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ECOFEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

An Analysis of Ecofeminist Ethical Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on ecofeminist ethical theory. A first aim is to clarify ecofeminist views on five central issues in the field of environmental ethics. These issues are: (1) Views of nature, (2) social constructivism and nature, (3) values of nature, (4) ethical contextualism, and (5) ethical pluralism. A second aim is to compare ecofeminist standpoints with certain standpoints within nonfeminist environmental ethical theory. A third aim is to critically discuss some of the main standpoints in ecofeminism.

The analysis focuses on the works of Karen Warren, Sallie McFague, Chris Cuomo, and Carolyn Merchant. Other important sources are the environmental philosophers and ethicists J. Baird Callicott, Paul Taylor, Irene Klaver, Bryan G. Norton, Christopher Stone, Eugene Hargrove, Holmes Rolston III, Per Ariansen, Don E. Marietta, and Bruno Latour.

The result of this study is that there are no main differences between ecofeminism and nonfeminist environmental ethics regarding the main standpoints on the five issues. Rather, the significant differences are found within these main standpoints. In addition, one important characteristic of ecofeminist ethics is its “double nature,” that is, the fact that it is rooted in feminism and environmentalism. The double nature of ecofeminism results in a foundation out of which ecofeminism as an environmental philosophy has a unique potential to handle some of the theoretical tensions that environmental ethics creates.

From the perspective that environmental problems consist of complex clusters of nature-culture-discourse and that environmental ethical theory ought to be action guiding, it is argued that ecofeminist ethical theory has an advantage compared to nonfeminist environmental ethics. This standpoint is explained by the fact that ecofeminism holds a variety of views of nature, kinds of social constructivism and contextualism, and conceptions of values and of the self, and from the presumption that this variety reflects the reality of environmental problems. However, in order for ecofeminist ethical theory to fulfill its promise as an acceptable environmental ethical theory, its theoretical standpoints ought to be explicatured and further clarified.

Key words: Ecofeminism, environmental ethics, environmental ethical theory, ecofeminist ethical theory, views of nature, human/nature dualism, intrinsic value, intrinsic worth, social constructivism, ethical contextualism, intrapersonal pluralism, inconsistent self, cyborg self, practical ethics.

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David Kronlid
Introduction

Ecofeminism is a social movement as much as it is a theoretical discourse. As a social movement, ecofeminism can be defined as the community of women that are engaged in restorative and preservative work. Throughout human history, women have been engaged in the environmental movement all over the world. Since the early 1970s, ecofeminism has developed as a theoretical discourse at Western universities. Early ecofeminist analyses of the causes of and solutions for the environmental crisis were based on the idea of a feminine principle of care that was thought of as a foundation for a sustainable livelihood. This approach later became the object of internal critique. The critique included the development of feminist principles that criticized the meanings of “feminine,” “masculine,” “nature,” “culture,” etc. According to this latter, critical approach, ecofeminism could no longer be defined as a community of women. Rather, ecofeminism can be defined as the community of people who participates in critical ecofeminist analyses of the global environmental situation.¹

As activism, ecofeminism engages in different practices such as political, spiritual, and religious practice. In addition, ecofeminist theoretical analyses can be found within theology, history, ethics, sociology, economics, etc. These analyses illuminate a number of ways in which exploitation of nonhuman nature and of women are connected, and, they presuppose that a highlighting of these connections contributes to an appropriate management of environmental problems that are the result of exploitation of nature.²

It is my experience that ecofeminism is an underestimated environmental philosophy. For instance, my students often regard the term “feminism” to be too radical and therefore consider ecofeminism useless and even contra productive for the environmental cause. Furthermore it is my experience that ecofeminism is often stereotyped and wrongfully criticized among environmentalists.³ However, often it is radical and spiritual ecofeminism, which stresses essential dichotomies between women and men and

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² For a general introduction of the history of ecofeminism and women’s engagement in the environment, see Merchant, 1996. See also Adams (Ed.) 1993 for an overview of spiritual ecofeminism.
presupposes that women are “closer” to nature, which is criticized. Accordingly, environmentalists who celebrate ecofeminism sometimes share the idea that women are closer to nature and consequently they regard women to be more caring towards nature than men are.

Moreover, ecofeminism is also marginalized because it is reduced to standpoints of biological essentialism or because it is presented as a cozy variant of caring for earth policy. My starting points are first, that these stereotypes alone do not constitute an adequate interpretation of ecofeminism. Second, they do not constitute the appropriate basis for environmental ethical theory or for environmental policy. These claims are based on the fact that as a result of the first stereotype, emancipation of women is hindered because in this approach women become environmental housekeepers. In addition, they are also based on the fact that caring is not an exclusive female capacity and that feel good attitudes towards nature cannot offer sufficient solutions to the world’s environmental problems.

Ecofeminism is rooted in environmental ethics and feminist ethics. Environmental ethics and feminist ethics focus on two important social and theoretical issues, namely the welfare of nonhuman nature and the unequal relationship between men and women. The fact that ecofeminism explicitly combines feminist concerns with nature issues means that ecofeminism is a unique environmental philosophy. For these reasons, it is of importance to analyze central environmental ethical theoretical issues in ecofeminism.

Ethical analyses of ecofeminism are not unusual, for example, important normative work has been done. Moreover, ecofeminism has been object of critical analysis in a debate between deep ecology and ecofeminism in the *Journal of Environmental Ethics*. However, to my knowledge a study of ecofeminism that focuses on ethical theoretical issues and includes descriptive, comparative, and critical analyses of ecofeminism remains to be done. Therefore, this study is conducted on the basis of the belief that it will contribute to a deeper understanding of the contribution of ecofeminism to environmental ethics, hence, to ethics at large.

Environmental ethics and feminist ethics challenge ethical theory in a number of ways. *First*, from the perspective of environmental ethics, one reason why ethical theory is challenged is that environmental ethics belongs

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4 One example of a view of ecofeminism as a primarily feel-good "caring" and "loving" attitude towards nature was presented to me in a dialogue lecture on ecofeminism that myself and the, at the time, spokes person of the Swedish Green Party, Lotta Nilsson-Hedström held at the international day of women, 2000, at The Center for Environmental and Development Studies (Cemus) in Uppsala, Sweden.


6 See for instance Fox, (1989) 1993, for a discussion concerning the debate between deep ecology and ecofeminism.
to the field of applied ethics. Applied ethics relates ethical theory to practice, which means that our relationships with nature constitute the foundation out of which ethical reflection departs. It also means that ethical theories are applied to these relationships.

One way of illustrating these challenges is to look upon environmental ethics as crossing a number of boundaries, which ethical theory traditionally presupposed. One example of such a boundary is the boundary between present and future generations. The storage problems that follow from present nuclear technology usage force us to analyze the moral significance of future generations. Another example is that the boundary between what is considered as human and as nonhuman is crossed as soon as the question of nonhuman carriers of intrinsic value is introduced by nonanthropocentric (nature-centered) environmental ethicists. Nature, it is presumed, needs to be taken into account on its own merits.

Furthermore, the current global environmental situation means that the boundary between the far and the distant is relativised. The acid rains, the thinning of the ozone layer and the climate changes are problems that do not belong to one nation, one state, continent, or culture. This means that global conditions have local impact and vice versa.

In sum, the fact that nonanthropocentric environmental ethics considers animals, plants, and mountains as having moral standing and the fact that it focuses on nature relationships, results in new and complex theoretical questions, which poses challenges to ethics at large.

Second, feminist ethics also challenges ethical theory in several ways. For instance, feminist ethics presupposes that most dominant theories within nonfeminist ethics are based on specific assumptions about an ideal ethical theory saying that such a theory should be abstract, universal, value-neutral, and objective. Feminist ethics questions these ideals and highlights that they are based on an assumption regarding the possibility to keep reason and emotion apart. That is to say, allegedly emotions are subordinate to reason in nonfeminist ethics. Consequently, feminist ethics suggests that an acceptable ethical theory also ought to consider emotional aspects of moral life. Feminist ethics also emphasizes that contextual considerations are of importance for decision-making and for ethical theory. This means that we, as ethicists, should pay attention to the relationships of moral agents. One of the reasons why feminist ethicists emphasize context is that feminist ethics holds that there is no value neutral theorizing. From the fact that they regard theorizing to be value laden follows that we ought to pay attention to the conditions in which theories and values are developed in order to properly assess whether the theories in question are acceptable. In addition, feminist ethics rejects the idea of either abstract and general normative theories or

\[ Of \text{ course, it can be argued that global environmental problems are caused by a specific culture or nation. However, the point is that once these problems become problems they are of global concern.} \]
contextually dependent normative theories. Rather, feminist ethics seeks to reconcile the two from the perspectives of women’s everyday life experiences.8

Thus, feminist ethics highlights the relevance of women’s experiences as women for ethical theory. This focus is stressed because feminists regard “women”9 to be marginalized in traditional ethical theory. According to feminist ethics, the fact that “women” constitute a subordinated social group means that the ethical insights drawn from the experiences of women are highly significant. Consequently, feminist ethics highlights relationships in general, and “women’s” relationships in particular as starting-points for ethical theorizing,10 which is also connected to the claims that emotions are “…at least a partial basis for morality itself and certainly for moral understanding.”11

Moreover, feminist ethics asserts that the public and the private, the personal and the political (and therefore also culture and nature) are enmeshed in complex relationships and structures, and claims that the fact that traditional ethical theories have maintained these as separate spheres is of moral as well as of ethical concern. Feminist ethics holds that women have been conceptualized as belonging to what is commonly referred to as private and natural spheres and men to what is referred to as public and cultural spheres. Therefore, women are often regarded to be “closer to nature” than men. In this view, the meaning of woman is enmeshed with or reduced to biological functions (biological essentialism). Feminist ethics claims that from this view follows, that women should not participate in cultural endeavors such as warfare, trade, and politics. Feminist ethics questions this oppressive12 attitude, and argues that what is regarded as private actions such as childbearing and breastfeeding have political/cultural as well as private/biological significance. In line with this, feminist ethics also stresses that culture and nature are intertwined in a way that makes dualistic ontologies questionable. Furthermore, feminist ethics claims that the fact that what is regarded as a typically female practice is defined as a “natural” practice follows a lower status of embodied experiences than of a “cultural” and more abstract practice. Feminist ethics claims that such a standpoint is typical for dominant nonfeminist ethical theorizing and that it

8 Held, 1993, pp. 49-54. It should be noted that according to Held, a feminist contextual ethical theory is not identical with a situation-oriented ethical theory; Held highlights that a situation-oriented theory tends to obstruct mechanisms of structural oppression, which a contextual ethical theory avoids.
9 I am using quotation marks because I want to acknowledge that the category of women is not always identical to the female biological sex.
10 Held, 1993, pp. 51-52.
12 See Young, 1990, for a definition of oppression. According to Iris Marion Young, marginalization is one of five faces of oppression.
ought to be questioned because embodied experiences are or may be significant for ethical theorizing.\textsuperscript{13}

What is more, feminist ethics favors a conception of a social self in contrast to a conception of an “isolated” self because allegedly “individualistic” selves do not recognize the importance of relationships. Consequently, a social self is presented as alternative to the purportedly “traditional liberal view of the self” (a self fundamentally isolated from other selves).\textsuperscript{14}

The “social self” is constituted partly or completely in and through its relationships with others. It is important to note that this statement is not necessarily a version of essentialist social constructivism, that is, a version of the standpoint that nothing but social processes or discourses determine the self. Rather, it refers to a claim that allegedly abstract, general, and universal normative ethical theories are inadequate because they presuppose an atomistic notion of the self, which feminism regards to be questionable. From the fact that we are essentially relational beings and that abstract and isolated selves do not exist feminist ethics concludes that, normative theories ought to entail conceptions of the self, which resemble real people and not ideally isolated (“pathological”) agents.\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, feminist ethics highlights that both the meaning of knowledge and knowledge in itself are social products. Lorraine Code claims:

> Because knowledge-production is a social practice, engaged in by embodied, gendered, historically-, racially- and culturally-located knowers, its products cannot fail to bear the marks of their makers [hence] knowledge is made...  \textsuperscript{16}

This quote illustrates that according to feminist moral epistemology the meaning of knowledge, as well as the criteria for justified knowledge reflect the social structures in which knowledge claims are made. Feminist ethics presupposes that there is a “…complex power structure of vested interests, dominance and subjugation,” behind nonfeminist epistemology.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, feminist epistemology deviates from traditional philosophical moral epistemology, according to which the central questions are “How do we find out what is right and what is wrong?” and “Which of our moral views are justified?”\textsuperscript{18} Rather, according to feminist moral epistemology, the central epistemological question is; “Whose knowledge are we talking about?”\textsuperscript{19}

Feminist moral epistemology is divided in two main positions; informed empiricism and standpoint epistemology. According to the former, empirical evidence and justification are dependent on context and the meaning of

\textsuperscript{13} Held, 1993, pp. 54-57.
\textsuperscript{14} Held, 1993, pp. 58, 62.
\textsuperscript{15} Held, 1993, pp. 57-63, 62.
\textsuperscript{17} Code, 1998, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{18} Dancy, 1998, p. 286.
objective knowledge is ensured by intersubjective criticism.\textsuperscript{20} According to the latter, knowledge claims made from a feminist critical standpoint include additional “…explanatory, transformative and emancipatory potential,”\textsuperscript{21} which should not be overseen. Following the fact that the meaning of knowledge and what is regarded as justified beliefs are products of different social practices, such as for instance the practice of Science, one aim of feminist moral epistemology is to identify actual intersubjective criteria for specific knowledge claims. This means to critically analyze in which ways these claims and their justifications are related to the social practice in which they are made, and, to critically analyze the presupposed meanings of “women” as well as the practical consequences for women.\textsuperscript{22}

Aims and Problems

This study has three main aims. The first aim is to conduct a descriptive analysis of ecofeminist ethical theory. The second aim is to conduct a comparative analysis of ecofeminist and environmental ethical standpoints. The third aim is to conduct a critical and constructive analysis of ecofeminist ethical theory.

In order to fulfill the three main aims, five theoretical issues that are of relevance for nonfeminist environmental ethics, for ethical theory, and for ecofeminism are in focus. These issues are views of nature, social constructivism and nature, values of nature, ethical contextualism, and ethical pluralism. The main concern of this project is neither to characterize a, or the typical ecofeminist ethical theory, nor, to characterize a typical feminist environmental ethics. Rather the main concern is to clarify the theoretical contributions of ecofeminism to nonfeminist environmental ethics. Following this the main problems of the study are:

1. What are the characteristics of ecofeminist ethical theory?
2. What are the significant differences between ecofeminist and nonfeminist environmental ethical theory?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory?

\textsuperscript{22} Code, 1998, p. 141.
Method

This is a text-based study. The texts that form the basis of the analyses are articles and monographies published between 1980 – 2001 by the U.S. authors Karen J. Warren, Carolyn Merchant, Chris Cuomo, and Sallie McFague.

This is also a meta ethical study. This means that it focuses on basic ethical concepts and conceptions such as epistemological, value theoretical and ontological presuppositions in environmental ethics. For the reason of clarity, the descriptive, comparative, and critical analyses are separated according to the following. The descriptive analysis is conducted in chapters two – six. The comparison between ecofeminism and environmental ethics is conducted in chapter seven. Finally, in chapter eight a critical and constructive analysis is performed, which is based on the previous analyses. The critical analysis is based on a number of criteria of evaluation and focuses on advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory.

This study is interpretative. In other words, it is based on a distinction between the “interpreter’s” analytical language and the language of the object of analysis. The analytic language is composed of questions that are put to the material but also of the terminology that is used to characterize and systematize the results. The language of the object of analysis is identical with the ecofeminist texts that form the basis of the analyses and includes the texts that compose the comparative material. The quality of the study depends on keeping these two “languages” separate even though they are not entirely autonomous. The analytic language is in process, that is, it “changes, expands, and becomes more nuanced in confrontation with the text.”

The analytic language is developed in relation to five central issues in environmental ethics; hence, the study departs from and focuses on these issues, which will be described below. In the first chapter, these issues are examined and further explicated in order to establish analytical questions by which ecofeminist standpoints will be clarified, compared, and criticized. Hence, the descriptive and in part constructive analysis of nonfeminist environmental ethics in chapter one serves the purpose of categorizing environmental ethics in order to conduct the comparison with ecofeminist ethical theory. Furthermore, this categorization sharpens the analytical questions.

The purpose of the interpretation of ecofeminism is to clarify the meaning of statements that are related to the theoretical issues. This means to present a reasonable interpretation of ecofeminism as well as to obtain a deeper understanding of ecofeminism. A reasonable interpretation is obtained by

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24 Grenholm (Ed.), 1981, p. 76. (My translation)
relating separate statements to the overall production of the author or to other statements in a specific book or article. Furthermore, a reasonable interpretation follows a principle of generosity. That is to say, in cases of optional interpretations the most generous interpretation of ecofeminism is chosen in conformity with the overall meaning of the texts. A reasonable interpretation is also characterized by taking the intentions of the authors into account when these are explicated, because such a consideration “widens the linguistic context and narrows the number of reasonable interpretations.”

Finally, in those cases when the author’s texts does not give explicit answers to the analytical questions a reconstruction of the author’s standpoints is called for. Such reconstructions are always conducted in accordance with the principle of generosity.

This study is neither purely author focused nor purely problem oriented. Rather, the advantages from both methods are combined. Problem-oriented methods offer clear-cut and thorough analyses of certain issues in focus. In contrast, author focused ethical methods aim at a complete account of the work of a specific author. That is to say, no or few selections are needed because the purpose of the analysis is to give a full coverage of the author’s standpoints. In this study, the number of authors is limited and specific questions are chosen as analytical tools, for the purpose of combining advantages of both methods. This means that the analysis becomes more constructive than a purely author focused analysis since it is based on five specific theoretical issues. This also means that the analysis becomes more sensitive to the material than a purely problem oriented analysis. On the other hand, the combination of methodological approaches can also be problematic because it does not give a comprehensive picture of the ecofeminist point of view at large. Another problem is that it does not give a comprehensive picture of the author’s standpoints regarding environmental ethics besides these five issues. However, the purpose of this study is to clarify ecofeminist standpoints regarding certain ethical issues and not to give full coverage of the ecofeminist field. Consequently, a combination method is more suitable in order to fulfill the aims of the study.

Finally, the variation of literary styles causes additional interpretation problems. For example, monographies offer more coherent presentations than the collection of articles. The fact that many of the articles are written at different times and have different purposes means that they cover so many aspects that the general message in the articles sometimes becomes incoherent. A monography on the other hand is often more coherent, which means that the author’s standpoint becomes easier to clarify.

26 Grenholm (Ed.), 1981, p. 64.
Five Central Issues in Environmental Ethics

This study focuses on the following five theoretical issues:

1. Views of nature
2. Social constructivism
3. Values of nature
4. Ethical contextualism
5. Ethical pluralism.

These issues are chosen on the basis that they summarize certain challenges to ethical theory, that they are central for the field of environmental ethics, and because ecofeminism has something of importance to contribute to the understanding of them.

The following brief survey serves the purpose of describing the theoretical relevance of the issues for ethical theory, for environmental ethics, and for ecofeminism. The outline of this survey is, first, to relate the issues to ethical theory at large and to environmental ethics. Second, the issues are related to ecofeminism.

When it comes to the issue of views of nature, it has played a central role in the history of ethical theory and concerns among other things what is regarded as natural and the differences between nature and culture. There are two main ideas of thought regarding “the natural” and the prescriptive status of nature.28 The first idea suggests that what is morally proper can be determined in accordance with a supposed “natural order.”29 According to this tradition, the “natural” is prescriptive, and can be supported by theological as well as secular arguments. For instance, it can be argued that there is an order in nature, given and maintained by God, according to which both humans and nonhumans ought to act and behave. From a secular point of view, it is the laws of nature or of society or of human mind that are essentially prescriptive. According to this idea, we ought to treat nature, animals, and each other in a way that is consistent with current ecology, social sciences, psychology, etc. If we act in opposition to these theories, we contradict our natural behavior or our nature and therefore these actions are considered immoral. In other words, according to these ideas we ought to follow what is “natural,” however defined.30

28 Evernden, 1992, pp. 18-19.
29 See Buckle, 1995, pp. 161-174, for a discussion on natural law. See also Van DeVeer & Pierce, (Second ed.) 1998, pp. 29-32, for a discussion concerning the natural law tradition and environmental ethics. See also Northcott, 1996, on a discussion concerning “natural order” and environmental ethics.
The second main idea is that what is moral (as such) and what is morally proper is defined in opposition to what is regarded as natural. In this survey, Thomas Hobbes exemplifies this idea. He defines the natural state as something that we must defy because it works against the well being of humankind. According to this idea, what is considered morally proper is socially constructed and manifested in a social contract. Consequently, humans ought to take control over nature and the natural. Hence, nature and the natural do not imply what is morally proper. Morality as such and the morally proper is defined in contrast to “the natural” or “nature.”

Regarding environmental ethics and views of nature, the discussion of nature’s prescriptive status is further developed. This is evident in the restoration debate and its arguments concerning authenticity of nature. In this debate it is argued that nature ought to be preserved from human intervention, because human intervention as such degrades the “intrinsic value”, unique identity, or authenticity of nature. Following this line of thought, an alleged “natural” state of nature determines how we ought to treat nature.

The second issue concerns social constructivism and nature. The question whether the natural determines what is morally proper is intimately related to this second issue. Social constructivism challenges the ontological idea that nature exists independent of human consciousness, or of social processes. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann claim that reality is socially constructed. However, although social constructivism challenges the independent existence of nature, reality is defined as, “…a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot “wish them away”)…” Furthermore, knowledge is defined as “…the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics.”

Social constructivism combines philosophical epistemology and sociological epistemology. This means that the question of the nature of knowledge is intimately related to the question of knowledge production since the meaning and content of “knowledge” cannot be established without taking the conditions in which knowledge claims are made into consideration.

Regarding environmental ethics and social constructivism and nature, social constructivism is a debated issue. Some environmental philosophers argue against viewing nature as socially constructed and claim that social

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constructivism implies normative relativism as well as anthropocentrism. According to the critics, normative relativism is considered to hinder a functional environmental policy. Further, according to environmental philosopher Mick Smith, deep ecologists claim that social constructivism is inconsistent with nonanthropocentrism.

The third issue concerns *values of nature* and particularly intrinsic values of nature. The common meaning of “intrinsic value” is: *a value that is worth pursuing for the sake of its own.* Utilitarian and Kantian ethicists have different opinions on the locus of intrinsic value as well as on the meaning of intrinsic value. Kantian ethics regards “rational nature” - which in Kant’s theory refers to humans alone (“humanity”) - as the only thing that is “an end in itself.” On the other hand, utilitarian ethics often understands happiness in terms of “welfare” as intrinsically valuable.

According to the Kantian tradition, humans are intrinsically valuable (are ends in themselves), which means that they have ends of their own, and not that we ought to produce as many humans as possible. Only humans have ends of their own because only humans can be free, rational, autonomous agents, which according to Kantian ethics is characteristics of being a *person.* According to Utilitarianism, intrinsic value is often defined in terms of what we seek for the sake of its own, and the only thing that we seek for the sake of its own is “pleasure.”

Kantianism distinguishes between “value” and “dignity” or “worth.” That is to say, “value” is per definition replaceable. This means that it is possible to receive compensation for the loss of value with something of equal or higher (to a greater extent for the moral agent in question worth attaining) value. On the other hand, “worth” is not replaceable in this sense. Following this, artificial and natural objects, personal qualities, processes, events, etc., have value for people while people are the source of all value. Thus, “worth” is intimately linked to the meaning of *personhood,* and restricted to humans alone. Hence, only people ought to be respected as ends.

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36 Arguments against social constructivism is offered by environmental philosophers Anna Peterson, 1999, and Mick Smith, 1999. Anna Peterson argues herself against social constructivism and Mick Smith refers to deep ecologists arguments against social constructivism.

37 The reason why I refer to Smith and not directly to the deep ecologists is that Smith’s critical analysis of this matter illuminates important aspects of social constructivism and the deep ecology critique of it. Furthermore, Smith’s presentation serves my purposes here, which is to relate ecofeminist social constructivism to this criticism.

38 See Thomas, 1993, p. 66, for a comment on the idea of intrinsic value.

39 See Norman, 1983, pp. 118-122, for a comment on the Kantian notion of respect for persons.

40 See Thomas, 1993, pp. 66-74 for an introduction of the utilitarian concept of intrinsic value.


42 Thomas, 1993, pp. 66-69.


44 Norman, 1983, pp. 120-121.
in themselves. In the Kantian tradition, respect for people means respect for people’s pursuits of their own ends through free will and action.\textsuperscript{45}

In environmental ethics, the normative and value theoretical questions of nature’s intrinsic value is often regarded as the questions. Both Kantian-oriented and utilitarian-oriented conceptions of value are represented in environmental ethics. For instance, nonanthropocentric ethics can be based on the idea that nature (however defined) has worth or dignity of its own. In this sense, nature has worth of its own in the same respect as humans have worth of their own. This means that nature has dignity and therefore we ought to respect nature. Kantian nonanthropocentric environmental ethics includes explicated criteria for such a dignity. Utilitarian nonanthropocentric environmental ethics holds that natural entities can be capable of experiencing pleasure and pain, (hedonism) or, that certain conditions can be preferable to nonhumans (preference utilitarianism). That is to say, these nonhuman pleasures or states of affairs are the locus of intrinsic value. According to utilitarianism, the criterion for an action against nature to be morally proper is based on the more or less valuable consequences of the action.

Another important question regarding this issue is whether intrinsic values have existence independent of human points of views or not. This question is relevant because environmental ethics is tied to environmental practice. That is to say, it seems as if some environmental philosophers presuppose that intrinsic value or worth that in this sense has objective existence is a more effective or valid foundation for environmental policies and practice than nonobjective intrinsic value or worth.\textsuperscript{46}

The fourth issue regards ethical contextualism. In order to clarify in which ways ethical contextualism is presented as an alternative standpoint to ethical universalism, something needs to be said about universalism. Ethical universalism can be both normative and formal. Normative Kantian universalism holds that an action is morally proper if it passes the “categorical imperative” test of consistent universalizability.\textsuperscript{47} On the other hand, formal Harean universalism holds that universalizability is a logical or conceptual criterion for distinguishing moral judgments and principles from non-moral judgments and principles.\textsuperscript{48} Accordingly, formal universalism

\textsuperscript{45} Norman, 1983, pp. 121-122. However, it is important that this view does not collapse into paternalism, that is, people cannot be forced to pursue what other people regard that they ought to pursue.

\textsuperscript{46} See for instance, Smith, 1999, according to which it seems as if the deep ecologists that Smith refers to advocate such a position.

\textsuperscript{47} See Norman, 1983, pp. 106-118, for a discussion about Kantian universalism.

\textsuperscript{48} See Thomas, 1993, pp. 32-33, for a definition of Harean formal universalism. From this does neither follow that what I refer to as Harean universalism cannot be combined with normative universalism, nor that Hare’s definition of universalism is not normative. The purpose here is to explicate the differences between the notion of formal universalism and the notion of normative universalism.
holds that the judgment, “I ought not to restore nature!” is a moral statement (as distinguished from non-moral statements) only if it can be thought of as a judgment that all similar people in a similar situation ought to follow.49 Moreover, normative universalism holds that the same judgment refers to a morally proper action (as opposed to an immoral action) only if the judgment is willed to be a universal law that every other similar person ought to follow.50

As an alternative standpoint to ethical universalism, ethical contextualism51 highlights that moral reasoning is conducted not by abstract individuals (agents) but rather by actual individuals (persons). In line with this, ethical contextualism holds that the formal universalizability test is neither necessary nor applicable in order for a judgment to qualify as a moral judgment. The reason for this is that according to ethical contextualism, moral agents do not exist; hence, identical moral situations do not exist. Following this, moral reasoning only exist in specific contexts among moral people. Hence, as a formal thesis, ethical contextualism holds that it is not necessary for a judgment to pass the Harean universalizability test in order for it to be considered as a moral judgment. As a normative thesis, ethical contextualism holds that a judgment or action can be morally proper even if the action in question is not whished to be universally valid. In other words, ethical contextualism means that it is possible to determine that an action or judgment is morally wrong or not even though it is willed that, every other moral agent or person ought not to make the similar act or judgment.

The fifth issue regards ethical pluralism as an alternative standpoint to ethical monism. Monistic normative ethical theory only recognizes one principle of morality.52 According to monistic teleological ethical theories such as utilitarianism, moral actions are considered right or wrong based on whether they promote or do not promote one specific goal. Orthodox utilitarianism does not recognize any other goal, or, intrinsic value, than experiences of pleasure. This means that only one principle is regarded as a valid normative principle, the principle that our actions ought to produce as high amount of experiences of pleasure as possible for all humans. Ethical pluralism on the other hand recognizes several equally valid normative principles, although some of these principles might be supreme in a given case, context, or situation. A pluralist can argue that the principle of avoiding unnecessary suffering and the principle of respecting a person’s dignity or worth, are equally valid at the same time.

49 See Thomas, 1993, pp. 32-33, for a comment on formal universalism.
51 See Bergmann, 1997, pp. 16-18, for illuminating discussions on ethical contextualism. Although Bergmann is primarily interested in theological contextualism, his work is relevant for the analysis of ethical contextualism in this study.
52 See Thomas, 1993, pp. 8-9, for the basic meaning of monism and pluralism that I follow in this study.
The question whether environmental ethics should be monistic or pluralistic is a debated issue. In this study, I presume that the main reasons why monism is defended and the so-called intrapersonal pluralism is rejected are the following. One main reason why normative monism is preferred by some environmental ethicists is that normative pluralism regards normative theories as extrinsic to the self while monism regards them to be intrinsic to the self. A second main reason why intrapersonal pluralism is rejected is that the monist standpoint is based on an ideal of a consistent self, which cannot be combined with intrapersonal pluralism.

The question whether these five issues are relevant to ecofeminism is illuminated by the six challenges of feminist ethics to ethical theory that are outlined in the beginning of this introduction. Concerning different views of nature, ecofeminism takes as starting point the relationship between women and nature, in practice as well as in theory. Furthermore, ecofeminism often supports the idea that nature is socially constructed. Although the meaning of social constructivism is unclear, the fact that ecofeminism emphasizes social constructivism is a good reason to suspect that ecofeminism has something of importance to add to the understanding of the second issue. Furthermore, regarding values of nature, although ecofeminism does not typically engage in what is commonly referred to as “the intrinsic value project,” the fact that ecofeminism combines concern for nature and feminism makes an analysis of ecofeminist conceptions of values of nature relevant. In addition, regarding ethical contextualism ecofeminism is commonly associated with “contextualism,” and the fact that feminist ethics also highlights the importance of concern for the context, calls for an analysis of ecofeminist conceptions of ethical contextualism. Finally, regarding ethical pluralism, the idea of a social self is central in ecofeminism. The fact that conceptions of the self are central in ecofeminism means that there are good reasons to assume that ecofeminism entails alternative conceptions of the self that might be starting-points for a critical discussion on the monist ideal conception of a self.

In conclusion, in order to clarify, compare, and evaluate ecofeminist standpoints regarding these five issues, the following five questions are relevant:

1. What is characteristic of ecofeminist views of nature?
2. What is characteristic of ecofeminist social constructivism?
3. What is characteristic of ecofeminist conceptions of nature’s value?
4. What is characteristic of ecofeminist ethical contextualism?
5. What is characteristic of ecofeminist pluralism when it comes to ecofeminist conceptions of self?

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Main Material

The work of the four ecofeminist authors Karen Warren, Sallie McFague, Chris Cuomo, and Carolyn Merchant are in focus in this study.

To recall what I wrote earlier, one important background assumption of the study is that ecofeminism is often stereotyped and therefore wrongfully criticized. In fact, none of the authors represent biological essentialism and “back to earth” or “women are closer to nature” ecofeminist standpoints.54

Furthermore, the authors represent three different disciplines – Protestant theology, Philosophy and the History of ideas – which means that they can be expected to have different standpoints on the five issues in focus. This is important because the environmental situation that environmental ethics addresses is complex and therefore ought to be addressed from an interdisciplinary perspective. Even though it can be expected that each author emphasizes different aspects they are not too disparate in terminology and focus of analysis.

Furthermore, Warren, Cuomo, McFague, and Merchant are all influential and active thinkers in their respective field. Finally, of course there are a vast number of ecofeminists who fulfill all these criteria. However, for obvious reasons it is not possible to analyze all ecofeminist authors.

Karen J. Warren is professor of philosophy at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A. She is one of the early ecofeminist philosophers. Her work has had great impact in the field of environmental ethics as well as within ecofeminism at large. Her primary areas of scholarly interest are feminist and environmental philosophy. She has spoken on ecofeminist philosophy in various parts of Latin America, Australia, and Scandinavia, Russia, as well as in the U.S. She is the author of more than forty-five refereed articles and editor or co-editor of five books. She has collected her central thoughts on ecofeminist philosophy in Ecofeminist Philosophy: a Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters, 2000, which is of special concern for this study.

Chris Cuomo was at the time for the publishing of her book Feminism and Ecological Communities: an Ethic of Flourishing, 1998, assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, USA. Cuomo represents, together with Victoria Davion and others, a shift in ecofeminist philosophy from analyses based on biological and social essentialism to analyses based on a more critical, feminist (as opposed to feminine) approach. Cuomo also represents a trend in current ecofeminism, in which environmental ethics relates to postmodern themes. These ideas have interesting consequences for, for example, conceptions of the self and an alleged human/nature dichotomy.

54 See Des Jardins, 1997, pp. 237-244, for a presentation of the “three waves” of ecofeminism, according to which the second wave represents a celebration of “a distinctive female point of view.” (The first wave is identified as a liberal standpoint.)
Sallie McFague is Professor Carpenter of Theology Emerita at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, USA. Four of her books focus on the relationship between humanity and nature. Her work is explicitly conducted from a U.S. Christian protestant point of view. McFague has made important contributions to ecofeminism, ecotheology, and theology by combining feminism, theology, environmentalism, and metaphorical theory of language. She is the author of numerous refereed articles on ecotheology and several books on ecotheology. Of specific interest for this study are: Metaphorical Theology - Models of God in Religious Language, 1982; Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age, 1987; The Body of God: An Ecological Theology, 1993; and, Super, Natural, Christians: How We Should Love Nature, 1997.

Carolyn Merchant is Professor of Environmental History, Philosophy, and Ethics in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, University of California, Berkeley, USA. She is one of the most internationally recognized ecofeminist scholars. Her feminist analysis of conceptual and symbolic connections between historical movements and the oppression of women is a classic. Her books; The Death of Nature; Women Ecology and the Scientific Revolution, (1980, 1983) 1990; Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World, 1992; and Earthcare: Women and the Environment, 1995, are of specific interest.

The literary styles of these authors are normative and descriptive. McFague, Cuomo, and Warren are more normative than descriptive while Merchant tends to be more descriptive. Their language is in general charged with emotional and evaluative statements and rich in metaphor. This is most evident in McFague and Cuomo. In addition, their style is often personal as they explicate their points of views. However, from this does not follow that they are explicitly argumentative. Rather, the arguments are often implicit.55

**Terminology**

Meta ethical analyses demand a clear and consequent terminology and therefore, definitions will be stipulated throughout this work. However, certain basic terms need to be clarified at this point.

Nature is a term that is used in three main meanings. First, “nature” stands for a wide conception of nature, according to which the entire cosmos is included. However, sometimes the term nature is also used as the opposite of the terms culture or humans. Second, “nonhuman nature” is used in order to distinguish between humans and nonhumans and still recognizes that humans and nonhumans alike are natural creatures. Third, “nature-as-it-is”

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55 This discussion about literary styles is inspired by Cassirer (1986) 1999, pp. 11-38.
refers to nature existing independent of human consciousness and or social processes.

*Ethics* – reflection on morals – is distinguished from *morals* – actual past, present, and future values, norms, and beliefs.  

*Environmental philosophy* is an umbrella term, which embraces a variety of theories from different disciplines that focus on aspects of the relationship between humans and nature and is not limited to moral philosophy and theological ethics.

*Environmental ethics* refers to the field of moral philosophy and theology that focuses on the moral aspects of the relationship between humans and nature. Environmental ethics includes reform or weak anthropocentrism (human centered standpoints) and nonanthropocentrism (nature centered standpoints). Environmental ethics also refers to themes of ethical analysis within radical ecology (or radical ecophilosophy), ecotheology, and postmodern environmental ethics. These sub variants of environmental ethics will be presented more in detail below.

*Environmental ethical theory* represents in general systematic normative, descriptive, and meta ethical theoretical analyses in environmental ethics. In this study, it particularly refers to ontological, epistemological, value theoretical, and normative questions associated with views of nature, social constructivism, conceptions of the value of nature, ethical contextualism, and ethical pluralism. Consequently, environmental ethical theory refers both to complete ethical theories as well as to particular standpoints on certain theoretical issues.

*Ecofeminism, the field of ecofeminism, ecofeminist ethical theory,* etc., stand for theoretical reflections on the relationship between humanity and nature that are based on some version of the twin domination thesis. The twin domination thesis means that there are important connections between (a) exploitation of nature and (b) oppression of women, for ethical theory. It is important to note that, when used in this study, the term *ecofeminism* only refers to the standpoints of the four authors analyzed in this study – if not stated otherwise.

*Ecofeminist* and *ecofeminine* have different meanings. An analysis is *ecofeminist* only as far as it includes “...an analysis of sex, gender, and

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56 See Stenmark, 2002, p. 14 and Des Jardins, 1997, p. 16, for discussions on the meaning of “ethics” and “morals.” Des Jardins makes a distinction between ethics (what I and Stenmark refer to as morals) and *philosophical ethics* (what I refer to as normative ethics).

57 Anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism is further defined in chapter one on the issue of values of nature.

58 Environmental ethical theory includes many more questions or issues than these, hence, the list presented here is far from complete.

59 See Warren’s article, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” (1990) 1993a, in which Warren makes an effort to systematically explain this connection. See also Des Jardins, 1997, p. 238, for a shorter definition of this connection.
patriarchy. In addition, “…a feminist analysis must look closely at the roles women play in various patriarchies, e.g. the historically identified feminine roles.”

Nonecofeminist ethical theory, nonecofeminist ethics, etc. represent work in environmental ethics that does not take the twin domination thesis as an explicit starting point. This does not mean that a nonfeminist environmental ethical theory or nonfeminist environmental philosophy, etc., is necessarily inconsistent with the twin domination thesis, that it contradicts some other substantial or formal characteristics of ecofeminism, or that it is anti-feminist. These terms only stand for those ethicists and philosophers that are discussed in this study if not stated otherwise.

The Field of Research

1973 is an important year in the history of environmental ethics. In this year, three papers were published that opened up the field of environmental ethics. These papers were Peter Singer’s “Animal Liberation” in *The New York Review of Books*, Arne Naess’ “The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements: A Summary” in *Inquiry*, and Rickard Sylvain’s (then Routley), “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethics?” at the Fifteenth World Congress of Philosophy in Varna, Bulgaria.

These papers questioned anthropocentric, or humancentered, ethical theory. Looking back, Singer, Naess, and Sylvain have come to represent animal ethics, radical ecophilosophy, and nonanthropocentric ethics. Several academic journals that focus on environmental ethical issues have seen the light since 1973. The most important is *The Journal of Environmental Ethics*, founded by Eugene Hargrove in 1979.

Animal ethics deals among other things with the question of whether nonhuman animals have intrinsic value or not. The most well known theories of animal ethics are animal rights theories (Tom Regan) and sentient ethics.
(Peter Singer). Recently, Helena Röcklingsberg, Uppsala, Sweden defended her doctoral thesis on animal ethics. In addition, Carl-Henric Grenholm has published work on animal ethics as well.64

*Deep ecology*, or ecosophy, is currently a well-established nonanthropocentric sub-discourse represented by scholars like Bill Devall, George Sessions, and Warwick Fox. They advocate some of the main ideas of deep ecology, such as the conceptions of a transpersonal or transcendent self, of biological egalitarianism, and a holistic worldview.65

*Biocentric* and *ecocentric nonanthropocentrism* are currently well represented and the efforts to construct valid arguments and theories in favor of the intrinsic value of nature are numerous. Kenneth Goodpaster and Paul Taylor are two of the most influential biocentric philosophers. They argue in favor of the moral standing of plants.66 In addition, ecocentrism argues in favor of the moral standing of nonhuman groups and wholes such as species, ecosystems, populations, and communities. Two of the most frequently cited ecocentric philosophers are John Baird Callicott67 and Holmes Rolston III.68 They have published numerous articles and several books on the topic, which are of relevance for this study. In Sweden, Staffan Kvassman has published work in favor of nonanthropocentric environmental ethics from a theological phenomenological perspective.69

*Anthropocentrism* claims that nonhuman nature only has extrinsic (instrumental), utility, and contributory anthropocentric value. However, anthropocentrism does not represent anti nature ethics. Rather, anthropocentrism refers to attempts to develop environmental ethical standpoints, which consider nonhuman nature, indirectly and for human centered reasons only. Bryan G Norton has done important work in this area.70 Per Ariansen argues in favor of instrumental constitutive value of nonhuman nature.71 Furthermore, Don E Marietta represents a nature sensitive anthropocentrism.72

In Sweden, work in environmental ethics has been done that are not explicitly normative but rather describe and critically discuss certain theoretical problems. Here, Anders Nordgren, Thomas Anderberg, Mikael

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64 Regan and Singer have published numerous articles and books on animal ethics, see for instance Regan, 1983 and Singer, 1981, 1987.
70 Kvassman, 1999.
73 Marietta, 1995.
Stenmark, Anders Melin, Stig Wandén, and Fredrik Lundmark among others are representatives of different approaches within environmental ethics.\textsuperscript{74} 

\textit{Ecotheology} is an additional tradition in environmental ethics. John B. Cobb, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Andrew Linzey, and Michael Northcott\textsuperscript{75} discuss environmental matters from a theological perspective. Academic ecotheology grew as a response to arguments like those offered by Lynn White Jr., who argues that a Christian worldview is partly to blame for the global environmental crisis.\textsuperscript{76} Like other fields of environmental philosophy, ecotheology is diverse and comes in conservative, moderate, liberal, and radical versions.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{Postmodern environmental ethics}\textsuperscript{78} is perhaps more than the previously discussed discourses in a process of critical reflection on ontological and epistemological foundations of environmental ethics. One of the themes in postmodern environmental ethics is a questioning of objective and universal knowledge. A consequence of this questioning is that knowledge is seen as a product of social relationships, movements, or structures. This amounts to a questioning of correspondence theories of truth, which has implications for ontology as well. Sometimes postmodern environmental ethics questions the content or meaning of “reality.” In addition, sometimes, postmodern environmental ethics questions the alleged ontological/epistemic distinctions that ontological and or epistemological realism is based on. A second theme in postmodern environmental ethics is the questioning of essential properties. This means that identity is not seen as atomistic, essential, and inherent individual properties but as results of an individual’s relationships. Consequently, conceptions of a self with an essential kernel or core onto which beliefs, views, emotions, etc., are attached are replaced with a relational ontology of the self. According to a relational ontology of the self, the self is constituted through social phenomena such as relationships. This


\textsuperscript{75} Cobb, 1972; Ruether, 1975a, 1975b, 1993; Linzey, 1998; Northcott, 1996.

\textsuperscript{76} White, 1967. White’s article attracted attention to anthropocentric dominion ideas in the Scripture. His article was not primarily an attempt to dismiss Christianity and its greatest advantage was that it provoked a start of ecotheology and theologian environmental ethics.

\textsuperscript{77} Oelschlaeger, 1994, pp. 121-124. According to Oelschlaeger, A \textit{conservative} ecotheology draws on the infallible authority of God revealed in scripture, tradition, or revelation. \textit{Moderate} ecotheology relates to other sources as well, such as other religious traditions and science. For example, the Judeo-Christian creation story can be interpreted in terms of the so-called Big-Bang theory as well as of evolution theory. According to \textit{Liberal} ecotheology, typically Christian sources like the Scripture, Christian traditions, and revelation are looked upon as texts that demand contextual interpretation in contest with other texts. \textit{Radical} ecotheology retains some elements of the Christian tradition but does not hesitate to question conservative, moderate, and perhaps liberal foundations of it, such as the idea of \textit{Imago Dei}, the supremacy of the Christian God, etc.

\textsuperscript{78} See Oelschlaeger (Ed.), 1995, for articles on postmodern environmental ethics. My characterization of postmodern environmental ethics is inspired by Oelschlaeger’s work.

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means that the self originates simultaneously with its relationships, and, that it exists only as far as it exists within relationships.

**Ecofeminism** developed during the same period as nonfeminist environmental ethics. Françoise d’Eaubonne coined the term “eco-feminism” in 1974. The common denominator of all ecofeminist theories is the idea that domination of women and other subordinated groups and exploitation of nature are interconnected. Karen Warren lists a number of connections that are used as departures for ecofeminist analyses: (a) historical and causal, (b) conceptual, (c) empirical and experiential, (d) epistemological, (e) symbolic, (f) ethical, (g) theoretical, and (h) political connections. Consequently, ecofeminist analyses can be found in history, philosophy, sociology, science of religion and theology, political science, science, and of course in environment- and development studies, and gender studies. In Scandinavia, several Ph.D. projects focus on aspects of ecofeminism.

As clarified earlier, ecofeminist ethical theory relates to **feminist ethical theory**, which is an internationally well-established discipline. In early feminist ethics, the care-theme was dominant because feminist ethical theory took as starting-point a critical approach towards nonfeminist ethical theory, which according to feminist ethics primarily focused on “public” affairs in terms of “justice.” As stated previously in the introduction, according to feminist ethics, this approach marginalized significant variables of the lives of women. Later, feminist ethicists came to focus on “justice” and theories of justice, reconciling “justice” with “care.” Of course, feminist moral philosophy also includes philosophy of science, epistemology, theories about postmodernity, political philosophy, theological ethics, etc. Moreover, feminist ethics is also represented in different variants of applied ethics such as peace ethics, sexual ethics, environmental ethics, animal ethics, health-

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79 d’Eaubonne, 1974. There are also references to 1984 regarding d’Eaubonne’s article. However, 1974 is the year that is most commonly referred to. In addition to d’Eaubonne’s article, Rosemary Radford Ruether published “Women, Ecology, and the Domination of Nature” in *The Ecumenist* the same year.

80 Warren, 1996, p. x. This presentation of ecofeminism is mainly taken from Warren. I have left out and added some authors. See Warren, 1996, pp. x-xxvi for a fuller presentation of ecofeminist research.


83 Shiva, 1988; Salleh, 1990.


85 Murphy, 1988; Daly, 1978; Spretnak, 1982; Ruether, 1993.


87 Adams, 1990; Curtin, 1996; R. King, 1996.

88 Mies & Shiva, 1993; Bar On & Ferguson (Eds.), 1998.

89 For instance at Universities in Finland, the University of Karlstad in Sweden, and the University of Uppsala in Sweden, several Ph.D. projects that focus on ecofeminism and on ecofeminist themes are in progress.


