

CHAPTER I

Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature

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Theory—the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees—theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth.

ADRIENNE RICH

“Notes Toward a Politics of Location”

Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labor movements, women's health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements. Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and various other nondominant groups—a self that is interconnected with all life.¹

In their analyses of oppression, socialists, animal liberationists, ecologists, and feminists each distinguish between privileged and oppressed groups, where the privileged are upper- or middle-class, human, technologically and industrially “developed,” male, and the oppressed are poor or working-class, nonhuman animal, “undeveloped” nature, and female,

respectively. Ecofeminism describes the framework that authorizes these forms of oppression as patriarchy, an ideology whose fundamental self/other distinction is based on a sense of self that is separate, atomistic.

As Nancy Chodorow's and Carol Gilligan's studies have repeatedly shown, a sense of self as separate is more common in men, while an interconnected sense of self is more common in women.² These conceptions of self are also the foundation for two different ethical systems: the separate self often operates on the basis of an ethic of rights or justice, while the interconnected self makes moral decisions on the basis of an ethic of responsibilities or care. Whether these self-conceptions and affiliated ethical systems are innate or culturally learned is uncertain. Gilligan has noted that while both sexes have the ability to access both types of moral reasoning, the "focus" phenomenon is particularly gender-based: that is, men tend to focus on rights, whereas women tend to focus on responsibilities. What is certain is that a failure to recognize connections can lead to violence, and a disconnected sense of self is most assuredly at the root of the current ecological crisis (not to mention being the root cause of all oppression, which is based on difference).³

It is now common knowledge that rights-based ethics (most characteristic of dominant-culture men, although women may share this view as well) evolve from a sense of self as separate, existing within a society of individuals who must be protected from each other in competing for scarce resources. In contrast, Gilligan describes a different approach, more common to women, in which "the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules."⁴ Similarly, Karen Warren's "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic" describes eight boundary conditions of a feminist ethic; that is, conditions within which ethical decision making may be seen as feminist. These conditions include coherence within a given historical and conceptual framework, an understanding of feminism as striving to end all systems of oppression, a pluralistic structure, and an inclusive and contextual framework that values and emphasizes humans in relationships, denies abstract individualism, and provides a guide to action.⁵ The analyses of Gilligan and Warren indicate that ecofeminism, which asserts the fundamental interconnectedness of all life, offers an ap-

propriate foundation for an ecological ethical theory for women and men who do not operate on the basis of a self/other disjunction.

In brief, this psychological—and political—construction of the self and the associated ethical system explains why ecofeminists do not find their concerns fully addressed in other branches of the environmental movement. Though some may agree with social ecologists, for example, that the root cause of all oppression is hierarchy, ecofeminists tend to believe hierarchy takes place as a result of the self/other opposition.

Ecofeminists' interconnected sense of self requires us to create a theory that will provide, as fully as possible, an inclusive and global analysis of oppression. To do this, theorists must meet with activists to exchange information and to create political strategy; ideally, theorists must also be activists, thereby enacting the goal of ecofeminist praxis. A meeting of theorists and activists concerned about the fate of women and the earth, the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, took place on November 9-12, 1991. In Miami, Florida, over a thousand women from around the world gathered to create a women's action agenda for presentation at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Throughout the conference, a number of topics reappeared which are of concern within ecofeminism. These included population, global economics, Third World debt, the ideology of development, environmental destruction, world hunger, reproductive choice, homelessness, militarism, and political strategies for creating change globally.

From many respected speakers, the message was the same: the earth is at a turning point, and women's efforts are critical at this time. "Things will not just happen," Wangari Maathai told participants. "Women must make things happen." "It is up to us," said Vandana Shiva, "and not to the heads of state in Rio." One of the participants in Marilyn Waring's workshop on global economics spoke most eloquently. "What you're signing on for here," she said, "if you really care about the issues of this world, is a life sentence. The capacity to weep and then do something is worth everything. We want to remember that emotions are things we value. Creating change globally—this is not something you can do in your spare time. We all have to live it."

In 1983 the first collection of essays on ecofeminism appeared: *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, edited by Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland and published by the Women's Press in London. In this collection, the "Eco-feminist Imperative" was first defined by Ynestra King, and the following chapters described ecofeminism as a theory and

practice whose various manifestations included anti-nuclear activism, the international women's health movement, women and land rights, women and world hunger. The collection included the Unity Statement of the Women's Pentagon Action, U.S.A., a document adopted by the original organizers of the largest all-woman protests since 1968.⁶ Wangari Maathai described the work of women in Kenya, whose struggle against deforestation is intimately connected to their own survival; Anita Anand described the Chipko movement in India. From the first collection, then, ecofeminism has addressed issues of global concern.

