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Relating to Nature: Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism?

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Two of our most seminal philosophies of nature, deep ecology and ecofeminism, offer alternative accounts of our relationship with the natural world. Deep ecology tends to take a basically holistic view of nature—its image of the natural world is that of a field-like whole of which we and other 'individuals' are parts. It encourages us to seek our true identity by identifying with wider and wider circles of nature, presenting the natural world as an extension of ourselves, the Self-writ-large. In this view, our interests are convergent with those of nature, and it becomes incumbent on us to respect and serve these common interests.

Ecofeminists, in contrast, tend to portray the natural world as a community of beings, related, in the manner of a family, but nevertheless distinct.[1] We are urged to respect the individuality of these beings, rather than seeking to merge with them, and our mode of relating to them should be via open-minded and attentive encounter, rather than through

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abstract metaphysical preconceptualization. The understanding born of such encounters should result in an attitude of care or compassion which can provide the ground for an ecological ethic.[2]

Although the tension between these two theories cannot be resolved by merely cutting and pasting them together, I think that a dialectical reconciliation of their respective views of nature can be achieved, though this may result in an irreducibly ambivalent ecological ethic. Such ambivalence may in fact be precisely what an adequate understanding of the ecological structure of reality requires.

In this essay, I begin with an examination of the metaphysical axioms of deep ecology. I argue that these axioms generate a fundamental dilemma for deep ecologists. In attempting to resolve this dilemma, I find I have to give up the ethical conclusions to which deep ecology is normally assumed to lead, and draw instead on an ethical perspective more akin to that found in ecofeminist literature.

The Two Metaphysical Axioms of Deep Ecology

The primary axiom of deep ecology is the thesis of metaphysical interconnectedness. Arne Naess images the natural world as a field of relations. He advocates:

> rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational total-field image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things. The total field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept—except when talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication. (Naess 1973)

In an early paper, Warwick Fox identifies as the 'central intuition' of deep ecology the idea 'that there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence … To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of

deep ecological consciousness'.[3] All exponents of deep ecology seem to agree that individuals, to the extent they can be identified at all, are constituted out of their relations with other individuals: they are not discrete substances capable of existing independently of other individuals. The whole is understood to be more than the sum of its parts, and the parts are defined through their relations to one another and to the whole.

The second metaphysical presupposition of deep ecology functions more as a hidden premise—it is not listed as an axiom, as the interconnectedness thesis is, but, so far as I am aware, it is nevertheless taken for granted in all versions of the theory. The presupposition in question is that nature can best look after its own interests, that it is only our interventions in the natural course of events that give rise to terminal ecological disasters. This assumption is implicit in the injunction to let nature take the lead in ecological matters, to minimize our interference in it and to try to shape our own interests to those of nature. It is neatly summed up in Barry Commoner's third law of ecology: nature knows best.

Now let us look at the implications of these two metaphysical assumptions for our relation to the natural world. According to deep ecologists, the fact of our interconnectedness with the rest of nature implies that we are ultimately identifiable with nature; the fact of the indivisibility of reality implicates us in wider and wider circles of being. We should accordingly shed our confining ego identity, and gradually open up to nature at large. The process of achieving the widest possible identification with nature is equated, in deep ecology, with Self-realization: Self-realization is a matter of enlarging one's sphere of identification.

Normative implications are taken to follow hard on the heels of this identification thesis, together with the assumption that nature can and should look after its own interests. For if we are in this sense one with nature, and our interests are convergent with those of nature, then we shall be called upon to defend nature from human interference, just as we are called on to defend ourselves against attack. As activist and deep ecologist John Seed puts it, 'I am protecting the rainforest' develops to 'I am part of the rainforest protecting myself' (Seed 1985). Recognition of our identifiability with nature is taken to entail a commitment to ecological resistance.

The Identification Dilemma

At this point in the argument however, an intractable dilemma raises its head. I shall call it the 'identification dilemma'. If we are identifiable with nature, as the interconnectedness thesis implies, then whatever we do, where this will include our exploitation of the environment, will qualify as natural. Since nature knows best how to look after itself, it follows that whatever qualifies as natural must be ecologically for the best, at least in the long run. In short, if we are truly part of, or one with, nature, and nature knows best, then our depredations of the natural world must be ecologically, and hence morally, unobjectionable.