91 See for example Young, 1990; Möller Okin, 1989; Lebacqz, 1987.
care ethics, etc. At the Department of Theology, Uppsala, Sweden, feminist ethics is one of the central research areas.\textsuperscript{92}

Outline

This study has four parts. In part one (chapter one), the five theoretical issues are dealt with in a descriptive analysis of nonfeminist environmental ethical theoretical positions. This presentation of nonfeminist environmental ethics aims to develop the analytical tools, which will be used in the analysis of ecofeminist ethical theory. Further, these theoretical standpoints will serve as a comparative instrument in the analysis conducted in part three. Part two (chapters two - six) deals with ecofeminist ethical theory. Here ecofeminist ethical theoretical standpoints regarding the five issues are analyzed. Each author’s view on the issues in question is described. Part three (chapter seven) focuses on a comparison between ecofeminist ethical theory and environmental ethical theory and ends with a concluding remark on the contribution of ecofeminism to environmental ethics. Finally, part four (chapter eight) deals with the advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory and includes a clarification of some of my own standpoints regarding the issues in focus, ecofeminism, and environmental ethics at large.

Chapter 1

Five Central Issues in Environmental Ethics

This chapter presents nonfeminist environmental ethical standpoints on the previously presented five central issues in environmental ethics. First, three views of nature will be described. This is followed by an introduction of two arguments against social constructivism. After this, descriptions of different conceptions of nature’s intrinsic value follow. Proceeding with a classification of different variants of ethical contextualism, finally the meaning of ethical pluralism and monism will be clarified in terms of conceptions of consistent and inconsistent selves.

1. Views of Nature

Regarding the meaning of a “view of nature,” this study takes the following definition as starting point. A view of nature is “the image in which we think of and experience nature.”\(^1\) A view of nature includes descriptive as well as normative ideas of nature and of the relationship between humans and nature.\(^2\)

This chapter focuses on three different views of nature in nonfeminist environmental ethics. The first nonfeminist view of nature is place-oriented.\(^3\) In this view natural places and accordingly “the natural” is defined in contrast to “non-natural” places such as domesticated landscapes, cities, etc.\(^4\) Thus, the idea of a human/nature dichotomy is essential in this view of nature and often entails what can be referred to as geographical, existential, and conceptual human/nature dualism.

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\(^1\) Lundgren (Ed.), 1993, p. 62.
\(^2\) Lundgren (Ed.), 1993, p. 63.
\(^3\) See Ariansen, 1996, p. 39 for an example of such a view of nature.
\(^4\) Here, I use ”place” in the meaning of geographical place; places we can travel to, a “location within physical space.” See Malpas, 1999, for a thorough analysis of place. Malpas, 1999, p. 173. “Of course, place remains more than just a backdrop – more than just a ‘location’ within physical space. Place…possesses a complex and differentiated structure made up of a set of interconnected and interdependent components – subject and object, space and time, self and other.”
Although it is possible to differentiate between these different kinds of dualisms, they are often interrelated. One example of how human/nature dualism is used in nonfeminist environmental ethics is presented in restoration standpoints, which often presuppose a place-oriented view of nature and geographical dualism. These restoration standpoints focus on places to restore, such as a certain area (like the Love Canal area), a certain ecosystem (like the sea beds of the Baltic Sea), or a species in a certain area (like the restoration of wolf in Norway and Sweden). Here, nature is identified in sharp contrast to domesticated places and the boundaries that separate nature and culture are apparent; nature is per definition a demarcated area.

Combined with a normative human/nature dualism, a place-oriented view holds that certain human interventions - or human interventions as such - are considered degrading or damaging to nature’s unique authenticity or value. According to this approach, the unique identity of nature is preserved as long as human interventions are restricted to visiting hours, and follow a certain code of conduct, which does not alter the authenticity of nature. In addition, in the restoration discourse normative human/nature dualism is often based on a distinction between “nature” and ”artifact.” For instance, Erik Katz claims that a maintained naturalness of “nature” entirely depends on whether humans intervene in wilderness areas or not. According to Katz, the alleged intrinsic value of nature is conditioned by maintaining a geographical human/nature dualism. Consequently, when humans violate the authenticity of nature and objects of nature, it is because their interference as such turns nature and these objects into human artifacts.

Existential human/nature dualism is a standpoint according to which experiences of nature as amoral are necessary in order for us to maintain our identities as moral, human beings. Hence, a maintained geographical nature/culture dichotomy is necessary for the sake of maintaining an identity as moral agent.

Existential dualism is sometimes combined with conceptual dualism according to which, if and only if there exists something that we conceptualize as “amoral,” e.g. nonhuman nature, will the “moral,” e.g. culture/humanity make sense or even exist. Accordingly, the conception of autonomous nature “…is a necessary constituent element for an ethical

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6 Katz, (1992) 1998, p. 233: “Artifacts are human instruments; their value lies in their ability to meet human needs. Natural entities have no intrinsic functions; they were not created for any instrumental purpose. To attempt to manage natural entities is to deny their inherent autonomy; a form of domination.”

7 See Ariansen, 1996, pp. 31-42 for a discussion on nature as constituting the meaning of being moral.
project…” because, “nature” is defined in opposition to and/or as a complement for definitions of “culture” and vice versa.

The second nonfeminist view of nature is process-oriented. This view makes it possible for both entities and objects to have natural and cultural identities simultaneously. While a place-oriented view focuses on objects, a process-oriented focuses primarily on process. One consequence of this is that according to a process-oriented view, natural objects can be altered as long as this interference does not alter the fact that these objects originate in the processes of nature, and that these processes are intact. That is to say, even though natural objects might be changed, the authenticity of nature is maintained because nature’s authenticity is linked to a natural process and not to the identity of specific objects or places of nature. According to Eugene Hargrove, the “natural” can be defined as the ongoing historical processes that also precede present nature and not merely be defined as current natural objects and processes.9 Hargrove claims that it is “…the ongoing natural history that constitutes the essence of nature.”10 A keyword in Hargrove’s process-oriented view is “self-creation.” This means that the process of natural history is a self-creative process in which humans can interfere from a position outside that process (like jumping in a river that floats by). Following a process-oriented view of nature, human interventions will only change the identity of objects of nature as natural if human interventions relocate them outside the self-creative process. Thus, human interventions as such, are not automatically a problem. However, if a result of human interventions is that the objects no longer originate in the self-creative process of nature, they become artifacts,11 from which follows that the authenticity is lost. Consequently, the process-oriented view of nature is in conformity with human interventions with natural objects and places as long as this does not alter the processes of nature.12

One consequence of a process-oriented view is that it makes it possible to keep a descriptive human/nature dualism without denying that the processes of nature and the processes of culture are parts of the same evolutionary process. The reason why this is possible is that both the human sphere and

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8 Ariansen, 1993b, p. 13. See also Ariansen, 1993b: p. 12, wherer he writes: “Just as the phenomenon of the morally good draws on the phenomenon of the morally evil, the phenomenon of morality draws on the phenomenon of amorality. Pure nature is, as we have seen, the domain of amorality. So, the distinction between the realm of morality and the realm of amorality is a constitutive prerequisite for forming the very idea of culture. Without nature as a contrast to culture we would no longer be able to see ourselves as free and autonomous agents.”


12 See also Attfield, 1999, p. 16, where Attfield defines nature as “…processes not predominantly modified or shaped by human activity.” See pp. 9-26 for a more comprehensive presentation of Attfield’s view on nature.
the natural sphere are viewed as distinct processes, which both exist within the evolutionary process. Moreover, a process-oriented view of nature can entail descriptive as well as normative human/nature dualism. According to the latter, the natural process serves as a moral standard.

The third nonfeminist view of nature is non-dualistic. This view of nature can be understood as a reaction against the strong emphasis on the conception of wilderness in environmentalism. In this view, the idea of wilderness is exchanged for “the wild.” Environmental philosopher Erik Katz touches upon a non-dualistic view as he follows environmental philosopher Tom Birch’s discussion about “wildness” as “still being there” and that wildness maintains its own “integrity” despite any human intervention. However, Katz maintains a place-oriented view of nature that upholds a normative nature/culture dualism.\(^{13}\)

In addition and contrary to a non-dualistic view, environmental philosopher Robin Attfield uses a view of nature as the wild as a way of keeping the two spheres apart. Following Thoreau, Attfield claims that the idea of nature as wild is needed in order for us to maintain a belief that nature is not a human creation. That is to say, the wild guarantees a nature that exists beyond human control, separate from humanity.\(^{14}\)

Environmental philosopher Irene Klaver’s view of nature differs from Katz and Attfield’s views in that she regards humans as well as nonhumans potentially “wild.”\(^{15}\) Her view maintains neither descriptive nor normative human/nature dualism. According to Klaver, “wilderness” was constructed historically because we no longer endured the wild. This means that through out the history of human nature relationship, wilderness places were constructed as controlled places.\(^{16}\) The wild on the other hand is characterized as a quality that escapes both social control and fixed conceptual definitions.\(^{17}\) Following Klaver, the wild seeps through our philosophic, restoring, ecologic, ethical, feminist fingers as soon as we try to capture (define, control) the nature of the wild.\(^{18}\) Therefore, it is impossible to demarcate wild nature in geographical areas or as a disparate process.\(^{19}\) Furthermore, Klaver’s view of the potentially wild nature-culture is characterized by change, as a potential quality in both humans and nonhumans. Consequently, in this non-dualistic view of nature, change has a

\(^{14}\) Attfield, 1999, p. 18.
\(^{15}\) Klaver, 1995, p. 124. “Wildness pervades us if we are open to it and participate in it. It is implicit in us and we in it.” The view of nature-culture as wild introduced here is inspired by and follows Klaver’s article.
\(^{16}\) Klaver, 1995, pp. 118-125.
\(^{17}\) Klaver, 1995, p. 124.
\(^{18}\) Klaver, 1995, p. 126. “As with seasons, the being of the wild is change; it is a fluttering companion located between waking and dreaming; a colorful connection between knowing and not knowing; never caught in rigidity, it always moves, comes and goes.”
\(^{19}\) Klaver, 1995, pp. 120-121. Se also Klaver, p. 129, where she writes: “Wild is what travels through our skin, through our borders.”
different meaning than in the process-oriented view presented above. Moreover, if restoration practices were based on a non-dualistic view of nature, the ability for nature-culture creatures to be wild is what should be restored and preserved, and not a specific process, entity, or place. Hence, in this view, nature is not “natural,” and culture is not “cultural.”

A non-dualistic view of nature differs from the other views accounted for here. In this view of nature-culture as wild, geographical and conceptual human/nature dualistic principles are set aside. Instead, the “wild” is what connects humans with nonhuman nature, not that which separates us from it as is the case with “wilderness.” Although assessments regarding human interventions in nature as morally good or bad are possible following this view, these assessments are never based on principles that such interventions violate nature’s authenticity.

To conclude, this discussion shows that the question concerning which views of nature that are represented in ecofeminism needs to be further developed in order to compare nonfeminist views of nature with these views represented by nonfeminist environmental ethics. Therefore, the following questions will be the starting point:

   a) What is nature essentially identified as?
   b) What are the ecofeminist views on the human/nature dualism?
   c) Is nature regarded as amoral, immoral, or as a moral standard?

2. Social Constructivism and Nature

Social constructivism typically claims: “What is considered a natural environment depends on the particular culture and society defining it.” One way of understanding this claim is that social processes sustain all understandings, or even existences, of nature. Several environmental philosophers criticize such an understanding. For example, Anna Peterson claims that social constructivism implies normative relativism because, if social processes produce all understandings or even existences of nature, it

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20 Alternatively, they sometimes are, but the meanings and identities of nature and culture are permanently in flux.
21 See Burr, (1995) 2000, pp. 1-2 for a discussion on terminology. The terms social constructivism and social constructionism are used interchangeably in the literature and as Vivien Burr shows, there are good reasons to choose the term constructionism. However, because it is central for my analysis to distinguish between “construism,” “constructionism,” and “inventionism,” the term social constructivism is used in this study (rather than social constructionism) as an umbrella term for these three kinds of social constructivism.  
24 See Peterson, 1999 and Smith, 1999.
will become impossible to determine if, when, and why a certain treatment, understanding, or condition of nature is preferable or not. Peterson claims,

If there is no “real” nature, if all nature is constituted by human interpretation or invention, than we have no grounds on which to evaluate one environment as better or worse or to resist some forms of intervention and support others.

In addition, deep ecologists criticize social constructivism because they claim that it reduces environmental problems to interhuman affairs only. That is to say, some deep ecologists regard social constructivism as just another:

...anthropocentric hubris which allows blinkered humanists to regard their theoretical problematics as complete without regard for nature’s own being. (verb)

This criticism presupposes that the social constructivist idea that nature is a human construction is incommensurable with nonanthropo-centrism as such.

In order to clarify and understand this criticism as well as to clarify, compare, and criticize ecofeminist social constructivism, the following three questions concerning social constructivism need to be discussed.

a) What is the meaning of social constructivism?
b) What aspects of nature are considered as products of social processes?
c) What is the nature of these processes?

3. Values of Nature

The meaning of nature’s alleged intrinsic value or worth and the question whether nonhumans have intrinsic value or worth have been central in nonfeminist environmental ethics since its beginning. Consequently, environmental ethicists are often categorized according to their standpoints regarding the meaning, locus, and origin of nature’s intrinsic value.

However, the fact that no common definitions of nature’s alleged intrinsic value exists within nonfeminist environmental ethics makes analyses of this

28 Callicott, 1989, p. 160. Callicott holds that the question of nature’s intrinsic value is “…the central theoretical problem of environmental ethics.” See Norton, 1987 for a value theoretical taxonomy.
29 See Norton, 1897 and Stenmark, 2002, their works are good examples of this way of defining different environmental ethical theories.
issue problematic. For example, intrinsic value/worth of nature is sometimes used as a criterion for granting nature moral standing and sometimes as the meaning of nature’s moral standing. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that discussions about nature’s intrinsic value or worth are from time to time simply constituent parts of nature friendly rhetoric. In addition, “intrinsic value” or “intrinsic worth” sometimes only refer to conceptions of objective value and sometimes to both non-objectivism and objectivism.

According to the terminology that is used in this study, “value” is defined as a qualitative and quantitative concept and “worth” as only a qualitative concept.

Intrinsic value is a nonmoral value, which means that the fact that something has intrinsic value is not the same as that it is morally good. The definitions of nonmoral values below are based on William K. Frankena’s work with the concept of intrinsic worth added to the list.

**Utility value** refers to things that are good because of their usefulness for some purpose.

**Extrinsic (instrumental) value** refers to things that are good because they are means to what is good.

**Inherent value** refers to things that are good because the experience of contemplating them is good or rewarding in itself.

**Intrinsic value** refers to things that are good in themselves or good because of their own intrinsic properties.

**Contributory value** refers to things that are good because they contribute to the intrinsically good life or are parts of the intrinsically good life.

**Intrinsic worth** refers to entities that have a dignity of their own.

**Anthropocentric, Biocentric, and Ecocentric Values of Nature**

Environmental ethics is divided into two major categories based on different conceptions of the value or worth of nature; anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism holds that nature does not have intrinsic value or worth while all variants of nonanthropocentrism holds that nature has intrinsic value or worth. There are several variants of nonanthropocentrism and in is study, biocentrism and ecocentrism is of importance because of their central roles in the field of environmental philosophy.

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30 Stenmark, 2002, pp. 30-34. Stenmark mentions one such conceptual confusion on p. 32. See also Norton, 1987, pp. 154-155 for a table on nonanthropocentric normative standpoints regarding the intrinsic value of nature.

31 Thomas, 1993, p. 66. “If we accept the idea of intrinsic value, this does not commit us to the existence of objective values – of a realm of values independent of mind…Something has value for me, if I do not want it merely because it conduces to something else. I value it for its own sake.”

32 Frankena, (1963) 1973, p. 82.
Bryan G. Norton argues that it is possible to develop a coherent anthropocentric theory of nature’s value, which in his case serves as a rational basis for a rationale for species preservation. However, the fact that Norton does not develop a nonanthropocentric value theory coheres with the ideas that nature has what Frankena refers to as utility, inherent, and contributory value.

Norton introduces a distinction between instrumental demand values and instrumental transformative values. This means that from the fact that nature has instrumental value not only because nature meets our actual demands but also because nature changes (transforms) our preferences, the entire category of instrumental values are not, or may not, result in unsustainable exploitation of nature. One consequence of Norton’s standpoint is that if it is possible to establish that not all of nature’s instrumental values are destructive to nature, it is unnecessary to establish a nonanthropocentric value theory. In other words, from a preservationist perspective, a certain anthropocentric value theory is rational. Consequently, Norton’s standpoint is that it is not necessary to develop a coherent theory of nature’s intrinsic value or worth in order to develop a rational ethical theory a basis for the preservation of species.

Per Ariansen defends another kind of anthropocentrism. He claims that nature has constitutive value. That is to say, nature has constitutive external (instrumental) value, which means that our experiences of nature are constitutive of our identity as human beings, per se, as well as of our identities as particular human individuals.

According to this variant of anthropocentrism, nature’s constitutive value can be regarded neither as a utility value nor as an inherent value. Rather, it is a contributory value since to be “human” is part of the intrinsically good life. As such, it is, according to Ariansen, “…at the bottom, both of the ethical perspective and of the religious perspective.” In short, who we are, are in a deep sense a product of our experiences of nature.

Biocentric ethicist Paul Taylor’s definitions of value and worth do not entirely correspond with Frankena’s definitions. For example, Taylor uses the term “value” to refer to subjective values of nature only and the term “worth” is used to refer only to the meaning of objective values of nature.

33 Norton, 1987. This excellent work on the meaning of environmental ethical value is in itself a defense for normative anthropocentrism. See p. 135, for a definition of anthropocentrism: “…only humans are the locus of intrinsic value, and the value of all other objects drives from their contribution to human values.”
35 Norton, 1987, pp. 207-213. See this passage for an argument in favor of anthropocentric transformative value theory (what Norton refers to as “weak anthropocentrism”), in terms of a distinction between felt and considered preferences.
36 See Ariansen, 1996, pp. 31-37 for a definition of nature’s constitutive value.
Moreover, Taylor’s term *intrinsic* value is used to refer to events, conditions, and goals that we experience as enjoyable in themselves, and, to interests that we want to achieve because we regard them as worthwhile in themselves.\(^39\) In addition, Taylor’s term, *Inherent* value refers to the value nature, objects, places, art, and buildings, etc., have because they are the kinds of things they are. This means that Taylor’s term “inherent” refers to “non-instrumental” values of nature, which “inhere” in nature in the sense that nature is valued because of its characteristics or qualities; i.e. nature is valued because of nature’s beauty or biological, cultural, or religious importance (noncommercial importance).\(^40\)

If we translate Taylor’s standpoints into Frankena’s terminology, which will be used from now on, Taylor’s *inherent* worth, equals objective *intrinsic* worth.

As advocating normative biocentrism, Taylor argues that only nonhuman entities that are alive possess inherent worth. The reason for this is that only living entities have interests.\(^41\)

According to Taylor, if it is possible to establish what is in the interest of an entity, it is also possible to establish its objective good; i.e. to establish what it would benefit from and what would harm its life cycle from its own point of view.\(^42\) Accordingly, the objective good of animals and plants is established in terms of their individual biological development.\(^43\) That is to say, their biological well-being equals their development according to a in beforehand-established biological life span,\(^44\) which is considered “normal.” Following the Kantian tradition, the intrinsic individual worth that Taylor ascribes nonhuman plants and animals is not quantifiable. Moreover, the worth they possess, they possess in power of their capacities of being organized as a whole, which means that the organism has intrinsic worth because it, as an organic whole, strives towards fulfillment of its interests.\(^45\)

Taylor’s standpoint is consistent with the idea that nature has subjective and objective utility, extrinsic, inherent, intrinsic, and contributory values for humans. However, according to Taylor, intrinsic worth of nature is

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41 See Taylor, (1986) 1989, pp. 60-71 for a discussion on “The concept of the Good of a Being,” and pp. 75-79 for a discussion on the “inherent worth” of nonhumans. According to Taylor, if we cannot establish what is in the interest of an entity from its own point of view it makes no sense to speak of it in terms of objective intrinsic worth (In Taylor’s terms, “inherent worth”).
43 Taylor, (1986) 1989, p. 66. “A butterfly that develops through the egg, larva, and pupa stages of its life in a normal manner, and then emerges as a healthy adult that carries on its existence under favorable environmental conditions, might well be said to thrive and prosper. It fares well, successfully adapting to its physical surroundings and maintaining the normal biological functions of its species throughout its entire span of life.”
44 Alternatively, as Callicott puts it in Callicott, 1989, p. 145: “a thrusting, striving, driving, developmental tendency or direction (whether conscious or unconscious)...”
objective, since its existence is independent of whether humans value nature or not.\textsuperscript{46}

The version of ecocentrism accounted for in the following holds that nonhuman wholes and individuals have subjective intrinsic value in addition to their utility, extrinsic, inherent, and contributory value.

J. Baird Callicott’s distinction between objective and nonobjective intrinsic values deviates from Taylor’s distinctions. According to Callicott, intrinsic value refers to objective values of nature, and inherent value refers to non-objective values of nature.\textsuperscript{47} Callicott views species as well as ecosystems, and the land itself as having inherent value.\textsuperscript{48} According to Frankena’s definitions, this means that Callicott’s standpoint is that natural wholes have subjective intrinsic value.

As an emotivist in the Humean tradition, Callicott does not offer properties or capacitates of nature as criterion for nature’s intrinsic value. Instead, statements about intrinsic value with reference to nature are supposed to express an evolutionary developed empathy (“bio-empathy”) towards nature.\textsuperscript{49}

Callicott claims that intrinsic values are external to nature because they originate in human sentiments and within the evolutionary process of social concern. Therefore, extended moral embrace is a matter of time, of moral evolution, and of moral agents with “less narrow” “social and intellectual horizons.”\textsuperscript{50} In other words, according to Callicott, we are moving (developing) towards a morality that includes concern for nonhuman individuals as well as for wholes.\textsuperscript{51} Consequently, according to Callicott, and if we assume that ethical theories develop in correlation to environmental morals, we will develop coherent ecocentric normative and value theoretical theories in due time.

\textsuperscript{47} Callicott, 1989, pp. 161-162.
\textsuperscript{48} Callicott, 1989, p. 134. “Nonhuman species, I argue, may possess intrinsic value in this truncated sense [nonobjective sense], which is consistent with the world view of scientific naturalism. Indeed, my suggestion is that the world view of modern science not only allows for the intrinsic value of nonhuman species in this limited sense, but its cosmological, evolutionary, and ecological perspectives actually foster such value.”
\textsuperscript{49} Callicott, 1989, p. 152. “The Humean Darwinian bio-empathic moral metaphysics, based upon naturally selected moral sentiments, provides a theory according to which species qua species may have ‘intrinsic value’.”
\textsuperscript{50} Callicott, 1989, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{51} Weston, 1995, pp. 223-242. Anthony Weston joins Callicott in the view that nonanthropocentrism is in process. Weston claims that the time has not yet come for a fully developed and theoretically coherent nonanthropocentric ethical theory.
Origins of Values of Nature

The question concerning subjective versus objective intrinsic value of nature is addressed in terms of origin of value in this study. The reason for discussing this matter in terms of the origin of value is that the distinction between objective existence and objective origin is important for a discussion concerning theoretical acceptance of environmental ethical conceptions of value and worth.

Nonanthropocentrism can be combined with at least four basic ideas about the origin of nature’s value; anthropogenic, biogenic, ecogenic, and theogenic origin. According to J. Baird Callicott, all values of nature are anthropogenic, Callicott claims:

…from the point of view of scientific naturalism, the source of all value is human consciousness […] no value can, in principle, from the point of view of classical normal science, be altogether independent of a valuing consciousness.52

In this quote, Callicott claims that values of nature originate in human feelings of empathy towards nature and that value statements regarding nature refer to emotions towards nature.53 In this sense, Callicott holds that human consciousness at least partly constitutes utility, extrinsic, inherent, intrinsic, contributory values, and intrinsic worth.

Taylor’s biocentrism can be interpreted as if worth of nature has biogenic origin. This interpretation is based on Taylor’s claim that nature-others54 have inherent worth because they strive to fulfill what is in their objective interest. This means that the intrinsic worth of nature-others originates in individual nature-others, independently of human influence. The minimum criterion for an entity to have inherent worth is that the entity is alive, hence has a good of its own, because then and only then it is possible to define its interest. Consequently, the worth of nonhuman individuals originates in biological processes of development manifested in each individual plant or animal. From this follows that Taylor affirms an objective conception of the intrinsic worth of nonhuman individual others.55

The intrinsic value of nature can also be regarded as having ecogenic origin. One aspect of this approach is that value of nature originates within

52 Callicott, 1989, pp. 133, 134.
53 Callicott, 1989, pp. 160-165. This interpretation differs from how Bryan Norton, (1996) 1998, p. 204, characterizes Callicott’s egocentrism. According to Norton, it follows from Callicott’s standpoint that the intrinsic value of nature has objective origin because value are independent of human evaluations and originate in “…the integrity of whole agent/object which are morally considerable owners of their own value.”
54 Throughout this work, the term nature-others will be used. One reason for using this term is that I wish to establish a terminology that, at this point does not take a stand in the normative question concerning nature’s intrinsic value. That is to say, “nature-others” and “human-others” are to be seen as descriptive terms according to which they are “others” of different kinds, without any normative standpoints taken regarding their moral standing or significance.
55 This presentation of Taylor’s biocentrism as “biogenic” follows the previous presentation of Taylor’s biocentrism in this chapter.
and through evolutionary systemic processes in which both humans and nonhumans take part. According to Holmes Rolston III, the conception of intrinsic value as a “value-in-itself,” does not acknowledge the systemic origin of neither value or the carriers of value. Following this, instead of a concept of “value-in-itself” – atomistic intrinsic value, we should use a concept of “value-in-togetherness” – systemic intrinsic value.

Rolston holds that nature-objects and their intrinsic value originate simultaneously and because of this, the system is the constituent of the origin and existence of nature’s intrinsic value. Moreover, from a human point of view, ecogenic intrinsic value of nature has objective existence in a weak sense because it is neither completely independent, nor completely dependent of human influence.

Rolston denies the idea that value of nature has emotive anthropogenic origin because this standpoint does not cover the systemic aspect of the relationship between humans and nature, between facts and values. Furthermore, he claims that both facts and values are “properties of the system,” hence, the origin of value is ecogenic; it is the system itself, the process of life that gives birth to value.

Value and worth of nature can also be regarded as having theogenic origin. According to Andrew Linzey, value of nature originates in the love of God. That is to say, humans and nonhumans have “a unique and equal value” because they are subjects of God’s inclusive love. Thus, the love of God establishes an (for humans) objective origin of nature’s intrinsic value. Another variant of theogenic value holds that intrinsic value of nature originates in the divine act of creation. According to Oelschlaeger:

63 Rolston, 1998, pp. 510-511. On p. 511, Rolston states: “…the system is a value transformer where form and being, process and reality, fact and value are inseparably joined.”
67 Linzey, (1990) 1998, pp. 57-58. “For our concept of God forbids the idea of a cheap creation, of a throwaway universe in which everything is expendable save human existence. The whole universe is a work of love. And nothing which is made in love is cheap. The value, the worth of natural things is not found in Man’s view of himself but in the goodness of God who made all things good and precious in his sight.”
68 Nash, 1989, p. 96, exemplifies such a standpoint in the following quote: “In a sense the myriad forms of life, as well as the earth itself, had rights that originated from their being the work of the deity.”
If you must move the rock..., ‘Schaeffer argues,’ then by all means, move it. But on a walk in the woods do not strip the moss from it for no reason and leave it to lie by the side and die. Even the moss has a right to live. It is equal with man as a creature of God.65 [Emphasis added.]

To conclude, this overview of different aspects of conceptions of nature’s value or worth in environmental ethics, shows that this is a complex question. So, in order to clarify ecofeminist conceptions of value, a nuanced analytical tool is needed:
   a) What kind of value or worth does nature have?
   b) What is the meaning of nature’s value or worth?
   c) What are the origins of nature’s value or worth?

4. Environmental Ethics and Ethical Contextualism

Ethical contextualism is not an uncommon standpoint within nonfeminist environmental ethics but in order to compare nonfeminist standpoints with ecofeminist standpoints it is important to further clarify the meaning of nonfeminist environmental ethical contextualism.

At this point, a basic meaning of context on the basis of which the forthcoming analysis will be conducted needs to be established: “Context” means “the surrounding conditions in which something takes place.”66 Following this definition, a person’s context is the social (interhuman) and ecological (nonhuman) conditions within which that person leads his or her life. It is important to note that this meaning of context does not merely refer to conditions in the meaning of a stable “backdrop” or “background,” in front of which the relationship between humans and nonhuman others take place.67

Universalism and Four Meanings of Context

Ethical universalism is often presented as the opposite to ethical contextualism. Therefore, before the introduction of four meanings of nonfeminist ethical contextualism, a nonfeminist universalistic approach will be presented.

According to Paul Taylor, universalizability is a formal criterion for valid ethical theories.68 He claims that ethical theorizing is and ought to be universal. This means that Taylor states that in order for principles and norms: “...to constitute a valid normative ethical system” they must not refer

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65 Oelschlaeger, 1994, p. 130.
to particular people. Moreover, ethical theories must be considered to be universally applicable to all moral agents as such, be intended to be applied disinterestedly, and be advocated as normative principles for all moral agents to adopt. Following Kantian ethical universalism, Taylor claims, "...if we correctly judge an act to be morally right, it is because it is in accordance with a rule that applies to everyone as a matter of principle." Furthermore, he claims that a "...moral rule or standard is valid only if those who adopt it as their own normative guide have an attitude of approval toward its being adopted by all others...the standard or rule must be willed to be a universal law for all rational beings."

Formal universalism often includes normative universalism. According to a principle of universal consistency, an act is morally right if and only if a reason for performing it in a certain context is regarded as a valid reason to perform the same action in a similar context. According to a principle of impersonality, an act is morally right if and only if one's reason for performing it in a certain context must be a valid reason for anyone to perform the same action in a similar context.

Ethical contextualism claims that ethical theorizing is or ought to be influenced by contextual aspects and, denies the principles of consistency and impersonality. However, ethical contextualists stress different aspects of context and consider different contextual aspects to be of varying significance for environmental ethics. Hence, the following presentation will show that several different contextual aspects are highlighted within nonfeminist environmental ethics.

The following presentation of four ways of understanding “context” is based on a distinction between internal and external contexts. An internal context is typically a perspective held by individuals. This means that “context” refers to perspectives, worldviews, belief-systems, etc. that are

69 Taylor, (1986) 1989, p. 27. Taylor holds that a rule or standard “... does not contain any reference to particular persons or actions...”
70 Taylor, (1986) 1989, pp. 27, 28. On p. 27, Taylor defines universal moral rules and standards as by necessity “...thought of as being universally applicable within the class of all moral agents."
71 Taylor, (1986) 1989, p. 27. The formal condition of generality means that a rule or a standard “...never states that a specific individual or group must perform a certain action of a certain time and place.”
72 Taylor, (1986) 1989, pp. 27, 28. On p. 28, Taylor writes: “...a valid moral rule or standard must be a normative principle that can be applied universally to all beings who are moral agents, and it must be conceived to be universally applicable by those who subscribe to it as a validly binding moral norm.”
75 Norman, 1983, p. 117.
76 Norman, 1983, p. 117.
77 Bergmann, 1997, p. 31. Bergmann states that the context has economical, class, geographical, sex/gender, ethical, and cultural dimensions. I prefer to discuss in terms of different contextual aspects.
internalized in or applied by a moral agent. An external context on the other hand is the eco/social conditions in which an individual is situated. Internal and external contexts are of course more or less connected. However, since one might either stress an individual perspective or a group-oriented perspective and that one or the other might result in different practice, there are reasons to distinguish between them.

The first nonfeminist contextualism stresses the meaning of context as individual perspective. The idea that each individual holds a set of beliefs, a worldview, or a conceptual framework, which determines his or her moral beliefs, is characteristic for this approach. For example, if this approach was applied to epistemological matters, it would amount to a standpoint that each individual holds several distinct belief systems with corresponding distinct rationalities. Sometimes it is argued that each such belief system is autonomous, which means that it can be justified according to its own standards of rationality. From this follows that a person can hold a scientific perspective, such as a belief in the theory of evolution, and a religious perspective, such as a belief in the Christian creation story simultaneously. That is to say, a person can hold inconsistent perspectives simultaneously because these perspectives are justified in accordance to autonomous standards of rationality.

J. Baird Callicott’s ecocentrism is an example of such a kind of perspective-oriented contextualism. It is possible to interpret Callicott’s view as if belief systems must be consistent with one another. For example, Callicott claims that a “…dogma of the scientific world view…” that amounts to the idea that nature is value-neutral, is “a formidable obstacle” in order for us to establish an idea of the objective intrinsic value of nature. In other words, from the perspective of modern science it is allegedly impossible to establish a certain value theory. This means that all internalized and adopted sub-perspectives (“theories,” “worldviews,” “principles,” etc.) ought to be consistent with each other. Consequently,

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78 Timmons, 1996, p. 299.
79 Stenmark, 1994, p. 361, discusses a contextual model of rationality. In this discussion, Stenmark introduces the “autonomy thesis.” Stenmark uses “context” in the meaning of practice and not in the perspective-oriented meaning I introduce here.
80 See for example Callicott, 1999, p. 172. See also Geertz, 1973, p. 127. Callicott follows Geert’s definition of worldview, according to which, a “worldview” is someone’s “…picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order.” Here cited in Callicott, 1999, p. 36.
81 Callicott, 1999, p. 133.
82 Callicott, 1999, p. 132.
83 Callicott, 1989, p. 132. “A fundamental doctrine of modern science remains a formidable obstacle, however, to all the heroic attempts of philosophers to establish the existence, and adequately explain the nature, of intrinsic value, the value of something in and for itself.” On p. 133, Callicott continues: “…the classical attitude that nature is value-neutral remains a virtually unchallenged dogma of the scientific world view.”
ideas that contradict some or all aspects of a perspective in question will be rejected.

From this follows that Callicott’s moral contextualism (the fact that moral values are contextually influenced) supports his ethical contextualism (the fact that ethics is or ought to take context into consideration). In his discussion about whether it is reasonable to ascribe objective intrinsic value to nature or not, Callicott utilizes what he refers to as “the scientific worldview.” In other words, he holds that the scientific worldview cannot include a notion of nature’s objective intrinsic value without being inconsistent.

An additional different individualistic contextual approach according to which each individual must consider his or her “habitat,” is presented by Bryan G. Norton. He claims:

…we must pay attention to the context in which our values are formulated and acted upon, and that context is the interaction between a culture and its habitat that is described in the “natural history” of a place.84

Furthermore, he states: “humans necessarily understand their world from a given local perspective.”85 What this contextual approach seems to imply, is that from the fact that values originate “locally” and are “…anchored to a particular place by a strong sense of the history and the future of the place,”86 follows that environmental ethics ought to take each locally developed individual perspective into consideration. This is confirmed as Norton states that he favors “values that emerge from experience of one’s home place.”87

The second nonfeminist contextualism can be described as a critical and culture-oriented88 contextualism. Ramachandra Guha represents such an approach,89 according to which certain environmental ethical ideas are criticized from the perspective of certain cultural aspects. In this approach, “context” is interpreted as cultural aspects, for example, socio-economic, scientific/technological, and religious contextual aspects. What is more, cultural aspects may occur as local, regional, and global aspects.

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88 See Westin, (Second ed.) 1995, p. 29, for a definition of culture. Westin defines culture as: “that which is typical of the way of life of a particular people located at some distinct period in time and at some distinct place.” See also Harré & Krausz, 1996, pp. 11-16, according to which, “Culture” refers to human social structures and relationships, to social rather than individual (contrary to the perspective-oriented contextualism previously presented) phenomena with historic and traditional origins such as systems of integrated practices, symbols, and concepts. They define culture as “…an integrated system of symbolic and material practices, that is ways of achieving goals and projects that are constrained by local norms, and which are historical in that they emerge from and continue traditions.”
Guha argues that the universal claim of U.S. deep ecology to put the principles of deep ecology “into practice on a worldwide basis” are questionable from the point of view of actual socio-economic life experiences of Indian people because such an implementation has grave social consequences. According to Guha, U.S. deep ecology does not recognize that the “…over-consumption by the industrialized world and by urban elites in the Third World” is a cause of global environmental degradation. Instead, deep ecologists claim that anthropocentric ideas and attitudes are to blame. Accordingly, a focus on attitudinal causes and solutions of environmental problems results in a flawed theory, because this focus obscures the fact that one main cause of the problem is economic practice. Moreover, Guha claims that deep ecology does not acknowledge that it is impossible for First and Third World people in poverty to act upon biocentric attitudes, values, and beliefs because of their social positions in the global economic and social structure. Thus, from this follows that, due to its failure to consider global socioeconomic cultural contextual aspects, U.S. deep ecology ends up with an ethical theory that at its best is inadequate and at its worst supports and maintains unjust socioeconomic global structures. Hence, according to Guha, an environmental ethical theory that accepts that U.S. Deep Ecology is universally valid, disregards ethically relevant contextual aspect, i.e. global socioeconomic contextual aspects, and consequently maintains an, from Guha’s point of view, unjust socioeconomic order.

A third nonfeminist contextualism is represented by Don E. Marietta. This contextualism is situation-oriented. According to this approach “context” is demarcated in both place and time. Marietta states:

...what makes an approach to moral judgments contextual is that it acknowledges more influence of the situation in shaping ethical norms than most other approaches allow.

Marietta is not entirely clear on what is meant by “situation” here. However, according to another definition, a “situation” is: “...a position or state at a particular time; set of conditions, facts, and events having an effect on a person, society, etc.”

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94 Marietta, 1995, p. 144. “Contexts are always specific and particular: a context is an actually existing situation...” This approach should not be confused with particularism. Particularism holds that universally or contextually morally relevant properties do not exist and that because of this, we ought not theorize in terms of principles at all. Contextualism on the other hand, holds that there might be contextually valid principles. See Thomas, 1993, pp. 94-97, for a characterization of particularism.
95 Marietta, 1995, p. 143.
One characteristic of situation-oriented contextualism is that it can be combined with the contextual approaches previously described. That is to say, it can consider both individual internal contexts as well as external contexts. However, one disadvantage of this approach is that it risks becoming insensitive to contextual aspects prior to and after the actual situation because it is limited in time and place.

A fourth nonfeminist contextualism highlights geographical aspects.97 Again, Norton’s contextualism serves as an example. Norton represents what can be referred to as local contextualism. Local contextualism is a variant of geographical contextualism, which stresses the ethical significance of contextual aspects in the meaning of a person’s geographical (social as well as ecological) conditions. This means that Norton claims that a person’s “…home place locates the perspective from which one understands and values elements and processes in the natural context of our actions.”98 This is an approach in which “context” is understood primarily in spatial terms. Following this, local contextualism can be contrasted with other geographical approaches such as regional contextualism and global contextualism. These approaches are founded on the same principle although they refer to different scales. Consequently, according to geographical contextualism, the size of the area in question varies and might refer to a village, town, park, forest, lot, neighborhood, region, etc.99

Kinds of Ethical Contextualism

Above, four nonfeminist contextual approaches are presented. In addition to the question of what is meant with “context,” an additional important question needs to be addressed. Namely, the kind of ethical contextualism that is represented in nonfeminist environmental ethics. However, before contextualism will be further presented additional definitions of ethical universalism need to be established.

Ethical universalism can be descriptive, value ontological, and epistemic, besides formal and normative. According to descriptive universalism it is possible and desirable to reflect ethically, entirely independent of contextual aspects. Furthermore, according to value ontological universalism, values originate and exist independent of contextual aspects. Finally, according to

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97 Attfield, 1999, pp. 9-12. Here, Attfield is discussing whether there exists a global environment or not. On p. 10, he introduces a definition of the environment as a “field of significance,” as “…the necessary situatedness of human beings within the context of their active, practical and perceptual engagement with their surroundings.”


99 Bergmann, 1997, p. 16. Bergmann claims that we ought to distinguish between a “local theology,” and a “contextual theology.” (My interpretation) In the analysis of ethical contextualism in this study, I have chosen to view local aspects as kinds of contextual aspects instead of viewing them as part of an alternative standpoint to contextualism.

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epistemological universalism, the justification for the reasons why we find certain moral beliefs or ethical theories valid ought to be universal.

In addition, contextualism comes in normative, descriptive, value ontological and epistemological variants as well. Don E. Marietta rightfully claims that normative ethical theories have always paid some attention to practice. However, according to Marietta, normative contextualism implies something beyond this. Marietta states:

…”all ethical systems have paid some attention to the situation in making moral judgments…In fact, most important ethical systems have recognized the significance of the situation and given it some degree of importance.”

It can be assumed that normative contextualism claims that the same action can be morally right in one context and wrong in another at the same time. The reason for this is that contexts are “shaping ethical norms.” This means that, one does not demand that a principle according to which one judges whether an action is morally right or wrong does not require that the principle according to which the act is judged, is a universally valid principle. Moreover, normative contextualism holds that it is improper to argue that the following statement, “it is wrong to kill wolfs because such an action produces lesser pleasurable consequences than any other alternative action,” is valid in other contexts than in the one it is made.

According to descriptive ethical contextualism, ethical reflection is or ought to be determined, or to other extents influenced, by contextual aspects. From this follows that Guha, Callicott, Norton, and Marietta’s standpoints are all based on descriptive contextualism.

According to value-ontological contextualism, values of nature do neither originate nor exist independently of contextual aspects, or in other words, values can neither originate nor exist in isolation from contextual aspects.

According to epistemological contextualism, contextual aspects are relevant for justification of moral beliefs. Mikael Stenmark offers the following general definition of epistemological contextualism: “What is rational or irrational can be determined only internally, from within a context (practice); there exist no context-independent standards of rationality.”

100 Marietta, 1995, p. 143.
101 Marietta, 1995, p. 143. In Marietta, 1995, p. 146, Marietta writes: “Of course, contextualism has to recognize as right in one context what was wrong in another. Why do many people object to this?”
102 We should keep in mind the difference between moral and ethical epistemic justification. That is to say, moral epistemic justification refers to the question whether moral beliefs can be justified independent of contextual considerations or not. In addition, ethical epistemic justification refers to whether ethical propositions or claims can be justified independent of contextual considerations or not. See Timmons, 1996, pp. 298-299, for a distinction between doxastic (moral) and nondoxastic (ethical) justification.
103 Stenmark, 1994, p. 354. Please note that Stenmark adopts a certain conception of context here, namely, context as practice.
Bryan G. Norton defends epistemic situation oriented contextualism and claims:

Truth and objectivity must be sought in the specific characteristics of specific situations in which action is required. [He continues] Knowledge and moral discussion must be understood as a part of the struggle to determine adaptable policies, rather than a distinct “field” of theoretical morality.\\footnote{Norton, (1996) 1998, p. 208.}

Contextual Influence on Ethical Theory

A third and final question regarding ethical contextualism needs to be addressed. This question concerns to what extent context influences or ought to influence ethical theory. The question is relevant for two reasons. First, it seems undoubtedly to be the case that contextual aspects have more or less impact on people’s values. Secondly, if this is the case, ethical contextualism ought to take this matter into consideration since ethical theory ought to consider the way “things” are.

With this in mind, it is not surprising to find that, nonfeminist contextualists and nonfeminist definitions of contextualism represent a variation concerning the extent to which the context influence ethical theory.

For example, according to Marietta, one characteristic of contextualism is that “…the recognition of the context is not \textit{minimal}…”\\footnote{Marietta, 1995, p. 143.} and that contexts are “shaping ethical norms.”\\footnote{Marietta, 1995, p. 143} That Marietta is using the term “minimal” indicates a presupposed difference in contextual influence. Furthermore, in his definition of epistemic contextualism, Stenmark states that what is rational and irrational can be \textit{determined only} from within context.\\footnote{Stenmark, 1994, p. 354.}

Finally, Norton claims: “Truth and objectivity \textit{must} be sought in the specific characteristics of specific situations…”\\footnote{Norton, (1996) 1998, p. 208.} Norton’s claim further strengthens that the question of contextual influence needs to be further elaborated in the forthcoming analysis of ecofeminist contextualism.

To conclude, the result of this presentation of nonfeminist environmental ethical contextualism is that three important questions need to be put to ecofeminism in order to clarify the nature of the contribution of ecofeminism to the field of environmental ethics. These questions are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item a) \textbf{What is the meaning of “context”?}
  \item b) \textbf{What kind of ethical contextualism is represented?}
  \item c) \textbf{To what extent does the context influence ethical theory?}
\end{itemize}
5. Intrapersonal Pluralism and the Conception of an Inconsistent Self

Recently, environmental ethicists have debated whether ethical pluralism or ethical monism is a preferable theoretical standpoint. From a monist point of view, it is claimed that ethical pluralism implies inconsistency in our moral lives. Moreover, based on the assumption that what is referred to as intrapersonal pluralism implies inconsistency in our moral lives, intrapersonal pluralism is rejected. The main reason for this is that it is assumed that mental health\textsuperscript{109} as well as accurate development of one’s morality\textsuperscript{110} requires consistency of the self.

Monists distinguish between intrapersonal pluralism and interpersonal pluralism. Intrapersonal pluralism accepts that a person in a given situation can hold that several inconsistent normative ethical theories are justified. Interpersonal pluralism denies this but accepts that different individuals can hold inconsistent normative ethical theories to be equally justified.\textsuperscript{111}

As an advocator of pluralism in general, Christopher Stone\textsuperscript{112} holds that intrapersonal pluralism is an acceptable theoretical standpoint.\textsuperscript{113} The reason for this is that Stone holds that environmental ethical theories are “…intellectual frameworks that support the analysis and solution of particular moral problems.”\textsuperscript{114} This means that different ethical theories (frameworks/planes/maps) create different pictures of reality as well as different “…rules, principles and so on, to which that version of the world is subject.”\textsuperscript{115} From this follows, that when we apply a theory to a certain

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\textsuperscript{109} Callicott, 1999, pp. 172-173. According to Callicott, changing worldview back and forth (in relation to different environmental problems) is a sign of moral immaturity. Furthermore, such a person leads a life in “…a perpetual state of self-contradiction or as the philosophical equivalent of an individual with a multiple personality disorder.”

\textsuperscript{110} Callicott, 1999, p. 172.

\textsuperscript{111} See Callicott, 1999, pp. 143-183 for his defence of monism and rejection of intrapersonal pluralism. See Norton, (1996) 1998, p. 213, n. 1, where Norton argues against moral monism and recognizes the distinction between Callicott’s “principles monism” and “theoretical monism.” Principles monism only allows “…a single principle that covers all moral quandaries [which] imply a single correct action in different situations.” Theoretical monism on the other hand, “…might employ more than one principle…” as long as these are unified in one consistent, monistic theory.

\textsuperscript{112} Stone, 1995, pp. 243-259.

\textsuperscript{113} Stone, 1995, pp. 254-255. “It would appear that a pluralist, analyzing some choice situation in one framework (say, one that accounts for species in an appropriate way) may conclude that act a is right. The same person, analyzing the situation in another framework (one built, say, from a person-regarding viewpoint) concludes b.” Stone continues: “There is a third set of cases in which more than one framework will appear appropriate and the different frameworks, rather than mutually endorsing the same result, reinforce different, even inconsistent action.” Thus, “[u]nder pluralism, a single situation, variously described, may produce several analyses and various conclusions.”

\textsuperscript{114} Stone, 1987, p. 133.

\textsuperscript{115} Stone, 1987, p. 134.
situation, we limit the objects of significance, the questions of relevance, and the strategies or methods of relevance. In short, we “map” the morally relevant situation according to our environmental ethical theory, in the same way as we for instance “map” the geological world in accordance with geological theories.

