somewhat diminish the original ecofeminist passion to reclaim 'nature' in an organic sense—certainly when it comes to women's biology."¹⁰⁵ They further claim that an ecofeminism grounded in women's traditional feminine virtues, maternal roles, and special relationship to nature need not be "reactionary." Such an ecofeminism can be "revolutionary"; it can motivate women to get engaged in political action. For example, Ynestra King, a critic of cultural (nature) ecofeminism, notes that throughout her entire pregnancy, she kept thinking that in the time it took her to gestate one precious human being, eight thousand children in the Persian Gulf had starved to death or died of causes directly attributable to the weapons used by US forces during the Gulf War of 1990–1991. Overwhelmed by this thought, she realized that "thinking like an ecofeminist" requires one to make "abstract connections concrete."¹⁰⁶

Although they find the perspective of all transformative ecofeminists compelling, critics suspect its demands are too challenging for relatively affluent people to accept. In particular, the critics think the degree of activism and lifestyle change that transformative-socialist ecofeminism requires are commitments that comfortable and complacent citizens are unlikely to embrace. Most people, including most feminists, do not want to radically change the way they live. For example, they do not want to become "card-carrying" vegetarians or pacifists.

In response to this objection, some socialist and transformative ecofeminists simply comment that people's reluctance to make lifestyle changes is not a moral justification for their not doing so. Altruism requires a certain measure of self-sacrifice. Other socialist and transformative ecofeminists soften this response by conceding that moral progress is often incremental. Even if a

person is not willing to forsake eating meat altogether, for example, he or she can at least refuse to eat animals that have been factory-farmed or grown under extremely cruel conditions.

Likewise, even if a person is not willing to devote the bulk of his or her time working for environmental causes or feels overwhelmed by them, there is *always* some positive difference, however small, he or she can make. According to Judith Auerbach, Doretta Zemp, creator of the satirical comic strip *Roseanna of the Planet*, commented:

Too often the environmental issues are bigger than we are, and we feel helpless in the face of their enormity, such as the greenhouse effect, the rape of the rain forests, and the Bhopal pesticide leak, which killed 2,500 people and permanently injured 17,000 more. What can we do about that? But Roseanna, my character, is down to our size. She and her best friend, stuffy old Egmont, wax in passion over concerns that are on our scale: chemicals in the home, neighborhood pollution, and the malathion spraying against our will. They disagree on everything except where to go for solutions. He uses ivory tower rhetoric and blind faith. I see Roseanna as every woman, and I see Egmont as exemplifying conventional wisdom, government, and big business.¹⁰⁷

While Egmont stands idly by, trusting that Big Brother will save everyone from environmental doom, Roseanna is busy throwing out the ozone-damaging deodorants in her bathroom, the poisonous bug sprays under her kitchen sink, and the herbicide-laden cosmetics on her bureau. Seemingly, there is always something one can do.

Finally, even if a person is not a pacifist, he or she can be antimilitary. To be opposed to the waging of wars—the intention of which is domination by means of destruction of life—is not the same as being opposed to participating in any act of violence whatsoever. Self-defense and wars waged for the purpose of liberating oneself and one's people from the forces of death are not incompatible with socialist and transformative ecofeminist ideals. To be sure, socialist and transformative ecofeminists will try to resolve conflicts creatively (e.g., nonviolently) and peacefully (e.g., through rational destruction). But when they realize their voices will not be heard and the destruction of everything and everyone (especially their children) precious to them will continue, even the most peaceful ecofeminists will fight for *life*.