To this objection, a deep ecologist might reply that although we are ontologically one with nature, we may not consciously recognize this to be the case. In consciousness, we may construct our identity in opposition to nature. Our actions vis-à-vis the environment will then reflect this false consciousness, rather than the underlying ontological fact: we shall be acting as if we were ontologically detached even though this is not in fact the case. Such action may then be regarded as unnatural, in the sense that it does not testify to our actual interconnectedness with the rest of the world.

This reply however would appear to conflate the natural with the true. It may be perfectly natural for consciousness to belie the ontological facts, for there may be adaptive value in its doing so in certain circumstances. After all, there are many species which, though ontologically interconnected with the rest of life (according to the interconnectedness thesis), nevertheless appear to act out of narrow self-interest and exploit the environment to the best of their ability for their own ends. ('Plagues' of locusts and mice spring to mind in this connection; but many species, even in normal circumstances, tread anything but lightly on their lands, relying on the regenerative powers of nature rather than on their own restraint to ensure the continuing health of their environments. The noble elephant is a case in point.) Such a gap between consciousness and the ontological underpinnings of a species' identity may well serve nature's own purposes—it may be part of the long-term ecological scheme of things. If this is the case, then such a gap would be ecologically,

and hence ethically, unobjectionable. If we consider it desirable that our consciousness should reflect our true ontological estate, then we cannot claim that this is because such fidelity to ontology is natural; we must rather admit that it is because we value truth. But then there is no reason to suppose that the present self-interested, exploitative behavior of humanity is unnatural; and if it is natural—if it is in accordance with the ways of nature—it cannot, from a deep ecological viewpoint, count as wrong.

In sum, it is plausible to argue, in the light of the interconnectedness thesis, that whatever we do to the environment is natural, and that, since nature knows best, our present despoliation of the environment must in fact be in nature's long-term interests. We might wish to change our ways on our own behalf, recognizing that we are at present orchestrating our own extinction. But we have no grounds for changing our ways on behalf of nature, which is to say, on grounds of ecological morality. To suppose otherwise is in fact to perpetuate the old division between humanity and nature, and with it the old assumption of human supremacism. For to suppose that we can destroy nature is to deny that nature knows best, where this is to admit that we had really better take the rudder after all, and steer nature through this crisis that we have created for it. In other words, to allow that what we are doing to the environment is natural, and yet to insist that it needs to be changed by us, is to deny that nature knows what it is doing; it is subtly to re-usurp control. If we are true to the metaphysical premises of deep ecology, if we accept both our oneness with nature and nature's fitness to conduct its own ecological affairs without our assistance, then we should allow our own evolution to run its 'natural' course, whatever that turns out to be, on the understanding that by doing so we shall be advancing the cause of life on earth. It may well be that our massive impact on the planetary ecosystem is paving the way for an epoch-making transition in evolution—perhaps analogous to the transition from anaerobic to aerobic life in the early stages of the history of life on earth.

The insistence of deep ecologists that we are one with a nature which best knows how to look after itself then does seem directly to imply that we have no ecological nor, hence, moral grounds for intervening in the spontaneous course of human affairs as these affect the environment. This

poses a dilemma for deep ecology, since deep ecologists have no desire so to acquiesce in the present regime of environmental degradation and destruction. If they persist—as I have no doubt they will—in exhorting us to engage in active 'ecological resistance', then we have to conclude that there is an inconsistency at the heart of deep ecology.

Holistic and Individualistic Readings of the Two Axioms

If, as environmentalists, we are already committed to ecological resistance, the conclusion of the previous section forces us to re-examine the two metaphysical premises of deep ecology. One or both of them will have to be modified, in some way, if deep ecology is to retain its activist appeal. Let us then review each of these axioms in turn.

The interconnectedness thesis. Is there anything logically amiss with the idea of interconnectedness that is so central to deep ecology, anything that would account for the counterintuitive conclusion to which, when conjoined with the thesis that nature knows best, it was found to lead? I think the problem with this thesis, in the present connection, is not that its interpretation within deep ecology is in any way logically flawed, but merely that it is partial.

Deep ecologists have, in the main, given the idea of interconnectedness a holistic reading; they have taken it to mean that nature, as a metaphysical whole, is logically prior to its parts, and that the identity of each part is functionally determined by way of its relation to the whole. They concede a degree of autonomy to individuals, but ultimately they view that autonomy as apparent only, without fundamental ontological significance. Different exponents of deep ecology offer slightly different accounts of the ontological status of individuals (and hence of the relationship between self and nature).[4] However, despite these differences, the holistic emphasis remains marked: the viewpoint of the individual must, in one way or other, be given up in favor of the viewpoint of the whole. We and all other individuals are ultimately seen as in some sense 'one with' nature.