According to this standpoint, a person who applies different mutually inconsistent normative principles or theories in a given situation and in a given context, at the same time, and holds them all valid, can be correct in doing so. Following this, from a perspective according to which ethical theories ought to be action guiding, Stone claims that intrapersonal pluralism is a preferable alternative compared to monism because it does not exclude as much potentially significant information as monism does. The reason why monism limits the field of significance is, according to Stone, that because monism only recognizes one possible valid principle of theory, monism carries with it a beforehand normative either/or solution to moral problems.\textsuperscript{116}

Monists agree with pluralists that environmental ethical theories ought to be action guiding. However, from the monist perspective, a reason why we ought to reject pluralism is that it fails to be action guiding because it lacks a clear notion (principle) of which “map” to follow. Consequently, pluralism leaves us with several options but no distinctive prescriptions.\textsuperscript{117}

One way of understanding this dispute is that advocators of pluralism focus on ethical pluralism - the standpoint that it is possible and or desirable to develop ethical intra- or interpersonal pluralistic theory. Monists on the other hand seem to be concerned with moral pluralism – a standpoint according to which inconsistent individual attitudes, values, and behaviors or beliefs are unacceptable.\textsuperscript{118}

However, in this study, this issue will not be dealt with from this perspective, but rather, from the perspective that the main reason why monists and pluralists differ is that they have different views on the relationship between normative theories and a person’s self as well as on the ideal self. Furthermore, I presuppose that one reason why monists take a standpoint against intrapersonal pluralism is that monism presupposes an ideal of a consistent self.

Stone, from a pluralist point of view, holds that it is possible to take distinctive and contradictive normative standpoints without this resulting in mental break down.\textsuperscript{119} According to Stone, ethical theories are tools or lenses

\textsuperscript{116} Stone, 1995, pp. 247-249, 254-255.
\textsuperscript{117} Callicott, 1999, pp. 155-158.
\textsuperscript{118} Ashmore, 1987, pp. 153-155. As Robert B. Ashmore’s discussion on the need for consistency in moral systems illuminates, inconsistency in this sense is a matter of holding “inconsistent beliefs.”
\textsuperscript{119} Stone, 1995, p. 250. “Pluralism invites us to conceive the intellectual activities of which morals consist as being partitioned into several distinct frameworks, each governed by its own appropriate principles.”
that give us information about a certain moral situation. Stone claims that from this follows that ethical theories function as action guides. This means that because each theory gives different evaluative and descriptive information, they provide a number of possible alternatives. Consequently, Stone’s way of looking upon ethical theories indicates that they are external to our “selves” because we shift between them rather unproblematically.

From a monist point of view, a person cannot hold contradictory normative standpoints without a more or less serious flaw in his or her personhood. This is so because monists regard ethical theories to be internal to the self. Moreover, according to Monism, internal inconsistency of the self is a sign of dysfunction, and therefore, what we need, it is argued, is a single principle or theory in relation to which all our normative claims are consistent.

In sum, the fact that a person holds contradictory normative standpoints is, in itself, a sign of moral immaturity because he or she contradicts what can be understood as an ideal principle of organization of the self – a principle of logic consistency.

Reconstructing an Ideal of the Consistent Self

The meaning of ”self,” of course varies, and the following basic definition of the “self” is used in this study: a self is that, which ”a sense of a coherent, dynamic, physical entity to which the sense of agency belong,” refers to.

The way Callicott displays his argument in favor of monism the self seems to have a core, or kernel that is distinct from its beliefs. That is to say, these beliefs, which refer to and cohere with a person’s normative ethical standpoints, are assembled into a coherent whole (a world view) that is organized according to a principle of consistency. Moreover, the self, or its morality, develops according to an in beforehand defined, linear process according to which a coherent moral outlook is the normal, that is, the healthy and mature ideal result.

The fact that monists regard normative theories to be internal to the self is a reason why they deny both ethical and moral pluralism. For instance, according to Callicott, a person cannot adopt a normative environmental

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120 Stone, 1987, p. 133. Stone, who compares ethical theories with the theories of for instance geometry, chemistry, art, defines ethical pluralism as the idea that the field of environmental ethics is like a collection of different “…intellectual frameworks that support the analysis and solution of particular moral problems.”

121 Alternatively, a single, over-arching monistic theory within which all our principles fall.

122 Wenz, 1993, p. 68. Wenz argues that what he refers to, as “extreme” ethical pluralism ought to be rejected because it fails “…to be responsive simultaneously to all of one’s roles and commitments.”

123 Stern, (1985) 2000, p. 82.

124 It should be noted that it is possible to imagine an inconsistent self with this structure as well. I am grateful to professor Jaana Hallamaa for pointing this out to me.
ethical theory without also adopting other “foundational ideas” about the moral person, the good, etc. Consequently, if one adopts foundational and other ideas, which are inconsistent, an inconsistence of self emerges. Such inconsistence is cured either by working on our moral development, by submitting ourselves to medical assistance, or by abandoning the standpoint of intrapersonal pluralism.

Therefore, in order to characterize ecofeminist standpoints concerning intra- and interpersonal pluralism, an analysis focused on whether ecofeminism holds reasonable conceptions of an inconsistent self will be conducted. The analysis will follow this line of questioning:

a) What are the characteristics of ecofeminist conceptions of the self?
b) Do ecofeminist conceptions of self include conceptions of an inconsistent self and if so, in what ways?

Conclusion
In this chapter, the five issues were clarified and categorized in terms of standpoints taken by nonfeminist environmental ethicists and philosophers. Consequently, the line of analytic questions was further developed. Furthermore, a basis for the comparative analysis in chapter seven was outlined.

Three views of nature were identified. These views were a place-oriented and a process-oriented view of nature, which both presuppose a principle of descriptive - and sometimes normative - human/nature dualism. Moreover, a non-dualistic view of nature-culture as the wild was sketched.

Furthermore, two arguments against social constructivism were presented. One objection is that social constructivism implies radical normative relativism. Another objection is that social constructivism is incompatible with nonanthropocentrism.

Regarding the third issue, a value terminology was stipulated. Following this terminology, three nonfeminist standpoints were characterized as anthropocentric, biocentric, and ecocentric. Furthermore, regarding origin of nature’s value, anthropogenic, biogenic, ecogenic, and theogenic standpoints were highlighted.

The analysis of the fourth issue, ethical contextualism, showed that nonfeminist environmental ethics includes ethical universalism as well as

125 Callicott, 1999, p. 172. Callicott writes: “When an agent adopts an ethical theory, an ethical ‘intellectual framework’ as Stone defines his neologism, he or she adopts a moral psychology, a notion of the supreme good, a criterion of moral considerability, among other foundational ideas.”


127 Callicott, 1999, pp. 172-173. Callicott holds that a mature moral agent “…cannot comfortably live in a perpetual state of self-contradiction or as the philosophical equivalent of an individual with a multiple personality disorder.”

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ethical contextualism. Regarding the meanings of “context,” four approaches were accounted for; a perspective-oriented, a culture-oriented, a situation-oriented, and a geography-oriented meaning of context. Furthermore, definitions of descriptive, normative, value-ontological, and epistemological contextualism were suggested. Finally, the analysis showed that there seems to be different opinions regarding the extent to which contextual aspects influence ethical theory.

The analysis of the fifth issue – ethical pluralism – suggested that the reasons why monists and pluralists have different opinions regarding whether intrapersonal pluralism is a preferable standpoint or not is that they have different opinions regarding the relationship between the self and normative theories as well as regarding the nature of the ideal self.
Chapter 2
Ecofeminism and Views of Nature

In this chapter, four ecofeminist views of nature will be presented; nature as subject, nature as informant, nature as partner, and nature as ecological communities. The purpose of this presentation is to clarify ecofeminist standpoints regarding views of nature and compare these to nonfeminist views of nature accounted for in chapter one.

The following questions will be answered: (a) What is nature essentially identified as? (b) What are the ecofeminist views on human/nature dualism? (c) What are the ecofeminist views on nature as amoral, immoral, or a moral standard?

Nature as Subject

McFague offers a variety of views of nature. For example, she acknowledges a wide view of nature according to which, nature is “…the totality of processes and powers that make up the universe,” and there is nothing but nature. However, for our purposes her view of nature-others as subjects is what is important. As we are discussing McFague’s view of nature we should keep in mind that according to her, nature as subject is, as she regards all views of nature to be, a metaphor and as such nothing more and nothing less than a candidate for being a plausible model of nature.

McFague claims that we ought to “model” the relationship between humanity and nature as a relation between subject and subjects, rather than

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2 See Stenmark, 2002, p. 17, for an example, as well as definition, of a wide conception of nature.

3 McFague, 1997, p. 16.

4 McFague, 1997, p. 111. “Acknowledgement of the subjectivity of other lifeforms, the land, and even of the earth as a whole is critical to embracing fully the subject-subjects model.”

5 See also chapter three in this study on nature and social constructivism for a more comprehensive presentation of McFague’s metaphorical thinking.
as a relation between subject and objects. In her view of nature-others as subjects, nature-others are ascribed agency, which is defined in terms of their activeness. This is affirmed in the following quote. McFague claims:

This opens the way to speak of animals, trees and plants, mountains, oceans, and even the earth as a whole as subjects, as agents which both influence others and are influenced by them.

The reason why McFague holds that individual entities as well as ecosystems and even earth itself are active is that they influence and are influenced by other natural entities as well as by humans. That is to say, nature is not considered active merely because it evolves. Rather, nature is considered active because humans cannot choose to be influenced by nature because we are constantly under the influence of nature. Following this, we ought to view nature-others as agents who determine what our lives can be, reminiscent of the way we determine what their lives can be.

Following Thomas Moore and what is referred to as soul-ecology, McFague also claims that; “the world is alive.” This view is reminiscent of vitalism, and expanded to include not only living entities (as in “strict” vitalism) but also to include inert objects such as buildings and rocks.

The difference between knowing nature-others as objects and knowing them objectively is central in McFague’s view of nature. Knowing nature-others objectively means that they are active as co-producers of knowledge. Here, McFague understands “knowledge” as a social process between the knower and the known, a process in which nature-others are active. McFague holds:

Knowledge of other persons, unlike knowledge of objects, is slow and reciprocal, for who another is, is not merely the creation of the knower. It depends on the openness of the known as well as the thoughtful attention and loving eye of the knower.

McFague also holds that conceptions of objects contain an ideal of how knowledge of objects ought to be achieved. That is to say, knowledge of objects does not require the same attitude of respect as knowledge of

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6 McFague, 1997, pp. 7-8, 95-97. On p. 97, McFague writes that replacing a subject vs. object model with a subjects/subjects model means that “...everyone and everything is somewhere on the subject continuum.”

7 McFague, 1997, p. 108. See also p. 111.


10 See Kim & Sosa (Eds.), (1995, 1997), 1998, p. 508, for a definition of strict vitalism. They define vitalism as the “doctrine of an autonomy of life.” Furthermore, vitalism was “...traditionally opposed to ‘mechanism,’ the view that living things are nothing but complex machines.”


12 McFague, 1997, p. 108. “Perhaps there is no greater significance of our model than this point: it overturns knowledge of nature as object, as for or against human beings, and insists that we know it objectively, in terms of its own subjecthood.”

subjects does. McFague claims that if we adopt a view of nature-others as subjects, the same epistemic attitude as the attitude we have towards humans will follow. According to McFague, knowledge of humans as well as of nature-others is ideally based on respect for their subjecthood. 14

Besides the fact that nature-others have agency and are active as co-producers of nature knowledge, McFague holds that processes of nature are “intentional.” These intentions of nature-others are not of the same kind as human intentions. Rather, this can be interpreted as if, in biological terms, natural entities have a drive towards fulfillment of their specific life cycles in accordance with their ecotypes. 15

That nature-others have intentions means that individual entities, ecosystems, and earth as a whole have “ends” of their own kind. This amounts to a capacity of nature-others to fulfill their own “healthy flourishing.” 16 McFague exemplifies intentionality of nature-others with a story of a wood tick. The tick waits eighteen years for the right combination of sweat, light, and heat to act upon what can be referred to as the completion of its own “flourishing.” 17 There is nothing random about the geographical position of the tick, since it is pushed towards a certain place in power of its internal drive to fulfill its “flourishing” as a wood tick. 18 Thus, the tick moves as a subject in its own “self-world,” that is, in its own experiences of nature with the intention to fulfill its life cycle. 19

Furthermore, McFague’s stresses nature as wild neighborhood. She claims that both “wilderness” and “wildness” lie in the eyes of the observers. 20 According to McFague, the idea of wilderness is an urban myth that stems from a need to escape our ordinary life. This standpoint is based on a claim that the ideal of wilderness refers to “a flight from the city.” 21 Thus, “wilderness” entails a strict geographical human/nature (or city/wilderness) dualism that envisions nature as out there, rather than among us. 22 However, McFague does not entirely abandon the idea of wilderness, rather, she believes in wilderness areas for the sake of preserving natural variety. In

15 Allaby, (1994) 1998, p. 136. According to Allaby, “ecotype” means “A locally adapted population of a widespread species. Such populations show minor changes of morphology and/or physiology, which are related to habitat and are genetically induced. Nevertheless they can still reproduce with other ecotypes of the same species.”
16 McFague, 1997, p. 109. Following her metaphorical theory, McFague stresses that the “intentionality” of nature is a metaphor that refers to the activity of nature.
20 McFague, 1997, pp. 122-129. This claim that “the wild” and “wilderness” are socially constructed is warranted by the standpoint that all our understandings of nature are mediated through language - see chapter three in this study on McFague’s social constructivism regarding this matter.
addition, she focuses on nature-others as “wild.” According to McFague, wild nature is present in the midst of culture, which means that a local place within reaches of our daily lives can be a wild place. That is to say, ditches, an abandoned lot, a creek, a small park, etc., can all be wild places. Even the flowers in our windows or the fish in our aquariums qualify as wild nature-others. Moreover, wild places need not be, although they can be, large. Wild places are the forests of your childhood, or the small trees grown in pots on the roof of the building outside someone’s office. Moreover, a wild place is a particular place that is undomesticated in the sense that it might surprise us, which means that we cannot determine the moves of the wild; wild places give us the opportunity to meet “earth others” as “subjects.”

Although McFague acknowledges a wide concept of nature, she stresses that we ought to focus on particular nature as in the example of the wood tick, because a focus on particular nature-others is a constitutive part of her view that individual relationships with nature-others are a starting point for the process of respecting nature. The importance of direct experience of particular nature, is expressed as follows:

This [the experience of being in touch with particular nature-others] is not an oceanic experience of connection with nature in general. Rather, it is an interest, a fascination with others, often one other, that develops from focused attention to particular things in special places. It comes from small beginnings in local places with someone concrete, embodied other.

To conclude, McFague acknowledges both a wide concept of nature, which includes every aspect of reality, and a view of particular nature-others. However, the view of nature accounted for here, is (a) a view of particular nature-others. In addition, McFague’s view of nature-others as subjects is further characterized by the following. Nature-others have (b) agency because they have significant influence on our and other nonhuman’s lives. Furthermore, they are also (c) active as co-producers of knowledge of nature and (d) have intentions of their own. In addition, particular nature-others are characterized by being (e) wild. Finally, that nature is wild means that nature-others are (f) unpredictable in the similar way that human subjects (rather than objects) are unpredictable.

24 McFague, 1997, pp. 120-121.
Nature as Our Partner

Carolyn Merchant stresses the importance of viewing the relationship between humanity and nature in such a way that neither humanity nor nature is dominated by the other part. In other words, she seeks balance between humanity and nature as she develops what she refers to as a partnership ethic.28

According to Merchant, nature is a homogenous whole. That is, she refers to a relationship between “humanity” and “nature” in general terms.29 Nature, as humanity’s active partner, is perceived as separated from humanity and humanity act upon nature as a distinct whole. According to Merchant, historically, nature had “the upper hand” and humans accepted the unwanted circumstances caused by earthquakes, storms, droughts, floods, etc.30 The industrial revolution changed this. By then, humanity turned the table and humans came to dominate nature to the point where humanity is by now capable of destroying the processes of life.31

According to Merchant, nature is a “real, live, active” entity,32 and a proper view of nature acknowledges that humanity and nature have a dynamic relationship. In this context, a dynamic relationship means that nature and humanity set the conditions under which they evolve.33 Merchant’s view of nature contains an idea of nature as alive. This means that nature speaks to us, and that we ought to be “…listening to, hearing, and responding to the voice of nature.” This means that, nature is also active in the sense that it has “a voice” that it is possible to “hear.” Merchant’s poetic language expresses the view that nature is not simply an object at our disposal.

Furthermore, Merchant’s view of nature as partner includes the idea that it is possible for nature to evolve on its own, detached from humanity. This idea signifies that nature and humanity are separate counterparts, and means that nature has a right to its own “space” and “time.” Merchant claims:

Just as human partners…must give each other space, time, and care, allowing each other to grow and develop individually within supporting nondominating relationships, so humans must give nonhuman nature space, time, and, care, allowing it to reproduce, evolve, and respond to human actions.35

33 Merchant, 1996, p. 218. “…both humans and nonhuman nature are equal partners, neither having the upper hand, yet cooperating with each other. Both humans and nature are active agents.”
35 Merchant, 1992, p. 188.
This view that nature and humanity are separate is further emphasized as she agrees with Herbert Marcuse that a “…nonexploitative relation would be a ‘surrender,’ ‘letting-be,’ acceptance.”

Merchant also holds that nature is “unpredictable.” That is to say, that nature is “primarily” and “fundamentally chaotic,” which means that we can no longer view nature as stable, predictable, and balanced. She claims:

The second component of the new partnership brings nature into an active relationship with humans and entails a new consciousness of nature as equal subject. […] Because nature is fundamentally chaotic, it must be respected and related to as an active partner through a partnership ethic.

This claim that nature is chaotic presupposes that nature is simultaneously ordered and disordered, and not that disorder (instability) completely replaces order (stability). Although Merchant mentions that, “certain domains of nature” are predictable and that “a very large domain” is unpredictable, she makes no distinctions between different kinds of disordered relationships, and she does not clarify in what way nature is chaotic in all its processes. From this it can be concluded that according to Merchant, nature in general is chaotic, which is the reason for why we ought to respect nature and relate to nature as a whole as our partner.

In sum, Merchant’s view of nature as our partner amounts to (a) a general view of nature. Nature is considered (b) active because it has the power to dominate humanity. Moreover, nature has (c) a voice of its own, which indicates some kind of agency of nature. In addition, from this follows that nature (d) is essentially separated from humanity. Finally, (e) nature is unpredictable because it is disordered and ordered rather than in balance.

Nature as Informant

Karen Warren often uses particular views of nature. This becomes clear in the way in which she draws on ecology and “observation set theory,” in the way she describes nature as a conversational partner, and in the way in

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42 See Warren & Cheney, 1996, for a discussion regarding the relationship between ecology and ecofeminism.
43 Warren, 2000, p. 159.
which she uses a first-person narrative to illuminate the relationship between
a human individual and a specific nature-other.44

According to ecologists Allen and Hoekstra, who advocate observation set
theory, the ecologist views (observes) nature through a certain ecological
observation set. This means that ecological observations take two aspects
into consideration; spatiotemporal scale and a certain criterion for
observation such as organism, population, community, ecosystem,
landscape, or biome.45 From this consideration follows that the accuracy of
description of nature as “stable,” “harmonious,” “fragile,” “complex,” etc.,
will depend on which spatiotemporal scale and which criterion for
observation that will be chosen in every specific case. According to Allen
and Hoekstra, one important point with this approach is that “[c]omplexity in
ecology is not so much a matter what occurs in nature as it is a consequence
of how we choose to describe ecological situations. That description is often
only implied in the questions we ask.”46 Consequently, the observation set
(scale and criterion) predisposes the result of ecological investigations,
which means that allegedly there are several, equally valid ecological views
of nature. According to Warren, the fact that behavior and the identity of an
ecosystem (of nature) differ due to particular observation sets of particular
ecologists makes it “…in fact impossible to designate the components of the
ecosystem.”47 In conclusion, the way Warren uses observation set theory
ends up to a view of nature imprinted by the terms of ecology.

However, Warren also suggests a different view of nature. According to
this view, Warren characterizes particular nature-others as informants in a
process of knowledge production. Following Donna Haraway, Warren
states:

As a corrective to such tendencies [to portray nature as a dead and inert object of
knowledge], Haraway recommends that we view nature as an active agent or
participant in the construction of knowledge and that the object of knowledge be
pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource…48

Here nature is considered active because it supposedly informs and inspires
our knowledge and our values of nature. Warren gives an example of such
alleged inspiration as she claims that science ought to be based on a
“conversation” with nature.” Warren exemplifies a conversation with nature
by referring to Nobel Prize-winner cytogeneticist Barbara McClintock’s
testimony that she through out her carrier as a maize plant scientist related to

44 Warren (1990) 1993a. In this article, Warren tells a first-person narrative about the
relationship between a rock-climber and a rock, which illustrates one view of nature that is
presupposed in her work.
83.
48 Warren, 2000, p. 159.
49 Warren, 2000, p. 35.
nature by becoming “… ‘friends’ with each kernel of corn…”50 In addition, the plants “spoke” to McClintock because she literally developed “a feeling for the organism.”51 Accordingly, following Warren’s characterization of particular nature-others here, Warren presents these, as active informants in the sense that they can speak to us and can become our friends.

What Warren displays here is that individual nature-others are active. However, in The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,52 in which she takes a story about a rock-climber as example of how attitudes towards nature inform and influence our nature-values, nature-others come off as rather passive. In this story, the relationship between an individual human and a particular nature-other is in focus.53 The act of climbing follows two distinct attitudes; the attitude of a conqueror or of a caring friend. The point is to emphasize that certain attitudes produce certain nature values as well as certain behavior towards nature. The nature of the relationship between the climber and the rock is entirely dependent on the attitude of the climber in this story, which makes the climber the active agent, not nature. That is to say, nature is active, but only active in response to the climber and the climber’s attitude. Moreover, the focus is on the experience of the climber. In the following, Warren describes the rock climber’s condition after the friendly climbing. She states:

I closed my eyes and began to feel the rock with my hands […] I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what it offered me […] to come to know a sense of being in relationship with the natural environment. It felt as if the rock and I were silent conversational partners in a longstanding friendship.54

From this follows, that unlike McFague, Warren does not view particular nature as an unknown, surprising, or upsetting other. Rather, the rock, although situated in the midst of wilderness, is not active. Although Warren describes that the result of the more caring attitude is that the rock and the climber become like old friends, the fact that the feeling of friendship is purely a result of change in attitude towards the rock, makes the rock more like a passive reservoir for the climber’s projections of attitudes than an active friend.55

In summary, Warren’s views of nature are (a) particular views of nature. Moreover, nature-others are described (b) as active in the sense of being (c) informants of nature knowledge as well as being (d) inspiring conversational partners. However, particular nature-others also come off as (e) passive informants that merely respond to the attitudes of moral agents.

51 Warren, 2000, p. 159.
Nature as Ecological Communities

In 1997, Chris Cuomo published *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing*. Despite putting “ecological communities” in the title, she does not develop this conception of nature in detail. However, Cuomo’s view of nature is primarily outlined in ecological terms; as different ecological communities, which are defined as “…ecosystems, populations, and bioregions.”

According to a reference book in ecology, *ecosystem* means: “…a community of interdependent organisms and the physical environment they inhabit.” An ecosystem is further characterized by its capacity to maintain some degree of balance through a “…flow of matter and energy within and through the system.” The term “ecosystem” can be applied to different levels such as to a microscopic level as well as to earth itself. Furthermore, “ecosystem” emphasizes the systemic processes and functions of a community of nonhuman plants and animals; individuals as well as species.

The same reference book defines *population* as “a group of individuals” of the same or related species (fish, dogs, birds, humans etc.) “occupying a specific area.” This means that it is possible that more than one population can inhabit a specific ecosystem and that populations are spread across ecosystem boundaries. Finally, David Macauley discusses *bioregion* as “…an area ‘defined by its lifeforms, its topography, and its biota, rather than by human dictates; a region governed by nature, not legislature.’” A bioregion can be divided into several sub regions (ecoregions, georegions etc.) and can have different sizes and shapes such as for instance the size of the Baltic Sea region or of the basin of a river. Moreover, bioregionalism tends to idealize the state of nature and emphasizes that constructions of human communities ought to be determined by native biological and topological conditions, including particular watersheds, climate, soil, etc. of a certain place. From this follows that populations and ecosystems belong to bioregions but also that they exist across the boundaries of bioregions.

An additional important element in the bioregion concept is the significance of the visual and spatial form of places. It is commonly presumed that geographical (in a broad sense) conditions of a bioregion ought to condition the nature and impact of human interventions. Moreover,
bioregions are often used normatively in the sense that what is regarded as their normal geographical conditions are used as standards for how they ought to function as well as for how humans ought to behave towards them.63

Following this introduction of Cuomo’s view of nature, what are the specific characteristics of nature as ecological community? According to Cuomo, nature is active but not primarily active in relation to humanity or humans. Rather, nature is regarded as primarily internally active. The central term that Cuomo uses in order to describe this activity is nature’s (alleged) “dynamic charm,” (which she also uses as criterion for nature’s moral standing)64 she writes as follows:

Dynamic charm is not an immutable Aristotelian essence, but an active capacity for response and change. It is most apparent in instances of alteration, adjustment, and resistance to environmental and internal fluctuations. It is not a set of natural traits through which something responds to the “outside” environment, but a socially and/or ecologically determined capacity to respond and adjust to unpredictable externalities (climate changes, predation or hostility, pollution, scarcity) and unpredictable changes that seem more internal (disease, changes in preference, aging). Dynamic charm is “internal” in that it is a manifestation of the biological potential of a specific sort of entity, is physically locatable in a specific body or group of bodies, and because its failure results in the demise of that body or group. Yet it is dependent on externalities to develop, and the very nature of an entity’s dynamic charm can shift dramatically as a result of forces and events originating outside the body or community.65

Moreover, something’s or someone’s dynamic charm refers to:

...clusters of real transmutable qualities [as well as an entity’s] diffuse, ‘internal’ ability to adapt to or resist change, and its unique casual and motivational patterns and character...66

The conception of dynamic charm can be interpreted as being of similar meaning as a species or an individual’s genotype and phenotype. This interpretation follows from the fact that ecology characterizes an entity’s genotype and phenotype as an “active capacity.”67 That is to say, it refers to an entity’s inner, genetic characteristics as well as to its specific characteristics as these are adjusted to its environment. Furthermore, Cuomo’s normative view of nature focuses on living individuals, groups,

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63 Macauley, 1996, p. 15.
64 Cuomo, 1998, p. 71 “...it is an entity’s dynamic charm...that renders it morally considerable...”
67 Cuomo, 1998, p. 72. According to Allaby (Ed.), 1998, pp. 310, phenotype is: “The observable manifestation of a specific genotype; those observable properties of an organism produced by the genotype in conjunction with the environment.” Furthermore: “Organisms with the same overall genotype may have different phenotypes because of the effects of the environment and of gene interaction. Conversely, organisms may have the same phenotype but different genotypes, as a result of incomplete dominance, penetrance, or expressivity.” [Emphasis added.] (According to Allaby (Ed.), 1998, p. 178, genotype is the “…genetic constitution of an organism, as opposed to its physical appearance (phenotype).”)
and systems and does not entail nonliving entities although it includes systems, which are populated by living entities as well as inert objects.68

The fact that nature is supposed to have “dynamic charm” amounts to the fact that nature has some kind of “intentionality,” “telos,” or a self-creative characteristic of its own. Following a process-oriented view of nature, Cuomo argues in favor of the flourishing of nature, independent of human intervention.69 This means that such flourishing is regarded as preferable to nonhuman flourishing that is caused completely or partly by human interventions. Accordingly, Cuomo’s conception of nonhuman flourishing expresses normative human/nature dualism, which consequently presupposes some kind of descriptive human/nature dualism.70

In the “interlude” in *Feminism and Ecological Communities* called *On Ethics without Purity*, Cuomo discusses the thrills and threats of “the cyborg,” a hybrid of machine and organism.72 This discussion displays a tension within her view of nature. On one hand, Cuomo offers the view of nature accounted for above, in which nature is defined primarily in ecological and biological terms and functions. On the other hand, she introduces a conception of a cyborg in order to stay away from dualistic visions of the world.73 This becomes clear as Cuomo refers to Haraway’s description of cyborgs as beings that are “…not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines.”74 According to Haraway, the cyborg stands for “three crucial boundary breakdowns;”75 the boundaries between human and animal, between organism (animal-human) and machine, and between physical and non-physical.76 On the other hand, Cuomo explicitly states that she has problems with the way in which the cyborg celebrates the coupling of technology and organism, and how the cyborg lacks “An edge. A history. A fierce sense of loyalty based on connections. Vulnerability.”77

Cuomo embraces an ideal view of nature in which nature ought to flourish on its own separate from humanity, as well as (implicit in her attraction for the cyborg) a view of nature that does not affirm the human/nature dualism that such an ideal is based upon. From this we can conclude that her view of nature is in process. That is to say, Cuomo’s view of nature entails a tension between human/nature dualism, and a non-dualistic view of nature-culture.

70 Cuomo, 1998, p. 76, “When possible, ecological feminists therefore promote the unhindered unfolding of nonhuman life through policies of (human) nonintervention.
71 Cuomo, 1998: p. 76.
72 Cuomo, 1998, pp. 82-90.
73 Cuomo, 1998, p. 83. Cuomo writes: “…our dependence on and identification with machines is hardly less significant than the fact that we are flesh.”
To summarize, Cuomo’s view of nature is inspired by ecology as well as of science fiction literature and she presents nature in (a) general terms rather than particular. Moreover, she presents nature as (b) primarily an ecological community consisting of ecosystems, populations, and bioregions. Furthermore, (c) nature is self-creative, in the sense that it seeks its own flourishing as a living system or as individual entities separate from humanity. Moreover, (d) nature is active but primarily internally active and not as much active in relation to humanity. In addition, (e) this activity is causal and motivational and resembles the life-processes that ecologists describe in concepts of genotype and phenotype. Finally, (f) it is characterized by being a view of nature in process, because she combines an orthodox view of nature as ecological community with a cyborg-view of nature.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter showed that ecofeminism contains a variety of views of nature, thus there is not one ecofeminist view of nature. Instead, four different views of nature were identified: “Nature as subject,” “nature as informant,” nature as partner,” and “nature as ecological communities.”

Regarding the first question, whether ecofeminism identifies nature as essentially a place, a process, or as potentially wild, it can be concluded that based on this analysis, place-oriented and process-oriented views of nature are represented in ecofeminism. Place-oriented views are most explicitly found in McFague and Warren’s work. Although Cuomo’s view can be characterized as place-oriented, it combines such a view with a process-oriented view of nature. Merchant does not identify certain places as Warren and McFague does. Rather, she refers to nature in general as a community.

Regarding the second question concerning human/nature dualism, the analysis shows that all four views of nature encompass descriptive human/nature dualism. However, this is most clearly executed by Merchant and Cuomo who also express a principle of normative human/nature dualism, according to which we ought to let nature be. In addition, Warren and McFague’s descriptive human/nature dualism is particular rather than general. Moreover, we can conclude that a non-dualistic view of nature is not fully developed.

On the matter of the third question, it is clear that ecofeminism regards nature as amoral. However, as stated in the previous paragraph, both Merchant and Cuomo view nature, or certain conditions of nature, as moral standards according to which we ought to treat nature.

Finally, we can conclude that despite the internal differences, there are many similarities among their views of nature, such as for example that
nature is often presented in particular terms, as active, as someone rather than something, as unpredictable, and that nature is often discussed in terms of relationships.
Chapter 3

Ecofeminism, Social Constructivism, and Nature

This chapter focuses on ecofeminist ideas about the claim that nature is socially constructed. As it is presented in the introduction, one of the reasons why this issue is focused upon in this study, is that social constructivism has been criticized by environmental philosophers. These critics assume that social constructivism implies normative relativism and that because of this social constructivism makes rational restoration policies impossible, and, that social constructivism is incommensurable with nonanthropocentrism. In order to assess this critique and to clarify the social constructivism of ecofeminism, the following questions will be discussed: (a) What does it mean to socially construct? (b) What aspects of nature are the products of social processes? (c) What is the nature of these processes?

Construing the Meaning of Nature

One variant of ecofeminist social constructivism is *social construism*. To construe something means, “to place a particular meaning” on something and to “understand or explain” something “in a particular way.” Social construism states that aspects of nature are construed through dualistic thinking, or, dualism. Karen Warren claims:

The meanings of ‘nature’ are constructed out of human values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions – different and differing human conceptual frameworks.

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2 See for instance Plumwood (1993) 1997, p. 42. Plumwood supports this view, she writes that dualistic thinking amounts to an “…alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm.” [Emphasis added.]
In this quote, the term "constructed" is used in the same sense as I use the term “construed.” I distinguish between social construism and social constructionism for the sake of clarifying different kinds of ecofeminist social constructivism. Accordingly, to socially construct means “to build” and to “make by putting together or combining parts…” a physical, theoretical, or abstract “building.” This means that in this study “social constructions of nature” stand for, for example theories of nature, bodies of beliefs, and physical constructions such as landscapes or cities. That is to say, in this study “social construction” refers to socially constructed wholes such as an ethical theory, an economic system, a landscape, or a body of beliefs. Consequently, this means that Warren’s claim is that we construe meanings of nature in and through conceptual frameworks. That is to say, it seems as if Warren refers to an act of interpretation of nature.

According to Karen Warren, we construe nature through the oppressive “conceptual framework” of Western societies in which value-dualistic thinking is a key element. Accordingly, meanings of nature are socially construed in and through the mechanism of value-dualistic thinking. This means that Western people have a “window” to the world, a “conceptual framework” that explains, justifies, and maintains, certain basic beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes about our selves, other humans, and nature. Following Warren, nature, people, entities, processes, etc. are construed (interpreted) in and as dualistic and hierarchically ordered pairs such as nature/culture, men/women, wild/ordered, etc. The relationship between these pairs is internally exclusive, oppositional, and evaluative. That is, the meaning of one is necessarily related to the meaning of what can be referred to as its significant other. Hence, as an automatic mechanism, the value-dualistic thinking that purportedly is a component of patriarchal oppressive conceptual frameworks systematically construe meanings of nature and women, inherently related to meanings of culture and men (and vice versa).

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2 See also Peterson, 1999, p. 343. Peterson makes a similar distinction between “construing” and “construction.” According to Peterson, we construe nature as we ascribe “trees or animals or rivers” their “identities and worth”. I believe that this is a fruitful distinction. Peterson however, does not take advantage of this distinction in her critique of social constructivism.
3 Warren, 1993b, p. 122. “Conceptual frameworks are the socially constructed lenses through which one perceives oneself and others.” According to this quote, the frameworks themselves are products of social processes. However, the focus here is on the way conceptual frameworks construe aspects of nature.
4 Warren, (1990) 1993a, pp. 322-323. It seems as if Warren does not hold that value-dualistic and value-hierarchical thinking are problematic as such. Rather, it is their function together with the alleged function of the logic of domination in patriarchal and oppressive societies that make them problematic.
5 “Dualism” is a central theme in ecofeminist philosophy. See for example, Plumwood (1993) 1997, pp. 41-68.
6 Warren, (1990) 1993a, p. 322; Warren, 1997b, pp. 19-20 n. 52. Warren have developed the conceptual framework to entail five characteristics: (1) value hierarchical thinking, (2) value
Warren’s social construism presents construism as primarily an individual psychological phenomenon, because, despite the fact that the framework is maintained intersubjectively, Warren’s discussion of conceptual frameworks implies that each individual internalizes the framework. When internalized, each framework determines how the individual construes nature.

Chris Cuomo represents a version of social construism that focuses on social practices rather than on the conceptual frameworks of individuals.\textsuperscript{10} That is to say, the meaning of normative concepts and conceptions such as “care,”\textsuperscript{11} “man,” “woman,” and “nature” are always given in and through complex social processes that cannot be bound to a certain individual framework.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, the construing process originates and exists in and through the social processes within and between social as well as ecological communities.\textsuperscript{13} Here, the aspects of nature that are construed are maintained in social structures rather than in individual frameworks.

dualistic thinking, (3) power-over conceptions of power, (4) conceptions of privilege, and (5) a logic of domination. (Added characteristics emphasized.) See Butler, 1993: p. 3, for a poem, which illustrates a basic notion of dualistic constructivism. Butler writes:

”Darkness
Gives Shape to the light
As light
Shapes the darkness

Death
Gives shape to life
As life
Shapes death.

The Universe
And God
Share this wholeness

Each
Defining the other.

God
Gives shape to the universe
As the universe
Shapes God.”

\textsuperscript{10} Cuomo, 1998, p. 123. “We cannot ignore the relationships between ‘woman’ and women, and ‘nature’ and nature and the stuff that is considered natural. Likewise, we cannot ignore the ways in which these and other subjugating concepts and categories are parasitic and symbiotic upon each other, make sense because of each other, are enacted upon each other, and become reified through practices, and the ways they criss-cross in and through people’s lives, conceptual schemas, and political situations.”

\textsuperscript{11} Cuomo, 1998, p. 129. “...‘caring’ cannot be fully described without discussing its agent, its object, and the context in which it occurs. Caring, then, is most meaningfully evaluated \textit{in situ}. Talk of caring and compassion in the abstract, devoid of attention to the object of caring and the context in which the caring occurs, is ethically uninformative.”

\textsuperscript{12} Cuomo, Chris, 1998: pp. 44–45. On p. 46, Cuomo writes: “...human moral agency only makes sense in the rich varieties of our communities, and human community only exists as part of the ‘natural’ world. While they do not determine our ethics, our dependencies on and relationships with nature, and our physical needs and predispositions, shape and limit what ethics can be, or what ethics can mean, in any given context.”

\textsuperscript{13} Cuomo, 1998, p. 58. “Generally, perspectives that are sources of innovative or particularly useful moral insights are rooted not in anything necessary or essential about identity, but in
Both Cuomo and Warren\textsuperscript{14} agree on that “[d]ualisms constructed in systems of binary opposition often become the bases of systems of domination and subordination.”\textsuperscript{15} However, since Cuomo claims that meanings of nature and culture are “multifarious and shifting” her social construism is more vague as well as more comprehensive than Warren’s construism.\textsuperscript{16} The fact that it is not clear in what ways the structural process of dualistic construism works, and the fact that Cuomo supports the idea of the cyborg as a plausible ideal – the cyborg being a creature that does not recognize or confirm neither dichotomies nor dualisms – can possible be interpreted in favor of thinking that Cuomo’s construism is not limited to dualistic construism.

Constructing Knowledge of Nature

A second variant of ecofeminist social constructivism is social constructionism. Although Sallie McFague’s social constructivism encompasses all three variants of constructivism\textsuperscript{17} discussed in this chapter and hereafter, the focus here is on her constructionism.\textsuperscript{18} According to McFague, we socially construct our understandings of nature into models, that is, into coherent bodies of what is regarded as knowledge of nature. She claims:

> Once we realize that how we think of nature and ourselves in relation to the natural world is a convention, a way of seeing that is implicit in our culture but not absolute, not eternal, and not “natural,” then we realize that change is possible. Change of this sort, a change in sensibility, occurs through changing metaphors. We think in terms of major metaphors and models that implicitly structure our most basic understandings of self, world, and God.\textsuperscript{19} [Emphasis added.]

A few elements in McFague’s theory of language need to be clarified in order to describe the social constructionism exemplified in the quote above. McFague’s claim that knowledge of nature is socially constructed is based on her thesis that language is essentially \textit{metaphorical}.\textsuperscript{20} One consequence of practices and in critical responses to systems of power and meaning. These perspectives are determined within real social relations and consequently associated with, adopted by or relegated to members of subjugated groups.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Warren, (1990) 1993a, pp. 322-323.
\textsuperscript{15} Cuomo, 1998, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{16} Cuomo, 1998, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{17} I distinguish between social construism, social constructionism, and social inventionism.
\textsuperscript{18} Although McFague is not always referring to constructions of nature, I have applied her metaphor theory to this discussion about the construction of nature.
\textsuperscript{19} McFague, 1997, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{20} McFague, 1982, pp. 16-17. According to my interpretation, McFague uses the term “metaphorical” in two meanings. The first meaning refers to the relationship between language and reality or in this case, nature. In this relation, language is \textit{indirect}. It is with this relationship in mind we should understand the meaning of that language \textit{constructs} nature.
This thesis is that language has construing, constructing, as well as inventing functions.

This means firstly, that we always interpret (construe) nature in and through language. In addition, the fact that language is metaphorical means that language has an indirect relation to nature independent of human consciousness (nature-as-it-is). That is to say, nature statements refer to nature-as-it-is, but are never direct descriptions of nature-as-it-is. From this follows that indirect knowledge is the only way to “know” nature and to “know” the nature of our relationships with nature. An interesting effect of this standpoint is that the ontological/epistemic dichotomy that is presumed in McFague’s distinction between direct and indirect language becomes dissolved. This means that the important question for McFague is which views of nature that are justified rather than which views of nature that are true (corresponds to nature). The reason why we perceive some views of nature as direct references to nature-as-it-is is that we have become accustomed to them, and not that they “mirror” nature-as-it-is. Given this, we secondly, conceptually construct nature, model nature, within interpretive contexts.

Knowledge. The second meaning refers to the relationship between metaphor and, what can be referred to as conventional knowledge. (Alternatively, in McFague’s terminology, between metaphors and literalized models.) It is with this relationship in mind we should understand the meaning of that language invents meanings of nature. See also Code, 1998, p. 141, for a similar distinction related to a discussing on the characteristics of feminist epistemology in terms of “burdens of proof.” Code claims that according to feminist epistemology, “...burdens of proof are redistributed laterally (across communities of enquirers) and not just vertically (from a transcendent observer to the data).” McFague would say that burdens of proof are never redistributed vertically. See for example, McFague, 1982, p. 134.

McFague, 1982, p. 134: “...there is no uninterpreted access to reality; hence, we are not dealing, on the one hand, with ‘reality as it is’ and, on the other hand, with views of it; but solely with the latter. We are dealing with old and new, accepted and unconventional, views of reality.” An alternative meaning of metaphorical language is that knowledge of whether our nature language corresponds to nature-as-it-is or not, cannot be achieved.

I am using quotation marks here to mark that I am aware of the fact that McFague’s standpoint presupposes a specific kind of conception of knowledge. From the following quotes follow that, according to McFague, also the meaning of knowledge and what counts as knowledge is constituted by and situated within language. McFague, 1982, p. 15. “Less obvious, but of paramount importance, is the fact that metaphorical thinking constitutes the basis of human thought and language.” McFague, 1982: pp. 8-9. “First, feminists generally agree that whoever names the world owns the world [...] With Ludwig Wittgenstein, feminists would say, ‘The limits of one’s language are the limits of one’s world,’ and with Martin Heidegger, ‘Language is the house of being.’” Moreover, “Since we are all born into a world which is already linguistic, in which the naming has already taken place, we only own our world to the extent that the naming that has occurred is our naming.” See also McFague, 1982, pp. 16-17.

McFague, 1982, pp. 137. “Therefore, the criteria for our choice of models, for adequate and inadequate models, for dominant models, for the criticism of models, for the introduction of new models, are the critical issue.”

McFague, 1982, p. 16. See McFague 1997, p. 71-72, for a critical discussion about knowledge as a “mirror” of nature. See McFague, 1993, pp. 91-97, for a discussion about reality and the models of science.
McFague’s standpoint can be regarded as a version of social constructivism rather than social constructivism because what she refers to can be described as theory building or the building of coherent bodies of beliefs (constructed aspects of nature), rather than disparate interpretations of nature-as-it-is (construed aspects of nature).

According to McFague, nature metaphors, nature models, and concepts of nature interact. Nature language as such is a continuum of indirect references to nature-as-it-is with metaphor as one pole, models as a transitory middle position, and conceptual language as the other pole.25

Nature models are explanatory and have structural, taxonomic social authority. This means for example that if nature is constructed as an organism we become (as) parts of that organism and we will understand the well being of nature (and us) in terms of physical health. On the other hand, if nature is constructed as a machine, then plants, animals, etc. are (as) exchangeable parts of that machine. In addition, we may also become (as) exchangeable parts, or become (as) possible keepers of the machine, and so on.26

The difference between modeling nature and conceptual thinking is that the latter seeks to organize and unite models into coherent theories of nature. This means that conceptual language seeks similarities among models in order to gain precision and consistency. Moreover, conceptual thinking criticizes our metaphors and models of nature, asking questions such as: “Why is a model of nature as an organism not widely accepted?” “Is this model hurtful to someone and if it is, who and why?” “What does it mean to do scientific research on the basis of this model?” etc. Moreover, in order to understand the metaphor “nature is an organism” we use conceptual thinking to ask: “What kind of organism?” “Is every part of nature included?” “How does its parts relate to one another?” etc.27

One difference between nature models and nature metaphors is that the former are always constructed socially. That is to say, metaphors can be individual but a model of nature is socially constructed per definition since its existence is dependent upon intersubjective acceptance. To model nature also implies the inclusion of normative standpoints.28 For example, the reason for why a certain model of nature presupposes that an authenticity of nature exists, which is degraded (violated) by human intervention is that it implies a certain understanding of nature as essentially non-human. Furthermore, such a model of nature might imply a hands-off policy as

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25 McFague, 1982, p. 23. “…the main point is that models are a further step along the route from metaphorical to conceptual language.”
27 McFague, 1982, p. 26. “The task of conceptual thought is to generalize…to criticize images, to raise questions of their meaning and truth in explicit ways.”
28 McFague, 1982, p. 23. See also p. 16.
morally proper and an idea that a respect for nature’s alleged intrinsic value is conditioned by the fact that humans do not intervene.

McFague presents an example of social constructionism rather than construism because models of nature refer to a coherent theory of moral knowledge of nature rather than disparate knowledge claims or beliefs. That is to say, the fact that McFague claims that we produce theories of nature, in this case a coherent body of claims regarding nature with a status of nature-knowledge, means that McFague here represents social constructionism.

It is important to note that the difference between social construism and social constructionism according to the definition of these terms suggested in this study, is not only that according to the former, aspects of nature are abstract interpretations while the latter also includes buildings and landscape-planning. Rather, the difference is also that social construism primarily refers to disparate interpretations of aspects of nature-as-it-is while social constructionism refers to constructions of coherent bodies of aspects of nature, including physical aspects of nature-as-it-is.

Karen Warren represents a second example of ecofeminist social constructionism. Her use of ecological observation set theory means that individual ecologists socially construct ecological knowledge of nature. From the fact that we only can perceive or know nature-as-it-is ecologically through different ecological observation sets, and the fact that every different observation set is equally valid, follows that there are several equally justified ecological views of nature. Thus, the individual ecologist who chooses one specific ecological observation set, constructs a particular kind of ecological “knowledge” of nature. That is to say, the two aspects of ecological observation sets – spatiotemporal scale and a certain criterion for observation determine the content of constructed ecological knowledge.

One important aspect of Warren’s constructionism is that because it is closely linked to a choice by the individual ecologist, it can favorably be described as individual constructionism rather than social constructionism.