Following Caldecott and Leland, Judith Plant's *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (New Society) appeared in 1989; Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein's *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (Sierra Club Books), in 1990. Plant's collection addresses four aspects of ecofeminism: theory, politics, spirituality, and community. Topics in Diamond and Orenstein's collection fall into the categories of history/mystery, politics and ethics, and political activism. Ecofeminist ethics in relation to animals is either marginalized or entirely neglected in both books, but is addressed more fully in Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci's *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence Against Animals and the Earth* (1989), and the relation between the oppression of women and that of animals is developed in Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990). Finally, the Spring 1991 issue of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, which was devoted to "Ecological Feminism," included essays on ecofeminism's relation to animal liberation, deep ecology, literary practice, environmentalism, and grassroots politics, as well as the relationship between self and nature.

Other texts are devoted exclusively to the relationship of ecofeminism, Third World women, and international "development." Among them are Gita Sen and Caren Grown's *Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*, published by the Monthly Review Press in 1987, and Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, published by Zed Books in 1988. Certain presses, such as Zed Books and Westview, along with ISIS International, have devoted much energy to publishing books on women in development, a topic that is integral to ecofeminism.⁷

Ecofeminists have described a number of connections between the oppressions of women and of nature that are significant to understanding why the environment is a feminist issue, and, conversely, why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns.⁸ For example,

the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind. One task of ecofeminists has been to expose these dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth.

Another connection between feminism, animal liberation, and environmentalism has been made by documenting the effects of environmental pollution and degradation on the lives of women and animals. Many writers note that toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and other pollutants take their first toll on women, women's reproductive systems, and children.⁹ These hazardous chemicals are often initially tested on laboratory animals to determine levels of toxicity; this practice, together with the enormous environmental costs of factory farming and meat eating, demonstrate the linkages between environmental degradation and the oppression of nonhuman animals (speciesism). The racism and classism inherent in First World development strategies, built on one ethic for economic production at "home" but another ethic for the Third World, have resulted in tremendous hardships for women, who are frequently the major providers of food, fuel, and water in developing countries.¹⁰ By documenting the poor quality of life for women, children, people in the Third World, animals, and the environment, ecofeminists are able to demonstrate that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. Instead of being a "single-issue" movement, ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously. It is for this reason that I see coalition-building strategies as critical to our success. For if one thing is certain, it is that women alone cannot "save the earth"—we need the efforts of men as well.

What has kept ecofeminists from joining wholeheartedly with environmentalists thus far is a fear of the ecological "melting pot." Repeatedly, women who join men in progressive movements have been silenced or relegated to traditionally feminine, supportive roles—as noted by the co-founder of Feminists for Animal Rights, Marti Kheel. A movement that sees the concerns of women—or any oppressed group—as something "extra" to be "integrated" cannot hope to enlist our energies or address our needs. Until their analyses take all forms of oppression into account,

building coalitions between environmental and social activist groups may be the best way to ensure full representation while maintaining diversity.

Within ecofeminist theory, the place of animals must be addressed. In *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, Janet Biehl charges that while ecofeminists celebrate a plurality of voices and viewpoints in both the formal presentation of the theory (collections rather than single-author texts) and in the voices of the theorists themselves, ecofeminism remains “self-contradictory”: “Ecofeminists who even acknowledge the existence of serious contradictions,” writes Biehl, “tend to pride themselves on the contradictions in their works as a healthy sign of ‘diversity’—presumably in contrast to ‘dogmatic,’ fairly consistent, and presumably ‘male’ or ‘masculine’ theories.”¹¹ Biehl discredits ecofeminism based on what she perceives as its theoretical inconsistencies. And in regard to vegetarianism, she is right: in the three anthologies published at the time of this writing, ecofeminism has failed to locate animals as central to any discussion of ethics involving women and nature.¹² Some theorists, most notably Marti Kheel and Carol Adams, have taken this issue as their special concern, while others dismiss it entirely. Addressing the centrality of all life on earth—which includes all animal species—has been the motivating force for this present collection.

The contributors to this volume reject the nature/culture dualism of patriarchal thought, and locate animals and humans within nature. In essence, this shift involves reconceptualizing the framework of ecofeminism. We are attempting to enter into dialogue with other ecofeminists, building on or challenging this theory as it develops.