It is arguable however that this reading of the interconnectedness thesis captures only one side of its meaning. If a systems-theoretic approach

is adopted, it is possible to see interconnectedness as entailing the identities of both wholes and individuals. From a systems-theoretic viewpoint, the world (particularly the biological world) appears as a field of relations, a web of interconnections, which does indeed cohere as a whole, but within which a genuine form of individuation is nevertheless possible. An individual is, from this viewpoint, an energy configuration or system which maintains itself by way of its continuous interactions with its environment. Since it is only able to maintain its integrity by way of this continuous give and take with the environment, its existence is a function of its relations, its interconnections. But since these interactions do indeed enable it actively to maintain its integrity, it does enjoy a genuine, though relative, individuality. In this way, the world may be seen as both a seamless whole and a manifold of individuals.[5]

On this reading then, metaphysical interconnectedness implies an irreducible ontological ambivalence at the level of individuals: individuals are, in this scheme of things, analogous to the 'wavicles' of quantum mechanics. In quantum mechanics, light is analyzed in terms of these wavicles: looked at from one point of view, a ray of light manifests as a stream of particles (photons), while from another point of view, it manifests as a wave phenomenon (a pattern in a field). Light cannot be reduced to either photons or field. Ontological ambivalence is thus intrinsic to its nature.

Under the sway of the interconnectedness thesis, deep ecology tends to view the natural world from the holistic perspective exclusively, and therefore considers individuals as field-like rather than as particulate. This one-sided reading of the interconnectedness thesis inevitably also affects its reading of the principle that nature knows best. The principle that nature knows best will be understood to mean that nature knows best for itself as a whole, but it is not taken to imply that nature knows best for the individuals that are its elements. Reading the principle in this latter sense raises obvious questions about its validity. Let us look at the principle in the light of this double reading, and consider whether it can be retained.

The thesis that nature knows best. The principle that nature knows best implies that nature is the best servant of its own interests, and therefore that, from the viewpoint of environmental ethics, whatever nature does is right. It follows from this that the natural order is a moral order, that

within this natural order everything ultimately turns out for the best, so far as nature is concerned. Can this assumption be defended? In order to answer this, we need, as I have pointed out, to look at the principle under both its holistic and its individualistic interpretations. I shall argue that under the holistic interpretation, the natural order is indeed a moral order, but that under the individualistic interpretation, it is not.

The answer to the question whether nature knows best, when nature is viewed under its holistic aspect, depends to some extent on the empirical question of whether or not we, or any other particular life form, have the capacity to extinguish life altogether on the planet. On current evidence this appears to be unlikely: it is widely believed that even full-scale nuclear holocaust would fail to eliminate microbial life forms and that the adaptations of these life forms to the new conditions would usher in a new evolutionary epoch. In light of this assumption that the demise of one order of life creates an opportunity for another, I think we can say that, from the viewpoint of the whole, nature inevitably works toward its own good.

Nature—understood under its holistic aspect—knows best not only in the sense that it is capable of looking after its own interests; it appears to know best in a wider moral sense as well, since the ecological order not only secures its own self-perpetuation, but also appears to exemplify both justice and generosity. Such ecological justice consists, in the first place, in the fact that ecological 'transgressors' pay for their ecological 'transgressions' by being selected out of existence; and it consists, in the second place, in the fact that such self-elimination of actual individuals provides possible individuals with their opportunity to gain entry into the actual world. Such perfect impartiality between the actual and the possible must surely represent the acme of justice! If it is objected that it is scarcely just to condemn an entire ecosystem to extinction on account of the ecological 'transgressions' of one of its elements, it must be remembered that from the holistic point of view there is no absolute distinction between an element and its ecosystem. The various elements of an ecosystem are merely different expressions of its own intrinsic logic or theme. It makes no sense, from this holistic perspective, to say that we, as ecological deviants, are endangering our otherwise ecologically viable ecosystems, or the ecologically innocent elements of those ecosystems. For if we are deviant,

so are the ecosystems with which we are holistically or internally related, and so too are all the elements of those ecosystems. If we deserve to be selected out for our mistakes, so too does the ecosystem, or even the entire order of life, which defines us.