Carolyn Merchant represents a third variant of ecofeminist social constructionism, which combines physical and theoretical constructions. Merchant claims:

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31 See Allen and Hoekstra, 1992, p. xiii, for a defense of observation set theory.
32 See Allen and Hoekstra, 1992, pp. 10, 53. See also chapter two in this study on Warren’s view of nature, for the introduction of the two aspects of ecological observation sets.
Nor are nature and culture, women and men, binary opposites with universal or essential meanings. Nature, wilderness, and civilization are socially constructed concepts that change over time and serve as stage settings in the progressive narrative.33

The fact that according to Merchant the meanings of nature are socially constructed is explained by the fact that we do - in our communities – physically construct or landscape nature. What we are concerned with here is a clarification of Merchant’s notion of the connection between physical and conceptual constructions of nature.34 According to the quote above, physical and conceptual constructions of nature are interconnected. The “progressive narrative” that Merchant refers to is the process of economic growth, supported and constituted by scientific and industrial development.35

From Merchant’s historical analysis follows that views of nature are constructed in and through social processes in which meanings of nature-as-it-is, nature-as-it-is, and socioeconomic forces co-work.

Merchant claims that dominant images (ideas, metaphors) have epistemic as well as moral authority.36 The idea is that certain times and cultures reinforce the dominance of certain nature models. A model of nature is dominant when it serves (functions) to explain and justify certain ontological, epistemological, and ethical meanings, as well as the behaviors and attitudes associated with these meanings.37

According to Merchant, the dominant Western model of nature changed from organicism to mechanism during the period when Europe was industrialized.38 Allegedly, one reason for this shift was a decline of the preceding “image” of nature (organicism) and the fact that this decline caused feelings of insecurity and tension.39 Supposedly, the fact that these changes created a need for an ordered and structured worldview explains why a new view of nature was constructed in accordance with the new industrial society according to which nature was a machine rather than an

33 Merchant, 1996, p. 50.
34 Merchant, (1980) 1990b, p. xvi. “In seeking to understand how people conceptualized nature in the Scientific Revolution, I am asking not about unchanging essences, but about connections between social change and changing constructions of nature.”
37 Merchant, (1980) 1990b, p. 4. “Controlling images operate as ethical restraints or as ethical sanctions – as subtle ‘oughts’ or ‘ought nots.’ Thus as the descriptive metaphors and images of nature change, a behavioral restraint can be changed into a sanction.” See also Merchant, 1996, p. 84. “The new image of nature as a female to be controlled and dissected through experiment legitimated the exploitation of natural recourses. Although the image of the nurturing earth popular in the Renaissance did not vanish, it was superseded by new controlling imagery. The constraints against penetration associated with the earth-mother image were transformed into sanctions for denudation.”
38 Merchant, (1980) 1990b. This is in fact the theme of The Death of Nature.
39 Merchant, (1980) 1990b, p. 3. “By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the tension between technological development in the world of action and the controlling organic images in the world of the mind had become to great.”
organism.\textsuperscript{40} According to this new view, nature consisted of foundationally
dead and inert – externally interrelated – matter.\textsuperscript{41}

One element of this process of transformation was an introduction of new
physical constructions within and of nature such as waterwheels, furnaces,
mills, cranes, etc. The fact that these physical changes of nature became
more common caused an increase in the amount of new experiences of
nature as possible to manipulate and to alter by machine technology.
Consequently, in the new view of nature as a machine, nature came to look
and act differently as economical growth in terms of increased exploitation
of natural recourses, enhanced rapidly.\textsuperscript{42} The alleged result of this process
was that the new machine-model of nature was established as \textit{the} true view
of nature.\textsuperscript{43}

This physical and socioeconomic construction of meanings of nature is
also explained by the fact that it is impossible to separate descriptive and
normative elements in different views of nature. According to Merchant,
descriptions necessarily imply prescriptions (or sanctions). One example of
this is the mining industry. The mining industry challenged the model of
nature as \textit{Mother Earth}. In this model, the earth was viewed and related to as
a subject, and protected in moral terms by virtue of her subjecthood.\textsuperscript{44}
Consequently, it was morally wrong to “penetrate into her entrails” for
minerals.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, given that Earth was considered an active agent, the
ways in which she behaved had a purpose beyond human demands and in
this model humans were regarded children who should respect that purpose
(order).\textsuperscript{46} In the new model of nature as a machine, these moral constraints
ceased to exist.

In sum, the following elements were interactive in the process in which
new descriptive and normative meanings of nature, which were assembled
into a coherent view of nature as a machine, were socially constructed: the
process of socioeconomic development, concrete alterations of the landscape
and the insecurity, which followed from a descent of the view of nature as an
organism.

\textsuperscript{40} Merchant, (1980) 1990b, pp. 99-215, 194-195. Here, Merchant describes a change from the
world as an organism to the mechanical order.
\textsuperscript{43} See Merchant, (1989) 1990b, pp. 273-274 on how the new ideas of nature as inert and
machine-like were spread through “scientific populization.” See also McFague, 1982, p. 26. If
we would follow McFague’s terminology, we would say that the model of nature as a
machine became “literalized.”
\textsuperscript{44} Merchant, (1980) 1990b, pp. 29-41.
\textsuperscript{45} Merchant, (1989) 1990b, p. 30. Here Merchant is quoting a warning against mining offered
by compiler Pliny, (A.D. 23-79).
Inventing Meanings of Nature through Metaphor

The third variant of ecofeminist social constructivism is social inventionism. Social inventionism is probably the most criticized form of social constructivism. One reason for this is probably the presumption that inventionism is associated with ontological relativism, which indicates that nature-as-it-is, does not exist. Chris Cuomo and Sallie McFague, emphasize inventions of nature. Cuomo claims:

...as we determine how to reconsider our actions and relations with nature, we inevitably reinvent nature and ourselves.

Here, it can seem as if Cuomo claims that nature-as-it-is is invented, or alternatively, that she favors the view that, "[t]here is nothing outside the text." However, it is more likely that she is arguing in favor of an invention of meanings of nature rather than of nature-as-it-is. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Cuomo repeatedly claims that it is meanings of nature, culture, men, women, etc., that are invented and not nature, culture, men, women, etc., as-they-are. However, it is confusing that she uses "nature" as well as, nature, in her discussion without always making explicit distinctions between conceptions of nature and nature-as-it-is.

A second example of social inventionism is Sallie McFague’s metaphorical theory. McFague’s metaphorical theory is based on the existence of nature-as-it-is. As a “critical realist,” she builds her inventionism on an ontological/epistemological dichotomy. She neither denies that nature-as-it-is exists, nor that nature exists for us independent of human consciousness. This position can be interpreted as the claim that we socially invent meanings of nature.

According to McFague, one important characteristic of metaphors is that they disarray conventional knowledge, are thought provoking, etc. McFague claims:

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47 See for instance Peterson, 1999, in which Peterson seems to define any constructivism that is not an interpretation (construe) as an invention of nature-as-it-is (what can be referred to as ontological inventionism).
48 McFague, 1982, p. 17. In this context, it is interesting to notice that McFague refers to metaphors as “revolutionary.”
53 McFague, 1982, pp. 131-133.
54 McFague, 1997, pp. 16-17. “So, in one sense there is nothing but nature, for none of our cultural transformations could have occurred except through the physical evolution of the remarkable human brain. But in another sense, we construct nature: nature is never ‘natural’…”

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We can create reality – in fact, we do all the time with the constructs we embrace unknowingly. We can also create reality knowingly – and humanely – by living within models that we wager are true as well as good for human beings and other forms of life.\(^5\)

McFague’s claim that we “create reality” – her metaphorical inventionism – can be compared to a working process described by William Cronon.\(^6\) Cronon supervised the anthology *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinvention of Nature*, which focuses on the issue of meanings of nature.\(^7\) He describes how the authors brought what Donna Haraway called “found objects” to their meetings. A found object could be a text, a photography, an article, a painting; “…anything that would exemplify…the ideas of nature [they] wished to explore.”\(^8\) The result was “a playful tool” that served as inspiration and a challenge for exploration of new meanings of nature. This means that, for the person who brought the object, it was already included in that person’s view of nature. However, for the others, it (possibly) carried a sense of what in accordance with McFague’s standpoint can be referred to as a familiar shock. By familiar shock is meant that in order for metaphor to function as inventor, it must include an element of familiarity and an element of shock. Such a familiar shock is the essence of Sallie McFague’s metaphorical thinking, thus of the process of metaphorical invention.\(^9\)

According to McFague, there is a tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the similar and the dissimilar, order and disorder, consistency and inconsistency, the familiar and the shocking, in metaphorical language. Metaphorical, modeled, and conceptual thinking are in symbiosis and in order to invent meaning a metaphor cannot be completely disconnected from the current scheme of knowledge. That is to say, it is necessary to have a component of recognition and a component of shock because, only recognition does nothing to disturb conventional knowledge, and only shock makes no sense. However, when combined, the clash between the familiar and the shocking invent new meanings of nature.\(^6\)

In Steve Baker’s *The Postmodern Animal*, there is a picture that is a good example of a simultaneous presence of the familiar and the shocking in metaphor, which may throw us into a state of new ethical (or other) meaning of “animals” as well as of our relationships with animals.\(^6\) The picture displays a woman holding the head of a dead cow in her hands, licking the

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\(^{5}\) McFague, 1993, p. 91.

\(^{6}\) Cronon (Ed.), 1995, “Introduction.”


\(^{8}\) Cronon (Ed.), 1995, p. 27.

\(^{9}\) McFague, 1982, p. 17. “…good metaphors shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension and they are implicitly revolutionary.”

\(^{10}\) McFague, 1982, pp. 15-18, 199, n.18, and n. 20. See p. 18 for a list of other characteristics of metaphorical thinking; “…ordinariness, incongruity, indirection, skepticism, judgment, unconventionality, surprise and transformation or revolution,” of which I have discussed only a few.

\(^{11}\) Baker, 2000, p. 87. See also chapter 4, “The Unmeaning of Animals.”
By looking at the picture of the woman licking, a chain of associations starts due to the clash between the shocking and the familiar. That is to say, the shock enters as we watch the interaction between two familiar actors. The tongue of the licking woman, touching the flesh of the cow has a potential to invent new ethical meanings. These new ethical meanings may concern meat eating as such, sex and meat eating, meat eating as putting your tongue up against carcasses of other creatures, bodies like your own, cannibalism, the human/animal, hence human/nature boundaries, Imago Dei, taking “things” in your own hands (tongues), etc.

Following this, in one sense nature does not exist. That is, according to McFague, nature-as-it-is cannot exist for us in any other way than as construed through language. Allegedly, we only exist in interpretable social, cultural, and historical contexts of language and everything that exists, exists for us in and through these interpretive contexts. Hence, purportedly, it is impossible to know anything about nature-as-it-is even though we conceptualize certain phenomena of the world as “nature” and other phenomena as “culture.” That is to say, according to McFague, whatever “nature” means to us, its meanings cannot mirror its raw existence.

In sum, McFague’s inventionism is an invention of new meanings of nature. The metaphorical language is a way to speak about the “lesser-known” (unfamiliar) in terms of the “better-known” (familiar) according to which knowledge, understood as socially “agreed” upon conventions, is constructed into coherent and consistent wholes of meaning and theories of nature. Finally, metaphor, using “humor and the grotesque” introduces new, in relation to prevailing epistemological schemes, incongruent meanings of nature. In this sense, her inventionism is horizontal; it operates in between models of nature. Moreover, it upsets the conceptual order (and possibly also the rules of this order), which makes it possible to understand something new (up until then unknown) and unfamiliar about nature that goes beyond the current body or theory of knowledge-as-social-convention.

Thus, McFague seems to represent a mix of construism, constructionism, and inventionism. That is to say, on a basic level of understanding and in relation to nature-as-it-is, we all construe disparate meanings of nature-as-it-

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62 McFague, 1997, p. 17. “But in another sense, we construct nature: nature is never ‘natural’...”
63 McFague, 1982, pp. 16-17.
64 McFague, 1982, pp. 3-4; 37-42.
66 McFague, 1982, p. 15. “...a metaphor is seeing one thing as something else, pretending ‘this’ is ‘that’ because we do not know how to think or talk about "this," so we use “that” as a way of saying something about it.”
68 I am grateful for the conversations I have had with Eberhard Hermann, Martin Holmberg, Stefan Eriksson, and Irene Klaver regarding this and other issues concerning “reality,” reality, and the meaning of knowledge.
is through language, while we use conceptual language to structure, that is, to *construct* coherent bodies and theories of knowledge of nature. Finally, metaphor functions as the *inventor* of new meanings. As inventor, metaphor functions in between the presently socially accepted bodies of beliefs (“knowledge”) and potentially new bodies of beliefs (“knowledge”).

**Conclusion**

What does it, according to ecofeminism, mean to socially construct? According to this analysis, three kinds of ecofeminist social constructivisms are identified: Social construism, social constructionism, and social inventionism. According to *social construism*, humans always *interpret* nature. That is, what we “know” about nature, is based on particular interpretations of nature. According to *social constructionism* - according to which we socially construct, that is, build nature - humans construct meanings and knowledge of nature-as-it-is as well as physical aspects of nature-as-it-is into coherent wholes. Finally, according to *social inventionism*, humans socially invent, or create, meanings of nature in power of metaphorical language.

The issue of social constructivism is not only a matter of different kinds of constructivism, but also a matter of which aspects of nature that are construed, constructed, and invented. As it has been shown, ecofeminist social constructivism varies regarding this matter. That is, it does not accentuate that nature is “…sustained by social processes.” Rather, aspects like meanings, knowledge, as well as physical aspects of nature-as-it-is are the alleged products of social processes. Hence, according to ecofeminist social constructivism it is more accurate to speak of *aspects of nature* rather than of *nature* as sustained by social processes.

Regarding the nature or identity of these social processes, it follows from the analysis in this chapter that, construes, constructions, and inventions of aspects of nature are the products of value-dualistic conceptual frameworks, of dualistic as well as complex eco/social structures and discourses, of the interaction between physical and conceptual constructions of nature, and of metaphorical language.

To conclude, this analysis shows two important things. First, ecofeminist social constructivism does not entail the claim that nature is invented. Second, ecofeminist social constructivism displays both individual and social constructivism. In chapter seven, ecofeminist social constructivism will be contrasted to the variants of social constructivism presupposed in the critique offered against social constructivism by deep ecologists and environmental philosopher Anna Peterson.

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Chapter 4
Ecofeminism and Values of Nature

The issue concerning the intrinsic value of nature is not a typically ecofeminist one. This means that ecofeminists in general do not engage in projects that primarily aim at constructing coherent and consistent theories of the intrinsic value of nature. Rather, ecofeminism tends to presuppose that nature has “intrinsic value.”¹

However, this does not mean that ecofeminism does not have anything of importance and relevance to add to this issue. On the contrary, this is one of the reasons why a clarifying analysis of ecofeminist conceptions of value becomes interesting and relevant.

In order to assess ecofeminist conceptions of nature’s value as well as to compare these conceptions with the nonfeminist conceptions of nature’s value, the questions that are outlined in chapter one, serve as starting points:
(a) What kind of value or worth does nature have? (b) What is the meaning of nature’s value or worth? (c) What are the origins of nature’s value or worth?

The Value of Nature and Subjectivism

The purpose of Karen Warren’s work is not to argue in favor of nature’s intrinsic value, rather, nature’s intrinsic value is presupposed. Warren distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic value. Extrinsic value is defined as “instrumental value.” However, compared to Frankena’s definitions, the meaning in which Warren is using “instrumental value” corresponds to Frankena’s term “utility value” rather than his “extrinsic,” or, “instrumental” values. Thus, Warren’s term instrumental value means that nature is valued because it is useful for some purpose (utility value) and not because it is a

¹ As it will be shown in this chapter, several of the ecofeminists studied here take as starting point that nature has “intrinsic value,” or, rather, that nature ought to be respected in its own right, or, looked upon as a subject, etc.
mean to what is good (extrinsic value).2 Continuing the comparison with Frankena’s terminology, there are no clear indications that Warren holds that nature has contributory value. However, in the following quote she seems to submit to an idea that nature has inherent value. Warren states,

\[ \text{I closed my eyes and began to feel the rock […] I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what it offered me…[and]}…\text{come to know a sense of being in relationship with the natural environment […] It felt as if the rock and I were silent conversational partners in a longstanding friendship.} \]

The fact that the rock-climber is overwhelmed with positive feeling towards the rock supports the interpretation that nature is good because the climber’s experience of nature is good or rewarding in it self (inherent value). However, Warren also defends a subjectivist standpoint and gives no other reasons for the claim that nature has intrinsic value than that she “loves” nature.3

Subjectivism differs from emotivism because it states that value statements are reports of certain emotive conditions of moral agents rather than expressions of such attitudes.5 Accordingly, Warren’s standpoint that nature has intrinsic value means that Warren has an attitude of love towards nature.6 The fact that value statements refer to the existence of certain attitudes towards nature means that they are possible to translate into factual statements.

The emotivist on the other hand holds that value statements are expressions of attitudes or emotions towards nature; such as “hooray” or “yippee.” From this follows that emotivism is a noncognitivist position, according to which value statements cannot be falsified. According to subjectivism, it is possible to examine whether it is true or not that a person has a certain attitude or not, in this case, the attitude of love.7

Warren clearly states that her aim is not to prove the existence of, or offer criteria for the intrinsic value of nature. According to Warren, when we claim that nature has intrinsic value we are merely giving a report of the fact that we have a certain attitude towards nature.8 That is, intrinsic value language is reduced to linguistic representations of positive attitudes based on personal experience.

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2 Warren, 2000, p. 74. "Nature is intrinsically valuable – a ‘good in itself’ (or an end-in-itself) - because of its own intrinsic properties and not because of its usefulness for some (human) purpose or end.” Here Warren describes one way of establishing the moral standing of nature.

3 Warren, (1990) 1993a, pp. 327-328. This passage can also be interpreted as if nature has contributory value, that is, that nature is good because it contributes to the intrinsically good life.

4 Warren, 2000, p. 75. Warren compares this attitude to the attitude she claims that we express as we say to your children, “I love you.”

5 Bergström, (1990) 1993, pp. 25-26. Here, I follow Bergström, who claims that subjectivism differs from emotivism in this respect. See also Rachels, 1995, pp. 432-441.

6 Warren, 2000, p. 75.

7 See Rachels, 1995, p. 437, for a discussion on subjectivism and the difference between reporting or expressing attitudes or feelings.

8 Warren, 2000, p. 75.
on certain emotions. Because of this, Warren considers “theorizing” about nature’s intrinsic value in normative environmental ethics problematic.9

Following Joel Steinberg, Warren holds that “moral worth”10 of humans as well as of nature “is groundless” in the respect that it can only be explained in terms of the attention it refers to: “…we love our children because we love them.”11 Furthermore, she states: “Ultimately there is no ‘ground’ or ‘justification’ for our loving them other than the fact that we do.”12 Moreover, because this attitude of love implies that nature has moral standing, the consequence is that we have no grounds out of which we can justify statements such as we ought to consider nature morally, or nature has moral standing,13 besides the fact that we do love nature. That is, “intrinsic value” – love – is self-evident. From this follows that Warren deviates in part from Frankena’s definitions because she translates nature has intrinsic value to someone loves nature and not to nature has a good because of its intrinsic properties, which follows Frankena’s definition of intrinsic value.

Regarding the origin of nature’s non-utility value, they are anthropogenic because they originate in the moral agent. Moreover, since statements that nature has non-utility value are reports of certain attitudes, the existence of nature’s non-utility value is maintained only as long as we, in this case, love nature.

Warren makes no explicit claims regarding the locus of nature’s intrinsic value. This means that one consequence of her conception of anthropogenic, subjective, and intrinsic value is that the locus of value is relative, since it follows the attitude of love. Hence, the question of which non-human entities that has “intrinsic” value becomes a question of which entities that are loved. Consequently, living and non-living, individuals and wholes, etc., are all potential targets for Warren’s subjective non-utility value.

The Value of Nature, Moral Sentiments and Nonhuman Flourishing

Cuomo shares Warren’s view that discussions concerning proving the existence of the intrinsic value of nature should be avoided. However, Cuomo’s reason for taking this standpoint is that such discussions may lead

9 Warren, 2000, pp. 75-76.
10 The fact that Warren is using the terms “worth” and “value” interchangeably indicates that she probably regards that these terms stand for the same thing, that is, the attitude of love towards nature.
11 Warren, 2000, p. 75. Here, Warren quotes Feinberg in Feinberg, 1972, p. 92: “…it may express a 'kind of attitude not itself justifiable in more ultimate terms.'…”
12 Warren, 2000, p. 75.
13 Warren, 2000, p. 76. “…no attempts to ‘ground’ claims about moral considerability of the nonhuman natural environment (or its members) – is possible.” See also, p. 93n. 5.
to the possible conclusion that nature has no intrinsic value after all.\textsuperscript{14} This conclusion is unacceptable to Cuomo since the foundation of ecofeminist ethics is “an assertion of the value of our lives, our communities, and nature.”\textsuperscript{15} Still, for Cuomo, the term intrinsic value means “noninstrumental value.”\textsuperscript{16} However, she does not make a distinction between “instrumental value” and “utility value.” In addition, there are statements that can be interpreted as the standpoints that nature has inherent,\textsuperscript{17} contributory,\textsuperscript{18} as well as intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{19} There are two reasons for why Cuomo claims that nature has intrinsic value, namely that nature is good in itself and that nature has the intrinsic property of “dynamic charm.”

Cuomo takes her starting point in Hume’s thesis that: “the foundations of morality are felt...[and that]...reason and morality are rightfully ‘slaves of the passions’...”\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, she claims: “...goodness does not inhere in objects.”\textsuperscript{21} What Cuomo affirms here is not a value-theoretical subjectivism like Warren’s standpoint. Rather, Cuomo makes a general claim that evaluations, norms, and what she refers to as “moral values,” are anthropogenic,\textsuperscript{22} in the sense that emotions are always relevant for the act of valuing nature. However, Cuomo does not reduce intrinsic value statements to merely verbal references to certain attitudes.

Cuomo claims that if statements of intrinsic value are to be “meaningful,” it is necessary that humans appreciate nature.\textsuperscript{23} This means that nature must be considered necessary for – or a potential improver of – human life or, in any other way appreciated for aesthetical or epistemological reasons.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{14} Cuomo, 1998, p. 47. In a comparison with feminist ethics, Cuomo writes: “Sara Hoagland argues that to debate the value of women’s lives is to admit that it is possible that women’s lives are not valuable (Hoagland, 1988).”

\textsuperscript{15} Cuomo, 1998, p. 47. See also p. 64, for another reason for avoiding this: “In some instances, rational reasons elude us, and we simply find ourselves valuing someone or some thing that in no meaningful sense can be said to have use value for us.”

\textsuperscript{16} Cuomo, 1998, p. 48. “…ecological feminist ethics...begin with...the sense that women, humans, communities, and natural objects and systems have noninstrumental value, and we should avoid harming them.” Cuomo, 1998, p. 12. “Instrumental value refers to use value. [...] beings with noninstrumental value have additional, ethically significant value above and beyond their use value.”

\textsuperscript{17} Cuomo, 1998, p. 49. Cuomo claims that noninstrumental valuing of nature “…might be for aesthetic reasons.”

\textsuperscript{18} Cuomo, 1998, p. 48. Cuomo claims that a thing that has intrinsic value (“moral value”) “…must be the kind of thing [...] which makes human life better than it would be without it...” See also Cuomo, 1998, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{19} Cuomo, 1998, p. 64. Cuomo asserts “…I may value the marsh...for reasons that hinge on the fact that it just is something independent, beautiful, and complex.”

\textsuperscript{20} Cuomo, 1998, p. 47.


\textsuperscript{22} Cuomo, 1998, p. 48. “For a thing to have meaningful moral value, some moral agent must value it as a member of the ethical universe...”

\textsuperscript{23} Cuomo, 1998, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{24} Cuomo, 1998, p. 48.
However, in addition she claims that “intrinsic” values must refer to the interests of nature-others.\(^{25}\) This indicates, in contrast to her claims referred to earlier, that goodness \textit{does} inhere in objects, or in other words, are biogenic. According to Cuomo, only entities that are able to flourish can have “intrinsic” value,\(^{26}\) that is, moral standing.\(^{27}\) An entity is able to flourish only if it has “dynamic charm.”\(^{28}\) Cuomo states that “dynamic charm” refers to a capability of living entities to – in relation to these entities environmental as well as inner life forces – seek the good of their own. This means that they strive for a healthy and thriving existence in accordance with their specific ecosocial identities.

Cuomo claims that the dynamic charm of an entity “…serves as a primary site for determining what is good for that being or thing.”\(^{29}\) This statement further strengthens the interpretation that her standpoint is that nature has intrinsic value, which originates, at least in part, in nature-in-itself, that is, that whatever it is that are in these entities interest this can be determined independent of human sentiments. This approach indicates that the origin of nature’s intrinsic value is as much a matter of human sentiments as it is a matter of nature’s intrinsic properties. In sum, Cuomo’s position can be interpreted as follows. \textit{Normatively}, evaluations are always and necessarily anthropogenic. \textit{Semantically}, in order for a conception of intrinsic value to be intelligible it must refer to entities that have, in Frankena’s terminology, human utility, contributory, and inherent value, and, inhere the property of dynamic charm. The reason for this conclusion is that Cuomo combines Humean emotivism with a naturalistic view\(^{30}\) of the origin of the non-moral good. That is to say, although evaluations inhere within the moral agent, the interests of nonhuman entities originate in the entities in question, hence are biogenic.

An alternative interpretation of Cuomo’s standpoint is that the intrinsic value of nature has \textit{ecogenic origin}\.\(^{31}\) That is to say, the fact that positive evaluations of nature are anthropogenic and therefore must refer to states of affairs that are of human concern, and, that nonhuman interests are biogenic,

\(^{26}\) Cuomo, 1998, p. 62. “…a defining feature of ecological feminist thought is its commitment to the \textit{flourishing}, or well-being, of individuals, species, and communities.”
\(^{27}\) Cuomo, 1998, pp. 45-50, 71-73. According to Cuomo, the meaning of nature’s moral standing is “to be valued for its own sake” or, to be object of an act of “noninstrumental valuing.”
\(^{29}\) Cuomo, 1998, p. 71. According to Cuomo, the fact that an entity has dynamic charm is what “…serves as a primary site for determining what is good for that being or thing.”
\(^{30}\) Cuomo, 1998, p. 63. According to Cuomo, “…a basic ethical conception of the good…should be […] \textit{naturalistic} - grounded in…facts about people, societies, animals, and ecosystemic processes…”
\(^{31}\) Cuomo, 1998, p. 64. This interpretation is supported by Cuomo’s claim that “Ethics that begin with flourishing capture the sense in which instrumental and noninstrumental value are
fulfilled in the flourishing of nonhumans, could be interpreted as if intrinsic value of nature originate in interplay between moral agents and those objects to which it refer. That is, taken separately neither anthropogenic evaluations nor biogenic interests, and intrinsic capacities, are sufficient for intrinsic value of nature to originate. The fact that Cuomo combines emotivism with an idea that nature-others such as plants and species and ecosystems have a good of their own supports this interpretation.32

In sum, Cuomo’s conception of nature’s intrinsic value can be interpreted as if nature’s intrinsic value has anthropogenic, biogenic, and, ecogenic origin. I prefer to interpret her standpoint regarding this matter as ecogenic, since this standpoint considers the fact that Cuomo holds that in order for nature’s intrinsic value to originate, nature must be appreciated (in some sense) by humans, and, that the nonhumans in question, which intrinsic value talk refers to, must have the intrinsic property of dynamic charm. Finally, we have also seen that her view is that only living individuals and groups (ecological communities) have intrinsic value because these entities are the only ones that are able to flourish.

The Intrinsic Value of Eco/Social Goods

Carolyn Merchant’s normative claims elude ideas of moral consideration, and therefore as we shall see, ideas of intrinsic value of nature.

Merchant discusses four normative ethical theories (or theoretical perspectives) of which she rejects the first three. These theories are, in her terms: (a) egocentric ethics, (b) homocentric ethics, (c) ecocentric ethics, and (d) partnership ethics. The fact that she divides anthropocentrism in two sub groups, “egocentrism,” and “homocentrism” amounts to a departure from the established distinction between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism.33

Merchant describes ego, - and homocentrism in terms of individual and social “goods.” Ecocentrism on the other hand is described in terms of nature’s intrinsic value as a “property” of “goodness or richness.”34 According to Merchant, egocentrism claims: “…that what is good for the individual will benefit society?”35 and homocentrism is characterized by its claim: “The social good should be maximized…”36 Aaccording to Merchant, homocentric ethics is exemplified by “the utilitarian ethics” of Bentham and

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34 Merchant, 1992, p. 78.
36 Merchant, 1992, p. 70.
Mill. 37 Ecocentrism finally, is characterized by “...assigning intrinsic rather than merely instrumental value to nonhuman nature.”

In her critique of these three perspectives, Merchant uses two different meanings of intrinsic value. On the one hand, when she refers to ego - and homocentrism, she uses a teleological conception of value; individual and social “good” is defined in terms of what is in the alleged interests of individuals and what allegedly makes social groups happy. This means that here the meaning of “the good” is translatable into those actual conditions that are presumed to be beneficial to individuals as well as to the public.

Apparently, this bear mark of naturalism, since the meaning of the good of nature can be identified as or reduced to facts about nature, that is, whatever it is about nature that is or is presumed to be beneficial to humans. On the other hand, in her discussion of ecocentrism, she refers to a meaning of “the good” as a property of goodness and that ecocentrism looks upon nature as having such a property.

According to my interpretation of Merchant, “intrinsic value” (the “highest good”) refers to, according to egocentrism, whatever the individual considers beneficial, alternatively, what for a fact is beneficial for the individual. In addition, according to homocentrism, “intrinsic value” refers to: the happiness of the community. Finally, according to ecocentrism, “intrinsic value” refers to: a property of goodness.

Merchant views ethical dilemmas as situations of conflicts among “...these three dominant forms of environmental ethics...” She claims that, taken separately, ego, - homo, - and ecocentrism fail to properly consider the common good of what she refers to as the human and the natural community. This can be interpreted as if each fails to properly address ethical dilemmas as well as to properly address the question of moral significance.

Kenneth Goodpaster, who originally made the distinction...
between moral relevance and moral significance, claims that questions concerning *moral relevance* concern the question of which entities, and if so why, that are morally considerable (have intrinsic or inherent value or worth). *Moral significance* on the other hand deals with “…comparative judgments of moral ‘weight’ in cases of conflict” between entities morally considerable. Following this, we can conclude that Merchant claims that these three ethical perspectives represent inappropriate normative standpoints because they privilege the goods *either* of the individual, *or* of the social, *or* of nature, and in stead, she puts forward partnership ethics.

Laying out her “partnership ethic,” Merchant returns to a teleological conception of value. This is evident as she rejects the egocentric thesis that: “…what is good for the individual…is good for the society as a whole,” the homocentric thesis that: “…the greatest good [is that which is good] for the greatest number for the longest time,” and, the ecocentric thesis that: “…the good of the human community [is embraced and included] within…the good of the biotic community.” As an alternative standpoint, Merchant proclaims the following normative standpoint:

A partnership ethic sees the human community *and* the biotic community in a mutual relationship with each other. It states that “the greatest good for the human and the nonhuman community is to be found in their mutual living interdependence.”

In line with the terminology Merchant uses when she defines individual and public good, the meaning of this “ecosocial good” is defined as whatever it is that is beneficial for the biotic and the human community alike, from a surviving perspective. Without defining the meaning of this common good further, her main point is that whatever it is that benefits the human vs. the biotic community, this cannot be separated, hence it is a common good.

Merchant uses the terms “intrinsic” and “inherent,” and, “worth” and “value” interchangeably. In her characterization of ecocentrism, Merchant states: “…all things have intrinsic worth – value in and of themselves – not just instrumental or utilitarian value.” This may indicate that she wants to stress that “worth” means something different from “value.” However, it can also imply that she stresses the difference between the meaning of “intrinsic” and “instrumental.” A further confusing factor is that the fact that she states “…mainstream Western culture have traditionally assigned [only

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50 Merchant, 1996, p. 217. “A partnership ethic goes beyond egocentric and homocentric ethics in which the good of the human community wins out over the good of the biotic community (as in egocentric and homocentric ethics). It likewise transcends ecocentric ethics in which the good of the biotic community may take precedence over the good of the human community.”
52 Merchant, 1996, p. 216.
humans] inherent worth, [and] nature instrumental value as a resource for humans.”54 [Emphasis added.] This makes it unclear whether Merchant acknowledges the differences between the meaning of “inherent” and “intrinsic,” and, between the meaning of “worth” and “value.”

The fact that she makes no such explicit distinctions becomes clearer as she seems to use the utilitarian term value and the Kantian term worth, interchangeable. This is illuminated in a passage in which she discusses ecocentrism and the “integrity, beauty, and stability”55 of nature and where she states that a thing has intrinsic worth if it has “value in and of itself.”56

Following this, it seems as if Merchant uses the term instrumental value in the meaning of human utility value.57 The fact that her focus is on that which is in the actual common interests of the human as well as of the nonhuman community, affirms that she herself means “value” rather than “worth.”58 Moreover, in the light of her social constructivism the most reasonable interpretation is that her own suggestion of a partnership ethics entails a conception of an intrinsic value of anthropogenic origin. That is, she does not advocate the value theoretical standpoint that nature has a property of goodness.59

Two ideas are of importance here. First, that according to Merchant, it is impossible to entirely separate between what is in the overall survival interest of the human as well as the nonhuman community. This standpoint is explained by the fact that Merchant wants to avoid a standpoint that amounts to a merger between humanity and nature, because such a merger may lead to a reduction of human goods to nothing but the goods of the nonhuman community, which is also the main reason why she rejects ecocentrism. Moreover, she wants to avoid anthropocentric ethical egoism as well. The consequence is a normative standpoint that attempts to include concern for the common human and nonhuman good without reducing the one to the other.60 Second, supposedly these are goods worth pursuing for the sake of their own, and consequently, these goods are the locus of intrinsic value.

54 Merchant, 1992, p. 78.
58 Merchant, 1996, p. 215. When Merchant is discussing "the good of the biotic community” and "the good of the human community” it is clear that she does not make an explicit connection to a conception of an objective good in the Kantian terms of Paul Taylor. Rather, her ideas refer to a utilitarian notion of "the good” as that which we for a fact seek or ought to seek to accomplish, for the sake of its own.
59 Merchant, 1996, p. 215. In the paragraph following the definition of intrinsic worth, she goes on saying that the existence of biodiversity “is necessary…for its own sake.” As it was presented above in this chapter, Merchant is not in favor of what she refers to as ecocentrism because she holds that a conception of an objective intrinsic worth/value of nature in terms of intrinsic properties, which she associates with ecocentrism is likely to not take human interests into proper consideration.
From this follows that the locus of intrinsic value is not nature in itself, or aspects of nature, but rather that which is in the common interest of humanity and nature. That is to say, the intrinsic value is not a property that is ascribed to or belongs to certain nonhuman entities on the basis of which their moral standing is constituted. Rather, as it was presented in chapter two, according to Merchant, nature is humanity’s active partner, which we ought to respect. That is, she presupposes that nature has moral standing and on the basis of this standpoint, Merchant claims that what is in the common interest of both the human and the nonhuman communities, as partners in life, is what is worth pursuing for the sake of its own.

Merchant does not offer an explicit and detailed discussion about the nature of these interests, but in line with her normative human/nature dualism, it is reasonable to assume that it is in the interest of nature to be left alone. Merchant explains the meaning of respect for nature’s autonomy by giving an example from a supposed prediction of an earthquake in Los Angeles within the nearest 75 years. Here, respect for nature’s autonomy means not letting our conducts be guided exclusively by consideration for human social interests. That is to say, sometimes we ought to restrict our expansion of society and leave space enough to let nature be – even though this may become unpleasant for the human community – since “earth quaking” is part of the way nature behaves as a “free, autonomous actor.” Thus, according to Merchant, the act of respecting nature means not as much to preserve as many species as possible, or to restore certain areas, as it means to stand back.

Considering the question of origin of values, the most generous interpretation is that Merchant’s standpoint is ecogenic since, according to her, the overall common good of nature and humanity is identical and “…is to be found in their mutual, living interdependence,”63 and because Merchant stresses that her “partnership [ethics] is grounded in the concept of relation”64 In this sense, the origin of these intrinsic values is not dependent on neither human nor nonhuman individual points of views. Rather, the identity of those conditions (or processes, or state of affairs) that the human and the nonhuman community ought to pursue for the sake of its own depends on the nature of the “mutual, living, interdependence” between the human and the

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63 Merchant, 1996, p. 221. In line with her view of nature as it was presented in chapter one, nature has moral standing because nature is, as Merchant puts it, chaotic.
64 Merchant, 1996, p. 217. “[A] partnership ethics is grounded in the concept of relation. A relation is a mode of connection. This connection may be between people or kin in the same family or community, between men and women, between people, other organisms, and inorganic entities, or between specific places and the rest of the earth.” Furthermore, Merchant claims: “A partnership ethic of earthcare is an ethic of the connections between a human and a nonhuman community.”

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nonhuman community, and originate in interaction between humanity and nature. This indicates a conception of nature’s intrinsic goods, according to which these goods are objective in a weak sense because they originate independently of particular human and nonhuman individual interests or points of views, but not independently of the eco/social interdependence of humanity and nature.

The Intrinsic worth of Nature as Process

According to my interpretation of McFague, she holds that nature has intrinsic worth, rather than value, beyond its utility, contributory, and extrinsic value. She shares the definition of instrumental value as utility value with Warren, Cuomo, and Merchant.\(^65\) However, unlike the others she includes a notion of external (instrumental) value in her definition.\(^66\)

McFague’s conception of intrinsic worth can be interpreted as a process, in which the active choices of “paying attention,” of knowing nature “objectively,” and of “loving” nature, interplay.\(^67\)

That is to say, the meaning of the intrinsic worth of nature is explained in terms of nature being paid attention to, being known objectively, and being loved. Thus, together these three elements of this process constitute the meaning of intrinsic worth.\(^68\) McFague states:

> The message is that we pay attention to difference, that we really learn to see what is different from ourselves. That is not easy. We can acknowledge a thing in its difference if it is important to us or useful to us, but realizing that something other than oneself is real, in itself, for itself, is difficult. To acknowledge another being as different – perhaps even indifferent to me, as for instance a hovering kestrel – is, for most of us, a feat of the imagination.\(^69\)

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\(^65\) See for instance, McFague, 1993, pp. 165-166.

\(^66\) McFague, 1997, p. 29. The following statement can be interpreted as including a notion of external value: “To really love nature (and not just ourselves in nature or nature as useful to us – even its use as a pathway to God)…” [Emphasis added.]

\(^67\) McFague, 1997, p. 29. She writes, “…we must pay attention – detailed, careful, concrete attention – to the world that lies around us but is not us. We must do this because we cannot love what we do not know […] To really love nature (and not just ourselves in nature or nature as useful to us – even its use as a pathway to God), we must pay attention to it. Love and knowledge go together; we can’t have the one without the other.”

\(^68\) Or, the meaning of intrinsic worth could be described as if an act of intrinsic worth is characterized by a process composed of a certain kind of seeing, loving and knowing nature. It seems to me as if it is not necessary to understand such a process to be necessarily linear and causal since its elements can interact simultaneously.

\(^69\) McFague, 1997, p. 28.
She also states:

But I would like to suggest a different way that Christians should love nature – a way in keeping with the earthly, bodily theology suggested by the tradition’s incarnationalism, a way that allows us to love the natural world for its intrinsic worth, to love it, in all its differences and detail, in itself, for itself.70

This first element of the process of intrinsic worth is to pay attention to nature. This refers to an act of allowing particular nature to be, as it is, in itself – different from us. This implies a concept of *intrinsic worth* that makes sense independently of human appreciation, need, and respect. It also makes sense independently of nature’s characteristics or interests or any other properties of nature. The act of paying attention amounts to acknowledging nature others in all their forms, as they are, for themselves, in their own world(s).71

McFague focuses more on the otherness of nature than on nature’s interests, goods, or capacities to do well. The interests of particular nature, as for instance interests of a wood-tick, are relevant for understanding the meaning of nature’s worth, but, does not constitute a criteria for the tick’s intrinsic worth.

The essential meaning of the act of paying attention is a choice of focused concentrated attention towards a particular nature other. This choice is based on a disinterest in the nature-other as a unique individual. The fact that we are “disinterested” does not refer to that we are uninterested of particular nature others. Rather, this refers to the fact that the interest in nature others is not based on the fact that nature or that we appreciate nature. This amounts to that the purpose of this act is to understand and to get to know nature others, as they really, objectively are. In this way, nature according to McFague becomes subiectified; therefore, a conception of intrinsic *worth*, rather than intrinsic *value* applies here.

The second element of the process of intrinsic worth is objective knowledge.72 McFague uses two conceptions of knowledge, which I refer to as: knowledge-as-social-convention and getting-to-know-knowledge. According to the conception of knowledge-as-social-convention, objective

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70 McFague, 1997, p. 27. McFague has always been careful to point out that her work is contextually influenced and that it aims at a certain social context. This context is the community of protestant Christianity in the US. However, her message applies to and brings insights and perspectives on environmental ethical theory beyond the Christian community.

71 McFague, 1997, p. 106. According to McFague, we should look upon nature as “…subjects who live in their own worlds with their own interests…” Moreover, paying attention to nature means recognizing “…that the other exists for itself and not just for me.”

72 McFague, 1997. This book is devoted to a discussion about the significance of different ways of “seeing” (knowing) the world, for morals and for ethical analysis. Only some, yet central, elements is dealt with in this study. Both Warren and McFague are using Marylin Frey and her discussion about “the loving eye” and the “arrogant eye.” See Warren, 2000. p. 104. Warren however accepts Frye’s notion of the arrogant eye as *contrary* to the loving eye. According to McFague, the loving eye is not the “opposite” of the arrogant eye. See McFague, 1997, p. 34.
knowledge of nature is not obtainable since there is no epistemic correspondence (representation) between nature-language and nature-as-it-is. The conception of getting-to-know-nature should not be understood as an opposite standpoint to correspondence theories of truth. Rather, according to McFague, getting-to-know knowledge amounts to a possibility to disregard our own points of views and interests.73

The dominant meaning of objective knowledge is beliefs that hold independently of human points of views, conceptual schemes, or worldviews.74 In addition, we speak of objective knowledge if it is independent of a particular point of view of a certain individual. Furthermore, traditional objectivism aims at discovering and defining point-of-view independent properties and characteristics of nature.

McFaguean objectivism implies hunting for the particular, the specific, the subjecthood of nature others in all their differences. Hence, objective getting-to-know-knowledge means getting to know individuals as they are in themselves. This means that nature-others are active, as responding, surprising others.75 Thus, objective knowledge, according to McFague, does not mean that nature is objectified in the traditional sense; rather, in her model of getting to know nature objectively, it means that nature is subjectified.76

Although McFague denies objective nature-as-it-is corresponding knowledge, she celebrates the epistemological ideal within science that nature ought to be known disinterestedly. This means that particular nature-others ought to be known as they are, on their own terms, with no attention paid to our interests in nature. That is to say, McFague exploits this ideal that we, in order to get to know nature, ought to control the object (nature) and ourselves through carefully defined questions, material, methods, and experimental processes – preferably in a lab or office situation. However, getting to know nature in particular is supposed to be a messy, surprising, interactive process between two subjects; the human individual and nature in particular. This means that, although nature cannot and ought not to be regarded as merely an object, science provides an attitude towards nature that we should embrace in order to obtain disinterested knowledge. According to McFague, this ideal way of obtaining knowledge about nature

73 McFague, 1997, pp. 32-39. Given the necessity of perspectival knowing and the conviction that we live, know, and value nature from within linguistic interpretive contexts, McFague asks herself: “…which perspective, which kind of seeing, is better for nature?” Her answer is that we need to get to know nature in the sense outlined here, that is, “objectively.”
74 See Harre’ & Krausz, 1996, p. 5, for a discussion on objectivism.
75 McFague; 1997, p. 34. In McFague’s words: “…the complexity, mystery, and difference…” of nature-others.
76 McFague, 1997, pp. 91-118. In this chapter, McFague lays out her idea of “knowing nature as subject.”
is something we should cherish, because it helps us disregard our own interests in the process of getting to know nature.\textsuperscript{77}

The third element of the process of intrinsic worth is love.\textsuperscript{78} McFague’s conception of love can be characterized as having four components. The first component of love is a separation of love and value. According to this idea, nature is not valued because we love nature; rather, if we love nature, we love nature because we first get to know nature as it is, in and for itself.\textsuperscript{79}

The second component of love follows from the first component and is that love of nature is not a fundament of the intrinsic worth of nature. Rather, love will (possibly) follow in what I have interpreted as McFague’s “intrinsic worth process.”

The third component of love is a combination of love and justice.\textsuperscript{80} According to McFague, the love of nature should keep “…from being soft, from becoming private or personal, from depending merely on good-feeling,”\textsuperscript{81} because such kind of love cannot help us to make the choices that environmental and development practice require. In other words, we need something beyond sentimental love in order to be able to treat nature properly. Thus, McFague’s idea of love is “…tough-minded, dispassionate, and properly impersonal,” and is based on the assumption that humans are members of competitive ecological and social communities and therefore need to stay away from ethics that “locks in good feeling.”\textsuperscript{82}

Regarding the locus of nature’s intrinsic worth, it is possible to interpret McFague in at least two ways. On the one hand, every aspect of cosmos has intrinsic worth.\textsuperscript{83} This includes living entities as well as inanimate or inert objects,\textsuperscript{84} and includes individuals as well as species and other nonhuman groups.\textsuperscript{85} On the other hand, if the intrinsic worth of nature comes to

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\textsuperscript{77} McFague, 1997, pp. 134 - 137.
\textsuperscript{78} McFague, 1997, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{79} McFague, 1997, p. 29. “…we cannot love what we cannot know.” Moreover, “…only love based on real knowledge is valuable.”
\textsuperscript{80} McFague, 1997, pp. 155-158. This is an example of how McFague picks up a thread from feminist ethics. See the introduction in this study for a brief presentation of some of the characteristics of feminist ethics.
\textsuperscript{81} McFague, 1997, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{82} McFague, 1997, p. 157. In addition, according to McFague, “When we care about and for others, we imply that they have rights, that they deserve fair treatment, that justice demands attention to their needs and desires.”
\textsuperscript{83} McFague, 1993, p. 185. According to McFague: “…each and every part [of life in the cosmos] has both utilitarian and intrinsic value.” Here McFague equals instrumental value with utilitarian value and it is clear that she uses “intrinsic value” in the meaning of a value that is not a utility value, that is, intrinsic value equals noninstrumental utility value. Furthermore, on p. 165, she claims that “…each living being has in and for itself…” “intrinsic value.”
\textsuperscript{84} McFague, 1993, p. 16. In 1997, p. 112, McFague presents the idea that the “subjectification of the world” implies a new animistic “sensibility” or attitude according to which even “city buildings” have “subjectivity.”
\textsuperscript{85} McFague, 1997, p. 33. In a discussion about “the arrogant eye,” which is a metaphor for anthropocentric and patriarchal instrumental viewing of nature, she writes: “The natural world
existence in the relationships between humans and those particular nature-others that we relate to according to the way the “intrinsic worth process,” is described here, we might think of this universal worth of all “parts” of cosmos as primarily potential. This follows from the fact that, supposedly, nothing would have intrinsic worth that was not part of such a relationship.