Critiques of Global Ecofeminism

Critics of global ecofeminism, such as Janet Biehl, find the counterposition of women and nature (on the one hand) against Western culture at large (on

the other hand) regressive for the interests of women. Of particular concern for these critics are: (1) the association of the feminine with the irrational; (2) the location of Western women outside of the purview of Western culture; (3) the implied assertion that women have a dominant role in developing a sensibility of “caring” and “nurturing”; and that (4) women are unique in their ability to appreciate humanity’s “interconnectedness” with the natural world.¹⁰⁸ Also of concern for these critics is what they see as the lack of consistency in global ecofeminist theorizing:

Some assert that “All is One,” while others argue for particularism and multiplicity. Some are influenced by social ecology, while others have ties with deep ecology. Some regard ecofeminism as a liberatory concept of nearly unprecedented proportions, while others . . . reject the name “ecofeminism” altogether as insulting to feminist activists.¹⁰⁹

Even more disturbing for these critics is the way, as they see it, global ecofeminism tends to “celebrate the identification of women with nature as an ontological reality.”¹¹⁰

[Global ecofeminists] thereby speciously biologize the personality traits that patricentric society assigns to women. The implication of this position is to confine women to the same regressive social definitions from which feminists have fought long and hard to emancipate women.”¹¹¹

Most “embarrassing” about global ecofeminism, say these critics, is that

[its] sweeping but highly confused cosmology introduces magic, goddesses, witchcraft, privileged quasi-biological traits, irrationalities, Neolithic atavisms, and mysticism into a movement that once tried to gain the best benefits of the Enlightenment and the most valuable features of [Western] civilization for women.¹¹²

Critiques of Vegetarian Ecofeminism

Most vegetarian ecofeminists are contextual moral vegetarians, as opposed to universal moral vegetarians. Contextual moral vegetarians concede there may be some exceptions to the rule of not using or killing animals for various products, while universal moral vegetarians believe animals should never be utilized as a mere means to an end. According to Karen Warren, however, animal welfarists are at fault for exalting animals “to the status of full-fledged members of the moral club to which humans belong,” challenging the traditionally accepted

ethical hierarchy.¹¹³ Some feminists may also find that comparing the plight of animals to that of women serves to both degrade and distract from women's interests. For these critics, women's rights should not be linked to the rights of nonhuman species, because so doing suggests a demeaning commonality with so-called lower species. Additionally, animal welfarists elevate sentient individuals (humans and animals) "over and against the rest of nature," while the "ecological 'wholes' (e.g., populations, communities, species, and ecosystems) are inappropriately omitted from moral consideration."¹¹⁴ In other words, Warren says animals and humans are viewed without any "historical, social, and material contexts and independent of any relationships to other moral subjects."¹¹⁵ Likewise, Warren says that universal moral vegetarianism is problematic because it rests upon a "male physiological norm" that presupposes everyone can easily and safely abstain from animal products, when in fact some populations would find the lifestyle quite challenging (e.g., "some infants, children, adolescents, gestating and lactating women, Inuit, [and] primal peoples").¹¹⁶ While some universal moral vegetarians may bring examples to refute Warren's claims that vegetarianism isn't possible for everybody, this particular criticism sheds light on why many vegetarian ecofeminists are not absolutist. Feminist ethicists of care advise empathy with those in all walks of life. Ultimately, Warren suggests that universal moral vegetarianism is guilty of perpetuating "moral arrogance," which ultimately raises the philosophical distinction between "a value judgment" and "being judgmental" of nonsimilarly situated persons.¹¹⁷

Marti Kheel says there are three common theoretical challenges to absolutist vegetarian ecofeminism: "(1) cultural practices, (2) predation within ecology, and (3) concern for the suffering of plants."¹¹⁸ Concerning culture (and related to Warren's comments on judgmentalism), Kheel explains that dietary choices are intensely personal, and meat-eating is often accepted "when it is embedded in cultural traditions and conducted with 'respect,'" suggesting that to condemn meat-eating could be "disrespectful of other cultures and may even smack of racism."¹¹⁹ Yet Kheel notes that just because an act is "tradition" does not mean that the act is above moral judgment.¹²⁰

Other critics of absolutist vegetarian ecofeminism contend that "meat eating is a *natural* [emphasis hers] predatory activity that is fully consistent with ecology."¹²¹ In other words, they believe humans are simply part of a natural food chain and need animal protein to sustain themselves (similar again to Warren's comments that some people are physically unable to exist without animal protein). Absolutist vegetarian ecofeminists respond that the "need" for animal products has been addressed by the availability of inexpensive protein alternatives. Critics reply, however, that this need has only been addressed in Western nations, leaving the rest of the world without the protein that meat provides and that is required for a healthy diet.