From the holistic point of view then, the natural order is arguably an order of justice and as such qualifies as a moral order in a richer sense than that implied in the original maxim that nature knows best. Lest such a moral order seem too stern for us to countenance, however, there is, as I remarked earlier, a second way in which the natural—still viewed from a holistic perspective—is equivalent to the right. The moral significance of nature, understood in this second sense, resides in its boundless generosity. Etymologically, 'nature', as Holmes Rolston III points out, is derived from the Latin *natus*, meaning birth. Nature is the source, the wellspring, of life, and life is, after all, an entirely gratuitous gift, owed to no one. 'When nature slays', says Rolston, 'she takes only the life she gave … and she gathers even that life back to herself by reproduction and re-enfolding organic resources and genetic materials and produces new life out of it' (Rolston 1979). Because nature does not favor those who have life over those who do not, life is dealt out lavishly: the dispensability of the actual is a necessary condition for this lavishness. Nature is not only just, but infinitely generous. The natural order then, viewed from the holistic perspective, is moral not only in that it secures the long-term good of nature, but also in its justice and its generosity.

When nature is examined from the individualistic rather than the holistic viewpoint however, does it still qualify as a moral order? Is the natural still the right? We have seen that, from the point of view of the whole, individuals are generously given life and justly sacrificed that the gift of life might be passed on. As long as we are (quite properly) identifying with the whole, we can appreciate both the effectiveness and the justice of this arrangement, and concur in the price that is paid for it. When we (equally properly) identify ourselves as individuals however, we are likely to see things differently. Nature no longer appears to know best, if by its 'knowing best' we mean that it is capable of looking after the interests of individuals. Nor does it appear as just: the situation of actual individuals is importantly different from that of possible individuals. As actual individuals we have actual interests, urgent needs and desires; we

can suffer, and suffer terribly. There is neither justice nor generosity in trading in actual individuals for possible ones, from this perspective. The stern, though admittedly, life-giving 'plan' of nature-as-a-whole then has less to commend it from down here. Nor is it only *our* fate which assumes a larger moral significance from this perspective: that of other actual individuals does likewise. Fellow-feeling for them, familiarity with the imperative which drives them, identification with the shivering vulnerability that their actuality implies, gives rise to concern, to a moral interest in their plight.

Ironically then the impulse to resist the progressive destruction of the present order of life springs not, as deep ecology claims, from our identification with nature-as-a-whole—though that identification is perfectly proper, in light of the holistic interpretation of interconnectedness—but rather from our commitment to our individuality. It is as individuals that we feel concern for other individuals. In defending non-human beings against human depredations, we may even in a sense be resisting the greater moral order, the grand order of ecological justice. The compassion which forms the basis of our environmental ethic, from this individualistic point of view, is a function of our finitude rather than of our cosmic self-realization. In securing the conditions for the ongoing unfolding of life, nature (in its holistic aspect) is morally more far-sighted than we; in the name of compassion we seek to block that unfolding by clinging to those individuals which already exist, out of a sense of solidarity with them. As individuals we give our allegiance to individuals, if necessary even against the moral requirements of nature-as-a-whole.

Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: Complementary Perspectives?

This view of the basis of environmental ethics is much closer to ecofeminism than to deep ecology. Ecofeminism is by no means a position or a theory, but simply a fairly open field of inquiry, but it could nevertheless be taken to subscribe to the interconnectedness thesis.[6] It tends to interpret interconnection in the individualistic rather than in the holistic

sense: nature, from the ecofeminist perspective, is a community of beings, related, in the manner of a family, but nevertheless distinct. We are urged to respect the otherness, the distinct individuality of these beings, rather than seeking to merge with them, in pursuit of an undifferentiated oneness.

Since ecofeminism does not identify us directly with nature-as-a-whole, it does not fall foul of the identification dilemma. In other words, since it does not define us as identifiable with a monolithic nature, it does not have to see our destruction of the environment as a case of nature 'destroying' itself, where seeing our action in this way renders it morally unobjectionable. On the contrary, since it sees us as related to nature as to the members of a community or family, to whom the proper attitude is one of familial consideration and care, born of an empathetic understanding made possible by our common origins, or our mutually defining relations, ecofeminism is able to condemn our abuse of the environment outright: this is no way to treat one's family! So for ecofeminism, concern for nature is the product of a re-awakening to our kinship with our individual non-human relatives; it is grounded in our individuality, rather than in any kind of cosmic identification, and it springs out of a sense of solidarity with our fellow beings.