Where does nature’s intrinsic worth originate according to McFague? In order to answer this question correctly we must keep in mind that McFague’s conceptions of nature’s worth operate within models of nature. Therefore, the answer to the question depends on the perspective taken. For example, from a perspective within a model of nature others as loved by the Christian, creative God, the worth of nature has theogenic origin because nature others are included in the love of God as God’s creatures. Moreover, in such a model nature-others are viewed as the “new poor,” which means that the worth of nature originates and exists in the love of God, because God’s love is focused on the oppressed and the poor. Moreover, love of God through Christ becomes widened in order to include nonhumans down to microorganisms. From this perspective of the “…‘cosmic’ Christ,” the primary loci of intrinsic worth are “bodies.” This can be explained by McFague’s claim that God loves bodies, and the proof for this is that the cosmic Christ has risen not only in the body of his own but in all of our bodies (human bodies, animal bodies, plant bodies, the bodies of the inanimate, etc.). Following this Christology - which amounts to a panentheistic perspective - creation, universe, is (as) God’s body, and all parts of the universe are parts of the body of God.

On the other hand, from a perspective outside models, the origin of nature’s worth becomes anthropogenic. This can be explained by her thesis that all aspects of her thinking are products of social processes. Hence,

with its lifeforms has not been seen as having its health and integrity in itself, for itself, but rather in and for us.” [Emphasis added.]

McFague, 1993, p. 165. In a discussion that relates to a statement made by the World Council of Churches on the meaning of the phrase “the integrity of creation,” McFague holds: “This definition underscores the intrinsic value that each living being has in and for itself as a creature loved by God as well as the instrumental value that living beings have for one another and for God as parts of an evolutionary, Weblike creation.” [Emphasis added.] See also 1997, pp. 26-39, and 164-175, on the topics of “How Should Christians Love Nature,” and “Extending Christian Love to Nature.”

McFague, 1993, pp. 165, 200-201.


McFague, 1993, pp. 163-178.

McFague, 1993, pp. 179-191.

A panentheistic perspective acknowledges that creation, or in this case, nature, is as a whole and in all its parts, included in God. However, God is not reduced only to creation, or, in this case, nature. That is to say, the existence of God goes beyond the existence of nature. See Oelschlaeger, 1994, p. 121-122. According to Oelschlaeger, panentheism means the view that “God is both separate from or transcendent and a part of or immanent in the world.”

This model of God is most thoroughly developed in McFague, 1993.

See chapter three in this study on McFague’s social constructivism.
because intrinsic worth is understood as a process, which takes off in a choice to pay attention to particular nature-others, it has anthropogenic origin.  

A third aspect of the origin of nature’s worth combines her thesis of the inevitable social construing of the meaning of nature’s worth as well as the construction of theories of nature’s worth with her thesis that we nevertheless have physical contact with nature-as-it-is. Following this aspect, the actual worth of nature does not originate until the interplay between the individual’s choice to pay attention to and to touch particular nature, and the existence and activities of the particular nature-others as subjects in their own worlds, begin. Making this choice, the individual, situated in his or her context as a linguistic creature, takes off and takes part in a creative process that the worth of nature originates in and, a process that also denotes the meaning of nature’s intrinsic worth. In this sense, the origin of the intrinsic worth of nature can also be seen as ecogenic.

Conclusion

The three main questions in this chapter concern kinds of ecofeminist conceptions of value and worth of nature, meanings of nature’s value or worth, and origins of nature’s value or worth. From the analysis in this chapter, we can now conclude that nature, according to Warren, Cuomo, Merchant, and McFague has “intrinsic” value and worth. Hence, ecofeminism takes a nonanthropocentric standpoint.

We can also conclude that nature according to ecofeminism also has contributory, utility, and inherent value. One observation is that Warren, Cuomo, and Merchant equal the meaning of “instrumental” value with the meaning of “utility” value only. This means that only McFague uses the same terminology as Frankena in this respect.

Regarding the second question, we have seen that Warren advocates a subjectivist conception of value while Cuomo combines a Humean emotive conception of value with a kind of naturalistic conception of value. In addition, Merchant addresses intrinsic values in terms of common goods of the natural vs. the human community. Finally, McFague offers a conception of intrinsic worth according to which the intrinsic worth of nature can be understood as originating in certain interplay between human individuals and particular nonhuman others. Furthermore, this interplay was described as a process, which is composed by acts of paying attention, acts of knowing nature objectively, and acts of loving. These elements of the “intrinsic worth

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94 See for example, McFague, 1993, p.162: “...we must begin with the story of Jesus, not with everything that is. We stand within particular historical, cultural communities and see the world through those perspectives.”
process” were also interpreted as signifiers of the meaning of nature’s alleged intrinsic worth.

Regarding the origin of nature’s intrinsic values and worth, Warren’s view is clearly anthropogenic. Secondly, Cuomo’s position has elements of anthropogenic, biogenic, as well as ecogenic views. However, I interpret Cuomo’s standpoint as ecogenic because she combines emotivism and a focus on nonhuman “flourishing” as a criterion for moral standing. Thirdly, Merchant’s view is best understood as ecogenic because her conception of value, that what benefits humanity and nature, originates in interdependent relationship between the human and the nonhuman community. Finally, McFague’s view can be interpreted as theogenic, anthropogenic, and ecogenic, of which I choose to characterize it as ecogenic.

In sum, it can be concluded that although these ecofeminists all advocate nonanthropocentric conceptions of value or worth, they represent a theoretical diversity that makes a definition of one specific ecofeminist value theory impossible. Hence, ecofeminist conceptions of nature’s value cannot easily be compartmentalized as either biocentric or ecocentric.
Chapter 5
Ecofeminism and Ethical Contextualism

Four nonfeminist definitions of “context” were distinguished in chapter one: context as individual perspective, context as culture, context as situation, and geographical context. Moreover, four kinds of contextualism were discussed: descriptive, normative, value ontological, and epistemological contextualism. Finally, it was established that contextualists seem to presuppose that contexts influence or ought to influence ethical theorizing to different degrees.

Ecofeminist ethical contextualism will now be discussed following the line of questioning outlined in chapter one: (a) What is the meaning of “context”? (b) What kind of ethical contextualism is represented? (c) To what extent does the context influence ethical theory?

McFague, Cuomo, Warren, and Merchant all claim that ethical reflection ought to take context into consideration. Although the connections between ethical contextualism and moral contextualism are not always clear, it is evident that their ethical contextualism is based on an affirmation of moral contextualism, i.e. on the claim that our moralities, for a fact, are to some extent and in different meanings influenced by our contexts.¹

The authors highlight different meanings of “context.” Karen Warren sometimes stresses context as “personal relationships,” as geographical, and as “cultural,” and sometimes focuses on contexts as “narratives.” Chris Cuomo highlights social structures as well as the neighborhood as context. Carolyn Merchant is using “context” in a general sense. For instance in the sense that nature knowledge that is abstracted from the natural world is “context independent” knowledge. Following her history-oriented social constructivism, it is also possible to interpret Merchant as representative of a

³ Warren, 2000, pp. 128-129.
⁴ Warren, 2000, pp. 134-139.
⁵ Warren, 2000, p. 99. In Warren, 2000, there are about thirty references to “context.”
contextualism, which highlights historical movements or paradigms. Sallie McFague, finally, stresses “…historical, cultural, geographical, political, economic and personal contexts.”

The following is an attempt to clarify the nature of these relationships, as well as to explicate how they supposedly have ethical as well as moral relevance.

A Strong Contextualism Based on Touch

At least three different meanings of context emerge in the interpretation of Sallie McFague’s contextualism. The first highlights language, the second emphasizes cultural aspects, and the third stresses physical relationships and certain places. In the following, I develop the third meaning of context because it is closely related to the previous analyses of McFague’s standpoints. Before this contextual standpoint will be further explored, a short comment will be given on the other two meanings of context.

The first meaning of context highlights linguistic aspects. Here, language is the aspect of context in and through which we socially construct our ethical universe; language works as the vehicle of ethical meaning. In one sense, this is a universal statement; all moral agents share the prerequisites of linguistic contexts. The second meaning of context emphasizes cultural aspects. In this approach, cultural aspects in the context determine the meanings of our metaphors, models, concepts, and theories. Furthermore, these aspects are the intersubjectively maintained glue, which keeps our different ethical universes together as well as apart.

In sum, first, language as such contextualizes how we as humans view nature and, second, different cultural aspects contextualize these views into culture specific views of the world. According to McFague, the power of language cannot and should not be underestimated. Language is the pattern of meaning that easily can throw us into the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl as well as invent the cluster of ideas and practices that will make us farm abandoned lots.

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10 McFague, 1982, pp. 33-34; 1997, p. 17. “…there will be many views of what nature is, depending on different historical, cultural, geographical, political, economic and personal contexts.”
11 This is one of McFague’s basic presuppositions, based upon which she has written several books in which she among other things focuses on the ontological, epistemological, and normative meanings of the relationship between humans, nature, and God. See McFague, 1982, 1987, 1993, and 1997.
Context as Particular Relationships

In this meaning of contextualism, the important contextual aspects are individual particular and physical relationships to nature others. Following this interpretation, the important contextual aspect that we ought to consider is the relationship between the individual moral agent and the physical, material, particular nature-others that we can physically relate to, that is, that we can touch, specifically the wild in particular. This is explained by the fact that according to McFague:

> It’s a simple idea: if you don’t love things in particular, you cannot love the world, because the world doesn’t exist except in individual things.  

This means that, particular relationships are points of departure for love of nature. These relationships depend on two things: *choice* and *touch*, and result in what I refer to as getting-to-know-knowledge. Obtaining this morally relevant knowledge is dependent on a physical relationship between the wild other and the moral agent. A focus on nature in particular is a prerequisite for getting to know the wild. That is to say, the wild is there for us to know, to get to know, whenever we decide to do so. Thus, searching the ditch for water bugs, hiking in the mountains, focusing on the tenants in our aquarium or the wildness in yourself, etc., these are all examples of significant relationships as long as they originate in the deliberate choice to get to know them. Hence, individual relationships with nature in particular are the aspects of context through which nonanthropocentric norms, ethical guidelines, and moral beliefs can be constructed.

Here, getting to know – choosing to know – particular nature (objectively) as a subject is key to a sensibility that can be a basis for love of nature in general. Moreover, it is key to knowing the limits of our own actions, thus knowing when our actions violate the bodily needs of humans as well as nonhumans. From this follows that McFague’s contextualism is epistemological as well a normative.

Epistemological and Normative Contextualism

The best way to get to know nature-others morally is to touch nature-others and therefore the act of touching nature-others is central in McFague’s

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13 McFague, 1997, p. 112.
14 McFague, 1997, pp. 118-149. This idea is outlined in this chapter, titled: “Down to Earth: Close Encounters with the Natural World.”
16 McFague, 1997, p. 120.
17 See chapter two for a discussion about McFague’s view of nature as subject and chapter four on the process of intrinsic worth of nature.
contextualism. This means that according to McFague, touch is the sense through which we primarily get to understand that there are real, objective others in nature.\textsuperscript{19} This is so, because the physical resistance involved in the act of touching another body, results in an experience of the other as a demarcated other, that is, as someone in its self. Thus, paying concrete attention to nature in particular creates moral knowledge.\textsuperscript{20} This process involves primarily touching, but also smelling, and looking at nature-others with the purpose of getting to know them as they are in themselves. Consequently, the starting point for the process of moral contextualization is the touch of the other, the touch of the wild, based on the choice to get-to-know the nonhuman other.\textsuperscript{21}

The wild neighborhood is a highly significant factor in McFague’s contextualism. The purpose of her work is to lay a theoretical foundation for a normative nonanthropocentric ethic in which nature is “as” a subject.\textsuperscript{22} This means that to touch nature, as a subject is equal to regarding nature as something or rather as someone with objective existence. This means that the act of touching nature is the best way to take charge of your own moral education. In other words, to touch is to see is to respect.\textsuperscript{23} Consequently, according to McFague, there are no substitutes for this direct contact with nonhuman nature, and it is only through direct physical experience of nature-others that we will be reminded “…again and again of our deep connection with them [nature-others].”\textsuperscript{24}

One aspect of normative contextualism is that it implies that it is impossible to determine whether our actions against nature are morally proper if we do not consider contextual aspects. That is, it is not possible to establish valid moral standards without taking contextual aspects (however defined) into consideration. Following this, according to McFague, touching nature is the best way to establish such standards and to take context into consideration. This idea is connected to her concept of sin. According to McFague, sin is fundamentally about bodily needs, about violation of

\textsuperscript{19} McFague, 1997, pp. 93-95. McFague acknowledges the importance of our other senses as well. She stresses touch because she highlights the body. Touch is primary because it is related to the whole body, gives us direct contact with nature, is reciprocal (when we touch we are being touched), and reveals the world as both resistant and responsive.

\textsuperscript{20} Dancy, 1998, p. 286. According to Dancy, moral epistemology includes the questions of how we know what is right and what is wrong and, which of our moral views that are justified, which is to say, which of them count as knowledge and why.

\textsuperscript{21} McFague, 1997, pp. 91-95.

\textsuperscript{22} That something is “as” something is the core idea of her metaphorical thinking; nature is not a subject, nature is as a subject. This follows from McFague’s social constructivism that was described in chapter three, according to which no views, ideas, concepts, theories, etc., are descriptions of nature-as-it-is, merely interpretations. See McFague, 1982, p. 15, on “this” as “that.”

\textsuperscript{23} McFague, 1997, p. 94.

\textsuperscript{24} McFague, 1997, p. 122. See also p. 121.
Simply put, to sin is to take an inappropriate physical place (and space) on earth. Consequently, Western, affluent, and unsustainable lifestyles are sinful on the basis that we have grown out of bodily, hence moral proportions; out of (our proper) place. This concrete and physical notion of sin is linked to an idea that only by knowing our own physical limits, thus knowing the limits of others, we can fully understand when we violate those limits.

As any other normative standpoint, McFague’s thinking is linked to a normative ideal. Thus, she claims that basic bodily needs are the standard towards which we ought to measure the normative status of actions, of people, and of societies.

Strong Contextualism

From the fact that McFague claims that particular physical relationships between moral agents and say a turtle, a plant, a meadow, a bug, the remnants of an exploited forest area, a cockroach etc., are primary starting points for values, we can conclude that her ethical contextualism is a strong contextualism. A strong contextualism is a standpoint that holds that certain contextual aspects are the primary aspects that ought to be considered. According to McFague, touching relationships are the primary aspects to consider in order for us to establish when we are doing nature wrong or not.

It should be noted that besides touching relationships, she also puts forward nature writing as an aspect to consider as starting point for nonanthropocentric moral outlooks. However, this aspect is only secondary compared to touching relationships. This becomes evident as she presents the necessity of being in physical contact with nature-others in order to obtain objective knowledge of nature-others, as they really are as well as to obtain the content of valid normative standards.

To summarize, McFague’s contextualism is interpreted as strong, normative as well as epistemological contextualism according to which the particular and physical relationships between nature-others and individual moral agents are the primary contextual aspect. It should be noted that although it is possible to reconstruct or interpret McFague’s epistemic contextualism as a standpoint, regarding justified beliefs or moral theories,

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25 McFague, 1993, pp. 112-129; 1993, p. 18. “Whatever else salvation can and ought to mean, it does involve…first and foremost, the well-being of the body […] bodies matter…they are indeed the main attraction.” See also, p. 200.
26 McFague, 1993, p. 113. “…our particular failing (closely related to our peculiar form of grandeur) is our unwillingness to stay in our place, to accept our proper limits so that other individuals of our species as well as other species can also have needed space.”
27 McFague, 1993, pp. 116-117.
28 McFague, 1993, pp. 112-129.
the meaning of epistemological contextualism here concerns primarily the nature of knowledge production.

**A Strong Contextualism Based on Power Structures**

According to a second variant of ecofeminist contextualism, the important contextual aspect is group relationships, or, group connections. According to Cuomo, “ecological feminists…explore the relationships among phenomena and social rules, ethics, and values, and suggest alternatives to destructive relationships, attitudes and practices.”

Furthermore, Cuomo writes:

> Ethics, values, and moralities, are always political - they express, influence, and respond to power that is economic, governmental, discursive, symbolic and born in social relations. Values, practices, and conceptions of moral agency derived in oppressive institutions or practices are likely to promote, enable, or allow for oppression and mistreatment. In so far as they contribute to the domination, silencing, and devaluation of those defined as Others, feminists believe that ethics must be rejected or revised. For example, feminism begins with the belief that women and other Others have full moral value, as both moral agents and objects, so the interests of oppressed people, as individuals, and as members of groups, are ethically significant.

As quoted above, the focus on social structures means that this variant of contextualism becomes less “local,” or, “particular” than McFague’s contextualism.

In addition, Cuomo’s contextualism is normative as well as semantic, but the central idea is the contextualization of the meanings of concepts such as for example, “nature,” “human,” “animal,” etc. Moreover, according to Cuomo, the need to consider group connections between humans as well as between humans and nonhumans is significant for socially critical ethical theorizing. Finally, this variant is an example of *strong contextualism* rather than a radical contextualism because, as will be further
developed below, these contextual aspects are not the only constitutive bases for ethical meaning.

**Context as Power Structures**

The fact that Cuomo regards humans as essentially social beings is a main reason why her contextualism is group-oriented. Moreover, the reasons why oppressive and liberating structures (power relations), are highlighted by Cuomo, hence why they are interpreted as significant contextual aspects here, are the following. First, Cuomo claims that power structures sustain moral practice. Second, if the fact that power structures sustain moral practice is not critically reflected upon, the result will be ethical theories that support moral practice. According to Cuomo, oppressive structures give birth to moral values and norms, hence to ethical theories, which both favor privileged groups in the community. However, this also means that liberating structures can give birth to moral values and norms, hence to ethical theories that criticize the so considered immoral structures in oppressive communities. According to Cuomo, examples of liberating structures are feminist and lesbian communities.

Thus, one reason why Cuomo holds that we ought to take power structures into consideration is that she regards ethical meaning to be internally related to power structures. According to Cuomo, from this follows that the experiences people within these power structures have of their relationships with humans and nonhumans, ought to be starting-points for ethical theory building.

According to Cuomo, group relationships give birth to different kinds of social powers, that is, that some people have power to sustain or diminish life for other people or for nonhumans. This allegedly means that economic, political, discursive, and symbolic institutions and practices in our communities force women, animals, and other nature-others to live a life (to some extent) dominated, silenced, and devalued by those exhibiting these powers. That is, oppressed people and non-human others are forced to a life

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36 Cuomo, 1998, p. 74. “Ecological feminism begins from the biological and social facts that individuals are not atoms, and that we are social as well as distinct.”

37 Cuomo, 1998, p. 47. “...ethical rules and systems — especially as they commingle with social mores and values have tended to maintain social power and the ability to control others in the hands of the privileged...”

38 Cuomo, 1998, p. 58. “Generally, perspectives that are sources of innovative or particularly useful moral insights are rooted not in anything necessary or essential about identity, but in practices and in critical responses to systems of power and meaning. These perspectives are determined within real social relations and consequently associated with, adopted by or regulated to members of subjugated groups.”


40 Cuomo, 1998, p. 130.

41 Cuomo, 1998, pp. 57-60.
less worthy of them. Cuomo would say that they are not able to “flourish” as they ought to be.43

One result of Cuomo’s focus on power structures as contextual aspects is that these contextual aspects are to some extent beyond the individual moral agent’s control. That is to say, moral agents are as individuals, although members of a community in question, not in total and direct control of neither the moral order into which they are born, nor of the ethical theories that sustain this order.44

In sum, according to Cuomo, we are born into existing moral orders, which ascend in interplay between abstract and concrete practice.45

Semantic and Normative Contextualism

The reason why Cuomo’s contextualism is presented here as “semantic” is that she in Ecofeminism and Ecological Communities repeatedly claims that meanings of concepts like “woman,” “man,” “nature,” “culture,” as well as concepts that are of particular importance for her nonanthropocentric normative theory such as “flourishing,” are contextually determined.46 This means that meanings of human flourishing are constituted in and through the power structures in which they are used. Cuomo writes:

…the meaning of human, and women’s, flourishing is uniquely contingent on contexts, histories, and the stories that shape lives and social realities.47

She continues:

…“caring” cannot be fully described without discussing its agent, its object, and the context in which it occurs. Caring, then, is most meaningfully evaluated in situ. Talk of caring and compassion in the abstract, devoid of attention to the object of caring and the context in which the caring occurs, is ethically uninformative.48

One consequence of Cuomo’s descriptive semantic contextualism is that nonanthropocentric ethical theory ought to be practical. This means that it is impossible to determine the meaning of “caring,” “duty,” “morality,” “ethics,” etc., without considering accurate meanings in which they are being

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43 Cuomo, 1998. See chapter two regarding Cuomo’s view of nature and nature’s capability to flourish.
44 Cuomo, 1998, p. 97. “Moral agents – selves – as isolated as we sometimes seem, are necessarily relational, and our relations are neither atomistic nor linear…human individuals necessarily shape and are shaped through our interactions with other people, and within communities and groups.”
45 Cuomo, 1998, p. 56.
46 See for example, Cuomo, 1998, pp. 44-45, 117.
47 Cuomo, 1998, p 79. “Because human nature is not fixed or universal, and does not necessarily ‘aim toward’ any one telos, or end (as Aristotle thought it aimed toward wisdom and virtue), and because human capacities are expressed in vastly different ways and worlds, the meaning of human, and women’s, flourishing is uniquely contingent on contexts, histories, and the stories that shape lives and social realities.”
used, and, the consequences in terms of emancipation or oppression that are the direct or indirect results of their use. That is to say, the meaning of who ought to be cared for, which actions that are caring actions, the nature of a caring person can only be established in intimate relation to the moral practices of caring. It is impossible to understand and establish a relevant theory of for instance caring, if we do not “discuss” the caring agents and objects in relation to the power structures in which they are situated. Consequently, she holds that meanings of caring that are established without considerations taken to contextual aspects are inadequate.

Cuomo’s semantic contextualism is also represented in her descriptions of how she thinks that the meanings of our identities as individuals and as moral agents are acquired. According to Cuomo, power structures, and our experiences of our eco/social relationships within these power structures determine how we come to understand the meaning of being and becoming who we are, that is, how we interpret our identities as moral people.

Normative contextualism includes issues such as: who we ought to care for, what it means to care for someone, why we ought to care for someone, etc. Following the explanation of Cuomo’s contextualism above, it becomes clear that answers to these questions are thought of as functions of interplay between moral practice and ethical theory. Indeed, Cuomo’s own ethics, which presupposes the full moral value of women and living nonhumans, including groups, can be seen as a product of her experiences of being member of ecofeminist and feminist communities. In this sense, Cuomo’s contextualism can be seen as normative as well as descriptive.

Strong Contextualism

Strong contextualism represents a certain idea of the degree of which contextual aspects determine ethical theory. Given the validity of this interpretation, Cuomo’s contextualism shows a great diversity regarding this matter. In the following quote that refers to normative contextualism, the extent of which contextual aspects influence morality seems great;

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49 Cuomo, 1998, p. 100. “Our very selfhood and moral capacities are formed within and by social and ecological networks of dependence, interaction, meaning, material exchange, opposition, affection and power.” Moreover, “…human selves [are] socially and ecologically constituted and embedded.”

50 Cuomo, 1998, p. 46. “…human moral agency only make sense in the rich variety of our communities, and human community only exist as part of the ‘natural’ world. While they do not determine our ethics, our dependencies on and relationships with nature, and our physical needs and predispositions, shape and limit what ethics can be, or what ethics can mean, in any given context.


53 Cuomo, 1998, p. 47. “Perhaps the most basic ecological feminist starting point for an exploration of ethical alternatives is the assertion of the value of women…”

54 Cuomo, 1998, p. ix-x.
“…ethical norms can only be created and justified by humans in social contexts.”\textsuperscript{55} [Emphasis added.] The fact that Cuomo claims that moral norms only can be created as well as justified within social contexts indicates that both her moral and her ethical contextualism is radical, that is, that context-independent moralities and ethical reflections do not exist. Furthermore, she holds that “…perspectives that are sources of innovative or particularly useful moral insights are […] determined within real social relations…”\textsuperscript{56} [Emphasis added.] This interpretation of Cuomo’s contextualism as radical receives further support in the following quote, in which she discusses the meaning of concepts:

…the meanings of [“women” and “nature”] are historically bound [and because they are historically bound] no real universals apply…\textsuperscript{57} [Emphasis added.]

However, according to some of her other statements, her contextualism seems weaker. For example, according to the statement: “…the importance of feeling oneself and identifying one’s own interests in ecological contexts cannot be overlooked,”\textsuperscript{58} on the one hand indicates radical contextualism. However, on the other hand, although this “importance” cannot be overlooked, she also states that these experiences: “…might be the most promising point of departure for ethical decision-making and theory-building.”\textsuperscript{59} [Emphasis added.] Furthermore, she claims:

While they do not determine our ethics, our dependencies on and relationships with nature, and our physical needs and predispositions, shape and limit what ethics can be, or what ethics can mean, in any given context.\textsuperscript{60} [Emphasis added.]

From this follows that on the one hand, it can be concluded that Cuomo’s contextualism is radical, while on the other hand, it seems to be weaker. This is supported by the fact that according to Cuomo, all values and norms, hence ethical theories express, influence, and respond to different kinds of power structures.\textsuperscript{61} This means that, first, there exist oppressive orders into which we are born and or socialized, and second, there is a (possible) correlating response to this order. As was explained above, this dialectic movement between oppressive and liberating structures, moral values, and ethical theorizing, is a foundation for her ethics. In other words, she claims that ethics that is not internally related to the present moral practice in which it is manifested does not exist. Furthermore, almost mechanically, ethical theories are supposedly, if not reflected upon, bound to support the alleged

\textsuperscript{56} Cuomo, 1998, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{57} Cuomo, 1998, p. 122
\textsuperscript{58} Cuomo, 1998, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{59} Cuomo, 1998, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{60} Cuomo, 1998: p. 46.
\textsuperscript{61} In this sense, her ethical theory is reactive rather than merely constructive.
unjust moral order in which they originate. However, the fact that we can recontextualize ethics indicates a less radical standpoint.

Thus, to some extent, we can choose the relationships we use as starting points for ethical theorizing, but we can never choose to theorize entirely independently of contextual aspects. As it was stated earlier, one of the main reasons for this is that we are supposed to exist only as connected, contextual beings. Taken together, this implies a radical contextualism.

However, the quotes above also show that social structures have a more profound impact on ethical theory than ecological structures have. This can be concluded from the fact that Cuomo writes that social structures “determine ethical norms,” while ecological structures “do not determine our ethics.” These claims indicate a strong contextualism because some contextual aspects (social aspects) have higher significance than other contextual aspects (ecological aspects).

The fact that Cuomo makes a distinction between past and present contextual aspects also suggests that her contextualism is strong rather than radical. Cuomo claims:

In the process of exploring and creating ethical options and alternatives, reclamations of traditional ideas and practices might be useful, but they must be critically evaluated in terms of present contexts as well as their historical embeddedness.

The fact that Cuomo here seems to give equal weight to past and present contextual aspects could be interpreted as if her contextualism is moderate rather than strong or radical. However, based on the fact that she regards present contextual aspects to be of primary concern the interpretation that her contextualism is strong is more plausible. The reason for this interpretation is that on the one hand, Cuomo claims that traditional ethics and morals might be a aspects to consider as we are trying to construct environmental ethical theories with the purpose of enhancing a well being of all individuals and groups of humans and (living) nonhumans. However, on the other hand, she also claims that in order to judge the emancipatory force of such theories they must be tested against the interests of the oppressed.

To summarize, Cuomo represents a group-oriented, semantic as well as normative strong contextualism. Moreover, her ethical contextualism is mainly critical; in that she argues that ethical theory always should be

62 Cuomo, 1998, p. 47. “…ethical rules and systems — especially as they commingle with social mores and values have tended to maintain social power and the ability to control others in the hands of the privileged, though they sometimes enable radical shifts in social power.”


65 Cuomo, 1998, p. 48. “…ecological feminist ethics […] begin with…the sense that women, humans, communities, and natural objects and systems have noninstrumental value, and we should avoid harming them.”

66 Cuomo, 1998, p. 39. “…evidence that an ethical imperative has proven emancipatory in the past is inadequate proof that it can continue to do so.”
critically examined in the context of economic, governmental, discursive, and symbolic power structures. In addition, it recognizes that present ethical theory ought to be contextualized in relation to experiences of relationships within present social and ecological groups, but also in relation to past ethical theories and traditions.

Radical and Strong Contextualism based on Rules of Ethical Thinking

According to Karen Warren, one characteristics of ecofeminist philosophy is that it is “contextual.” Following this, one meaning of context that Warren acknowledges that is central is the before mentioned “conceptual framework.” She claims:

> One’s observation set, like one’s conceptual framework, will quite literally shape and affect what one sees; both provide a context for theorizing.

In order to clarify what she means by this I will start by stating that the emphasis on conceptual frameworks and observation sets are examples of what I refer to as perspectival contextualism in chapter one. According to Warren, every individual has a personal perspective on nature, on him or herself, and on others.

As the quote above indicates, the term conceptual framework has two different meanings. The first meaning outlines conceptual frameworks in the terms of a person’s worldview, which amounts to normative and semantic contextualism. The second meaning, according to which conceptual frameworks are referred to as ecological “observation sets” amounts to epistemic contextualism.

As it has been explained previously in this study, when Warren is using “conceptual framework” in the meaning of worldview, it is presented as a socially constructed lens, which is affected by social conditions such as that person’s gender, race, class, age, sexuality, nationality, and religion. Moreover, as such it is supposed to explain, justify, and maintain certain basic beliefs, values, assumptions and attitudes about our selves, others, and nature. In addition, as it is explained at other places in this study, Warren focuses on oppressive and patriarchal frameworks, which she claims

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69 Warren, 1993a, p. 322.
71 Here, the term “justify” stands for normative justification of a certain behavior rather than epistemic justification of certain beliefs.
72 Warren, 1993a, p. 322.
explains, justifies, and maintains subordination and domination of women by men.\textsuperscript{73}

Warren claims that people’s frameworks contain five elements or characteristics: value hierarchical thinking, value dualistic thinking, power-over conceptions of power,\textsuperscript{74} conceptions of privilege, and “logic of domination.”\textsuperscript{75}

A framework operates in the realm of ideas. Therefore, it is possible to look upon value hierarchical thinking, value dualistic thinking, and the logic of domination as three ground rules of a certain way of thinking. In particular, this means that these ground rules determine a certain (androcentric\textsuperscript{76} and oppressive) way of conceptualizing women, men, and nature that is generally typical for patriarchal oppressive societies. Hence, in her view a patriarchal oppressive framework is characterized by interplay between elements such as hierarchical and dualistic ways of valuing women, men, and nature, certain ideas about power and privilege, and a certain automatic function of these elements that maintains the oppression of women. Consequently, according to Warren, our thinking is organized according to these elements, which determine ethical thinking as such.\textsuperscript{77} From this follows that allegedly moral meaning is constructed in and through our worldviews.

**Normative and Epistemological Contextualism**

As we have seen, Warren claims that oppression and domination of women, feminized men, and nature are caused by a certain way of thinking, by the “logic of domination.”\textsuperscript{78} This logic can furthermore be seen as a structure of reason with an intrinsic value system, a rationality of oppression. Its “logic” is that whatever and whoever that are valued higher according to this value system have moral right to dominate whatever and whoever that are valued lower. Supposedly, this explains why women, feminized men, and nature have been dominated and oppressed by “men” in the history of patriarchal culture.\textsuperscript{79}

Warren looks at the Western world with its androcentrism and anthropocentrism and concludes that there are no good reasons for this moral

\textsuperscript{73} Warren, 1993a, p. 322. See also Warren, 1997b: p. 19-20, n. 52.

\textsuperscript{74} See Warren 1994b, pp. 182-183, for a discussion concerning different definitions of “power.”

\textsuperscript{75} 1993a, p. 322.

\textsuperscript{76} A vague yet basic definition of androcentrism is: ”male centered.”

\textsuperscript{77} Warren, 1993a, p. 322.

\textsuperscript{78} Warren, 2000, pp. 48-49.

\textsuperscript{79} Warren, 1993a, p. 323. Warren writes: “… without a logic of domination, a description of similarities and differences would be just that – a description of similarities and differences.” Furthermore, on p. 325, she states: “Ecofeminists insist that the sort of logic of domination used to justify the domination of humans by gender, radial or ethnic, or class status is also used to justify the domination of nature.
order. This is explained by the fact that she holds that from the fact that men and culture on one side and women and nature on the other are (in some sense) different (as it according to Warren is presumed in Western cultures) it cannot be concluded that men are superior to women and ought to subordinate women. Yet, this is what happens. Thus, Warren concludes, there must be a concealed value-premise in this thinking. Moreover, Warren connects disvaluing of women (sexism) with disvaluing of nature (naturism) by arguing that the fact that women historically are naturalized and nature feminized in science and everyday life is a sign of the fact that the same kind of thinking causes domination of both women and nature.80

The second meaning of conceptual framework is: “observation set.” Following the interpretation of the meaning in which Warren is using ecological observation set theory in the previous chapters, she holds that knowledge is contextually relative. This is evident in the following quote in which Warren claims:

> The fourth commonality between hierarchy theory and ecofeminist philosophy is epistemological: there is no context-independent knowledge.81

Here it becomes clear that Warren does not only refer to ecological knowledge as she relates ecological observation set theory to ecofeminism, here this becomes a general epistemological thesis: “there is no context-independent knowledge.” The interpretation that Warren’s contextualism is epistemological is also supported by her claim that it is “…in fact impossible, ‘to designate the components of the ecosystem’…”82

Radical, Strong, and Moderate Contextualism

Warren claims that every person has a framework, a “window to the world,” but not every person has an oppressive, patriarchal conceptual framework. However, it is not clear how she relates individual frameworks to social frameworks. A generous interpretation would be that the meaning in which she uses the term “framework” implies references to socially determined individual frameworks, which are related to one another.83

As far as individual frameworks go, the impact on ethics is radical. That is to say, the fact that Warren’s ecofeminism builds on the idea that every moral agent has a conceptual framework implies that there exists no other theorizing besides contextual theorizing. On the other hand, she seems to hold that there are different kinds of contextual theorizing.

80 Warren, 1993a, pp. 320-341.
83 Warren, 1993, pp. 323-324. I refer here to the places where she writes as if conceptual frameworks are something that a society or culture (here, the Western societies and cultures) can have.
In “Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology,” coauthored with Jim Cheney, Warren equalizes conceptual frameworks with “ways of thinking” and “worldviews.”\(^{84}\) Although some thinkers, like ecocentrist J. Baird Callicott, hold that worldviews cannot - and ought not – be shifted without significant loss of for example sanity, Warren and Cheney are of another opinion.\(^{85}\)

In “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” Warren emphasizes that a conceptual framework is a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions.\(^{86}\) “Basic” can be understood in at least two ways. In one sense, beliefs, etc. can be psychologically basic for the moral agent in the sense that they compose the fundament for a person’s moral outlook. In another sense, beliefs can also be theoretically basic. That is, they can be basic in the sense that they refer to conceptual foundations, the ideas, from which a person founds the normative theory he or she embraces at the moment or permanently. If one believes that it is possible to shift theories, then it might be possible to shift conceptual foundations as well. From the fact that Warren claims that these basic beliefs etc., “…shape and reflect how one views oneself and one’s world,”\(^{87}\) [emphasis added] it can be concluded that her contextualism is strong, rather than radical. This interpretation can be explained by the fact that she introduces several conceptual aspects, of which the ones you are using at the moment are of primary significance. However, regarding descriptive contextualism and as far as conceptual frameworks per se goes her contextualism is radical because she presupposes that it is impossible to theorize independently of conceptual frameworks. According to this view, the conceptual framework in question is identical with a person’s moral view. However, since it is possible to shift framework, they are (at least potentially) of equal significance, hence in this respect, her contextualism can also be interpreted as moderate because the conceptual framework, or the observation set a person, at the moment, is using can be exchanged for another equally relevant or valid observation set.

\(^{84}\) It seems as if Warren combines what Geertz refers to as “ethos” and “worldview.” See Geertz, 1973, pp. 126-127. “In recent anthropological discussion the moral and aesthetic aspects of a given culture, the evaluative elements, have been summed up in the term ‘ethos,’ while the cognitive, existential aspects have been designated by the term ‘worldview.’ A people’s ethos is the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mode; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their worldview is the picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order.” Here cited in Callicott, 1999, p. 36.

\(^{85}\) Warren & Cheney, 1996, p. 248. “One is immediately struck by the similarity between the hierarchy theorist’s emphasis on observation sets, ‘windows through which one views the world,’ and the ecofeminists emphasis on ‘ways of thinking,’ ‘world views,’ and ‘conceptual frameworks’ […] One’s observation set, like one’s conceptual framework, will literally shape and effect what one sees; both provide a context for theorizing.”

\(^{86}\) Warren, 1993a, p. 322.
Individual Contextualism

The way Warren discusses conceptual frameworks indicates that each individual internalizes a framework; conceptual frameworks are internal (cognitive, psychological) value systems according to which we automatically describe and value events and entities. From this follows that this abstract system functions like boxes in a dualistic and value-hierarchical drawer, in which categories already exist that we cannot help but use.

Warren’s thesis of the logic of domination displays the logic of domination as a way of thinking, used by all human beings as a pattern that we apply to the world. That is to say, this can be interpreted as a universal thesis about human cognitive and psychological characteristics, which means that we conceptualize all events, processes, and entities as of higher or of lower value, and simultaneously as having an opposite and excluding (dual) meaning in relation to its opposite event, process, or entity. According to Warren, this is the way we, as members of “Western societies,” or “the dominant Western culture,” think ethically; nature/culture, women/man, animal/human, nature/machine, mind/body, emotion/reason, female/male, etcetera.

It seems reasonable to assume that under certain circumstances a higher value is put on “woman” compared to “man” and on “nature” compared to “culture.” This shift, however, does not allow us to escape from this specific structure of moral and ethical thinking. That is to say, following Warren’s theory of the logic of domination, we never conceptualize the meaning of one thing, without also conceptualizing the meaning of its opposing and excluding dual partner, simultaneously.

In addition, although the social setting in which people and ecologists are situated are of significant importance in Warren’s contextualism (because without an intersubjectively maintained patriarchal or ecological paradigm, there would be no individual observation sets or frameworks to internalize) her focus is on individual frameworks, consequently her contextualism should be interpreted as individualistic.

Universally Shared Aspects to Consider

So far, it seems evident that Warren’s contextualism is an example of individual contextualism. However, by introducing the idea of “situated universalism,” Warren holds:

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87 Warren, 2000, p. 46.
88 Warren, 2000, p. 46.
89 Warren, 1993a, pp. 323, 324.
There is something we bring to the situation that we have in common with others and something in the situation to which we, across cultures, resonate.\textsuperscript{92}

It can be questioned whether this quote contradicts the previous variants of Warren’s contextualism that so far has been presented. That is to say, it is not evident that the fact that each individual has a conceptual framework that provides “a context for theorizing”?\textsuperscript{93} contradicts the fact that we may also, as Warren puts it, “bring something” universally shared “to the situation.” Moreover, the fact that she views observation sets as ecological maps that we apply to certain situations may not contradict this universal thesis either.

According to Warren, meanings of nature are necessarily contextualized through individual conceptual frameworks. However, “particular situations and experiences” would not “make sense,” and we would not “understand” these if we did not have “…universal truths (themes, emotions, principles)…”\textsuperscript{94}

Warren’s universalism builds on a notion of a capability to make sense of “situated,” particular events that one is confronted with. Although we always construe and construct meanings of nature socially, hence in particular places, times and contexts, the reason why we can do this in the first place is that we all have these universal characteristics in common.

To summarize, Warren represents individual-oriented normative and epistemological contextualism. In addition, it is also possible to interpret her contextualism as radical, strong, and moderate depending on which aspects of her conception of conceptual framework that are stressed. Finally, Warren claims that all humans have what she refers to as certain universal “truths,” but what actually seems to be alleged universally shared capabilities that she claims are needed in order for contextually developed ideas to make sense universally. It seems as if, according to Warren, there exist, a soil of meaning that we all share. One way of interpreting this is that there exist global contextual aspects that we all share, an interpretation that however seems unlikely since the universal truths she introduces seem to have more to do with a shared human nature than with shared meanings.

Radical Contextualism and Historical Processes

It is possible to interpret Carolyn Merchant’s social constructivism as a variant of ethical contextualism. In doing so, we discern a focus on historical processes as contextual aspects. The Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with its alleged enlightenment and its

\textsuperscript{92} Warren, 2000, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{93} Warren & Cheney, 1996, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{94} Warren, 2000, p. 113.
industrialization process are examples of such contextual aspects. Following this, dominant paradigms of meaning, knowledge, and values within science and everyday life are maintained within and through these processes.

According to Merchant, dominant models of nature, humanity, society, etc., are radically dependent upon certain social movements. Therefore, allegedly it is impossible to establish universal environmental ethical theories because ethical theories are dependent on the dominant ideas of their ages. These dominant “models” change, due to actual human-made physical alterations of nature-as-it-is that are made in the interest of, for example, the industrialization process and new social ideals that follow such a process. From this follows a history-oriented contextualism that differs from the other three variants of ecofeminist contextualism, because it operates on a different and more comprehensive social level.

According to Merchant, the way we give cultural and natural processes meaning and normative content, as well as epistemic status, is dependent on interactions between ideas and practice. Consequently, in time, models of nature, society, and humanity, overlap in a way that creates disturbance and insecurity in past models, and as these past models loose their normative status and their status as knowledge, they give way to new dominant models that makes new sense for the people in question.

Because descriptive models are viewed as intrinsically normative, moral meaning is created through out history and beyond in interplay between physical alterations of our environments and landscapes and ideas of the meanings of nature and culture. Following Merchant, human beings are situated in an everlasting process of exchange between ideas and practice, the abstract and the concrete.

In sum, according to Merchant, contextual aspects refer to dominant historical processes and because people are necessarily situated in their own ongoing history, her contextualism is radical. Moreover, a consequence of

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98 Merchant, (1980) 1990b. pp. xxii. See pp. 29-41, for an example of Merchant’s claim that dominant social and intellectual practices of a certain age determine values and norms.
101 Merchant, (1980) 1990b. p. 192. “The fundamental social and intellectual problem for the seventeenth century was the problem of order.” See also p. 216. “The brilliant achievement of mechanism as a world view was its reordering of reality around two fundamental constituents of human experience – order and power.”
102 Merchant, (1980) 1990b. p. 41. “Moral restraints were thus clearly affiliated with the Renaissance image of the female earth and were strengthened by associations with greed, avarice, and lust […] The organic framework, in which the Mother Earth image was a moral restraint against mining, was literally undermined by the new commercial activity.”
her historical perspective is that every aspect of ethical theory is equally dependent on context one way or another, however, according to the presentation of Merchant here, she emphasizes epistemic and normative issues.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that ecofeminism represents different meanings of “context.” According to McFague’s variant, individual phenomenon such as particular physical relationships between individual humans and nature-others are stressed. This contextualism combines an individual perspective with a geographical aspect. Warren’s individual perspective focuses on abstract perspectives such as worldviews and ecological observation sets. Cuomo’s third variant stresses group related phenomenon such as social oppressive and liberating structures and finally Merchant represents a fourth variant, which according to my interpretation is history-oriented in virtue of that Merchant focuses on historical national and international social processes or movements. Furthermore, the analysis shows that ecofeminist contextualism encompasses descriptive, semantic, normative, and epistemological contextualism. Finally, it has become clear that according to these ecofeminists, the extent to which ethical theorizing ought to be influenced by contextual aspects varies from weak and moderate to strong and radical. It should also be noted that Warren represents a universalistic approach.
Chapter 6
Ecofeminism, Intrapersonal Pluralism, and the Idea of an Inconsistent Self

One of the main reasons why ethical pluralists and ethical monists have different opinions regarding whether we ought to accept intrapersonal pluralism or not, is their different views on the relationship between normative theories and the self. Another reason, I presuppose, is that the monist standpoint is based on an ideal of a consistent self. This is explained by the fact that monists claim that a person who accepts several equally valid normative theories are morally immature or displays a philosophical equivalent to multiple personality. From this follows that intrapersonal pluralism might be acceptable if it is possible to establish a reasonable conception of an inconsistent self. Hence, in order to clarify ecofeminist conceptions of the self and compare these to the “self” that is implied in the monist argument, the following questions need to be discussed: (a) What are the characteristics of the self? (b) Do ecofeminist conceptions of the self include conceptions of an inconsistent self and if so, in what ways?

A Relational Self

The dominant conception of a self within ecofeminism is a relational or social self. According to Warren:

> Relationships are not something extrinsic to who we are…they play an essential role in shaping what it is to be human.¹

Furthermore, according to Cuomo:

> Our very selfhood and moral capacities are formed within and by social and ecological networks of dependence, interaction, meaning, material exchange, opposition, affection, and power.²

¹ Warren, 1993a, p. 335.
McFague asserts:

…the self is constituted by relationships and exists only in relationships. […] “…I’ am ‘I’ only in relationship with other people and other species…”

Finally, Merchant holds:

…social patterns are imprinted on us as we grow up amid a variety of economic, political, religious, and genderized social forces […] we ourselves are reflections of the values and norms of the larger society…”

Apparently, the basic meaning of an ecofeminist conception of a relational or social self is that our identities as individuals are internally related to our relationships. This means that relationships of the self exist prior to the existence of the self because relationships are constitutive of our identities. This idea of an ecofeminist ecological self is often outlined as a more favorable alternative to a so-called “atomistic self.” An atomistic self is a self, which as to its nature is not determined by relationships with other humans and nonhumans. Thus, according to atomism, individuals (or significant elements of the self) exist prior to their relationships, moreover, they are neither internally related to other selves nor to their environment.

From “Nature” to “Nonhuman Nature”

Merchant’s conception of a relational self is clearly expressed in her idea that humanity is radically interrelated with the natural community. However, in The Death of Nature, it becomes clear that humans, in some sense, are seen as outsiders in relation to nature even though interrelatedness between humanity and nature (in terms of organicism) is stressed.

Over the years, an inclusion of humans in natural “cyclical processes” grows stronger. For example, in Earthcare, Merchant emphasizes a “mutual relationship” and “connections” between, as she puts it, the “human and nonhuman community.”