The two chapters that follow provide an introduction to ecofeminist theory that places humans and animals within a wider conception of nature. Chapter 2, “Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice,” by Janis Birke-land, analyzes the conflict between green politics and ecofeminism. Green philosophy is predicated on the belief that fundamental social transformation is necessary. What appears to be the mainstream in green philosophy holds that anthropocentrism is the root of our social and environmental problems. Ecofeminism, in contrast, views anthropocentrism as a symptom of a much deeper problem: androcentrism. Changing our anthropocentric way of experiencing the world will not exorcise the underlying pathology, our power-based morality or “patriarchy.” An ecofeminist paradigm has the potential to help us see and redress the historical split between experiential/individual and critical/institutional approaches in environmental theory.

“Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between

Women and Animals” by Lori Gruen (Chapter 3) explores the construction of women and animals as dominated, submissive Others in theoretical discourse and everyday practice. In the name of scientific progress, experimenters have (ab)used women’s and animals’ bodies as the sites of medical research. One of the many implications of this scientific conceptualization of bodies has been an obsession with hygiene and appearance that distances humans from nature. Another implication has been the mechanization of food production and consumption, which negatively affects both women and animals. Gruen places these examples against the background of feminist and animal liberation theories and suggests that these traditional views promote and perpetuate unnecessary and unsustainable dichotomies (between nature and culture, between reason and emotion). Gruen’s conclusion illustrates how ecofeminist theory can provide an alternative, inclusive framework for liberation struggles.

The next three chapters discuss various applications of ecofeminist theory, whether in academe or through direct action. Chapter 4-,”Roots: Rejoining Natural and Social History,” by Stephanie Lahar, offers a foundation for an ecofeminist reading of history. According to Lahar, the human/ nature dualism that has been a starting point for ecofeminist theory underlies and undermines our relations to the environment, other people, and that which is embodied and unmediated in ourselves. One effect of this split is that we understand personal and collective histories from a culturally ingrained, dualistic perspective. This perspective perpetuates dynamics that have consistently oppressed women and other nondominant groups, and exploited nonhuman nature. Lahar explores the integration of natural and social history through a primary example of European migrations to lands that were colonized from 1600 to 1900, and uses this example to re-frame contemporary questions of historical responsibility, lifestyle choices, and public policy.

“Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality” by Linda Vance (Chapter 5) connects the theory and practice of ecofeminism. While hiking through the woods, she re-envision women’s history by looking for our place in the natural environment, both past and future. Vance critiques the male environmentalist description of nature as mother, protectress, provider, and nurturer as based primarily in male desire, and argues for a feminist reconceptualization of nature as sister, based on the common oppression shared by women and the nonhuman world. Vance conceptualizes ecofeminism as a sisterly bond, a fundamental rejection of all forms of domination, whose necessary goal is diversity rather than dualism.

In Chapter 6, “Questioning Sour Grapes: Ecofeminism and the United Farm Workers Grape Boycott,” Ellen O’Loughlin uses the grape boycott as a window for analyzing ecofeminism’s potential for being an inclusive, multifaceted philosophy for creating change. O’Loughlin argues that ecofeminist theory must be grounded in material and economic analyses if it is to be a transformative movement to end all oppression, rather than an essentialist equation of women and nature. Her examination of the material realities of women’s and men’s lives reveals many relations of oppression and exploitation between various groupings of people and the earth. Rather than ignoring the diversity of these oppressions, ecofeminists must actively support movements addressing them. O’Loughlin considers the ways in which the concerns of farm workers in the United States are relevant to ecofeminism. In particular, she explores the UFW-organized grape boycott as an informative example of how ecological and health concerns can link consumers and laborers originally separated by class, color, and culture.

Two chapters give specific focus to animal liberation and its relationship to ecofeminism. “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory” by Josephine Donovan (Chapter 7) provides a feminist framework for interpreting the claims of animal rights theorists. Donovan surveys the theories of traditional male philosophers who have advanced the dialogue surrounding animal rights, and shows how feminist analyses depart from these standard, rights-based ethical systems. Drawing on arguments advanced by Paula Gunn Allen, Marilyn French, Carol Gilligan, Sara Ruddick, and others, Donovan articulates an expanded feminist theory based on human interconnectedness and responsibility to all life.