It seems to me, as I indicated at the outset, that ecofeminism and deep ecology, with their complementary interpretations of the interconnectedness thesis, each captures an important aspect of our metaphysical and ethical relationship with nature. For if reality is indeed internally interconnected, if it does consist in a web of relations, then, as I explained earlier, it may be seen as both a whole and a manifold of individuals. From the viewpoint of the whole, it does appear to qualify as a moral order, though from the viewpoint of the individual, it does not. Since I claim both these viewpoints need to be taken into account in our attempt to determine how we should relate to nature, we find ourselves committed in the end to an irreducible moral ambivalence consisting of compassionate intervention on behalf of nature on the one hand, and enlightened acquiescence in the natural tide of destruction on the other. In accepting this ambivalence, we discover on the one hand that it is our humanity—our very finitude and limitation—rather than any grand plan in the stars that impels us to act on behalf of our embattled fellow creatures. In this

way the moral loftiness of deep ecology is brought down to the ground, rendered human. But on the other hand we discover that our compassion—the value taken for granted by ecofeminism—is not beyond moral question either. In light of the grand plan that *is* in the stars, compassion is seen to come down to our love of the familiar, our solidarity with the things that remind us of ourselves.

The recognition that our grounds for ecological resistance lie in our humanity, rather than in our Self-writ-large, or in the stars, is particularly important for environmentalists, I think. For many environmentalists, face to face with the heartbreaking consequences of human rapaciousness become embittered toward humankind and come to see our species as a curse upon the earth. Out of such a relapse into dualistic thinking, no true healing or affirmation of life can come. To recognize that our humanity is the wellspring not only of a consuming destructiveness but also of the precious compassion which counters it may be a redeeming thought, which will help to lead us out of the moral impasse created by the divorce between humanity and nature. It is to the roots of this divorce in dualistic patterns of thought that I shall now turn.

Dualism: Deep Ecological and Ecofeminist Responses

In this final section I would like to explore the ways in which deep ecology and ecofeminism, despite their contrasting (though on my account complementary) ethical perspectives, are inexorably at many points drawn into each other's orbit by the force of their common effort to escape the dualism that grips our Western conceptual framework.

Deep ecologists, as we have seen, assert that we as human beings are identifiable with nature-as-a-whole, but according to my argument, they then generate an inconsistency by insisting that, once we have recognized this identifiability, we should ally ourselves with nature against humankind. In other words, they re-assert a sharp division between humankind and nature. If deep ecology is to be consistent, I have argued, it should give up this division and the struggle to which it gives rise, and surrender

to the spontaneous course of human affairs. Since I do not think this is a conclusion which most deep ecologists would be prepared to accept, I shall not refer to this position of resignation simply as 'deep ecology', even though it is, according to my argument, truer to the premises of deep ecology than is the view which normally goes by that name. I shall instead refer to this position as 'cosmic ecology', or perhaps simply 'the cosmic view'. According to cosmic ecology then, our identification with nature-as-a-whole entails a moral acquiescence in all human action, insofar as it impinges on the environment, since our actions are now seen as manifestations of a cosmic order which is, so far as the environment is concerned, inherently moral.

From the viewpoint of ecofeminism, we as human beings are not identifiable with nature understood in a monolithic sense; rather we are members of the wider family of life. In recognition of the ties of kinship between ourselves and the other members of this family, we are motivated to treat those others with care and consideration. This may on occasion involve protecting non-human members from their human relatives, but the struggle that ensues will not be of the us-against-them variety, but will rather be many-sided. It will involve resisting the actions of some members in some circumstances, while being prepared to affirm the actions of those same members in others. Such a struggle will resemble the struggle that a mother may face within her family—restraining outbreaks of aggression among her offspring, while not allying herself with one family member against another. We who feel loyalty both to our human and to our non-human relatives are in much the same position as this mother; our task is to restore the set of relationships which will enable the family to function as a healthy system.

Cosmic ecology then appears to prescribe quietistic surrender to whatever is the case, while ecofeminism advocates many-sided negotiation for the sake of accommodating all our relations. Despite this contrast in their prescriptive outcomes however, the two views, as I indicated at the beginning of this section, converge in certain vital respects. To see this, let us begin by looking more closely at the implications of the cosmic view.