7 Merchant, (1980) 1990b, p. 293. “External forces and stresses on a balanced ecosystem, whether natural or man made, can make some parts of the cycle act faster than the systems’ own natural oscillations…” Here Merchant refers to and does not reject descriptive ecosystem holism. Moreover, it can be noted that the idea that there is a relevant difference between “natural” and “man made” forces, indicates that Merchant submits to a descriptive human/nature dualism.
8 Merchant, 1996.
9 Merchant, 1996, p. 216, 217. On p. 216, Merchant claims: “A partnership ethic sees the human community and the biotic community in a mutual relationship with each other.” Furthermore, according to Merchant on p. 217: “…partnership ethics is grounded in the concept of relation […] between people or kin in the same family or community, between
Although she recognizes and gives significant weight to the facts that humans are continuous with nature and that we are dependent upon nature, Merchant is careful to point out that there are also differences between humans and nature. This tendency to stress that the human species in all its individual and species-specific differences is necessarily connected to nature does allegedly not (and should not) necessarily reduce humans to merely biological creatures, nor reduce individuals to the holistic wholes of which they are parts.\footnote{See chapter four, regarding Merchant’s conceptions of nature’s value and the relationship between humanity and nature.}

Two ideas are of importance regarding Merchant and the other three author’s conceptions of a social self; difference and continuity:\footnote{Merchant, 1996, p. 204, “…the recognition of both difference and continuity between people and nature and between self and other helps to break down the logic of dualism at the root of the Western culture/nature split and to build a new critical ecofeminist philosophy based on relations and the ecological self.” Here Merchant refers to Val Plumwoods notion of “relational and ecological self,” see Plumwood (1993) 1997.} Merchant, Cuomo, Warren, and McFague implicitly try to avoid what they regard as a problem with some conceptions of a social self; a loss of “self-identity” or fusion with the whole.\footnote{See for example Cuomo, 1998, pp. 97-98, 107; McFague, 1993, pp. 58, 127-128; 1997, pp. 16-17; Warren, 2000, p. 105.} This is done in an effort to emphasize that humans are different from one another and from nature. Yet, the connections with nature are central to Merchant and the other’s conceptions of the self, because they claim that the atomistic self simply does not reflect the way our selves really are.\footnote{See Merchant, 1996, p. 217, for a discussion on “relations.” Obviously, Val Plumwood’s notion of a “relational and ecological self” have influenced Merchant. See also Chapter nine in Merchant, 1996, pp. 185-208, especially pp. 202-204.}

An Ecological Relational Self
Merchant embraces Val Plumwood’s notion of an ecological self, which is also outlined as an alternative to a conception of a disparate, atomistic self. However, Merchant does not say much more than that the ecological self is a self, related to other beings than beings of our kind with which we “coexist” and “depend upon” in different ways. These others are not limited to human others but may also be nonhumans. Moreover, the “ecological self” contains the idea that this relationship recognizes differences, and avoids a merger of the individual with the whole cosmos.\footnote{See Merchant, 1996, p. 217, for a discussion on “relations.” Obviously, Val Plumwood’s notion of a “relational and ecological self” have influenced Merchant. See also Chapter nine in Merchant, 1996, pp. 185-208, especially pp. 202-204.}

There is a tendency towards a conception of a disordered self in Merchant’s work. In chapter two in this study, we can see that Merchant endorses a view of nature as chaotic in which “chaotic” does not refer to men and women, between people and other organisms, and inorganic entities, or between specific places and the rest of the earth.”
disorder, but to order and disorder.14 Moreover, Merchant compares nature’s unpredictability with the way, according to her; free autonomous human agents are “unpredictable.” From this follows, on the one hand that humans are unpredictable. Furthermore, on the other hand, because the self is allegedly social and thus determined by its relationships, we can assume that this means that there is some kind of correlation between the identities of the humans and nonhumans we relate to and the selves that become the result of these relationships. That is to say, the human self that is the result of the relationships with disordered and ordered nature will presumable be ordered and disordered as well. Hence, in addition to Merchant’s idea that humans are unpredictable, we can conclude that following her conception of a social self, and her view of nature as disordered, it is possible to reconstruct what can be referred to as a conception of a disordered self.

A Consistent Self

Karen Warren’s conception of a conceptual framework and the story about the rock climber can illuminate her conception of the social self. However, first, let us consider the fact that Warren’s environmental philosophy includes a conception of the self, which is, at least to some extent, universal.15

As it was described in a chapter five, Warren argues that we can share for example aesthetic experiences, no matter how contextualized we and our values may be in and through different conceptual frameworks. The reason for this is that we encompass “universal truths (themes, emotions, principles).”16 That is to say, the self is so constructed that it has at least some universal elements. This means that some elements are shared universally by every individual in the class of humans. Following this, this can be interpreted as if the reason why we have trans-contextual experiences is that there exists a universal human nature. Alternatively, that at least elements of a universal human nature exist.18

Another tendency towards a universal conception of the self is that according to Warren, although it is possible to change conceptual frameworks, the fact that we do have conceptual frameworks applies to all

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14 Merchant, 1996, p. 203. From this follows also, according to Merchant, an appreciation of cultural as well as biological diversity.
15 Merchant, 1996, p. 221. On p. 220, she writes: “The second component of the new partnership brings nature into an active relationship with humans and entails a new consciousness of nature as equal subject.” Furthermore, “Because nature is fundamentally chaotic, it must be respected and related to as an active partner through a partnership ethic.”
16 Warren, 2000, p. 113. “There is something we bring to the situation that we have in common with others and something in the situation to which we, across cultures, resonate.”
17 Warren, 2000, p. 113.
human individuals. Moreover, even though oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks ought to be rejected, Warren presents the existence of conceptual frameworks as such as a universally shared characteristic.

Conceptual Frameworks and a Consistent Self

Attention will now be turned to the conception of a self that is implied in Warren’s central idea of “conceptual framework.” Warren’s conception of a conceptual framework contains descriptive and evaluative conceptions of nature, of one self, and of the other.

The idea that we have frameworks implies that the “self” is constituted by a core onto which these frameworks are attached. This implication is based on the fact that according to Warren, a person’s framework is a socially constructed lens, hence, it seems as if Warren’s “self” views the world from behind a socially constructed “glass surface” that covers the self. Moreover, as it is described in chapter five, the lens defines and decides the manner in which the self “perceives,” and “views” others, the world, and itself. Hence, the core-self is separated from its framework with its “basics” as well as from its “views.” Consequently, the core-self is a self that in some sense has these views externally attached to it. In this sense, and according to this interpretation of Warren’s conception of a self as a core-self, normative theories are external to the self because they are parts of and determined by the frameworks.19

With this in mind, it is not surprising that Warren accepts interpersonal pluralism.20 Her positive attitude towards this standpoint becomes even clearer as she uses ecological observation set theory as an analogy to conceptual frameworks and worldviews. According to this discussion, the notion of a fixed, one-and-only worldview is replaced by a possibility of individually chosen different simultaneously existing and contextually justified views of the world (observation sets).

With the intention of interpreting Warren’s conception of the self further, attention will now be turned to her story about the rock-climber.21 In the story, the subject has a choice between climbing either as a conqueror or as a caring person. On the first day, the subject is determined to get to the top. With the sense of “intense determination” she climbs without seeing where to put her hands and feet, stopping half way exhausted, falling from the cliff, rescued by the secured rope with a feeling of fear and relief, pausing, and then finally reaching the top. On the second day, she has changed her choice of attitude. Now, she looks at the rock, listens to the rock, and feels the rock in an attitude of love. Using her eyes, ears, and skin, the result is pure pleasure, and she finds herself caring for the rock, talking to it as a friend, a

partner, rather than to something of instrumental value for her climbing project. The result the second day is a sense of “…being in relationship with the natural environment.”  

The change towards positive feeling and the sense of being related to the rock is a result of her choice to approach the rock with a loving rather than with an arrogant attitude. In telling this story and following feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye’s idea that “The loving eye is contrary to the arrogant eye,” Warren claims that our choice of attitude, towards ourselves and nature is of significant importance to how we will understand and judge our experiences of nature, and, following these experiences, how we will come to conceptualize nature ethically.

This story conveys a self that implicitly enforces a primacy of consistency. There seems to be no room for inconsistent beliefs or views because the self acts and functions according to a principle of linear logic. That is to say, either you hold an attitude of a lover with its specific attached feelings and values of care and friendship, or, you embrace an attitude of a dominator, conqueror, and exploiter – with its attached negative feeling and values. In this story, morality is displayed as a smooth, simple and logical linear process that goes from a to a predetermined b.

Consequently, in this story, there is a lack of inconsistency in the process of moral thinking/feeling as well as in the experiences themselves. The alternative standpoint, that it might be possible to hold the caring attitude to be morally proper from one perspective, and simultaneously hold it to be wrong from another perspective is not an option. Moreover, the fact that the self in the story is unaffected by ambivalence, which may be seen as an expression of the inconsistency of moral situations, can be interpreted as the standpoint that there is one and only one morally proper attitude in this situation.

My reconstruction of a consistent self here should not be understood as if the fact that someone claims that one person can take different and inconsistent normative standpoints towards a given problem on different occasions, amounts to a presupposed inconsistent self. Rather, it is based on a kind of alleged inconsistency, which means that the self, standing before the rock, recognizes several simultaneous equally valid attitudes. In line of this, it is such a self that I find to be absent in Warren’s rock climbing story.

The self in the story experiences a very neat par of exclusive and contradictory feelings; caring or conquering, arrogance or love, this view or that view. Consequently, according to Warren, moral action seems to be machinelike with the consequence that this conception of the moral self does not measure up to the level of ambiguity that she herself claims that ethical

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22 Warren, 1993a, p. 327.
reflection ought to have.\textsuperscript{24} This is the case because in this story the anxieties and ambivalence that most of us experience towards many moral dilemmas, as well as the possibility to climb rocks proud as conquerors and affectionate as lovers, is absent. In other words, the mixture of feelings, attitudes, and values that every day life is full of is gone. In sum, the rock-climbing self stands in front of the rock, puts in the proper attitude and following behavior, awaits the result – a positive sense of belonging to nature.\textsuperscript{25}

This interpretation, which amounts to that Warren at least partly views morality as an essentially logic affair is strengthened by her description of patriarchy as an unhealthy social system. According to Warren, patriarchy is a system, which functions according to a cause and effect-principle from (a) to (d).\textsuperscript{26} The system is constituted by (a) “faulty beliefs (Patriarchal Conceptual Framework),” (b) “impaired thinking and language of domination,” (c) “behaviors of domination,” and finally (d) “unmanageability of life.”\textsuperscript{27} Without disputing her claim that patriarchy is an unhealthy social system or that these are elements of that system, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Warren describes the patriarchal system as a “…closed circle of individual and institutional ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving that is rooted in a faulty belief system.”\textsuperscript{28} Moreover, in order to “…break out of this unhealthy system…” we supposedly need, among other things to get the “right beliefs by rearranging one’s thinking…”\textsuperscript{29} In addition, ecofeminism, Warren claims, challenges patriarchy by “…replacing faulty patriarchal beliefs…”\textsuperscript{30}

The manner in which Warren presents morality implies that the self is caught in an either right, or wrong, situation with no alternative position. Consequently, this conception of a moral self has no room for the inconsistent attitudes and behavior that characterize genuine dilemmas.

In summary, the self that is implied in these examples seems to be organized according to a principle of consistency. In addition, the self seems to stay unchanged as different conceptual frameworks are attached to it, and as the self relates to nature others, e.g. rocks. From this follows that Warren does not take us any closer to a conception of the self that allows intrapersonal pluralism and inconsistency.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Warren, 2000, p. 115. “If a philosophical ethic is to be useful to and reflective of real-life decision making, it must be flexible enough to account for the ethical ambiguities of real moral life…”
\item \textsuperscript{25} See Latour (1991) 1999 and Löhman (Ed.), 1987, for one analysis of (Latour), and one example of (Lötman (Ed.)), the complexities of environmental problems.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Warren, 2000, pp. 204-216. See p. 207, for an illustration of patriarchy.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Warren, 2000, p. 207.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Warren, 2000, p. 207.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Warren, 2000, p. 211.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Warren, 2000, p. 211.
\end{itemize}
A Cyborg with a Curdled Self

In order to understand Cuomo’s conception of a self, her discussion concerning ideas of the cyborg and of a curdled self, is taken as starting point. This analysis will show that Cuomo, in her discussion about the cyborg, sketches a conception of an inconsistent self, of a social self, which acknowledges internal conflicts of the self. The starting-point is the following claim:

> Because different communities produce different meanings, or are different “worlds,” selves formed in the context of divergent, conflicting worlds are not unified but multiplicitous.

A cyborg is a creature that is neither fully human nor fully nature, neither fully organism nor fully machine, or, she might be described as being all of these at the same time. Moreover, the cyborg, socially invented in Science Fiction literature, is characterized by its capacity to flee dualistic descriptions because its essence is hybridity; often a mixture between machine and organism but other combinations are possible as well.

The cyborg fits well into Cuomo’s conception of a self, as a self with internal relationships with nature and culture. Cuomo, who is deeply critical of one-sided definitions of the self, of what it means to be human, to be an animal, to be a creature of nature, and, who acknowledges that concepts and conceptions have social power, offers a conception of a cyborg-self that allows internal inconsistency.

The cyborg is next of kin to machines as well as to nature and the way in which Cuomo presents the cyborg suggests that the cyborg is an arrogant as well as a humble (if it pleases her) creature. Possibly, it can be imagined that if the cyborg were to climb a rock, she would climb it as a giggling conqueror, in a playful challenge to meet the rock’s resistance to be...

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33 Cuomo, 1998, p. 83. A cyborg is a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction...” On p. 86, Cuomo presents one of the cyborg’s alleged strengths and powers; that she dwells “…on any number of discursive and ontological borders – human/animal/machine is only one possible hybridity.” Moreover, the cyborg “…flourishes on the borders.” A cyborg is not the same as a humanoid. A humanoid is someone, whose identity is essentially human, but has for various reasons had some of his or hers organic parts replaced by machine-like parts.

34 Cuomo, 1998, p. 85. A cyborg “…occupies a life at the intersections of nature and culture.”

35 Cuomo, 1998, p 89. The cyborg is a “cultured animal, mutt, anti-feminine woman, race traitor, computer-enhanced forest-dweller.”

36 Cuomo, 1998, pp. 83. Cuomo cites Haraway and follows her view on the cyborg as celebrating its “…joint kinship with animals and machines…”

37 Cuomo, 1998, p 89.
overcome, and, with lust for the rock as well as for the experience of climbing (or not).

Two ideas are important to highlight. First Cuomo, quoting Haraway, claims that the cyborg embraces “permanently partial identities,” and second, she claims that the cyborg can hold “contradictory standpoints.”

A Curdled Self

Following Cuomo, the cyborg inspires us to question ontological assumptions about the self, according to which the self is essentially “atomistic” and “unified” and which she claims are common in non-feminist environmental ethics. However, she is critical of the way the cyborg has problems (or, has no problems) with identifying her own body and the way the cyborg is (loosely) situated within “…social and ecological relations.”

This is explained by the fact that social and ecological relations are at the center of her ethical theory, which forces her to restrain the cyborg a bit, who she finds to be – despite her advantages – too “sterile” and perhaps too “unified.” That is to say, in Lugones, Cuomo finds a conception of the self, which points toward inconsistency, yet is (as all selves are, Cuomo would argue) “…multiplicitious, messy, and embodied.”

Cuomo is using the idea of a curdled self in order to reconstruct a conception of the self that is less sterile than the cyborg-self is, and in order to connect the cyborg to her own body as well as to her social context.

According to Cuomo, a partial self is a self with an “impure” identity. Here, she talks about the origins of the self and that the starting point, for a partial self originates in “separation.” Separation should be understood as a process of the self, becoming, because of and through, its relationships with other selves. Consequently, such a self is a self with partial identities, which means that, if the relationships that are constitutive of the self are

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38 Cuomo, 1998, p. 83. Here, Cuomo cites Haraway, 1991, p. 154. “A cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their…permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.”

39 See Cuomo, 1998, pp. 98-100, for Cuomo’s critique against conceptions of “atomistic” selves.

40 Cuomo, 1998, p. 82. Drawing on Lugones, 1994, p. 463, Cuomo states that: “…the pure, unified subject is a ruse.”

41 Cuomo, 1998, p. 86.


46 Cuomo, 1998, p. 88. It connects the cyborg to her “…history, ethnicity, social location, and agency.”


inconsistent, the self will become inconsistent. Given that this is a valid interpretation, Cuomo represents a conception of an inconsistent social self.

This version of a social, partial self is contrasted with the idea of a “pure” and “unified” subject. A pure and unified self is externally related to other selves (humans as well as nonhumans), with regard to its self-identity. According to Cuomo, such a conception designates an idea of a self that is essentially unchanged by others in the sense that it comes to existence and develops, prior to the existence of its relationships. As it was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, in order to capture the meaning of the social independency of such a self, it is described as “atomistic.”

The “heterogeneous identities” of the cyborg self that Cuomo advocates are generated from the number of significant relationships (and the nature of those relationships) of the self. That is to say, from the fact that the cyborg relates to animals, other nonhuman entities, different humans, machines, etc. in numerous and different ways, it becomes “permanently partial,” in a way that crosses culture/nature dichotomies and dualisms. Moreover, the cyborg engages in different practices, which constitutes it as a self that dwells on “…the overlapping borders of identities, practices, and characteristics which are not supposed to occur in the same body…”

From this follows that Cuomo’s conception of a permanently partial cyborg self is a conception of a self without a core or a kernel onto which different layers of beliefs and points of views are attached. Rather, different beliefs or points of views are results of the relationships of the cyborg. Moreover, these relationships are what constitute the self, in a condition of permanent flux. In other words, they are the self; hence, they are not attachments to the self.

Another way of putting this is to say that beliefs are identically related to the self, that is, instead of picturing the self as something (a core, kernel), which is (internally or externally) related to its parts (views, beliefs), these parts are the self. Hence, self-identity is changed when beliefs are changed as we relate to different entities, people, groups, etc. In this sense, this conception of the cyborg “self” seems similar to the monist conception of a self, according to which beliefs or theories are internally related to the identity of the self. This means that a change of beliefs will change the identity of the self. However, one difference remains, namely that according

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49 Cuomo, 1998, p. 84. According to Cuomo, “…the pure, natural, inherently wise and good organic body is a modernist myth.”

50 Cuomo, 1998, p. 97. “…atomistic individuals as ethical starting point…misrepresents individualism as a natural fact.”

51 Cuomo, 1998, p. 98. “Because different communities produce different meanings, or are different ‘worlds,’ selves formed in the context of divergent, conflicting worlds are not unified but multiplicitous.”

52 Cuomo, 1998, p. 89. See also, p. 85.

53 Cuomo, 1998, p. 89.
to Cuomo’s conception of a cyborg self, the self does not reject inconsistency, it endures it or may even enjoy it.

**An Embodied Self**

According to McFague, we are primarily bodies among other bodies.\(^4^4\) This means that we do not have bodies as much as we are bodies. In other words, our selves and our bodies seem to be identically related. However, McFague’s conception of who we are also contains an idea that we can distance ourselves from our bodies; we seem to be internally related, as well as identically related to our bodies. McFague holds:

> Our relationship with nature is like our relationship with our own bodies: we can live only in and through them, we are nothing without them, we are intrinsically and entirely embodied and yet, we can distance ourselves from them and have many different views of them. We both are our bodies, and we drag them around after us like cans tied to a dog’s tail.\(^5^5\)

According to McFague, we are a combination of mind and matter, which refers to a different conception of a hybrid self than the hybridity of machine/organism that Cuomo introduced.\(^5^6\) According to McFague, we are rather hybrids of mind and matter; the self is a radical continuum between body and mind, this, is the essence of McFague’s conception of a self.\(^5^7\)

McFague’s emphasis on an embodied self should be understood in the context of a Christian psychophysical dualism, according to which the psyche or the soul is of greater significance because it is regarded as being closer to God. McFague’s effort to conceptualize the human self in a way that highlights the significance of bodies in general is an effort to develop a Christian ecotheology that values the body.\(^5^8\)

McFague stresses an “organic” and “ecological” unity of earth as well as of the self.\(^5^9\) According to McFague’s standpoint, this is an organic and ecological unity that avoids fusion with human and nonhuman others\(^6^0\) and refers to the standpoint that “…everything that is is related to everything else

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\(^{4^4}\) McFague, 1993, p. 16.  
\(^{4^5}\) McFague, 1997, p. 17.  
\(^{4^6}\) McFague, 1993, p. 16. On p.19, McFague writes: “…our bodies and spirits…are on a continuum…”  
\(^{4^7}\) McFague, 1993, p. 16.  
\(^{4^8}\) McFague, 1993.  
\(^{5^0}\) McFague, 1997, p. 3. McFague argues in favor of a “subject-subjects” model of nonhumans and humans alike, according to which individuality is a “…radical individuality and radical unity - an individuality that does not hyperseparate from others and a unity that does not fuse with them.”
The conception of a purely organic body is strengthened as she claims:

The body is not a discardable garment cloaking the real self or essence of a person (or a pinetree or a chimpanzee); rather, it is the shape or form of who we are.62

In other words, in McFague’s thinking, bodies are the primary sites for the ecological crisis, hence for environmental ethics and her conception of self.63

Does McFague’s conception of an embodied self imply that we as embodied spirits and hybrids of mind and matter are inconsistent? That is, does she put forward that the parts of the self, spirit and body, mind and body, are inconsistent? The answer is no, and the most accurate interpretation of this matter is probably that McFague’s conception of the self does not allow for inconsistency (although it might allow for partial identities). This interpretation can be explained by the fact that McFague’s conception of a self as hybrid of body and spirit is founded on an idea of the self as a consistent organic whole. The most reasonable interpretation of an organic whole is that its parts work together towards the wellbeing of the organism and that if one part or another in the organism contradicts the overall goal of the organism, it becomes sick. This implies at least teleological consistency.

In summary, McFague’s conception of a self that is outlined here is essentially embodied and although social, the ideal self seems to be organized in accordance with a principle of organic teleological consistency.

Conclusion

We can now conclude that one main characteristic of ecofeminist conceptions of the self is that Warren, Cuomo, Merchant, and McFague all share a conception of a “relational,” “social,” or “ecological self.” That is, they claim that whatever selves are, or what their basic characteristics are, these are constituted by its relationships. This standpoint should be understood as a critical reaction against what is sometimes referred to as an “atomistic self.” This standpoint can also be understood as a way of affirming that although individuals are internally related to other selves, they are neither identical with these others nor with the alleged social or ecological whole that they compose with these others.

62 McFague, 1993, p. 16. She also writes: “…the body is not a minor matter, it is the main attraction.”
63 McFague, 1993, pp. 13-25. See also, McFague, 1997, pp. 118-129, for a discussion on the significance for morals, hence for ethics, to touch other bodies.
We can also conclude that regarding the question whether ecofeminist conceptions of self include ideas or ideals of inconsistent selves and if so, in what ways, neither of the authors explicates a fully developed conception of an inconsistent self. In line with my interpretation, Karen Warren and Sallie McFague submit to conceptions of consistent selves, while Chris Cuomo and Carolyn Merchant represent tentative conceptions of inconsistent or at least, disordered selves.

Cuomo and Merchant’s ideas of “impure” identities and contradictory standpoints (Cuomo), and unpredictable, disordered humans and nonhumans (Merchant) will serve as starting points for the discussion in chapter eight, where it will be discussed whether, and if so why, the conception of an inconsistent self is an acceptable standpoint. Before that, however, ecofeminist conceptions of a self will be compared to conceptions of the self that are presupposed in the nonfeminist, especially monist but also pluralist, standpoints.
Chapter 7
A Conclusive and Comparative Analysis of
Ecofeminist Ethical Theory and
Environmental Ethical Theory

In this chapter, the comparison between ecofeminism and nonfeminist environmental ethics will be conducted. Each of the five theoretical issues will be discussed in the following order, views of nature, social constructivism, values of nature, ethical contextualism, and ethical pluralism.

1. Ecofeminist Views of Nature and Environmental Ethics

In chapter one, three views of nature were identified within nonfeminist environmental ethics: a place-oriented view of nature, a process-oriented view of nature, and a non-dualistic view of nature. These views work together with descriptive and normative human/nature dualism. According to descriptive human/nature dualism, nature is regarded to be essentially nonhuman and humanity to be essentially non-natural. Three different kinds of descriptive human/nature dualisms were presented: geographical, existential, and conceptual. Descriptive dualism is often combined with normative dualism according to which nature ought to be left alone. Finally, descriptive non-dualism was represented in the view of nature-culture as the potentially wild. According to non-dualistic views of nature, humans and nonhumans are not essentially different although there are differences between humans and nonhumans as well as among humans and nonhumans.

The analysis in chapter two showed that ecofeminism includes place-oriented views of nature. McFague and Warren represent particular place-
oriented views of nature in which individual humans relate to nonhuman others in certain places such as neighborhoods, lots, ditches, rocks, etc.

Although Warren and McFague both claim that all human beings are ontologically speaking socially constituted and embrace the idea that humans and nonhumans alike are parts of an interdependent ecological and biological system, their environmental ethical theories support descriptive human/nature dualism. In fact, Warren and McFague’s normative theories depend on the existence of nature-others as others. For instance, McFague claims that physical relationships with nature-others form the basis of what I refer to as the process of intrinsic worth. Furthermore, the rock plays an important (although passive) role as container for Warren’s attitude of love in her subjectivist value theory. This geographical human/nature dualism and the ethical significance that is put on the interactions between humans and nonhumans are reminiscent of Per Ariansen’s idea that nature has constitutive value. According to Ariansen, our identities as moral agents are maintained through a geographical and conceptual human/nature dualism. Even though Warren and McFague do not explicitly agree with Ariansen’s claim that nature constitutes the existence and meaning of moral agency, it is clear that they share the view that nature, as the nonhuman other, has high moral as well as ethical significance. However, the main difference between ecofeminism and nonfeminist environmental ethics in this respect is that Warren and McFague explicate physical aspects of relationships with nonhuman others whereas Ariansen only discusses a “…general concern for the naturalness of nature,” according to which, the important issue is not physical aspects of the relationships but the existence of nature as a-moral. An additional difference is the possible outcome of Ariansen’s standpoint that physical nature can be exchanged for other phenomena that hold a property of being a-moral as long as our experiences of these properties maintain an existence and meaning of humans as moral beings. From this follows that what actually is of concern for Ariansen is nature-as-a-moral and not nature as such. In contrast to this standpoint, Warren and McFague focus on particular nature-others with which humans have physical relations. In this sense, ecofeminism displays embodied descriptive particular human/nature dualism without focus on nature as an a-moral phenomenon or concept.

In Chris Cuomo, a combination of place-oriented and process-oriented views of nature can be distinguished. The idea that nature “flourishes” indicates a process-oriented view and the conception of ecological communities as composed of ecosystems, populations, and bioregions implies a place-oriented view. Compared to Hargrove’s process oriented

1 See chapter six in this study on ecofeminist conceptions of a social or relational self.
2 Warren’s twin domination thesis is based partly on dualistic conceptual construism, which means that she shares Ariansen’s descriptive conceptual dualism.
3 Ariansen, 1993b, p. 12.
view of nature, according to which “…the ongoing natural history…constitutes the essence of nature,” Cuomo holds that the ongoing area-specific processes of flourishing constitute nature. Although Cuomo does not argue that human intervention in natural areas or processes violates the “authenticity” or “identity” of nature, she prescribes a hands-off principle and claims that autonomous nonhuman flourishing is preferable to any other kind of flourishing. However, she does not put forward any explicit arguments in order to support this claim in contrast to Hargrove who explicitly claims that the reason why humans ought to not interfere in the process of nature is that otherwise, nature’s alleged authenticity is violated. In spite of this difference, the focus on “self-creation” in nonhuman flourishing makes Cuomo’s normative human/nature dualism similar to Hargrove’s standpoint.

The combination of human/nature dualism and the claim that “pure” nature does not exist makes Cuomo’s view of nature confusing. This confusion is explained by the fact that the nondualistic view of human-nature that she affirms in her conception of the cyborg disagrees with her normative claims that we ought to let nonhuman nature flourish on its own. This is so because her conception of the cyborg implies, or reflects, a non-dualistic view of nature.

Merchant’s view of nature reflects a general descriptive human/nature dualism that falls outside the different nonfeminist views of nature accounted for in chapter one. Here, nature as a whole is distinguished from humanity as a whole. This view presupposes an easily distinguishable separation between the human and the nonhuman. According to Merchant, nature is neither essentially a place nor a process. Rather, nature and humanity are viewed as communities, which interrelate as communities.

Merchant argues in favor of momentary hands-off policies but this normative human/nature dualism is ”wider” than Cuomo’s dualism as well as than the nonfeminist place-oriented and process-oriented views accounted for in chapter one. This means that Merchant’s normative dualism lacks definitions of what it is that humans should not intervene with, which, for instance could be a wilderness area, a species, or a process of flourishing. Consequently, Merchant’s view of nature is closer to the general view of nature that Ariansen affirms than to the more specific views that Katz, Hargrove, and Cuomo put forward.

A final remark on normative dualism is that Merchant and Cuomo advocate that nature is better off left alone while Warren and McFague prescribe interaction. Although Warren and McFague also affirm descriptive human/nature dualism, they do not regard human interventions as violations of nature. On the contrary, it is the relationship between humans and nature.

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2 Although Ariansen also discusses separate trees and certain species, in the articles I refer to, his view of nature is mainly general.
as the other that is of importance. In fact, it is reasonable to interpret Warren and McFague as if their (respective) environmental ethical standpoints are dependent on the fact that we relate to nature physically.6

Another interesting observation regarding ecofeminist views of nature is the lack of explicated non-dualistic views of nature-culture.7 This observation is surprising since one characteristic of ecofeminist conceptions of the ecosocial self is an appreciation of interconnectedness between humans and nonhumans that acknowledges non-dualistic differences among humans and nonhumans. In addition, the fact that McFague and Cuomo affirm a hybrid-self implies a nondualistic view of nature. However, even though this is the case, Cuomo’s view of nature reflects descriptive as well as normative human/nature dualism.

Cuomo’s view of nature is closest to the nondualistic nature-culture view because her conception of the cyborg contains ideas that may cohere with the view of nature-culture as the potentially wild. According to this view, the potentially wild is a trait that connects us with nonhuman others. In this sense, nature-culture as potentially wild becomes neither a process nor an object essentially separated from humanity and humans. Rather, the potentially wild is a certain (potential) quality in both humans and nonhumans. This quality of being wild resembles the qualities of the cyborg to flourish on boundaries and to escape dualistic definitions of being a creature either of culture or of nature.

In addition, the meaning of restoration and preservation practice that follows from a nondualistic view of nature coheres with how we might imagine cyborg environmentalism. Preservation of the potentially wild in nature-culture does not primarily concern preservation of certain areas or processes. Moreover, this is not a matter of restoring something to what it originally was. Rather, preservation and restoration become a matter of maintaining and enabling human and nature-others to maintain their capacity to be wild, that is, to be change,4 something that seems to be attractive to the cyborg. In this context, to be wild means to be able to stay in motion in the sense that dualistic descriptions of the identities of certain areas, humans, and nonhumans (either natural or cultural) are avoided. Thus, the meaning of restoration here becomes a matter of making it possible for humans and nonhumans to maintain the processes, which constitute “wildness.”” Cuomo,

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6 See for instance the discussion about their conceptions of value in chapter four in this study and the importance of individual, physical relationships with particular nonhumans that are highlighted in these discussions.

7 On many occasions, they mention that presupposing an ontological human/nature dichotomy is a mistake. However, no main explicit efforts are made to develop a non-dualistic nature-culture language.


9 Nondualistic restoration probable calls for both reconceptualizations of our identities as culture-nature creatures, as well as of physical arrangements of certain nature-culture areas in which the wild can develop. It is an open question whether or not the wild is in need of
however, never fully supports this line of reasoning and the reason why she holds on to human/nature dualism is probably that her conception of value is, at least in part, naturalistic.

The distinction between views of nature as a-moral, immoral and as moral standard was established in the introduction to this study. With this distinction in mind, it is important to note that normative human/nature dualism is not the same idea as saying that nature is a moral standard. According to the former, we ought to refrain from intervention in natural places or processes. According to the latter, nature or that which is defined as natural is, in terms of itself, prescriptive. This means that if it is possible to establish what a natural condition is, we can also establish what a proper condition, behavior, or essence, etc, is. This is explained by the fact that a natural condition, behavior, or essence is identical to a morally proper condition, behavior, or essence. Following these definitions, normative human/nature dualism can be defended because we see nature as a moral standard but it can also be defended on other grounds, for instance because it is best for humans to stay away from nature because it bewilders us.

It is evident that neither nonfeminist nor ecofeminist environmental ethics regard nature to be immoral. The fact that ecofeminism regards nature to be an active subject does not mean that nature is viewed as a moral agent, rather, nature in general and particular nature-others are best described as amoral. This means that ethical standpoints are taken by humans alone regardless whether humans are truly (essentially) natural creatures or not.

Cuomo and Merchant support normative human/nature dualism, i.e. they claim that if it is possible nature should be left alone. Consequently, a state of nature that is a result of nature’s own processes only, is morally speaking preferable compared to a state of nature that is a result of human intervention. That is to say, the fact that the authenticity or unique identity of nature is violated is not the reason why Cuomo and Merchant argue that we ought to refrain from intervention. Thus, they differ from the nonfeminist human/nature dualism presented in chapter one. Moreover, although Merchant refers to the “autonomy” of nature, her statement does not reflect the same amount of romanticism as for instance Katz statement reflects. That is to say, Merchant and Cuomo’s standpoint does not entirely mirror Katz standpoint.

We can now conclude that place-oriented and process-oriented views of nature are represented in ecofeminism as well as in nonfeminist environmental ethics, and that descriptive as well as normative dualistic ontological and conceptual boundaries (similar to the way that “wilderness” needs such boundaries) in order to exist. Perhaps, restoring the wild in all of us is a matter of acknowledging human/nature boundaries and then crossing them, or, as the Hungarian author György Konrád puts it in his novel Melinda and Dragoman, “I regard people with imperial selfconsciousness to be mentally ill. I can fly away even if I do not move the borders. Borders
views are represented in both ecofeminist and nonfeminist environmental ethics. Moreover, the analysis shows that relationships between humans (or humanity) and nature-others (or nature in general) are central in ecofeminist views of nature. For example, Warren focuses on the emotional relationship between the scientist and individual corn-plants, and the either loving or conquering relationship between the rock and the rock climber. Merchant focuses on the relationship between humanity as a whole and nature as a whole, and also on the need for balance between these two counterparts. Moreover, Cuomo discusses these matters from a group-oriented perspective although she articulates her views in terms of communities, ecosystems, populations, and bioregions. Finally, McFague focuses on physical relationships between individual humans and particular nature-others. What is of importance is that these relationships function as explicated starting points for ethical reflection. In addition, ecofeminism often focuses on physical relationships with particular nature-others and does not primarily consider conceptual or symbolic relationships. Following this, one characteristic of ecofeminist views of nature is an emphasis on physical relationships with nature as essential for environmental ethical standpoints. One consequence of this emphasis is that nature is not objectified as something we, independently of our physical relationships fully define, can get to know, or value. This is not emphasized in nonfeminist environmental ethics.

2. Everything about Nature is a Product of Social Processes – Except Nature

The following table illustrates the diversity of ecofeminist social constructivism. The table shows that according to ecofeminism, the products of construing, constructing, and inventing processes are; meaning and knowledge of nature-as-it-is and in one case, physical aspects of nature-as-it-is. The table also shows that Warren and Merchant accentuate individual constructivism (i) while Cuomo and Merchant represent eco/social, group-oriented constructivism.

are not supposed to be extended, but crossed.” (My translation from Swedish.) See Konrád, (1988), 1992, p. 68.
Table 1. Ecofeminist Social Constructivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Meaning aspects of nature-as-it-is</th>
<th>Knowledge aspects of nature-as-it-is</th>
<th>Physical aspects of nature-as-it-is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and individual construals of separate aspects of nature-as-it-is</td>
<td>McFague, Cuomo</td>
<td>McFague, Warren (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social constructions of separate aspects of nature-as-it-is into coherent wholes</td>
<td>McFague</td>
<td>McFague, Warren, Merchant</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and individual inventions of separate aspects of nature-as-it-is</td>
<td>Cuomo, McFague (i)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before ecofeminist social constructivism will be compared to the social constructivism that is presupposed in the nonfeminist philosophical critique of social constructivism, two main observations that are important for the comparison need to be explained; ecofeminist inventionism and the difference between ecofeminist individual and social constructivism. The reason for this is that ecofeminist inventionism and individual constructivism are the most problematic standpoints from the critic’s points of view.

Ecofeminist Inventionism

In chapter three, McFague’s metaphor theory was characterized as inventionism and in order to clarify this approach her metaphorical theory and its epistemic and ontological implications need to be elucidated.

McFague is a critical realist, which in her case indicates two things. First, she acknowledges that nature exists as a reality independent of social processes. Second, she claims that we cannot have direct epistemic access to nature-as-it-is.\(^\text{10}\) This is based on the standpoint that, according to McFague, all our experiences of nature are filtered through language, which is essentially metaphorical, and that “metaphorical” denotes that nature-models (knowledge-as-social-convention) refer to nature-as-it-is indirectly. That is to say, indirect, nonreferential language operates in and between languages and aims at nature-as-it-is. In other words, language tells us something about how we perceive our relationships with nature-as-it-is but nothing direct about nature-as-it-is. McFague’s critical realism coheres with all three variants of social constructivism.

\(^\text{10}\) McFague, 1982, pp. 131-137. Alternatively and in other words, instead of a correspondence theory of truth, she uses a coherence theory of truth. According to Horwich, 1998, pp. 510,511, a correspondence theory of truth states: “…a belief (statement, sentence, proposition, etc.) is true just in case there exists a fact corresponding to it…” According to a coherence theory of truth, “…a belief is justified (i.e., verified) when it is part of an entire system of beliefs that is consistent and ‘harmonious’…”
From McFague’s critical realism follows that nature statements are not descriptions of nature-as-it-is, but interpretations of it. That is, we cannot determine whether nature statements are true or acceptable by means of empirical and direct comparison between statements and nature-as-it-is. However, this does not mean that nature-language is unintelligible or meaningless. Although epistemic justification is not a matter of correspondence between language and nature, we use nature language as if each new nature statement says something more accurate about nature-as-it-is as well as about our relationship with nature-as-it-is.¹¹ McFague’s standpoint is summarized in the following quote:

Constructive thinkers in any field (poetry, religion, philosophy, science, political theory, and so forth) are critical realists to the extent they believe that all perception and interpretation is metaphorical – that is, indirect (seeing or interpreting “this” as “that”) – and who also hold that their constructions are not heuristic fictions but discoveries of some aspect of the structure of reality.¹²

In order to clarify McFague’s critical realism, the tension between invention and discovery is important. On one hand, she claims that we have no direct epistemic access to nature.¹³ On the other hand, critical realism states that “…all constructs…is such as to bear description in some ways and not in others,”¹⁴ and that “…constructions are not heuristic fictions but discoveries of some aspects of the structure of reality.”¹⁵ (Emphasis added.)

If nature language per se does not correspond or mirror nature-as-it-is, how can it possibly describe nature? From this seems to follow that McFague’s theory becomes internally inconsistent. However, according to a different interpretation, statements like “bears description of,” “redescribes,” “discovers,” are neither epistemological nor ontological, but functional statements. This means that they refer to what we are doing when we are using nature language, which means that they refer to our efforts to find more accurate, fuller, more valid, more rational, ways of understanding nature-as-it-is. Following this interpretation of McFague’s standpoint, we can hold that nature-language discovers some aspects of reality, yet we know, that correspondence of these discoveries are impossible to verify because of the indirect nature of language. The fact that we only have access through interpretation to reality means that the invention process occurs between views of nature-as-it-is, and not between views of nature-as-it-is and nature-as-it-is.

The essential meaning of metaphor is the tension between “is” and “is not,” to think of “this” in terms of “that.”¹⁶ Accordingly, the invention occurs

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¹¹ McFague, 1982, pp. 131-137, see especially 133-134.
¹³ McFague, 1982, p. 134. “…there is no uninterpreted access to reality…”
¹⁴ McFague, 1982, p. 133.
when the familiar meaning of the metaphor (the “is”, and the “this”), meets the unfamiliar, upsetting, disturbing, absurd, weird, meaning of the metaphor (the “is not”, and the “that”). The clash between these two poles creates a third, new meaning. For example, the metaphorical statement, “Nature is a Dog,” refers indirectly to nature-as-it-is, as well as to dog-as-it-is. Conventional-knowledge tells us that we “know” what nature “is” and we “know” what dog “is.” However, we do not “know” (yet) what “Nature-Dog” “is.” Nature-Dog knowledge does not exist in our current epistemological scheme; hence, we have become inventors of Nature-Dog, which is invented as a potential model of nature, and either changes the body of knowledge in relation to which it was invented, or, is internalized in it.

Social and Individual Constructivism

Social constructivism can be pictured as a creative process located on a continuum between individual and social perspectives, accentuating the social or the individual pole. Karen Warren and Sallie McFague emphasize the importance of the individual’s choice of attitude and behavior in terms of conceptual frameworks, nature models, and observation sets. According to Warren, acts of individualistic construism and constructionism have social origins in the sense that an individual’s specific interpretation of nature reflects his or her social situation, context, and ecological preferences. However, it seems as if as soon as the individual attains the conceptual framework through which he or she interprets nature, the social process stagnates. This becomes clear when she compares the observation sets of individual ecologists to conceptual frameworks. It is the specific ecological perspective of research, chosen by the individual ecologist that constructs nature knowledge into a coherent theoretical perspective.

McFague and Warren’s individualism is also present in the reasoning concerning subjectivist intrinsic value of nature (Warren) and the process of nature’s intrinsic worth (McFague). According to McFague, the process amounts to getting to know nature objectively as a subject. This process starts with first hand experience of particular nature, skin to skin. As we have seen, the process of knowledge production is social. However, while a

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17 Payne, 1994: pp. 139-157. Payne has criticized Warren, arguing that her conception of a self refers to a “historical” self. That is to say, to a “self” that is fixed in history, drawing its ethical deliberation out of a, in time and place specified experience of leisure (the rock-climbing). He claims that her story does not reveal the significance of the context of the climber before the rock-climbing situation. Because of this marginalization, her story remains “one thing for the person involved.” Moreover, its social significance is restrained because the self is not confronted with the stories that constitute the self. A result of this is that the “structures” of dominion that are internal to the self remains unchallenged.

18 See chapter four in this study.
model of nature needs intersubjectively maintained acceptance, a nature metaphor arises within the individual.\(^19\)

Both McFague and Warren stress the individual’s responsibility to choose attitude and behavior towards nature. This choice constitutes a starting-point for the process of metaphorical inventions of meanings of nature. Thus, I suggest that this variant of ecofeminist social constructivism can be interpreted as *individual constructivism*.\(^20\)

Cuomo and Merchant’s constructivism is group oriented. Cuomo emphasizes the power of social relationships and structures. According to her, our interpretations of nature originate as well as are maintained in social structures in our societies and within social groups. Cuomo is not detailed in her description of the mechanism of social construism and exactly how meanings of nature are construed is not explained.

Merchant takes a wider, historical perspective compared to the others. Following the interpretations of Merchant in the previous chapters, values, factual descriptions, and landscaping are according to Merchant dominant elements in large-scale historical processes. These elements interact and thus they construe meanings of nature as well as result in constructions of physical nature. Moreover, this interaction also implies that the interpreted meanings of nature-as-it-is and the physical constructions of nature interact, thus enable, and maintain each other.

Thus, following Cuomo and Merchant, eco/social concrete structures (ecosystemic biological processes, schools, banks, etc.) and historical regional, national, and global movements (the Enlightenment and the Industrialization processes) produced and still produce meaning and knowledge of nature.

**Ecofeminist Social Constructivism and Nonfeminist Environmental Philosophy**

In order to assess whether the critique against social constructivism is relevant for ecofeminist social constructivism, let us recall this critique. First, environmental philosopher Anna Peterson, claims that social constructivism implies radical normative relativism, i.e. that it is impossible to determine if, when, and why a certain treatment, understanding, or condition of nature is preferable or not.\(^21\) Second, Mick Smith claims that deep ecology argues that social constructivism implies anthropocentrism, i.e.

\(^{19}\) McFague, 1993, pp. 84-91.

\(^{20}\) The important question whether and in what ways individual and social constructivism are autonomous is not dealt with here.

\(^{21}\) Peterson, 1999, p. 346. “If there is no ‘real’ nature, if all nature is constituted by human interpretation or invention, than we have no grounds on which to evaluate one environment as better or worse or to resist some forms of intervention and support others.”
that social constructivism implies that only humans who are at the center of moral as well as of ethical concern\(^\text{22}\).

Regarding the first argument against social constructivism, Peterson presupposes three things:

a) Social constructivism denies that nature exists independently of humans, (nature-as-it-is).

b) All aspects of nature are socially constructed

c) Nature is *constituted* by social construes or inventions.\(^\text{23}\)

*The first claim* is not relevant for ecofeminism since, as we have seen, Warren, Cuomo, Merchant, and McFague all affirm the existence of nature beyond human constructions; nature-as-it-is. However, this critique may be relevant for one variant of ecofeminist social constructivism; McFague’s inventionism. This is the case because it can be argued that a consequence of McFague’s position, which amounts to that we have no epistemic access to nature-as-it-is, is that nature-as-it-is is a product of social processes. That is to say, given that nature-knowledge and nature-as-it-is are autonomous, “real” nature can be regarded as invented.\(^\text{24}\) This means that if we only have nature models, i.e. models that only and necessarily refer *indirectly* to nature-as-it-is, we are left with modeled natures; nature-as-it-is construed, constructed, and invented. If this is the case, it can be argued that it makes no difference if nature exists independently of our models because modeled nature collapses into “real” nature and vice versa. Hence, the first claim may be relevant for McFague’s inventionism.

*Regarding Peterson’s second claim*, it states that all aspects of nature are socially constructed. So, does ecofeminist constructivism claim that all aspects of nature are the result of social processes? This question requires two answers. First, we can conclude that ecofeminism holds that nature-as-it-is exists. Second, we can conclude that ecofeminist social constructivism focuses on different aspects of nature-as-it-is. This means that according to my interpretation of ecofeminist social constructivism, what follows is that nature-as-it-is is construed, constructed, and invented all the time. However, supposedly, different aspects of nature-as-it-is are more or less construed, constructed, and invented at different times, rather than all aspects of nature all of the time, which supposedly make important difference as we are assessing the reasonableness of ecofeminist social constructivism. Hence, the second claim is irrelevant for ecofeminism.

\(^\text{22}\) Smith, 1999, p. 363.

\(^\text{23}\) Peterson, 1999, p. 346.

\(^\text{24}\) Alternatively, real nature is *as* an invention.
Regarding the third claim that nature is constituted by social constructs, it seems as if “constituted” here, means to “make up” or to “be.” That is to say, “nature is constituted” means, “nature is made up” by, or “nature exists” as, a result of social processes, which is a standpoint ecofeminist social constructivism rejects. Hence, as a general thesis regarding the existence of nature-as-it-is, this claim is irrelevant for ecofeminism. However, ecofeminism affirms that certain aspects of nature are “made up” in two specific ways. First, according to ecofeminist social constructionism, theories of nature are, and physical nature can be products of social processes. In this sense, these aspects of nature are “made up” because new bodies of meaning and knowledge of nature as well as physical constructions of nature are human products. Second, according to ecofeminist social inventionism, meanings (and values) of nature are invented in power of metaphorical language. In other words, meanings of nature are created. Hence, according to ecofeminist social constructivism, although nature-as-it-is is not constituted (invented) some aspects of nature are. Consequently, claim number three is not relevant as a general claim but relevant if specified.

The anthropocentrism critique on the other hand, states that if nature is socially construed, constructed, and invented, environmental problems are reduced to human affairs only. According to this critique, social constructivism is a form of colonization of nature because it only deals with discursive nature.

Mick Smith’s presentation of this argument, offered by deep ecologists, amounts to that social constructivism implies that nature is nothing more and nothing less than a human construction and that deep ecology therefore holds that social constructivism is inconsistent with nonanthropocentrism. Smith reconstructs the deep ecology standpoint:

...if we cannot claim to have a discourse which truly represents nature in itself, any claims that “nature” might have intrinsic value are seemingly problematized.