“The Feminist Traffic in Animals” by Carol Adams (Chapter 8) provides an ecofeminist analysis of the anti-animal rights critique within feminism. Adams speculates about the construction of bodies within ecofeminism, and contrasts this construction with the feminist traffic in animals. As Adams observes, theorizing about difference in terms of species has been positioned as less central to feminism than theorizing about difference in terms of race, class, gender, and heterosexism. But in the self/other dualism of patriarchal thought, “others” are feminized or animalized by the same ideological process in order to make their subordination seem more natural. Adams makes this connection explicitly in terms of the meals served at feminist conferences: arguing against a logic that privatizes food choices by making the political seem personal, or a logic that naturalizes food choices by making the domination and consumption of other species seem inevi-

table, Adams demonstrates that a feminist meal will be a vegetarian meal.

This collection is also committed to unveiling the harmful implications of the woman-nature association in Western culture. Chapter 9, “For the Love of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic” by Chaia Heller, explores the historical relationship between the domination and the romanticization of women, illustrating the functions of the cult of the romantic. Our modern iconography has rendered nature as a victimized woman, an angelic or madonna-like figure to be pitied, romanticized, and “saved.” Heller exposes the use of these romantic images to rationalize the domination of women and the devastation of nature. Instead of inciting activism, this portrayal of nature as the modern-day romantic madonna evokes passive, teary sympathy. Heller cites specific examples in which the U.S. government, multinational corporations, liberal environmentalists, and even deep ecologists have used romantic metaphors to obscure the social, patriarchal origins of the ecological crisis. By deromanticizing both women and nature, ecofeminism seeks to build bonds between women cross-culturally in order to end oppression.

“From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge” by Marti Kheel (Chapter 10) describes traditional ethical theories as advocating a type of heroism that needs to be replaced by an ecofeminist ethic of holism. Whereas nature ethicists have tended to concentrate on “saving” the “damsel in distress,” ecofeminists have tended to ask how and why the “damsel” arrived at her present plight. This plight, as Kheel describes it, involves a truncated narrative of domination whose missing stories cannot be retrieved using traditional patriarchal ethics. As a holistic ethic, ecofeminism completes the fragmented world view we have inherited by allowing the voices of women and nature to be heard.

Our last two chapters explore the cultural limitations of ecofeminism, for as the philosopher Karen Warren has noted, one of the boundary conditions for a feminist ethic is that it is contextual. In Chapter 11, “A Cross-Cultural Critique of Ecofeminism,” Huey-li Li finds that although there are parallels between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, the woman-nature affinity is not a cross-cultural phenomenon. Moreover, the absence of a transcendent dualism in Chinese society does not preclude women’s oppression; in fact, there are no exact parallels between Chinese people’s respectful attitude toward nature and the social and political inferiority of women. Li explores the transcendent dualism analyzed by Rosemary Radford Ruether, the mechanism outlined by Carolyn Merchant, and the problem of sexual differentiation described by Elizabeth

Dodson Gray in terms of specific cultural limitations. For non-Western women, the praxis of ecofeminism—which aims to end the interrelated oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, and ecological destruction—is more likely to ensure the solidarity of the global ecofeminist movement than is the culture-specific concept of an affinity between woman and nature.

Finally, my chapter, “Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?” (Chapter 12), examines three areas of debate within ecofeminism that have the potential to coopt Native American cultures: the place of animals within ecofeminist theory, the feminization of nature as “Mother Earth,” and the movement to reclaim the goddess in an ecofeminist spirituality. Ecofeminists have on occasion resorted to using Native American culture when convenient for building theory. Such use of a marginalized culture by a member of a dominant culture is acontextual and imperialistic. Through a culture-specific discussion of animals, “Mother Earth,” and the goddess, I propose that ecofeminism can and must address these topics and others while avoiding cultural imperialism.

As the human species approaches the capacity to annihilate all life on this planet, it becomes imperative that we challenge both the ideological assumptions and the hierarchical structures of power and domination that together serve to hold the majority of earth’s inhabitants in thrall to the privileged minority. Ecofeminists seek to articulate this challenge. Our goal in writing this book is to contribute to the evolving dialogue among feminists, ecofeminists, animal liberationists, deep ecologists, social ecologists—in short, all those in the international radical ecology movement who are dedicated to creating a sustainable way of life for all inhabitants on earth.

NOTES

1. Citing Robert Coles’ 1977 study, *Eskimos, Chicanos, Indians*, and John Langston Gwaltney’s 1980 text, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*, Joan Tronto suggests that “the moral views of minority group members in the United States are much more likely to be characterized by an ethic of care than by an ethic of justice.” See “Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care,” *Signs* 12 (1987): 650.

2. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Carol Gilligan, Janie Ward, Jill McLean Taylor, and