Can we really accept the idea, implicit in the cosmic view, that human life, however lethal in its intent and its impact on the natural world, is nevertheless tributary to the ultimate moral order? It goes painfully

against our grain, as environmentalists, to concede that the bulldozer and its driver are contributing to the moral order just as effectively as the forest is. Nevertheless, it is, I believe, important for environmentalists to concede this, since the typical deep ecological reverence for untouched nature—idealized in the concept of wilderness—is rooted in the very same dualistic understanding of the world that, by setting humankind above and beyond nature, paved the way for the ecological crisis. If we make a fetish of untouched nature, then we are implicitly reinforcing this dualistic view. To maintain this division—albeit reversing the values that dualistic thinking has traditionally assigned to nature and to humankind respectively—is, as I have explained at length, to contradict the basic metaphysical premise of deep ecology, namely, the interconnectedness thesis.

In conceding that nature is reflected in the bulldozer and its driver just as faithfully as it is in the forest, we are in fact transforming the traditional environmentalist image of nature. For many environmentalists, as I have remarked, true nature manifests itself in inverse proportion to its proximity to human activities or interventions. In other words, nature is in its truest state in wildernesses or remote regions. We can accordingly expect to experience the loss of nature most acutely in those places where humanity is most concentrated, as in the cities, the great metropolises of the late twentieth century. This assumption of course cannot be sustained in the light of the cosmic view, with its characterization of the human order as an instance of the natural order. The city itself, from this point of view, becomes a teeming locus of nature, a field of relations inevitably organizing itself into increasingly diverse and complex forms, where this efflorescence of new forms takes place not at a biological but at a cultural level.

Recognition of this suggests the further jolting insight that nature may not after all be confined to biology—that while it may have invented species as a vehicle for diversity and complexity, other forms of diversity and complexity might express its underlying essence or telos just as well. It is we, rather than nature, who are fixated on species, just as it is we, rather than nature, who agonize over the fate of individuals. Maybe nature can realize itself through emergent levels of culture, perhaps even—who knows?—through emergent levels of computer functioning. Given time,

nature will invariably create the order, the endlessly elaborated and modulated themes, that are so beautifully but perhaps contingently expressed in the biological and ecological life of this planet.

Looking at the city from the cosmic point of view then, we might register an intensification of the pulse of life there. Perhaps here, in the heart of the metropolis, nature is at its wildest. Certainly life is fast and full and dangerous in these streets, taut with uncertainty and unexpectedness. Perhaps as the wilderness retreats across the continents, its spirit returns, bright and sexy and violent, into our very midst. From this point of view, nature cannot die at our hands—everything we do merely constitutes its further unfolding. From the recognition that we and all our activities and contrivances are an expression of nature then, a new image of nature does indeed emerge. We can expect to discover its underlying Tao in the love-and-struggle-and-crimefilled streets of London or Tokyo just as surely as on the Siberian taiga or in the deserts of western Australia.

The same argument can be applied in relation to our artifacts, our technologies. The instruments of ecological destruction—the bulldozers, oil drills, missiles, H-bombs—are generally abhorred, even demonized, by environmentalists. To adopt the cosmic view however, and to recognize our true identity with nature, is to recognize that these technologies are all instruments of the natural order, on a par with tusks and venom, cyclones, landslides and ice ages. They are fashioned out of terrestrial materials by one of the earth's species and set in motion by that species' telos. If we truly honor the earth, we should honor these forms that have always been latent within it, and we should honor these emerging potentialities of its nature. Besides, since it is our technology which mediates our relationship with the world, we cannot honor the world if we despise our technology. In spiritual terms, we need, like the primal peoples so admired by deep ecologists, to locate the sacred not merely in the cosmos, but in the technology which discloses the cosmos to us.[7] Many of those primal peoples attributed an indwelling spirit to their artifacts. The latter were enchanted, charged with a life and destiny of their own, just as the wider world was. From the cosmic point of view, we need urgently to sacralize our own dangerously secular technologies, if we are to respect the world that these technologies open up to us.

To be prepared to accept as natural and hence to respect—perhaps to sacralize—our cities and our technologies of destruction is to respect and re-enchant the nature that we actually inhabit—as opposed to the nature that exists in some remote region which we may never visit, some world locked away in a reserve or fenced against human intrusions. It is within our own everyday world that we must forge our relationship with nature, and perhaps rediscover the sacred.