This critique is ontological, methodological, and epistemological. The ontological argument can be summarized as follows: Social constructivism ought to be rejected in virtue of being a form of ontological anthropocentrism because it implies that nature is a human invention, and, human inventions cannot have intrinsic value. First, it should be noted that the fact that something is a human invention, does not mean that it could not

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have intrinsic value or worth. Second, this critique is not relevant because ecofeminism does not deny the existence of nature-as-it-is.\(^{28}\)

The methodological argument can be summarized as follows: *Social constructivism ought to be rejected because its focus on "nature" turns environmental ethics into merely a matter of theory acceptance,* which implies that nature becomes insignificant. Here, social constructivism is rejected because it turns environmental issues into theoretical, abstract debacles, hence social constructivism means that we turn our focus away from the physical, corporal, concrete nature, hence its problems become a matter of abstract interhuman relationships and not a matter of concrete relationships between humans and nonhumans.

Regarding ecofeminist social constructivism, it is true that it amounts to the idea that although nature-as-it-is exists, it only exists for us indirectly. However, ecofeminist social constructivism combines an awareness of the impact of social processes on ethical thinking with concern for physical nonhuman nature. Moreover, ecofeminist social constructivism shows that the fact that environmental ethics and views of nature specifically are anthropogenic does not necessarily imply value theoretical or normative anthropocentrism. Moreover, although the meanings of, the knowledge of, and the physical aspects of nature-as-it-is are regarded as products of social processes, this does not reduce nature to a product of social processes, hence not to a disparate discursive entity.

The methodological argument presupposes that ethics ("discourse") and nature ("nature in itself") are possible to separate; hence, it presupposes that theory and praxis are or can be autonomous. One aspect of ecofeminist social constructivism is that theory and praxis are internally related. The fact that we always construe, construct, and invent aspects of nature-as-it-is does not turn nature-as-it-is into "nature." Ecofeminist social constructivism does not affirm the autonomy of ethical theory, moral praxis, and nature-as-it-is. On the contrary, the analysis shows that physical relationships with nonhumans\(^{29}\) are acknowledged and sometimes are seen as starting points for ethical theorizing. The methodological critique builds on an idea of a theory/praxis dichotomy that ecofeminism does not affirm.

According to the epistemological argument, social constructivism implies anthropocentrism because nonanthropocentrism demands true representations of nature-as-it-is. This epistemological aspect of the critique can be summarized as follows: *Social constructivism ought to be rejected because it entails epistemic relativism (or skepticism),* which makes nonanthropocentrism impossible. We have seen that ecofeminist social

\(^{28}\) Since I am dealing with the question of normative relativism in relation to Person’s critique of ecofeminist inventionism, it will not be dealt with here.

\(^{29}\) See chapter two for a presentation of that Merchant, Cuomo, Warren, and McFague all view nature in terms of relationships. See also chapter five, on ecofeminist ethical contextualism.
constructivism entails variants of epistemological relativism. However, from this does not follow that social constructivism is incommensurable with a conception of the “intrinsic value” of nature-as-it-is.

This argument presupposes that intrinsic values are dependent on knowledge of nature of a certain kind, that is, that existence of intrinsic value of nature demands full or complete epistemic representation of nature-as-it-is. However, despite the fact that such a claim rests entirely on the kind of value theoretical standpoint it is based on, this does not seem to be the case. If this would be the case, we could hardly value almost anything intrinsically because it seems impossible to determine whether our knowledge of something or someone is a complete representation of the object, process, or person in question. Think of ecosystems like forests, oceans, mountains; how is it possibly so that we can claim full or complete epistemic representation of these entities? Still, we value them intrinsically.

This discussion shows that ecofeminist social constructivism is more complex than the social constructivism that is presupposed by the critics. However, we can conclude that the kind of social constructivism that the critics presuppose is comparable to ecofeminist social inventionism, which can be interpreted as a form of ontological relativism. Moreover, the critique is also relevant regarding that ecofeminist social constructivism holds that all aspects of nature are, at least potentially, products of social processes.

3. Ecofeminism on the Values of Nature

A distinction between worth and value was introduced in the introduction of this study. In addition, certain nonfeminist conceptions of value of nature were presented in chapter one.

Anthropocentrism is defined as the standpoint that nature has only non-intrinsic values and that nature has demand, transformative, and constitutive value. Moreover, nonanthropocentrism is defined as the standpoint that nature has “intrinsic value” and or “intrinsic worth.”

In chapter one, additional concepts of non-intrinsic values were introduced; utility, extrinsic (instrumental), contributory, and inherent value. Furthermore, the issue regarding the origin of value was introduced and it was concluded that nonfeminist environmental ethics includes anthropogenic, biogenic, ecogenic, and theogenic standpoints, which refer to

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30 See Siegel, 1998, pp. 428-429, for a definition of epistemological relativism: “…knowledge (and/or truth) is relative – to time, to place, to society, to culture, to historical epoch, to conceptual scheme or framework, or to personal training or conviction – so that what counts as knowledge depends on the value of one or more of these variables.” The reason for this is the following: “…different cultures, societies, etc. accept different sets of background principles and standards of evaluation for knowledge-claims, and there is no neutral way of choosing between these alternative sets of standards.”
different ideas of whether values of nature have objective or non-objective origin, and, existence.

What are the differences between ecofeminist conceptions and the conceptions of the value of nature within nonfeminist environmental ethics? The table below functions as starting point for the following comparison.

Table 2. Ecofeminism on Values of Nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind and meaning of nature's value</th>
<th>Origin of nature's value</th>
<th>Locus of nature's value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Subjective intrinsic (non-utility) value</td>
<td>Anthropogenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuomo</td>
<td>Energetic and naturalistic intrinsic (non-utility) value</td>
<td>Ecogenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Utilitarian-oriented intrinsic ecological goods</td>
<td>Ecogenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFague</td>
<td>Process-oriented intrinsic worth</td>
<td>Ecogenic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first comparison concerns kind and meaning of nature’s value. It is clear that ecofeminism typically favors a nonanthropocentric conception of nature’s value or worth, which they share with nonanthropocentric nonfeminist ethicists Callicott, Rolston, and Taylor. The fact that ecofeminists defend or presuppose nonanthropocentric conceptions of value does not mean that they automatically oppose that nature has demand, utility, transformative, and constitutive instrumental (extrinsic) value. However, often ecofeminist meanings of “instrumental” and “intrinsic” value are defined as alternative opposites.

The analysis of the variety of definitions of instrumental value shows that only McFague follows Frankena’s definition of instrumental value, that is, that a thing has instrumental or external value if it is good because it is a mean to what is good. According to Cuomo, Merchant, and Warren on the other hand, the meaning of instrumental value equals the meaning of utility value, that is, that things are good because of their usefulness for some purpose.

Warren, Cuomo, and Merchant affirm nature’s intrinsic value while McFague implies a conception of natures intrinsic worth. In other words, it is only McFague who suggests a Kantian-oriented conception of worth, or, dignity.

In comparison to nonfeminist environmental ethics, Paul Taylor represents a Kantian approach. However, his approach differs from McFague’s in the following respects. First, he claims that inherent worth of nature has objective origin as well as existence. This is not confirmed by McFague. According to McFague, the worth of nature is a process that originates in the relationships between moral agents and particular nature-
others, which also maintains the worth of nature. Second, Taylor claims that the worth of nature applies universally to every living individual nature other. McFague who represents cultural contextualism and stresses the significance of contextual aspects such as personal relationships with nature-others would argue that the meaning and justification of the worth of nature is contextually dependent. This means that, although a claim that nature-others has intrinsic worth might be applied to nature-others outside one’s context; this claim can only be justified from within physical individual relationships.

McFague and Cuomo connect their teleological views of nature to their conceptions of value, which they share with Paul Taylor. That is to say, they all regard nature-others to have intentions or interests in their own flourishing as organic entities. However, for Taylor this amounts to an objective notion of a nonhuman good. For Cuomo and McFague this teleological view of nature is combined with the claim that intrinsic value and worth are always to some extent anthropogenic.

Karen Warren represents subjectivism, which means that her position comes close to Baird Callicott’s view. Warren’s conception of value is intimately attached to an individual’s positive attitude toward nature. Callicott on the other hand, combines an emotive standpoint with an evolutionary perspective, which amounts to a conception of value that implies less dependence for its existence on the individual’s positive attitude than Warren’s subjectivism implies.

In this context, Merchant is unique in her conception of nature’s intrinsic value as a utilitarian inspired common good, shared equally by nature and humanity. As was the case with the others and with Taylor, Merchant affirms that nature is someone, who has interests. However, whereas McFague and Taylor are focused on individual nature-others and Cuomo on ecological communities, Merchant is focused on nature as a whole.

The second comparison concerns the origin of nature’s value and we can conclude that it is only Warren who represents an idea of anthropogenic origin, something that she shares with Callicott. A second observation is that the idea of pure biogenic origin is not represented in ecofeminism. Even though Cuomo affirms that nature-others have goods of their own, in order for these goods to be morally relevant, human sentiments are required. In this sense, Cuomo deviates from Taylor because Taylor claims that intrinsic worth of nature has independent origin in the objective goods of plants and animals.

The analysis also shows that the idea of an ecogenic origin of nature’s value is common in ecofeminism. However, this standpoint differs from Rolston’s notion of systemic value on several accounts. First, Rolston’s systemic value is not linked to particular relationships as in McFague’s case. Nor is the origin of nature’s systemic value a mix of emotive and biogenic origin as in Cuomo’s case. Finally, Rolston’s systemic value is not equal to
that what is in the shared human and nonhuman interest, as in Merchant’s
case. Rather, Rolston’s systemic value originates in the evolutionary
ecological evolvement of life-processes and is a property of the system.

As far as theogenic origin of nature’s value is concerned, McFague can be
interpreted as representing this standpoint as well. In the context of a model
of nature as the body of God, it is possible to look upon the intrinsic worth of
nature as originating in the love of God, for example through the resurrection
of Jesus Christ in every species and body on earth. This means that
according to McFague, the intrinsic worth of nature can be argued for in
theological terms and in a manner that is reminiscent of Andrew Linzey and
Max Oelschlaeger’s standpoints. It is important however, to remember that
this interpretation is made in the context of a specific McFaguean model of
nature as the body of God.

The last comparison concerns the locus of intrinsic value and worth of
nature; hence concerns the question of which nonhuman entities that have
intrinsic value or worth.

Biocentrist Paul Taylor claims that every living individual has intrinsic
worth because it is possible to establish the interests of living entities.
Cuomo as well as McFague agree with Taylor on this matter. However, they
disagree on two accounts. First, Cuomo disagrees with Taylor because her
biocentrism is group-oriented since she claims that ecological communities
as well as individuals have a capacity to flourish. Following my
interpretation of McFague, who shares a teleological descriptive view of
nature with Taylor, all nonhuman entities, living as well as nonliving and
groups as well as individuals, have potential intrinsic worth. Thus, McFague
locates the origin of nature’s intrinsic worth in the interplay between the
valuing subject and particular nonhuman others (the intrinsic-worth-
process). Hence, the worth of nature is not reduced to positive attitudes
towards nonhuman nature (as is the case with Warren and Callicott), nor is it
conditioned by properties of nonhuman nature (as is the case with Cuomo
and Taylor), or reduced to a question of ecosocial utilitarian goods (as is the
case with Merchant).

J. Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston argue, as ecocentrists, that
nonhuman wholes such as species and ecosystems have intrinsic value.
Warren, Cuomo, and Merchant share this view. The most common reason
for why wholes are claimed to have intrinsic value is that the system has
inherent properties that are intrinsically valuable. Examples of such
properties are the integrity, stability, and the beauty of ecosystems.

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31 Goodpaster, (1978) 1993, pp. 53-54. In terms of Goodpaster’s distinction between
regulative and operative moral standing, it could be argued that according to Cuomo, the
intrinsic value of nature are defensible on emotive grounds independent of operability (they
are regulative), but operative only if they refer to living entities.

Norton), states: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty
However, ecofeminism concludes that nonhuman wholes have intrinsic value on other grounds. Warren for instance, grants nonhuman wholes intrinsic value because she loves them. According to Warren, to claim that nature has intrinsic value is to express a loving attitude towards nature. According to Cuomo, wholes have intrinsic value because they have a capacity to flourish. Merchant holds that nature in general has intrinsic value, that is, has goods that are worthy to fulfill as such because nature is an “equal partner” to humanity.

McFague’s normative nonanthropocentrism is limited because she emphasizes physical relationships as central for the intrinsic worth process. Following McFague, nonhuman others have intrinsic value only if they are possible to touch. From this follows that even if it were possible to touch some natural systems (lakes, mountains, etc.) the possibility to engage in direct physical contact with species, seems remote.

4. Ecofeminism and Nonfeminist Environmental Ethical Contextualism

The analysis in chapter one showed that nonfeminist environmental ethics highlights different contextual aspects.33 Four such aspects were distinguished: individual perspectives, cultural aspects, situational aspects, and geographical aspects. Furthermore, the analysis showed that there is a variety concerning which theoretical area that is supposed to be liable to contextual influence.

Some environmental ethicists claim that contextual aspects are not ethically significant and therefore they advocate ethical universalism. On the other hand, contextualists claim that contextual aspects are ethically significant and highlight the semantic, normative, and epistemic significance of these aspects.34

Finally, the analysis of ecofeminist contextualism in chapter five showed that there are reasons to further discuss the extent of which contextual aspects influence moral values and ethical theory since ecofeminist contextualism seems to hold different ideas about contextual influence as well.

33 My analysis of ethical contextualism is inspired by theologian Sigurd Bergmann’s analysis of contexts as having different dimensions. However, I prefer to discuss in terms of contextual aspects rather than dimensions. See Bergmann, 1997.

34 It is also possible to imagine a value-ontological contextualism. This theoretical aspect is however not discussed here.
The table below is a summary of ecofeminist contextualist standpoints and serves as starting point for the forthcoming comparison.

**Table 3. Ecofeminist Ethical Contextualism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Aspects</th>
<th>Definition of contextual aspect</th>
<th>Definition of theoretical aspect</th>
<th>Extent of contextual influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Individual perspectives - Conceptual frameworks; ecological observation sets, worldviews</td>
<td>Descriptive, normative, epistemological contextualism</td>
<td>Weak, moderate, strong, and radical contextualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuomo</td>
<td>Oppressive and liberating group power structures</td>
<td>Descriptive, normative, semantic contextualism</td>
<td>Strong contextualism, present oppressive and liberating social structures of primary concern, consideration taken also to past contextual aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Historical processes</td>
<td>Descriptive, normative, epistemological contextualism</td>
<td>Radical contextualism, every course of events occur within the context of history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFague</td>
<td>The physical relationship between a moral agent and a particular nature-other</td>
<td>Descriptive, normative, epistemological contextualism</td>
<td>Strong contextualism, individual physical relationships with particular nature-others of primary concern but other contextual aspects relevant as well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contextual Aspects**

Before the comparison of contextual aspects is performed, it should be noted that although the analysis shows that ecofeminism denies formal, descriptive, normative, epistemological, and value-ontological universalism there is one exception. Karen Warren argues in favor of what can be understood as a universal human nature based on the idea that all human beings, when confronted with expressions of art, music, etc., socially and ecologically contextualized people, as she puts it, “resonate” “across cultures.”

According to Warren, the fact that we can aesthetically and emotionally appreciate cultural expressions that originate in other social contexts than our own, gives proof of that: “There is something that we bring to the situation that we have in common with others and something in the situation to which we, across cultures, resonate.” Although moral values and ethical principles always have contextual origin and validity, we can, according to Warren, understand and appreciate them across cultural contexts.

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35 Warren, 2000, p. 113.
36 Warren, 2000, p. 113.
38 Warren, 2000, pp. 113-114.
Warren’s “situated universalism” is based on the idea that all humans have an inherent transcontextual ability to make sense of contextually determined meanings of, for instance, nature.\(^{39}\) However, Warren’s universalism does not include the normative principles of universal consistency and impartiality that Taylor affirms.\(^{40}\) Moreover, the analysis in chapter five shows that she denies epistemic universalism as well. In line of this, I conclude that Warren advocates the idea of at least some universal elements of the human nature, which amounts to a shared aesthetic capability. Whether this standpoint also includes, or demands, a thesis on semantic universalism and that therefore her universalism contradicts the fact that she also advocates that moral meaning is contextually determined as a product of dualistic moral thinking, is an open question.

As the table shows, the analysis of the rather general claim that environmental ethical reflection is “contextual,” shows that ecofeminism emphasizes the following contextual aspects: individual physical relationships, social structures, individual perspectives (frameworks, worldviews, etc.), and historical processes. The meaning of context as a perspective held by an individual is represented in both ecofeminism and nonfeminist environmental ethics.\(^{41}\) For example, Baird Callicott’s statement that certain ethical standpoints are incommensurable with certain worldviews is similar to Karen Warren’s claim that certain observation sets of frameworks determine whether certain normative principles are applicable (valid) or not.\(^{42}\)

Sallie McFague stresses the importance of relating to certain places in order to develop a nonanthropocentric morality. This view is similar to Bryan Norton’s claim that “ethics” originates “locally” thus is “…anchored to a particular place.” Thus, McFague and Norton share the idea that our experiences within and of a certain place are relevant for the nature of one’s morality. From this standpoint follows that we, as ethicists ought to take these places and our experiences of these places into consideration. Thus, McFague shares an emphasis on geographical aspects with Norton.\(^{43}\) One

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40 Warren, 2000, p. 114. See Norman, 1983, p. 117, for a discussion about the principles of universal consistency and impersonality. According to Norman, this principle states that an act is morally right if and only if one’s reason for performing it in a certain context must be a reason to perform the same action in a similar context. The principle of impersonality states that an act is morally right if and only if one’s reason for performing it in a certain context must be a reason for anyone to perform the same action in a similar context.
41 See for example, Callicott, 1999, pp. 35-36.
42 Warren, 2000, p. 114. This comparison is valid because, although Warren here is using “context” in the meaning of cultural circumstances, the similarity between her and Callicott’s reasoning concerning the relationships between ethical standpoints and perspectives such as “worldviews,” “observation sets,” “moral philosophies,” “frameworks,” etc, is clear in other essays, such as Warren & Cheney, 1996.
43 Given McFague’s metaphorical theory, it can of course be argued that she represents individual perspective contextualism, maintained through language. This is true, however, I
main difference between Norton’s localism and McFague’s approach however, is that McFague stresses the personal physical relationship between the individual and the nature-others located in our geographical (wild) context. Another main difference is that according to McFague, we can interrelate (contextualize) with nature in different places while Norton’s approach limits this process to “home places.”

Cuomo’s group oriented moral contextualism focuses on socio-cultural aspects, in which the contextual aspects are social power structures. The fact that she focuses on mixed communities, i.e. “ecosocial communities” results in an approach that captures cultural and natural aspects. Cuomo does not highlight the significance of individual perspectives or geographically demarcated places and nature-others. Rather she claims that the social structures in which we are born and brought up, shape our morality. Regarding the ethical significance of context, Cuomo advocates that we ought to use insights drawn from the experiences of subordinated people (and nonhumans) as subordinated, to criticize the oppressive structures that are the cause of the oppression in the first place. In comparison to the nonfeminist contextual approaches that are presented in chapter one, Cuomo’s approach resembles the way in which Ramachandra Guha uses the perspective of Indian people to criticize the ethic of U.S. deep ecology.

Sallie McFague’s contextualism is reminiscent of Marietta’s situation-oriented approach. However, whereas McFague’s approach is limited to the physical relationship between a human and a nature-other, a situation-oriented approach is more complex and encompasses other aspects as well. “Situation” means: a position or state at a particular time; set of conditions, facts, and events having an effect on a person, society, etc. This definition has the potential to encompass all other contextual aspects. The set of conditions, facts, and events that are mentioned above can refer to the aspects of individual perspectives and relationships, geographical circumstances, and cultural and socioeconomic processes.

Merchant’s historical contextualism is unique in this study and can favorably be interpreted as encompassing cultural and geographical aspects as well as individual perspectives. In this, Merchant’s approach is similar to

have chosen to highlight her normative as well as epistemological contextualism, and in doing this the significant contextual aspects are the relationships between particular nature-others and individual humans.

44 Cuomo, 1998, pp. 49-50. “Social affections felt and extended toward members of our own species, or others with whom we share systems of meaning, or feelings, of commonality, kinship and understanding can be ‘foundations’ for our ethical motivation. That is, emotional, symbolic, and cultural connections with others help move us beyond simple egoism and generate concern for and motivation toward the interests of others.”

45 Cuomo, 1998, p. 123. “…we cannot ignore the ways in which…concepts and categories are parasitic and symbiotic upon each other, make sense because of each other, are enacted upon each other, and become reified through practices, and the ways they criss-cross in and through people’s lives, conceptual schemas, and political situations.”

the situation-oriented approach. However, because of its specific historical analysis, it cannot as easily encompass specific situational details as the other ecofeminist approaches do.

Theoretical Aspects and Extent of Contextual Influence

Going from moral contextualism (the idea that contextual aspects influence our actual norms and values and the ideas of reality that accompany those ideas) to ethical contextualism (the idea that ethical theorizing ought to be conducted with consideration taken to contextual aspects) a certain theoretical focus is needed. The analysis in chapter one shows that nonfeminist contextualism focuses on descriptive, normative, and epistemological theoretical aspects while ecofeminism focuses on, with some variation, descriptive, normative, epistemological, as well as semantic contextualism.

It seems as if the main concern for ecofeminists as well as for nonfeminist contextualists is to argue in favor of a contextual standpoint in general, in opposition to some form of universal or generalizing ethical standpoint. There is not much effort put into a systematic analysis of whether an epistemological, a normative, or a semantic contextualism is preferable and why. One example of this is the way in which Chris Cuomo argues in favor of semantic contextualism. Her argumentation is conducted in opposition to “essential or necessary truths” concerning the meaning of “woman” and “nature.”47 A second example is Karen Warren’s argumentation in favor of epistemic contextualism in terms of ecological observation sets in opposition against “apriori or ecological reason…to give (ethical or metaphysical) pride or place” to one ecological view over another.48 A third example is Marietta’s argument in favor of a situation-oriented normative contextualism in opposition to universal applied normative ethics.49

Hence, one result of this comparative analysis is that in general all variants of ethical contextualism are implied within both ecofeminism and nonfeminist environmental ethics and that neither ecofeminism nor environmental ethics further develops them.

Regarding the extent of which contextual aspects influence ethical theory, the analysis in chapter one indicates that, according to nonfeminist contextualism, there are degrees of contextual influence. The reason for this interpretation is the language in which the contextual standpoints are articulated. For instance, Bryan G. Norton claims, “Truth and objectivity

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must be sought in the specific characteristics of specific situations…"50 A second example is Don E. Marietta, who holds that contextualism is characterized by the fact that “the recognition of the context is not minimal" and that “it acknowledges more influence of the situation…than…other approaches."51 Finally, Mikael Stenmark claims that, according to epistemic contextualism, the context determines what is rational or what is not rational.52

The analysis in chapter five shows that ecofeminist contextual ethical theory confirms that it is reasonable to assume that contextualists hold that there are degrees of contextual influence. In accordance with this, the following definitions are suggested. A weak contextualism recognizes the relevance of contextual aspects but these are of secondary importance compared to universal or to other-contextual aspects. A moderate contextualism considers universal aspects, other-contextual, and contextual aspects equally. A strong contextualism holds that universal or other-contextual aspects are of secondary importance compared to contextual aspects. Finally, a radical contextualism, holds that no other aspects than contextual aspects influence ethical theory.

It can be concluded that ecofeminist contextualism covers weak, moderate, strong, and radical standpoints. Regarding nonfeminist contextualism, it seems as if Stenmark, Callicott, and Norton express radical contextualism. Warren and Merchant share this radical approach. Furthermore, Marietta’s contextualism can be interpreted as weak, moderate, and strong.

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51 Marietta, 1995, p. 143.
52 Stenmark, 1994, p. 354.
5. Ecofeminism, Inconsistent Selves, and Nonfeminist Monism

The following discussion and analysis of conceptions of inconsistent “selves” is related to the recent debate within environmental ethics regarding whether ethical monism or pluralism is a preferable theoretical standpoint. In this debate, monists accept *interpersonal* pluralism and reject *intrapersonal* pluralism. One of the reasons for taking the monist standpoint is that the relationship between a person’s identity (self) and the normative ethical theory that is held by that person is internal. A second reason for taking the monist standpoint is that we presuppose or embrace an ideal of what I refer to as a consistent self.

The analysis in chapter six shows that Warren and McFague’s conceptions of a self tend towards a consistent self and that Cuomo and Merchant’s conceptions of a self lean towards ideas of an inconsistent self. The table summarizes the different ecofeminist conceptions of the self.

*Table 4. Ecofeminist Pluralism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The coming to existence of the self</th>
<th>Principle of constitution of the self</th>
<th>The relationship between the self and normative theories/moral beliefs</th>
<th>Theoretical intra/inter-pluralism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warren: An ecosocial internal core-self onto which beliefs, worldviews, and frameworks are attached</td>
<td>Consistent unity of emotions/attitudes and behavior</td>
<td>Externally related</td>
<td>Interpersonal pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuomo: An ecosocial internal embodied self</td>
<td>Inconsistent organic divergent multiplicity</td>
<td>Externally related</td>
<td>Intrapersonal pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant: An ecosocial internal self</td>
<td>Unpredictable disorder</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFague: An ecosocial internal embodied self</td>
<td>Consistent organic unity of mind and body</td>
<td>Externally related</td>
<td>Interpersonal pluralism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The first comparison* deals with different views on how the self originates and maintains its existence. One way of expressing this is in terms of internal, external, or identical relationships between the self and its ecological and social contexts. An *internally related* self (internal self) is a self that is what it is through others. Such a self is not identical with other selves and nonhuman entities. However, an internal self and the other selves
or nonhuman entities in its social and ecological context compose a specific whole. An externally related self (external self) is a self that is what it is completely independent of other selves and nonhuman entities in its social and ecological context. Finally, an identically related self (identical self) is a self that is what other selves and nonhuman entities are in their social and ecological context. That is, the self is identical with those to which it is related.53

Callicott, who defends the monist standpoint, advocates a socioecological internal self. He claims: “Relations are…ontologically prior to the relata [and] things (organisms and subatomic particles respectively) are what they are because of their relations with other things…”54 Callicott continues: “Nature is a unity, a whole, and the self, the “I” (mentally as well as physically construed), is not only continuous with it, but constituted by it.”55 Callicott’s attraction to this deep ecology inspired concept of self-in-Self – summarized in the claim “…nature is one and continuous with the self…”56 - is maintained throughout his work.57

Callicott58 shares this view with ecofeminism, but there is one important difference. The difference between Callicott and ecofeminism is that ecofeminism in general is critical of the tendencies towards fusion of the self and others that they claim is a risk with the deep ecological “self-in-Self.” Statements such as, “each of us is the world,” imply that his standpoint is somewhat less critical.59 Ecofeminists are skeptical about a conception of an identical self and one reason for this is that social relationships are often oppressive60 and an origin of “outrageous acts of emotional and physical destruction toward the other.”61 From this follows that without the possibility to separate the self from the larger Self, individual emancipation is claimed to become problematic or impossible.

Ecofeminism advocates a conception of an ecosocially internal self, which implies that we are what and who we are through our relationships with others, and, that those who we become are not identical with the whole of which we are parts, or, with the ones to whom we are related.

53 Østerberg, (1966) 1977, pp. 7-8. (My translation) These distinctions are taken from Østerberg’s discussion concerning different “forms of understanding” (In Swedish: “förståelseformer”).
57 Callicott, 1999, pp. 217-218
58 Callicott, 1999, pp. 217-218. “…people are created to be a part of, not to be set apart from, nature.” Furthermore, “…the worlds myriad living beings do not exist in isolation from one another. We earth creatures are all enmeshed in a tangled web of life.” (It should be noted that these comments are consistent with the conception of an external self as well.)
60 Cuomo, 1998, pp. 97-98.
61 McFague, 1993, pp. 127-128.
The second comparison concerns the relationship between the self and normative theories/moral beliefs.\textsuperscript{62} Here, the terms internal and external refer to whether a change in a person’s normative theory or beliefs amounts to a change in that person’s “self.” Advocating intrapersonal pluralism, Christopher Stone claims that normative theories are external to the self. Warren with her emphasis on the observation sets and frameworks\textsuperscript{63} share this view. Callicott on the other hand holds that normative theories/moral beliefs are internal to the self and that a shift in theory is a shift in belief, hence a shift of worldview and of personality.

From the perspective of McFague’s constructive approach toward models of reality, it can be assumed that McFague too regards theories external to the self. However, the fact that models have significant social and individual impact on our moralities indicates that they are in fact internally related to the self. Moreover, the fact that we can shift models does not imply that who we are stays stable in that process.

The difference between the question of the origin of the self (the first column in table no. four) and the question of the relationship between a person’s theories and self (the second column) is crucial for the comparison between Cuomo’s, Stone’s, and Callicott’s standpoints. According to Cuomo’s contextualism and social construism, interactive internal relationships exist between moral practice and ethical theory. This means that people who live in oppressive relationships within oppressive structures are often or always believed to be marginalized or in other ways oppressed in theory as well. Furthermore, it means that allegedly the ethical theories that originate under these circumstances reflect and justify this order (and vice versa). That is, the identity and value of the self is socially constituted; hence, the relationship between relationships and the self is internal. From this does not follow that the relationship between the beliefs and normative standpoints held by the self, and the self, is internal. Hence, I conclude that Cuomo agrees with Stone on this point.

The third comparison concerns principles of constitution of the self. From the analysis in chapter one and the analysis of ecofeminism in chapter six, we can assume that Callicott, Wenz, Warren, and McFague all agree that the moral self is ideally organized according to a principle of consistency. Warren tends to present moral life as an essentially logic endeavor. The logic of domination as well as the morality of the rock climber are references to and are based on a moral self whose nature seems to be primarily logic and who behaves essentially logically. In this respect, Warren comes close to Callicott’s monistic ideal of a consistent self. Warren’s self, consists of, like Callicott’s, a kernel to which worldviews, conceptual frameworks are

\textsuperscript{62} Although it is possible to treat normative theories and moral beliefs separately, it is not necessary to do so in order to conduct this comparison.

\textsuperscript{63} Warren & Cheney, 1996, p. 252. According to Warren and Cheney, observation sets have epistemic autonomy; they have “…their own epistemology and context-dependent ontology.”
attached and these attachments and the kernel of the self are (ideally) organized according to a principle of consistency.

McFague is of the same opinion as Callicott and Wentz when it comes to the idea that we need consistent order in our moral lives. We are, McFague states, “…‘unfinished’ at birth and [therefore] must construct and order [our] world…” The fact that McFague acknowledges that the need of self-consistence is “socially constructed” does not mean that it should be dismissed as arbitrary. The fact that McFague is using the health or well being of the body as a normative standard supports the interpretation of McFague’s conception of the self as consistent, because an organic conception of the ideal self presupposes physical consistency and coherence. Moreover, in the discussion on the matter of acceptable models, McFague states: “If one wants to live as a whole person…one needs to attend seriously to the picture of reality that is assumed…” [Emphasis added.] This statement suggests that worldviews and the self are internally related and that a consistent “whole” self is the ideal self.

Merchant’s emphasis on “mutual relationships” and “connections” between humans and nonhumans (although without explicit definitions of the nature of these relationships), and the fact that she draws on chaos theory, point toward a conception of a disordered and unpredictable self. In addition, even though a disordered self is not necessarily inconsistent, her discussion affirms a conception of a self that comes closer to enduring inconsistency - and the ambivalence that may be seen as a result of the inconsistence - of moral life, than Warren and McFague’s conceptions of the self.

Chris Cuomo’s conception of the cyborg self who embraces “permanently partial identities” and takes “contradictory standpoints” is undoubtedly the clearest example of an attempt to conceptualize an inconsistent self. Pictured as curdled mayonnaise, the partial identities (“impure identities”) of the self cannot be reduced to one harmonious consistent whole (in Callicott’s terminology, a mentally sane person with a properly developed morality). A partial self is a self in constant process of separation and because such a self is constantly constituted by its relations to machines, animals, Gods, the earth, other humans, etc., the self is and becomes, “permanently partial.”

According to monism, the interrelated parts of the “self,” are ideally organized through a basic principle of consistency. In line of Callicott’s claims that an inconsistent self is morally immature and allegedly suffers from the philosophical equivalence of multiple disorders, indicate that the self breaks down if inconsistency manifests itself within a person in a given

situation over a substantial period. However, according to Cuomo, a person with an inconsistent self endures (maybe even enjoys) to take contradictory normative standpoints. From the conception of an internal self and because the relations that constitute the self may or may not be relationships with logically and ontologically inconsistent entities (i.e. machines, organisms, and fictive creatures), it can be argued that inconsistent beliefs are not signs of malfunction or mental illness hence do not result in personal breakdown. That is, because the self is constituted by relationships, inconsistent relationships render inconsistent selves.

To conclude, Warren and McFague support interpersonal pluralism rather than intrapersonal pluralism, while the way in which I have interpreted Merchant and Cuomo’s conceptions of disordered and inconsistent selves, they indicate intrapersonal pluralism. However, even though Merchant’s self is disordered, and more unsteady than Warren and McFague’s, there are no clear implications towards intrapersonal pluralism in her work.

**Concluding Remarks on Ecofeminist Ethical Theory**

Which are the theoretical differences between ecofeminist ethics and environmental ethics? This comparison shows that ecofeminism entails a theoretical variety that resembles the theoretical variety in nonfeminist environmental ethics. The conceptions of nature and nature’s value, social constructivism, ethical contextualism, and ideas of consistent and inconsistent selves identified within ecofeminism can be found in nonfeminist environmental ethics as well. Still, there are important differences.

Ecofeminism is a unique environmental philosophy because it is double natured. As it is stated in the introduction of this study, this double nature is expressed in the twin domination thesis. Anthropocentrism, nonanthropocentrism, deep ecology, social ecology, ecotheology, and postmodern environmental ethics lack this specific “thinking at the crossroads.” Moreover, the feminism in ecofeminism forces ecofeminism to never lose sight of the concern and responsibility for human emancipation in general and for the emancipation of oppressed humans in particular. Furthermore, the eco in ecofeminism forces ecofeminism to combine its feministic humanism with a concern and responsibility for the wellbeing of non-human others as well. Of course, the combination of a concern for humans and nonhumans could rightfully be said about all variants of nonanthropocentrism. However, at least two things make ecofeminism unique in this regard. First, the feminist project is a more explicated and precise humanism than the species-oriented humanism in biocentrism,

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ecocentrism, deep ecology, and general anthropocentrism because ecofeminism identifies individual as well as patriarchal structural oppression. Second, ecofeminism conditions the emancipation of humans with the emancipation of nonhumans, claiming that one can never happen without the other.

The analysis of ecofeminism in this study shows some result of the fact that ecofeminism as no other environmental discourse originates and develops in the tension between feminism (humanism) and nonanthropocentrism. Although it is hard to establish that there are causal relationships between the double nature of ecofeminism and the ways in which ecofeminism handles the ethical theoretical tensions, I suggest that there are reasons to believe that the explicated double nature of ecofeminism has something to do with the fact that it entails this variety of theoretical standpoints. The following is a presentation of the distinctive character of ecofeminism as a double natured ethical theory in terms of some of these tensions.

The first tension is between the individual and the social. The fact that ecofeminism is rooted in feminism, which is forced to handle the need for emancipation of individual women and of the global community of women, ecofeminism deals with similar tensions. One such tension is to theorize about the relationship between the self and the human and nonhuman other. The conception of the social self that ecofeminism favors is neither related externally nor related identically to other individuals or groups. The effort in ecofeminism to theorize in a way that maintains individual autonomy and agency, while it still acknowledges that selves are internally related to other humans and nonhumans, is a heritage from feminism as well as from descriptive holism. Moreover, the fact that ecofeminism highlights the risk of fusion of the self in a larger Self, is associated with knowledge drawn from critical feminist analysis of violence in families and the loss of agency that is essential for the maintenance of such oppressive practices. Taken as a whole, this study suggests that ecofeminist ethical theory takes as starting points, on the one hand the importance of individual choices and responsibilities, and on the other that social structures are oppressive as well as empowering. This becomes especially clear concerning social and individual constructivism, context as individual perspectives and relationships, as well as concerning context as social structures and historic processes, and the conceptions of locus and origin of nature’s value.

The second tension is between nature and culture. This is expressed in descriptive as well as normative terms. The unique combination of normative feminist humanist and bio- and ecocentric claims, calls for full attention to the moral significance of women (humans) as well as for

69 Moreover, ecofeminist human concern is more specified than a class-oriented humanism in social ecology.

70 See the introduction in this study for a brief survey over characteristics of feminist ethics.
nonhumans, simultaneously. In fact, following ecofeminism the “intrinsic value” of humans and of nonhumans, which ecofeminism takes as starting point, cannot be manifested separately. Moreover, the ecofeminist social constructivism and descriptive contextualism show how “nature” is dependent on nature, ”culture” on culture and vice versa.

In addition, the origin and existence of nature’s intrinsic value and worth is often considered to be a product of relationships between nature and humanity or between particular humans and particular nonhuman others. This tension between nature and culture is also expressed in ecofeminist conceptions of the self, which in some versions become a critical approach towards a dualistic understanding of organisms and machines. The conception of the cyborg and other hybrid conceptions in ecofeminism reflect an effort to establish the idea that the meaning of being human is as much a matter of relationships with machines as with nature and nature-others. The fact that the body and embodied experiences are central in ecofeminist ethical theory is associated with early feminist theory that focused on highlighting typically marginalized, with femininity associated, “female” perspectives.

The third tension is between universal and contextual aspects. The fact that ecofeminist ethics defends ethical contextualism is associated with the effort in feminist theory to theorize out of the experiences of the oppressed. The fact that ecofeminist ethical theory is contextual per se and that it shows great variety regarding this matter may be seen as a development of this feminist project. Moreover, the fact that ecofeminism entails universal as well as contextual claims can be interpreted as a way of dealing with the fact that the oppression of individuals sometimes needs universal (global) attention and vice versa. This tension between the global and the local can of course also be seen as a heritage from the environmentalism movement as well.

The fourth and final tension is between fixed and fluid meaning as well as between found and created knowledge. Ecofeminism recognizes that the meanings of nature, men, women, self, morals, ethics, culture, and so on and so forth are maintained and changed intersubjectively. However, ecofeminism also recognizes that this does not necessarily amount to arbitrary changes or instability of meaning. The fact that the meanings of nature are socially construed, constructed, and invented and as such dependent on contextual aspects, allows for an intersubjectively maintained existence and justification. Ecofeminism tries to grasp the tension between the fact that nature is out there, for us to know and to get to know, and, the thesis that knowledge of nature are to a certain degree reflections of social processes. Knowledge of nature is socially constructed but never invented. This means that nature-knowledge is indirect a product of individual perspectives and relationships with nature-others and as such, in order to
maintain as knowledge, put to intersubjectively maintained standards of coherent evaluation rather than standards of corresponding evaluation.

Whether we find ecofeminist ethical theory and its theoretical “double natured” approach I have accounted for in this conclusion, to be theoretically acceptable is still an open question. I have tried to show that an ecofeminist distinctive characteristic is that it, because it dwells on the twin domination thesis, is forced to deal with some of the challenges in environmental ethics in a way that does not allow for definite either-or theoretical standpoints. The multifaceted appearance of ecofeminist ethical theory in general can thus be understood as an expression of the combination of concern for nature and feminist concern. Whether this approach amounts to theoretical advantages or disadvantages is a question to be discussed in chapter eight.
Chapter 8
Ecofeminist Ethical Theory – Advantages and Disadvantages

This chapter answers the last main question of this study: What are the advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory? Furthermore, a standpoint of my own will be suggested.

The chapter begins with a presentation of four criteria on which the analysis will be based. These standards of evaluation are of equal importance, which means that they cohere rather than being ordered hierarchically. Sometimes the criteria overlap and presuppose one another. Still, they are not of equal relevance for every issue discussed, and therefore they will not be applied equally.

The focus through out the whole chapter is theory acceptance. However, the aim is not to prove theoretical acceptance of ecofeminist ethical theory. Rather, the aim is to illuminate the advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory.

Standards of Evaluation

Critical discussions concerning the reasonableness of ethical theories are always based on certain criteria that are needed in order for an ethical theory to be theoretically acceptable. The following discussion is no exception in this respect and is based on four such criteria. It should be noted that this list is not comprehensive and that it is open for challenges. Nevertheless, it pinpoints some crucial aspects, which need to be considered.

The criteria are based on the idea that environmental ethical theories ought to be “practical.” A practical approach is case-oriented and regards theories as tools, to be used in order to understand and handle environmental and development problems. Consequently, a “practical environmental ethical theory” withholds that in one way or the other the ethicist ought to engage in environmental cases as they are manifested in our lives. An applied ethical
theory on the other hand is characterized by developing general and abstract principles independent of such practice. Moreover, it seeks to apply beforehand-developed principles to actual cases. In contrast, the ideal practical environmental ethical theory is one that develops through interaction with actual cases.¹

The first criterion is that environmental ethical theory ought to be action guiding in two specific meanings.² First, it ought to be action guiding in the sense that it should provide us with an understanding of different kinds of relationships between humans and nonhumans and kinds of cases of moral dilemmas. That is to say, it ought to provide a sense for the field of relevant environmental problems in general. Second, it ought to be action guiding in particular. This means that it ought to be relevant for particular environmental moral dilemmas as well.

The second criterion is that an acceptable environmental ethical theory ought to be precise.³ This means that it ought to be expressed in such a way that it allows us to understand the general message, and that it ought to be reasonably precise regarding the consequences of its normative claims. That is, if an environmental ethical theory claims that we ought to consider contextual aspects, this means that a reasonable demand is that it ought to illuminate the meaning of context, the meaning of what it means to consider contextual aspects, etc. The practical implications, for the ethicist as well as for the non-ethicist, regarding contextualism ought to be clearly stated.

A third criterion is that an environmental ethical theory ought to be comprehensive.⁴ That is to say, it should not be too narrow in scope and considerations, which means that it initially ought to take equal consideration to several seemingly contradicting normative principles. One aspect of comprehensive ethics is that it does not disqualify any theoretical standpoint in beforehand. That is to say, that it recognizes that all theoretical standpoints might have something of importance to add. Another aspect is that it recognizes that contexts and environmental and development cases are not necessarily autonomous. That is so say, each case of environmental dilemma should be seen as possibly having something important to add to the understanding and handling of other dilemmas. There might be shared characteristics and traits among the relevant cases, which, if recognized, might result in efficient and more informed conclusions on the practical significance of the theories in question.

¹ Norton, (1996) 1998, pp. 199-200. This discussion follows Norton’s distinction between “applied philosophy” and “practical philosophy.”
² The idea that Environmental ethical theories ought to be action guiding is not uncommon in environmental ethics. See for instance Stone, 1995, p. 246, see also Hargrove, 1989, pp. 5-9, and Callicott 1999, pp. 153-158.
A fourth criterion is that an environmental ethical theory ought to reflect reality. Following the claims of social constructivism and critical realism, this can of course be a controversial criterion. However, it is based on the presupposition that all humans share a life on this earth that most of us experience as real, although we might define its ontological and epistemic status differently. Here, I am inspired by the French sociologist Bruno Latour’s view. He argues that modern science does not represent the ecological crisis properly because it compartmentalizes environmental problems into autonomous problems of either nature, or, culture, or, discourse. Latour holds that environmental and development problems such as for instance cases like the hole in the ozone layer, the explosion in Bhopal, the Exxon Valdez accident, or the Chernobyl catastrophe are “…neither objective nor social, nor are they effects of discourse, even though they are real, and collective, and discursive.” Following this, the fourth criteria states that environmental ethical theory ought to reflect that environmental cases are simultaneously real, collective, and discursive.

Where is Nature Anyway?

In the following, I shall focus on human/nature dualism. This is only one aspect of the ecofeminist views of nature accounted for in this study, however, it is one of the basic presuppositions in any view of nature, and therefore one of the most interesting ones for environmental ethics as well as for everyday life.

A human/nature dualism can be descriptive as well as normative and I will argue that an acceptable ecofeminist ethical theory ought to reject both variants. Descriptive dualism ought to be rejected because it does not reflect actual human-nature relationships. This is not necessarily a claim that it should be rejected on the grounds that it does not correspond to objective reality. Rather, I argue that descriptive dualism contradicts scientific claims about the relationship between humans and nonhumans. What I have in mind is the simple statement that we are all creatures of and on this earth. The only reason to accept descriptive dualism is if it can be shown, in descriptive terms, that the differences between humans and nonhumans (or between “humanity” and “nature”) are unique compared to the differences between nonhumans, which, I claim, is not the case. From the perspective of a wide view of nature informed by ideas of ecological interdependence, it seems as

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6 See Newton & Dillingham, 1997 and Löthman, 1987, for presentations of these cases and other.
7 Latour, (1991) 1999, pp. 6. On p. 4, Latour writes: “…I will use the word ‘collective’ to describe the association of humans and nonhumans and ‘society’ to designate one part only of our collectives, the divide invented by the social sciences.”

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if the idea that there are essentially different differences between humans and nonhumans is problematic. It should be noted that this is not an argument against differences between and among humans and nonhumans as such, nor is it an argument in favor of biological reductionism. Rather it is an argument against the idea that there are differences between humans and nonhumans that are of a unique kind.\footnote{This does not mean that is impossible to value the differences between humans and nonhumans differently, or that we value humans differently than we value nonhumans.}

Latour’s view of the world affirms a rejection of descriptive dualism. Although Latour’s theory is too complex to be handled in detail here, his idea of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects illuminates and affirms that a descriptive dualism is part of a view of reality separated into nature/culture/discourse, which, according to Latour, is false. Latour claims:

Of quasi-objects, quasi-subjects, we shall simply say that they trace networks. They are real, quite real, and we humans have not made them. But they are collective because they attach us to one another, because they circulate in our hands and define our social bond by their very circulation. They are discursive, however; they are narrated, historical, passionate, and peopled with actants of autonomous forms.\footnote{Latour, (1991) 1999, p. 90.}

The point made by Latour is that a view of the world, which consists of objects and subjects, which are identified within and according to three “repertoires” of the modern mind; nature, culture, and discourse is based on the misunderstanding that the world consists of these disparate elements.\footnote{Latour, (1991) 1999, pp. 88-90. Latour speaks of four repertoires, and adds “Being” to culture, nature, and discourse. I only discuss three of the “repertoires.”} In contrast, Latour claims that the world consists of quasi-objects and subjects, which are essentially and simultaneously nature, culture, and discourse.\footnote{Latour, (1991), 1999, p. 90.}

According to Latour, one consequence of the fact that naturalists, sociologists, and interpreters stress their perspectives on environmental problems is that the gap between the three grows wider and firmer. Meanwhile, quasi-objects and subjects maintain their existence in the spaces between nature/culture/discourse. In fact, life takes place in these spaces in-between.\footnote{Latour, (1991), 1999, p. 42. “By rendering mixtures unthinkable, by emptying, sweeping, cleaning and purifying the arena that is opened in the central space defined by their three sources of power, the moderns allowed the practice of mediation to recombine all possible monsters without letting them have any effect on the social fabric, or even any contact with it.”}

A view of nature that contains a descriptive human/nature dualism cannot be acceptable since it does not take into account the fact that people, animals, plants, machines, ideas, are simultaneously social-natural-discursive. It should be noted that Ecofeminism does recognize that descriptive dualism ought to be problematized. Examples of this are the efforts to conceptualize an ecosocial self without it being fused with nature,
the conception of the cyborg, and ecofeminist constructivism. However, I would like to suggest that the fact that nature as such (Merchant), nonhuman others (Warren and McFague), and human and nonhuman communities (Cuomo) are given significant importance, as nonhuman, can partly be explained by the fact that ecofeminist nondualistic standpoints has not yet been fully developed.