The final theoretical challenge to absolutist vegetarian ecofeminism, according to Kheel, is the potential suffering of plants when used for food or other products. Kheel responds that it is the language of “rights.”

Although it is also tempting to invoke the language of “rights” or concepts such as “inherent value” or “inherent worth” to defend other-than-human animals, these constructs bring one group of beings into the orbit of moral concern by excluding the rest of nature. Animal advocates, for example, routinely invoke the “rights” of “sentient” or “self-conscious” animals, but few argue for the rights of rivers, mountains, and streams. The notion of rights, thus, places a conceptual wedge between the concerns of animal rights proponents and environmentalists.¹²²

According to Kheel, such theories as Nussbaum’s capability approach may help solve this problem, in that they recognize that different parts of nature have different “needs,” which means humans should strive to respect the needs we empathetically are best able to determine as relevant.¹²³ In being citizens on a planet with finite resources, we will inevitably effectuate some sort of harm to enable us to survive, by utilizing limited supplies of water, soil, clean air, and calories for survival. But according to Kheel, vegans can “find comfort in knowing that [their] diet helps to reduce suffering, since far fewer plants are required to feed a person on a vegan diet than one who eats animal-based foods.”¹²⁴

Conclusion

No matter the differences that exist between social-constructionist and nature ecofeminists or between socialist and spiritual ecofeminists, all ecofeminists believe human beings are connected to the nonhuman world: animal, plant, and inert. Unfortunately, we do not always acknowledge our relationship to the nonhuman world. As a result, we do violence to one another and to nature, congratulating ourselves on protecting our self-interests. In reality, each day, we kill ourselves by laying waste to the earth from which we originate and to which we will return.

Given the state of human affairs just described, ecofeminists wonder what it will take for the majority of human beings to realize how irrational as well as unfeeling human systems of oppression and domination are. These systems bring in their wake hate, anger, destruction, and death, yet we cling to our social constructs. Is the solution to this pathological state of affairs to create a culture in which we honor women and nature as some sort of saviors? Or is it instead to follow Dinnerstein’s instructions and insist that men and women alike assume

equal responsibility for both child-rearing and world building? What will it take for us to stop thinking dichotomously and to realize we are our own worst enemies? Are we wasting time waiting for the saving grace of some Godot when we should instead be using our own heads and hearts to stop destroying what we in fact are: an interdependent whole, a unity that exists in and through, and not despite, its diversity? Ecofeminists, especially transformative-socialist ecofeminists, and vegetarian/vegan ecofeminists, have already made their decision. They stopped waiting for the revolution, the transformation, the miracle to happen a long time ago. They are busy at work (and play), doing what they can to eliminate the blights that brown the earth and kill the human spirit.¹²⁵ The question remains, however, whether the rest of us are set to join them. Hopefully, this new millennium will bring the right answer.

Questions for Discussion

1. How has religion contributed to an oppressive culture for both women and nature? Is it correct to posit that oppression is not necessarily embedded within religion, but the result of a selfish misinterpretation of religious texts? Provide examples in which both women and nature are devalued, and consider under what religious reasoning such devaluation occurred.
2. Do you believe women can be liberated without simultaneously liberating nature? Or do you believe there is a larger culture of oppression that must be toppled so as to emancipate all within the grip of injustice?
3. Reflect on connections among the commodification of women, the “sexual politics of meat,” and “earth pornography.” Consider examples from advertising, entertainment, and recreation. How does the “pornographic mind” convey that women, animals, and nature are only useful in so far as they are useful to man, and to culture writ large?
4. In what ways does Warren’s suggestion to erase the nature-culture dichotomy work to liberate both women and men, as well as animals and nature? How does inclusivist ethics provide a voice to the historically voiceless among us (both sentient and nonsentient)?
5. Compare and contrast subsistence cultures with capitalist patriarchies. What steps could Western society begin taking to move toward the subsistence perspective?
6. Are ecofeminists (and feminists, for that matter) morally obligated to adopt some form of vegetarian lifestyle? Why or why not?