As it happens, these implications of cosmic ecology echo certain of the sentiments that ecofeminists have recently been expressing. Irene Javors, for instance, has said, in the idiom of feminist spirituality,

> The Goddess lives in the city. She is present in all her manifestations. However, we have great difficulty dealing with her as Hecate/Kali, the destroyer/crone. We fear the 'gifts' that she brings us—age, change, deterioration, decay, death. She is an alchemist who finds the seeds for new life within the compost heap of decomposing forms. We fear her and run from her dark side; by so doing, we blind ourselves to her holiness. (Javors 1990)

And another ecofeminist writer has recommended the resacralization of our technologies in the following terms:

> I believe it is time to create new songs of acknowledgement as well as ceremonies that include metals, petrochemicals and fossil fuels, electricity, modern solar power systems, and water power systems. I also believe it is very important to make sacred, to acknowledge the new ways and elements in our lives—from nuclear power (which is buried in our earth and activates our Sun) to plastics to computers. It is time now, again, for the entire world to honor these Spirits, these new molecular forms, to restore harmony and balance to our out-of-control systems and in particular, to our modern technologies. (Sanchez 1989)

Why is it that ecofeminists are beginning to enter the same spiritual terrain as the cosmic version of deep ecology? The argument behind these ecofeminist sentiments is quite different from the argument that leads to the cosmic view, but the two arguments are to some extent convergent. The argument which led to the cosmic view was, as we have seen, that overcoming the dualistic division of humankind and nature entailed

accepting human destructiveness as natural and therefore as morally unobjectionable. The ecofeminist argument centers on dualism too, but ecofeminists offer a much more systematic analysis of dualistic patterns of thought than deep ecologists do. From the ecofeminist point of view, dualism constitutes a full-blown ideology which interprets the world in terms of dichotomous pairs of qualities, such as active/passive, light/dark, mind/body, reason/emotion and culture/nature. Not only are the qualities that appear in these pairs of opposites dichotomized, in this dualistic scheme of things, they are also hierarchically ordered: within each of the above pairs of opposites, the left-hand term is invariably regarded as 'higher' than the term on the right. The reason for this, according to the ecofeminist analysis, is that the terms on the right are defined via their association with the feminine, while those on the left are identified with the masculine. The entire system exists for the purpose or legitimating the inferiorization of the feminine and all things traditionally associated with it.

From the ecofeminist perspective then, the split between humanity and nature that deep ecology seeks to heal is only one instance of a system of dualistic constructions that are psychosexual in origin and political in purpose. Hostility to nature is built into the very foundations of this patriarchal ideology, and the entire ideology must be dismantled if humanity and nature are to be re-integrated. In other words, we cannot set about uniting humanity with nature without at the same time effecting the demolition of this entire system of dichotomizations, including the original dualistic construction of masculine and feminine.

The ecofeminist critique of dualism then has been more concerned with rehabilitating—re-honoring—all the repressed terms in this entire system of pairs of opposites than with simply demonstrating the inextricability of humankind from nature. Within the dualist framework, it has of course been primarily the body, the emotions, eros, nature and the feminine that have been repressed. For this reason, ecofeminists have typically been concerned to celebrate these 'earthy' things. But death, decay and destruction are further aspects of 'earthiness' and have accordingly also been repressed. Ecofeminists are on the verge of pointing out that most environmentalists perpetuate this form of repression in their refusal to accept either the destruction of the non-human world or the

human instruments and centers of this destruction, where this still really amounts to a refusal to accept the dark side of nature itself. I am not sure that any ecofeminist has actually said that overcoming dualism involves embracing the destruction of the natural world, but this may in fact be a logical conclusion of the ecofeminist critique of dualism. By way of this rather different route then, ecofeminism appears to converge with the cosmic view in its conclusion that the destruction of the natural world at human hands cannot be regarded as an absolute evil.

In these different ways, ecofeminism and the cosmic version of deep ecology appear to be pointing to what might be an important truth for environmentalists, namely that we cannot save the world without first acquiescing in its loss. The belief that we can save the world rests on the very same assumptions that underlie our attempts to destroy it, these being the assumptions that, in the first place, we are in some sense bigger than the system (and are therefore capable of both destroying and saving it), and that, in the second place, death, destruction and extinction are in any case wrong, and not to be tolerated. Only when we accept the dark side of nature, and see it exemplified in our own destructiveness, can we truly begin to honor nature. And only when we honor it, understanding its dark side, will we be capable of approaching the world in a spirit of receptive encounter, for it is presumably, as many feminists have argued, our fear of this dark side, particularly the prospect of our own mortality, which underlies our drive to conquer, control, dominate and even destroy the world. Ironically then, it is by accepting and honoring the forces of destruction that we are freed from the impulse to destroy.

If strands not only of deep ecology but also of ecofeminism lead to an acquiescence in human destructiveness, an acquiescence that is ultimately the key to transcending that destructiveness in ourselves, does it follow that no grounds remain for ecological resistance, for the protection of non-human life from human exploitation? I think not. The ecofeminist rehabilitation of the dark side of nature has to be set in the context of its ethic of care and kinship. We may accept the dark side, the inevitability, even sacredness, of death and destruction, and yet continue to look out for our kin, continue to protect those for whom we care, in the way that I explained at the end of the previous section. To stand vigilant guard over those whom we love is not necessarily to try to cheat death, nor does

it necessarily involve the repression of 'the dark face of the goddess'. A balance must be found between the cherishing of life and the honoring of death. To cherish life need not entail subduing and taking control of nature, and to honor death need not entail abandoning ourselves and all our loved ones to the winds of chance. Our task is to maintain—and perpetually to renegotiate—the dynamic ambivalence which is the life-blood of a healthy morality, a living spirituality. Our acquiescence in mortality may thus lead us to a deep attunement to the terms of life, without in the process committing us to quietism. We need to only concede that our interventions on behalf of our fellow beings spring not from enlightenment but from a homely and humble and all-too-human love of kin. 'Enlightenment' consists in the ability to tolerate without bitterness and despair the failure of these interventions, should they indeed fail; for it is only when we are truly capable of this that we will have rooted out our own impulse to conquer and control the world, our impulse to reshape the world closer to the heart's desire.

Notes

1. Jim Cheney brought this point out very clearly in his 1987 article 'Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology'. *Environmental Ethics* 9(2). It is also explored extensively in Val Plumwood. Spring 1991. Nature, Self and Gender. *Hypatia* 6(1). However, as ecofeminism is not typically expounded systematically as a philosophy, other views of nature are also represented in ecofeminist works. Conversely, the view of nature that I have here identified as ecofeminist is also espoused by writers who make no reference to feminist theory at all. See for instance J. Baird Callicott's account of American Indian views of nature in 'Traditional American Indian and Western European Attitudes Toward nature: an Overview'. 1989. *In Defense of the Land Ethic*. Albany: SUNY Press. See also Callicott's book on multicultural environmental ethics. 1994. *Earth's Insights*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Both Callicott and Aldo Leopold, the architect of the land ethic Callicott is concerned to defend, tend to view nature as a community of natural elements and beings, but both also seem to adopt a holistic interpretation of community for ethical purposes, where this would run counter to the ecofeminist tendency. I am not really

concerned to discuss deep ecology and ecofeminism per se here, but rather a certain complex of issues which are central but not exclusive to these two positions. The issues in question concern the relative merits of the individualistic and holistic views of our relationship to nature. An author who has recently addressed these issues without reference to either deep ecology or ecofeminism is Robert W. Gardiner. 1990. 'Between Two Worlds: Humans in nature and Culture'. *Environmental Ethics* 12 (4).

2. Evelyn Fox Keller develops a sophisticated argument along these lines in 1985. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
3. In his later work, Fox has made more room for a relative form of individuality in his ecological metaphysic. See 1990. *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology*. Boston: Shambhala.
4. Val Plumwood identifies three versions of the deep ecological account of the relationship of self to nature. She calls them the 'indistinguishability account', the 'expanded self' account and the 'transcended or transpersonal self' account. Although there are indeed certain distinctions to be made among these three positions, it seems to me that they all involve basically holistic interpretations of interconnectedness, since they all point to the substitution of a greater Self for the normal self understood as ego or individual. See Val Plumwood. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of nature*. New York: Routledge.
5. This argument that the relational nature of systems entails both individuality and holism is developed in my book: 1991. *The Ecological Self*. London: Routledge.
6. This is evident in the web imagery which is so central to ecofeminism, and which appears in a number of ecofeminist titles, for example, J. Plaskow and C. Christ, eds. 1989. *Weaving the Visions*. New York: Harper and Row, and I. Diamond and G. F. Orenstein. 1990. *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books. In the latter work, the editors, in their Introduction, characterize the early ecofeminists as those feminists who 'affirmed and celebrated the embeddedness of all the earth's peoples in the multiple webs and cycles of life'.
7. The comparatively easygoing attitude of certain native peoples in this respect, unfettered as they are by hard-and-fast (dualistic) distinctions between what qualifies as natural (and hence sacred) and what does not, is illustrated by a point made by my colleague at La Trobe, Raj Bessarib, concerning a 'dreamer' of the Sardi people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. This story-teller of the dreamtime, Billy Ahchoo, includes a 'dance of the motorboat' in his repertoire of dreaming dances.

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