Latour claims that if we try to bridge the gap between nature and culture by replacing dualistic views of nature by taking our refuge to culture (there is nothing but culture), to nature (there is nothing but nature), or to discourse (there is nothing but text), the result is a fixation of the gap.

On the basis that this is a reasonable standpoint, which seems to be to me, I conclude that in order to refrain from maintaining the gap, we ought to abandon compartmentalized views of culture/nature/discourse altogether. That is to say, the place- and process-oriented views accounted for in chapter one, ought to be rejected because they uphold the idea of such a gap. In fact, this separation is sometimes regarded by nonfeminist environmental ethicists to be necessary in order for morality to exist, as well in order for a genuine respect for nature to exist.

Descriptive dualism often develops into or supports a normative dualism. What starts as a distinction (“nature/culture,” “heaven/earth,” “mind/matter”), easily becomes a separation (wilderness/city, wild/domesticated), which turns into a contradiction (what nature is, culture is not and vice versa). Although differences as such are not normative, as far as normative dualism is concerned, descriptive dualism is a necessary requisite for the existence of normative dualism.

In this discussion, I presuppose that humans and nonhumans are internal members of social, natural, and discursive networks. Is such a standpoint consistent with normative human/nature dualism? My answer is that it is not and that any view of nature that upholds a normative human/nature dualism is hard to accept.

This study shows that normative dualism is common in nonfeminist environmental ethics as well as in ecofeminism. According to Erik Katz, we ought to leave nature alone because nature in general has a unique authenticity that is violated if humans interfere with nature. Chris Cuomo and Carolyn Merchant also support normative dualism. Chris Cuomo’s claim that ecofeminists “…promote the unhindered unfolding of nonhuman life through policies of (human) nonintervention” does not presuppose any authenticity of nature that is maintained only through the separation between humanity and nature. However, she argues: “…nonhuman flourishing that do not require human intervention are superior to flourishing brought about by human interference in nonhuman processes and life, other things being

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13 See Latour, (1991), 1999, p. 59, for a comment on this line of development of what can be referred to as dualistic thinking.
equal.”14 It seems as if this claim is based on the idea that entities (individuals, groups) that are capable of flourishing have a kind of integrity and self-directedness.15 This resembles Merchant’s claim that we ought to let nature be because it is “fundamentally chaotic.” This means that Merchant takes the fact that nature is chaotic as a reason in favor of the idea that nature is a subject and therefore ought to be left alone. Merchant holds that we ought to, so to speak, let nature has its privacy.16 A claim that is similar to Cuomo’s claim that autonomous nonhuman flourishing is superior and ought to be promoted.

In other words, I suggest that normative dualism ought to be rejected because it presupposes a descriptive geographical or a process-oriented dualism. This objection concerns the possibility to separate human and nonhuman life processes. This has been discussed above but I would like to affirm my objection and question whether a descriptive geographical and process-oriented dualism is acceptable. Questions concerning internal relationships should be answered by ecologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Nevertheless, if we, as some ecofeminists do, claim the superiority of nonhuman flourishing, we need to presuppose that nonhuman flourishing is autonomous. That nonhuman flourishing is autonomous seems to be a contradiction in terms if we are to follow Cuomo’s process-oriented view of nature and anti-atomistic conception of the self and her view that nature and culture are internally related.17 For example, given that humans and nonhumans are internally related, how can there be completely autonomous processes of flourishing? Moreover, this standpoint needs to presuppose that somewhere in the process of life there exists a break between the human and the nonhuman, which from a perspective of ecology and biology seems hard to accept.

However, a view of nature that contains claims that we ought to refrain from interaction with nonhumans, is acceptable if it is precise on the nature of this interaction as well as on the identity of the areas and processes in question. Furthermore, it can be acceptable if it explicates the reasons for nonintervention in other terms than in terms of normative dualism. Consequently, in order for ecofeminism to be theoretically acceptable it ought to abandon descriptive and normative dualism because these standpoints maintain a false view of the relationship between humans and nonhumans. Furthermore, these standpoints seem to be too vague, which also weakens ecofeminism as action guiding practical environmental ethical theory.

14 Cuomo, 1998: p. 76.
15 Cuomo, 1998, p. 76. “…ecological feminists also stress the ethical value of integrity and self-directedness for nonhuman entities, including communities…”
16 Merchant, 1996, p. 221.
17 See chapters two and six on my interpretation of Cuomo’s standpoints regarding these matters.

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Claims that we ought to leave nonhumans alone are formally acceptable if they are precise and as long as they take their starting point in practice. That is, claims that certain particular nonhuman individuals, populations, ecosystems, processes, and places that it is possible for humans not to interfere with directly, may or may not, be left alone, are acceptable. A normative and pragmatic environmental policy is stronger however, if it reflects on and maintains the view that there are no autonomous social and natural entities or spheres. That is to say, that there are only nature-culture-discursive spheres and entities. The reasons why we ought to maintain a hands-off policy are better explicated in other terms than dualistic terms. Regarding this, Cuomo and Merchant both fail.

The fact that it is, from the perspective of ecology, questionable to maintain ideas of a nature/culture dichotomy is a challenge for environmental ethical theory. Because of its double nature, ecofeminism is well equipped to meet this challenge but in order to do so ecofeminism needs to be more precise on these matters and continue to develop nondualistic views of nature.

Is the nonfeminist non-dualistic view of nature-culture as the potentially wild an acceptable view? To speak of nature, culture, and discourse in terms that do not reflect a dichotomized relationship between the three is complicated because this dichotomization and the human/nature dualism is the horizon against which we lead our lives within most Western cultures. To create a nondualistic language means abandoning deeply rooted ideas of how “things” are. Nature-culture as the potentially wild can be interpreted as one effort to conceptualize Latour’s view. However, this constructive task needs time and dialogue in order to succeed.

Anything Goes with Nature as a Construct

In the following, two problems with ecofeminist social constructivism will be discussed, normative relativism and dualistic constructivism. Regarding relativism, I will argue that social constructivism does not necessarily amount to arbitrary relativism. Furthermore, I will argue against ecofeminist individual-oriented constructivism and in favor of ecofeminist social constructivism. Regarding dualistic constructivism, I will argue against ecofeminist dualistic constructivism and suggest a more “pluralistic” conception.
Normative Relativism and Explicated Systems of Reference

We know from earlier chapters that one reason for rejecting ecofeminist social constructivism is that it is supposed to imply normative relativism, which is based on that normative relativism is supposedly unacceptable. The reason why it is unacceptable is that it is assumed that normative relativism implies that shared moral standards do not exist and that, consequently, the fact that someone has the opinion that for instance the act to make parking lots of the entire forest area in the north of Sweden is morally right, makes that a right thing to do.¹⁸

Ecofeminist social constructivism amounts to relativism or rather to relativism. However, does this make rational choices between views of nature based on ecofeminist social constructivism impossible? We know from earlier chapters that ecofeminism does not deny the existence of nature-as-it-is. Accordingly, ecofeminist social constructivism does not imply ontological relativism. However, according to some versions of ecofeminist social constructivism (at least Warren and McFague) we do not have epistemic access to nature as it is. As I conclude in chapter seven this can be interpreted as a kind of ontological relativism, because if all we got are models of nature, models of nature are all that exist (for us), which means that nature is constituted by social processes.

This is a good point, however, even so it seems as if the critique against social constructivism for being normative relativistic is only relevant for individual constructivism and not for social constructivism. The processes of social constructivism occur in the tension between the individual as a carrier of the construes, constructs, and inventions, and the social structures and values that maintain them. Thus, social constructivism can emphasize either the individual or the social perspective. Karen Warren and Sallie McFague stress the individual perspective rather than the social while Cuomo and Merchant stress the opposite.

If the construes, constructions, and inventions were individual rather than intersubjectively maintained phenomena, I would agree that there is a risk of anything-goes-policies and the ethic in question would be problematic in terms of action guidance. Regardless which aspects of nature that are products of human processes, if these processes are not maintained intersubjectively hence evaluated intersubjectively (as for instance Cuomo’s version of social constructivism and contextualism indicates that they are) we could end up in the arbitrary situation as the one Peterson criticizes.

However, the idea of isolated and autonomous individual constructivism seems to be unreasonable because constructs always need a social context in

order to be maintained and normatively as well as epistemologically justified. We are not creatures in isolation and our concepts, values, and views of nature are constantly changing as they are challenged intersubjectively by other concepts, values, and views of nature. It may take time, and the challenge may be weaker or stronger, but eventually views of nature that we find unreasonable are changed for other views of nature. Following this, the reason why social constructivism possibly could amount to a policy problem is if it lacks a system of reference per se and not that it lacks a system of reference to nature-as-it-is, which is never the case. Alternatively, we do not need epistemic corresponding access to nature-as-it-is in order to rationally determine whether one conduct is better than another, and it is still possible to determine that one view of nature is more reasonable than an alternative view.

For example, using coherence criteria for epistemic justification, we can come to agree on the reasonableness of a view of nature as a fragile biological process in favor of a view of nature as our partner.

Thus, the fact that the social constructivism put forward by Karen Warren, Chris Cuomo, and Carolyn Merchant do not explicate such a system is a reason for criticism because a social constructivism that does not explicate its system of reference ought to be rejected in favor of one that does. That is to say, what we need is explicated standards for a proper conduct and for acceptable views, criteria put to intersubjective scrutiny.

Sallie McFague provides us with an example of an ecofeminist social constructivism that does explicate such criteria. According to McFague, views of nature are models of nature, and for acceptable models, she offers the following criteria:

…no model, whether in science or religion, is ever evaluated by itself apart from the network in which it appears. Models are paradigm-dependent – there is no innocent eye; hence, the principle criterion for judging a model, even in science, is not whether it corresponds with the “facts,” but whether it fits in the schema of “facts” as understood by a given paradigm.  

From this follows that McFague’s social constructivism does not result in arbitrary relativism because she offers a number of criteria to justify why we ought to adopt certain models of nature instead of others. She claims that making reasonable judgments is not a matter of finding correspondence between the judgment on the one hand and nature-as-it-is on the other, rather it is a matter of internal, intra contextual, horizontal coherence. Different models are put up against each other, not against nature-as-it-is; there are no

19 See Stern, (1985) 2000, for a discussion in terms of development psychology about our development as selves in social contexts and relationships.
20 Historical analyses as the one conducted by Merchant in The Death of Nature, support this claim.
foundational statements, hence epistemic justification is a matter of consistency of a body of beliefs.

One way of expressing this is that, following McFague, judgments that are based upon views of nature that measure up to these standards may not be true, but they might be responsible, something, which might be as good a foundation for normative judgments as we can possibly have. McFague offers five criteria:

1. Internal consistency and comprehensiveness.
2. Experiential consistency
3. External consistency
4. Ideological coherence
5. Normative advantages

According to the criterion of internal consistency and comprehensiveness, any view of nature conveys a pattern of interlocking sub models; the model of humans as in symbiosis with nature for instance, the model of earth as holistic system, humans as caretakers or not, etc. A rational view of nature has to make coherent sense of all its sub-models. This means that a rational view of nature cannot consume “diametrically opposed or contrary” sub models. For instance, a view of nature as an organism ought not to entail a sub-model of nature as a machine and humans as externally related to the other parts of the organism of nature. However, a responsible view of nature must be comprehensive, it must be able to cope with “…anomalies – events, factors, and experiences which strain [a model] beyond its ability to cope…” For example, the view of nature as an organism must be, as a conceptual system (theory), able to endure experiences that challenge this particular view – if these are “…otherwise comprehensive and fruitful.” In other words, a responsible view of nature must endure some amount of internal tensions without loosing its, in lack of better words, social stability.

Second, the criterion of experiential consistency tells us that a responsible view of nature must be consistent with our embodied experiences of nature. A responsible model cannot presume something about nature, which is not confirmed by our “felt” experiences of nature. Moreover, since McFague

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22 McFague, 1993, p. 239, n. 54.
23 McFague, 1993, pp. 84-91.
24 This conception of having responsible views or beliefs are inspired by Timmons, 1996, where he outlines a contextualist moral epistemology and discusses epistemological justification in terms of responsibility.
25 McFague, 1982, pp. 139-143; 1993, pp. 84-91.
26 McFague, 1982, pp. 139-140.
30 McFague, 1982, p. 139-140.
withholds that all experiences are embodied, a responsible model should not contradict embodied needs.

Third, the criterion of external consistency means that a responsible view of nature must be consistent with the present, dominant view of reality. For instance, it would be irresponsible to uphold a view of nature that we know contradicts (or cannot comprehend) the physical laws of nature. Moreover, the third criterion regards a responsible view of nature to be ideologically coherent. This means that a view of nature ought to be coherent with the beliefs, which we share with others in our religious, spiritual, political, ethical, moral, etc, communities.

These three criteria for responsible views of nature serve an overall purpose, to illuminate our relationship with nature, which is the fourth criterion. A view of nature that does not illuminate ("interpret, explain, make sense of") our relationship with nature is not acceptable.

The fifth and last criterion concerns normative advantages. This means that a responsible view suggests a direction to make things better. It is not responsible to adopt a view of nature if it in fact, or if one has strong reasons to believe, that the consequences that follow from adopting such a view of nature are in fact making things worse, in comparison with other alternative views. According to McFague, “…knowledge is not just a speculative matter but has a practical end: to make things better.” In McFague’s terminology, this means putting an end to unnecessary embodied suffering, regardless of species. This last criterion overrides all other criteria. McFague summarizes her criteria like this:

In assessing a model for adoption, we do (or should) base our judgment on many factors, among them, our own concrete, embodied experience; the insights and beliefs of the communities commanding our deepest allegiance; the picture of reality current in our time; and also, whether the model will help us live so that human beings and other creatures can thrive and reach some level of fulfillment.

In order to avoid falling into arbitrariness, an ecofeminist social constructivism ought to be outlined as follows. First, it should not stress the individual perspective but rather the social perspective. Second, the criteria for a responsible view of nature should be clear and explicated. Third, these criteria as well as the views of nature they serve to justify, should be put to intersubjective scrutiny.

32 See chapter six on McFague’s conception of an embodied self.
37 McFague, 1993, pp. 88-90.
40 Of course, there are always the problems of participation and fair representation. My argument depends on and is based on whether those humans and nonhumans that will be
From this does not follow that McFague’s criteria are acceptable. The point here is to discuss what is required of social constructivism in order for us to be able to determine whether it is an acceptable standpoint or not. It is not the point to determine the theoretical acceptability of such criteria. In order to do this, additional standards must be presented.

To conclude, ecofeminist individual constructivism is problematic because it does not submit itself to intersubjective standards of epistemological justification. On these grounds, ecofeminist social constructivism is acceptable provided that it explicates the criteria for responsible views of nature, because only then does it submit itself to intersubjective scrutiny, which is needed in order to establish rational environmental policies and acceptable environmental ethics.

Ecofeminist Dualistic Construism

One problem with ecofeminist constructivism is the affiliation with dualism. Ecofeminist dualistic constructivism presupposes a dialectic constructive process that takes place in between “nature” and “culture.” It tells us that the meaning of nature and culture is the result of the internal relationship between the two. It seems as if the idea of dualistic constructivism presupposes one of the dichotomies that Bruno Latour claims is a product of the modern mind. He states:

Are you not fed up at finding yourselves forever locked into language alone, or imprisoned in social representations alone […] The real is not remote; rather, it is accessible in all the objects mobilized throughout the world. Doesn’t external reality abound right here among us?

Do you not have more than enough of being continually dominated by a Nature that is transcendent, unknowable, inaccessible, exact, and simply true […] The collectives we live in are more active, more productive, more socialized than the tiresome things-in-themselves led us to expect.

Are you not a little tired of those sociologies constructed around the Social only […] Our collectives are more real, more naturalized, more discursive then the tiresome humans-among-themselves led us to expect.

Are you not fed up with language games, and with the eternal skepticism of the deconstruction of meaning? Discourse is not a world unto itself but a population of actants that mix with things as well as with societies, uphold the former and the latter alike, and hold on to them both.⁴¹

This quote is an example of how Latour expresses his view that environmental problems such as for instance the enhanced greenhouse effect are natural, social, and discursive, simultaneously. With this view of reality in mind, ecofeminist dualistic constructivism is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it presupposes a separation between discourse and nature, between theory and practice. One example of this presupposition is Warren’s central thesis that the value-dualistic thinking in “the logic of

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dominion,” is essential for oppressive patriarchal conceptual frameworks. That is to say, that value-dualistic thinking (dualistic construism) operates solely in the sphere of discourse. A second example of this presupposition is the manner in which Cuomo presents the interplay between oppressive and liberating social groups, between “nature” and “culture,” between ecological communities and human communities. These ideas seem to imply that the social, the natural, and the discursive are autonomous.

Sallie McFague’s constructivism, which takes as starting point the epistemic dichotomy between nature-as-it-is and nature language can also be interpreted as an expression of a dualistic constructivism that maintains the gap between nature, society, and discourse. Although McFague, who subscribes to critical realism, tries to connect discourse (language), social contexts and social processes, and nature, the fact that she so vividly contrasts language, nature, and moral agents confirms the disparity of these three spheres. This is clear in the way in which she throughout her work emphasizes that models can never be descriptions of reality. That is to say, McFague’s metaphor theory is based on the reality/discourse dichotomy. Given the view of the world coming from Latour, dualistic constructivism seems not to reflect the way things are.

Merchant too, who emphasizes that meanings of nature are socially construed and constructed as a result of interplay between social physical constructions of nature-as-it-is (landscaping, mills, furnaces, etc.), social processes (enlightenment, scientific revolution), and nature-as-it-is, can be interpreted as a standpoint based on interplay between the three spheres - an interplay, which actually presupposes that these spheres are or were autonomous and separate.42

A second objection against dualistic constructivism is that it only takes two “sides” into consideration. Is it really so that meaning and knowledge of nature are products of a dual process? Even if it turns out that nature, society, and discourse are disparate and autonomous spheres, the variety in nature, society, and discourse seems to be much more complex than dualistic constructivism acknowledges. Although it can be argued that this argument must be affirmed by ecologists, sociologists, and psychologists, however, from my perspective and on the grounds of everyday experience, meaning and knowledge seem to be constructed through anything but a dual process. I would suggest that an acceptable social constructivism ought to reflect the complexity of social, natural, and discursive variety in such a way that it at least recognizes that the meaning and knowledge of nature are sometimes products of plural processes rather than merely dual processes.

42 See Latour, (1991) 1999, p. 39. “Yet the modern world has never happened, in the sense that it has never functioned according to the rules of its official Constitution alone: it has never separated the three regions of Being I have mentioned...”[Emphasis added] Here Latour stresses that although we act as if these spheres are separated, they have actually never been separated.
Such a social constructivism would not limit itself to dual processes of construing, construction, and invention. Rather, it would recognize that the processes of social constructivism might be plural processes, that is, it might not always be the case that meaning, knowledge, and physical aspects of nature as-it-is are the results of only dualistic processes. That is to say, it seems reasonable to assume that objects, entities, and processes in nature-culture have not only ontological dual opposites or complements but are also related to objects, entities, and processes, which are not their exact opposite or complement as it is presupposed in for instance conceptual dualism. This means that it seems reasonable to assume that such nondualistic relationships also are constitutive in the processes of social constructivism.

To conclude, ecofeminist social constructivism ought to be more precise regarding systems of reference in order to gain the social stability that is needed in order for its ethical theory to be action guiding. Moreover, ecofeminist dualistic constructivism ought to be rejected in favor of a constructivism that does not presuppose dichotomies between nature, culture, and discourse. In addition, ecofeminist dualistic constructivism ought to be rejected in favor of a more pluralistic constructivism, because such an approach seems to reflect the complexity of life to a higher degree.

Valuing Nature at the End of the Day

The following discussion is an attempt to discuss some of the aspects of an acceptable ecofeminist conception of nature’s value. I will argue against subjectivism and in favor of a conception of nature’s value that is not limited to positive attitudes. Moreover, I will argue against a fixed locus of nature’s value. Finally, I will argue in favor of a concept of worth rather than a concept of value.

Three Arguments against Ecofeminist Value Subjectivism

Karen Warren’s version of subjectivism can be criticized, not because it results in arbitrariness, but because it fails to encompass important aspects of the relationship between humans and nonhumans. Supposedly, Warren’s subjectivism does not give us the action-guidance that is needed.

Karen Warren identifies the intrinsic value of nature with the positive attitude of love. According to Warren, intrinsic-value statements concerning nature refer to the attitude of love towards nature. This can be problematic because a conception of value that is reduced to references to positive attitudes of love towards nature seems to be too limited regarding the locus of value.
It might seem wrong to criticize a value theoretical standpoint because it is limited since such critique simply dismisses the value theoretical standpoint in question on the grounds that it is the standpoint it is. However, it seems reasonable to criticize a value theoretical standpoint based on its alleged normative consequences, which is what I am doing here. That is to say, on the basis that environmental ethics ought to be generally action guiding, Warren’s subjectivism seems problematic since it limits the field of relevance to those entities that are loved. This standpoint is based on the notion that it seems reasonable to assume that there might be good reasons to believe that other creatures, creatures that are not loved by any human being, are also worthy of our respect. This argument is based on a claim that sometimes our intrinsic value statements seem to refer to something else or something more than an attitude of love.

For example, if ideas of nature’s non-utility value are to be action guiding, and if we are laying out an environmental policy regarding the preservation of the natural variety on a given place based on Warren’s conception of intrinsic value, this will be a policy that excludes all the nonhumans in that place that are not loved. This seems to be a too narrow starting point.

An additional objection is that if we apply Warren’s subjectivism to future generations it seems as if sometimes our intrinsic value statements do not refer to attitudes of love. For example, it seems as if the claim, “we ought to morally consider the future Bear generations” sometimes does not refer to that we love these not yet existing Bears. That is to say, it seems problematic to love something that does not yet exist, thus it seems as if it is not clear in what way love of nature includes not yet existing nonhumans, which indicates that in some cases when we are making intrinsic value statements, these statements refer to something more or beyond attitudes of love.43

Warren’s subjectivism can also be criticized on the ground that it portrays environmental morality as a matter of choosing either destructive attitudes or positive attitudes towards nature, which seems to reflect a morality that is one-sided. That is to say, it seems to presuppose that there is only one proper attitude to take towards nature at the time, which to my mind is a standpoint that does not take the ambivalence, ambiguities, and contradictions that relationships between humans and nonhumans in certain cases sometimes consist of, into consideration. In other words, Warren’s subjectivism can be criticized for being too limited regarding the question of moral significance. Warren’s conception of intrinsic value is charged with merely positive content, and, to love, to value intrinsically, is a purely positive, linear, and logic endeavor. However, relationships are hardly as one-sided as Warren pictures them in her story of the rock climber. It seems as if a more reasonable view would be that the situations in which we relate morally to

43 It is important to note that this objection concerns the normative consequences of value subjectivism and that I do not claim that love is necessarily insignificant in value theory.
nonhuman others, who we bestow “intrinsic” value, are at least as complex as the situations in which we relate to humans. This means that proper and improper attitudes are not as easily separated as Warren presupposes.  

In Favor of Flexible Locus of Value

A reasonable conception of the locus of nature’s intrinsic value or worth ought to be as flexible as possible in order for an environmental ethic to be as sensitive as possible towards the cases it is developed in cooperation with. This means that environmental ethics ought to embrace normative pluralism, that is, it ought to recognize that at least potentially, biocentric, ecocentric, and anthropocentric normative standpoints may be equally epistemically justified at the same time. The main reason for this is that a standpoint of normative pluralism is better equipped to help create sensitivity for the nature of cases of potential moral significance. Consequently, normative nonanthropocentric theories that do not limit the locus of value to a specific kind of nonhumans are preferable to ones that do.

It might seem as if what actually should be demanded of an action guiding normative theory is that it is precise on the locus of value, however, I will argue that we need ecofeminist ethics to be as open as possible regarding the locus of value in order to have practical use of it. The fact that, as Christopher Stone argues, normative theories map fields of significance, and that, as Anthony Weston claims, we still are “before environmental ethics,” which means that nonanthropocentric theories are still in process, means that we cannot expect a fixed locus of value at this time. Moreover, the fact that normative theories are always, to some extent, contextually legitimized, also supports this argument because from this follows that we ought to accept the potential justification of any normative environmental ethic.

The theoretical stability that is needed in order for an ethical theory to be action guiding is maintained if the reasons for its normative standpoints are explicated and put to intersubjective scrutiny, and not primarily by establishing a thesis on the locus of value that is supposed to be valid in all contexts for a foreseeable future.

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44 In addition, a consequence of Warren’s approach is the exclusion of other possible contextual aspects beyond attitudinal aspects, which might be at work simultaneously. For example, contextual aspects such as physical relationships with nonhumans, socioeconomic circumstances, oppressive group structures, to mention only some of the aspects that McFague, Merchant, and Cuomo represent.

45 See chapter 1, on ethical pluralism for a presentation of Stone’s view on this matter.

46 Weston, 1995, p. 223. Weston wants to draw our attention to the “…slow process of culturally constituting and consolidating values that underlies philosophical ethics as we know it.”

47 Epistemological contextualism is defended below.
There are at least two ways in which a normative theory can be too rigid; it can be either too particular (or narrow) or too universal (or wide). The locus of value can be fixed in the sense that it is associated with attitudes and emotions. As it is explained above regarding Warren’s subjectivism, the locus is determined to follow the direction of attitudes. Warren is not alone on this matter. McFague’s process-oriented conception of intrinsic worth limits the locus of worth to those entities that are possible to touch. Consequently, an intrinsic worth of species and landscapes cannot be established because it is impossible to touch them. In addition, according to Merchant’s conception of ecosocial goods, the intrinsic value is identical to that which is in the common interest of the human and natural communities. Hence, anything that falls outside the field of interest falls outside the field of significance.

On the other hand, an intrinsic value that is ascribed to nonhumans following an in beforehand-established set of criteria is too rigid as well. Examples of such limited theories within applied environmental ethics are anthropocentrism, according to which only humans have moral standing, biocentrism, according to which only living individuals have moral standing, and sentientism, according to which sentient animals have moral standing. An additional example is Chris Cuomo’s biocentrism, according to which the intrinsic value of nature is limited to living entities, which are of significant importance to humans. These criteria are steadfast which means that they are not as flexible as I argue that they should be in order to help map the field of significance, since they put forward only one or several specific criteria for the locus of value and does not explicitly argue in favor of several valid normative principles.

The disadvantage of ecofeminist conceptions of value due to their limitation concerning the field of significance can possibly be erased by the following tentative suggestion, which follows Stone’s normative pluralism. My suggestion concerns that the project of developing nonanthropocentric normative ethical theories should focus on developing theories that do not differentiate among nonhumans as anthropocentrism does not differentiate among humans. Consider the fact that we find differentiation among humans or among kinds of humans in moral terms preposterous. Still, this is what nonanthropocentrists are doing all the time with nonhumans. We rightfully find anthropocentric normative arguments based on certain criteria such as gender, race, class, intelligence, etc., immoral. However, despite the fact that we know that there is a growing sensibility towards nonhumans in this regard – people do respect nonhumans - the locus question is still on the theoretical agenda. If nonanthropocentrism should take its challenge to

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48 Sentientism is briefly mentioned in the introduction of this study. According to sentientism, only those entities that have a capacity to experience pleasure and pain are loci of intrinsic value.

49 Here I am referring to the growing global vegetarian and vegan movements.
anthropocentrism seriously, and I believe that it should, this is as much a moral outrage towards those people who have nonanthropocentric worldviews, as racist, sexist, and classist ethical standpoints are to humanists.

Therefore, because it is essential for a practical environmental ethics to not limit the field of significance in beforehand, one consequence of acknowledging several simultaneously justified normative standpoints is that the question of moral standing (intrinsic value) can be abandoned in favor of a focus on the question of moral weight (moral significance). This means that we place theoretical focus on solving actual problems of conflict that arises in actual cases of moral dilemmas as they are presented and defined from the perspective of several different normative theories.

How an undifferentiating nonanthropocentric theory will be outlined is a question that cannot be answered here. However, because of its double nature, ecofeminism has the advantage of having the unique potential to encompass and conceptualize a flexible locus of nature’s intrinsic value or worth, and, because it is also rooted in the feminist movement, it should be well equipped to handle challenges regarding the moral significance of all creatures on this planet. The fact that ecofeminism for different reasons sometimes refuses to engage in the project of developing theories of nature’s “intrinsic value” and “worth,” can be seen as a step in the right direction.

An Argument in Favor of Ecofeminist Ecogenic Origin of Value

Ecofeminist conceptions of value entail ideas of anthropogenic, ecogenic, biogenic, and theogenic origin of the intrinsic values or worth of nature. (From now on, I will not differentiate between theogenic and biogenic origin, since both entail the idea that values originate independently of humans.) In the following, I will argue that one advantage of ecofeminism is that it is well suited for the standpoint of ecogenic origin and intersubjective existence of nature’s intrinsic value. The reason why ecofeminism ought to embrace this theoretical standpoint is that this standpoint offers a sufficient amount of social stability that nonanthropocentric ethical theories need in order to be action guiding.

I have used the term social stability several times in this chapter. In using this term, I wish to stress that it is not necessary to establish a conception of objective intrinsic value of nature (objective origin) in order for “intrinsic value” of nature to be a legitimate basis for environmental ethics and policy. That is to say, a conception of value that is put to intersubjective scrutiny might have the social legitimacy that is needed.

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50 See the conclusion in chapter seven on “the double nature” of ecofeminism.
51 For a definition of ecogenic, etc. value, see chapter one in this study.
The idea of an ecogenic origin of value affirms the positive consequences of anthropogenic origin and biogenic origin and avoids some of the negative consequences. The positive consequence of anthropogenic origin as I am using the term here, is that it highlights that there is always an amount of individual responsibility since it is founded on a choice of conception of value.\(^{52}\) This point is made by several ecofeminists in this study. Especially Warren and McFague highlight that the ways in which we come to value nature, are always to some degree a matter of individual choice. In addition, even in those cases when we acknowledge theories that locate criteria for the value of nature within nature (biogenic origin), this acknowledgment is based on individual, more or less reflected upon, preferences. It seems problematic to escape from the fact that humans are at least part of the process of the origin of value and therefore, to refute the idea of anthropogenic origin seems to be a mistake. Morality as phenomenon is a strictly human business.

However, as I have argued above, the idea that nature’s intrinsic value or worth is entirely dependent upon individual attitudes is problematic. In addition, even though the idea that nature’s value has anthropogenic origin seems reasonable in the light of social and individual constructivism, nature’s value need nature as well as a social context in order to maintain existence. That is to say, the values of nature, which come to existence within a certain human individual or a certain group of humans, would not come to existence was there not a nature towards which these values aimed. In addition, they can only maintain their existence intersubjectively in an interhuman dialogue within/among those from which the values originate.\(^{53}\) This argument takes into account the positive consequence of biogenic origin; that values of nature have a considerable amount of stability in time as well as in the social contexts in which they operate.

Even though values of nature originate in a particular human (indirectly through a social process), they must be expressed, interacted upon, and socially accepted in order to maintain existence. Roughly speaking, the process of origin and maintained existence occur between nonhumans, the individuals in question, and other humans with whom they interact. Thus, although we can argue that a value of nature may maintain existence independent of a certain human individual in whom it originated, a conception of the existence of nature’s value independent of humans as such, and of interhuman interaction, seems unreasonable.\(^{54}\)

\(^{52}\) That this is the case is of course dependent upon whether a person’s capability to act upon his or her moral agency is not limited by oppression.

\(^{53}\) See Dancy, 1995, pp. 417-418, concerning meanings of “objectivity” that has inspired the distinction between “coming to existence” and “maintaining existence” in this study.

\(^{54}\) This can also be explained in terms of that we do not own our moralities, or in other words, that the nature of our moral views is always a matter of social interaction.
The fact that values of nature maintain existence intersubjectively means that they gain the social stability that arbitrary anthropogenic values might lack, thus they maintain one positive aspect of biogenic and theogenic value, that we ground our decisions on values that are more than expressions of opinions or attitudes. In addition, the fact that it recognizes that values are always to some extent anthropogenic means that it also avoids a de-contextualized value theory. This is important because, it forces us to maintain a dialogue concerning the moral significance of nonhumans in a way that objective notions of nature’s value not necessarily entail because they are per definition found, and not chosen.

Following this I would like to conclude that ecofeminist conceptions of value/worth could be improved in terms of action guidance, if the ideas of disparate anthropogenic and biogenic origins are abandoned. Instead, I suggest that ecofeminism should focus on developing ideas of ecogenic origin in the direction of McFague and Cuomo’s work.

Worth and Value – Concluding Remarks on Ecofeminist Conceptions of Value

To conclude this section on the values of nature, I would like to argue in favor of a conception of intrinsic worth rather than value. I regard Sallie McFague’s conception of nature’s intrinsic worth to be the most promising candidate for an acceptable ecofeminist conception of value.55

According to McFague’s standpoint, nature is looked upon as a subject, that is, someone in its own right, who we ought to respect. The reasons for this respect are that nature-others are beings in their own worlds, that is, that they are individuals who exist as “their own.” That is to say, the respect is not founded in our love or empathy with nature (Warren and Callicott), not in nature’s importance to us or in its capability to flourish (Cuomo and Taylor), not in the fact that nature and humans share the same interests of being treated fairly and with respect (Merchant). Rather, to have intrinsic worth, means to deserve the right to be looked upon as someone who is a subject of its own life.

A first argument in favor of McFague’s conception of worth of nature is that it resists differentiation among nonhumans. Of course, theories of worth of nonhumans can be, are, and should be differentiating regarding moral significance in times of conflict. However, the fact that “worth” is associated with Kantian ethics in which the respect for all people – regardless of their particularities – is essential, speaks in favor of McFague’s conception of worth, since the way in which she outlines the relationship between humans and nonhumans, resembles the notion of respect that can be associated with

55 Although Merchant, Cuomo, and Warren too talk of nature in terms of agency and subjecthood, this is most clearly expressed by McFague.
Kantian human centered ethics. In McFague’s version, all nonhumans are entitled to be respected because they exist, as others, in specific “worlds” of their own.\(^{56}\) In addition, McFague’s conception of worth has the advantage of bestowing nature with a moral standing that cannot be exchanged or out ruled by any other amount or kind of “value,” intrinsic or nonintrinsic.\(^{57}\)

A second argument in favor of McFague’s conception of worth is that it is not conditioned by positive feeling towards nature. It is not limited to biophilia and excessive romantic awes of nature, which makes it better equipped to deal with questions of moral significance because it reflects the often harsh reality of the relationships between humans and nonhumans.

A third argument in favor of McFague’s intrinsic worth is that it resists arbitrary environmental policies, compared to “intrinsic value,” since values are per definition qualitatively and quantitatively exchangeable.\(^{58}\) The reason for this is that the McFaguean “worth” of nature has ecogenic origin,\(^{59}\) which gives it a stability that biocentric origin lacks. The main reason for this is, as mentioned above, that an interhuman intersubjectively maintained worth of nature with ecogenic origin is potentially more stable than values of biogenic origin because it builds on a social constructivism, which forces us to keep its meaning constantly contested against other conceptions of value.\(^{60}\) This may seem to be an odd argument, since biogenic origin includes a notion of objective existence, which seems to be as stable a foundation as we could ask for. However, I look at the stability of objective value or worth as the stability of something that is very hard and firm but that easily cracks. That is to say, the notion of objective existence includes the notion that if it can be shown that the intrinsic value or worth of nature in question is not objective after all, it is exchanged for another conception of nature’s objective intrinsic value or worth, which supposedly is the truly objective value. The previous has cracked. In addition, the stability of conceptions of intersubjective origin and existence of value are like the stability of a fishing rod. That is to say, it seems to be weaker compared to a firm stick, but its flexibility and capacity to endure tension makes it actually more stable. This is explained by the fact that it, as I understand its meaning in this study, does not predetermine that there exist one conception of value that is the value we ought to embrace. This is so because it recognizes the legitimacy of several different notions of origins and existences of value.

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\(^{56}\) I have mentioned earlier that the fact that McFague links, what I refer to as the “intrinsic worth process” to acts of touching nonhumans, is problematic in terms of differentiation. The point here is however the matter of making a reflected choice between “worth” and “value.”

\(^{57}\) It should be noted that this discussion refers to the question of moral standing and not to the question of moral significance.

\(^{58}\) See chapter one for a definition of “value” and “worth.”

\(^{59}\) Here I have chosen to follow my interpretation of McFague’s worth of nature as having ecogenic origin.

\(^{60}\) See chapter three and five on McFague’s social constructivism and ethical contextualism.
A fourth argument in favor of McFague’s conception of worth is that it confirms that the values of nature are not products of either social processes or natural processes, but a combination of both. This is an advantage because it reflects reality as it is presented to us by ecologists, that humans and nonhumans are part of the same processes of life and that facts and values arise simultaneously in these processes.61 This standpoint is strengthened by ideas within psychology concerning the relationship between the subjective mind, objective body, and its social contexts, and, I would add, its ecological context.62 Although Cuomo also submits an ecogenic standpoint, McFague’s focus on individual responsibility makes her standpoint preferable.

Finally, McFague’s conception of intrinsic worth is attractive because its positive charge is the result of a conscious process of paying attention to nonhuman others. It is not as it is in Warren’s conception of non-utility value something with which you start the relationship. Rather it is a potential outcome of the relationship. Separating moral respect from merely romantic love opens up the possibility to respect nature even though you do not like nature. This is only possible if the concept of love is, perhaps internally but not identically, related to the concept of value or worth. Hence, McFague’s conception of intrinsic worth of nature is associated with a general respect for nonhumans that seems less patronizing than subjectivism because according to McFague, the value of nature is not forced upon nature due to an attitude of alleged love. Rather, it allows us to value nature as possibly having moral standing at the end of the day.

Environmental Problems and Contextual Ecofeminist Ethical Theory

This part of the chapter contains the following. First, I shall argue in favor of a situation-oriented contextualism. Second, I shall argue that an acceptable environmental ethical contextualism ought to clarify the extent of which the theory in question is influenced by contextual aspects. Third, I shall argue that it also ought to be clear on the kinds of contextualism it puts forward, and finally, I shall argue that an ethical contextualism ought to clarify the process of contextualization, that is to say, the shift from moral contextualism to ethical contextualism.

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61 See chapter one for a presentation of Holmes Rolston III’s concept of systemic (what I call ecogenic) value.
62 See Anzieu, 2000, pp. 38, 45, for a discussion concerning this matter.
The Meaning of Context

One conclusion that can be drawn from the analyses in chapter five and seven is that ecofeminist ethical contextualism entails a rich variety of definitions of “context.” One advantage of ecofeminist ethics is that it recognizes that there are several meanings, levels, and ways of membership, of and in contexts. However, in order for ethical contextualism to be acceptable, it ought to be precise regarding the nature and meaning of the particular contextual aspects that are in focus. It is also important that it explicitly acknowledges that there are other potential contextual aspects to consider as well. The basic claim of contextualism - that our values and norms are contextually dependent and because of this, we ought to consider contexts - is not a sufficiently precise claim. In order to consider contextual aspects and because people are situated in different, sometimes conflicting, social, ecological, physical, abstract, local, global, etc., conditions (contextual aspects) the first thing we need to consider is that there are different contextual aspects to consider. This becomes clearer as we recognize that environmental problems are the results of different events and processes – some of them are primarily related to justice issues, some to gender issues, some primarily to scientific politics, some to economic development, some to family planning, some to all of these things, and so on and so forth. With this in mind, the first argument against ecofeminist contextualism is that it is not as action guiding as it could be. The reason for this is that it settles with a rather vague claim in favor of ethical contextualism without specifying the meaning of contextual aspects and without further analysis of the simultaneous contextual aspects we are under the influence of.

One example that illuminates this is Michael Zimmerman’s definition of radical ecophilosophy; deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism in relation to their analyses of what he refers to as the social origin of the ecological crisis. According to Zimmerman, deep ecology blames the anthropocentric worldview, social ecology blames “social hierarchy: Authoritarian social structures,” and ecofeminism blames patriarchy as “…oppressive social structure which justifies its exploitation of women and nature…” What seems to be the case, however, is that these three theses refer to contextual aspects that, according to my opinion, are all parts of the cause of the environmental crisis, although sometimes some more than others.

63 See Latour (1991,) 1999, introduction, for a description of the complexities of environmental problems. Environmental problems are considered hybrids of economic, social, ethical, political, ecological aspects. See also Newton & Dillingham, 2000 and Löthman, 1987, for examples of such problems.
64 Zimmerman (Ed), 1993, p. vii.
With this in mind, I would like to argue in favor of a situation-oriented contextualism. A situation-oriented contextualism has the advantage that it is well suited to encompass different contextual aspects; individual perspectives, cultural aspects, group structures, and geographical aspects. This is so because “a situation” is composed of all these aspects, while for instance, a geographical contextualism focuses merely on geographical aspects.

Another advantage of a situation-oriented contextualism is that it accords with practical environmental ethics, that is, it can easily be used as a tool for scanning a certain environmental case for significant contextual aspects. Moreover, as a theoretical tool it is well adjusted to function in environmental projects because projects have clearly defined relevant problems, significant people, periods, responsibilities, etc. An important aspect considering situation-oriented contextualism however is that a situation-oriented contextualism must be aware of the risk of leaving out past, future, and geographically distant contextual aspects. That is, it is important that “situations” are not viewed as, in time and place, disparate and autonomous.

An additional advantage of a situation-oriented conception of context is that it accords with the positive tendency in ecofeminist contextualism to reject the idea of autonomous contexts. This means that from the fact that moralities originate and develop under the influence of certain contextual aspects does not follow that this contextual morality cannot have something important to add to other situations. Cuomo for example states:

Certainly many ecological feminists are motivated by their own experiences as women, and their fellow-feelings with other women around the world. Emotional ties based on commonality are insignificant in ethics. The challenge for ethics is to capitalize on the fruitfulness of given, obvious connections within our species and communities without representing these connections as the summation of moral life.

Cuomo continues, claiming that moral concern – and consequently ethical analysis - founded in “[s]ocial affections felt and extended toward members of our own species, or others with whom we share systems of meaning, or feelings, of commonality, kinship and understanding…” is not limited to these others.

McFague shares this idea, and holds that intimate contextual aspects such as particular physical relationships are necessary in order for us to develop a moral concern for those in distant situations. She claims:

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66 A situation-approach runs the risk of dealing with environmental and ethical issues in isolation from their history and their relationships to other geographical areas.
It’s a simple idea: if you don’t love things in particular, you cannot love the world, because the world doesn’t exist except in individual things.\(^6\)

Although McFague does not claim that it is impossible to value, or morally consider nonhuman individuals and wholes outside particular relationships, she claims that particular relationships are necessary in order to develop a transcontextual morality. She writes:

“…local, close-by, available wild places are necessary for people and…such places give them the direct experiences with nature that help to create a sense of belonging to nature and caring about it. Such experiences are central to our ecological model’s becoming a functional one for people.” (Emphasis added.)

It seems as although a situation-oriented contextualism runs the risk of limiting the field of significant contextual aspects it is well suited for avoiding autonomous contextualism. The reason for this is that it is not restricted to either individual perspectives, relationships, historical movements or social structures. This makes it well equipped for contextual analyses of the moral problems and ethical challenges that for example arise due to the situation after the Chernobyl Catastrophe for the people in the North of Sweden. This means that it can be used as a theoretical tool that can help us identify the relevant contextual aspects that are active as normative and epistemic norm producers in that situation. For example, a situation-oriented contextual analysis illuminates the identity of the contextual aspects, which need to be taken into consideration in this situation in order to handle the situation according to what is considered proper, taking the active contextual aspects into consideration. This means that the identification of the active contextual aspects is not only necessary in order to know how we properly should apply certain normative theories or policies to the situation. More so, this is also necessary in order to identify which values that are normatively and epistemically justified in the situation. This is crucial in order to be able to handle a critical case like this.\(^7\)

The Significance of Contextual Aspects

In the following, I shall argue that acceptable ecofeminist contextualism ought to be differentiated. That is to say, it ought to acknowledge that different contextual aspects have more or less influence on our morals as

\(^6\) McFague, 1997, p. 112. This idea is reminiscent of how Russow, (1981) 1998, p. 502, claims that we do not in fact value species, because “[t]he reasons that were given for the value of a species are, in fact, reasons for saying that an individual has value. We do not admire the grace and beauty of the species Panthera Tigris; rather, we admire the grace and beauty of the individual Bengal tigers that we may encounter.”

\(^7\) Löthman (Ed.), 1987. This collection of articles published some years after the Chernobyl catastrophe gives witness of the vast and conflicting values at stake in the situations that people faced in the north of Sweden at this time.
well as on ethics, in different periods and in different situations. Following the conclusion in chapter seven, my suggestion is therefore that contextualism ought to differentiate between weak, moderate, strong, and radical contextualism. This means that, from the perspective of practical environmental ethics, a differentiated contextualism is preferable to a nondifferentiated contextualism. One reason for this is that such an approach identifies, which contextual aspects that are active in different situations, and, to what extent we ought to take them into consideration, as ethicists as well as in environmental practice. This is important, since one of the possible practical tasks for environmental ethicists is to identify the values and interests that are at stake in given environmental – and development cases.

A differentiated contextualism is best understood as a continuum of degrees of contextual influence. One positive consequence of a conception of a contextualism-continuum is that it is not necessary to look upon universal aspects as exclusive opponents to contextual aspects. Alternatively, in other words, that what we are facing are contextual aspects of different kinds, that is, of local, global, cultural, ecological, and individual etc., kinds. Thus, a continuum approach recognizes that our contexts are composed of different aspects and differentiates between qualitatively weaker or stronger contextual influence.

This argument takes as starting point the idea that some contextual aspects are shared by all humans and nonhumans, (we are all earthlings). Moreover, it seems as if some contextual aspects are shared only by a few people. This can be said about our particular family structures and our close-by experiences as fathers, daughters, brothers, mothers, wombats, wood ticks, etc. Finally, it seems reasonable to assume that some contextual aspects are shared by all people and nonhumans in a certain region or particular situation, such as those who stood in the rain and shared the downfall from Chernobyl.

The point is that contextual ecofeminist ethics ought to be more precise than it is and that nonfeminist environmental ethical contextualism is. In order for environmental ethical contextualism to be action guiding, we need it to be specific on which contextual aspects that are significant and why. Finding morally effective and illuminating ways of handling cases such as the post-Chernobyl situation, means facing conflicts between different interests, values, and norms, that is, situations like these demand that we consider several contextual aspects. Perhaps we should go out there and touch nature-others, as McFague suggests. Maybe we ought to consider our conceptual frameworks, ecological observation sets, and attitudes, as Warren claims. Perhaps a focus on the historical movement of growth politics or

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72 Of course, other classifications are possible as well; the point is that contextual influence differs.
power structures, which Merchant and Cuomo focus on, is significant for handling the problems of this situation. The point is that all these contextual aspects are relevant and we need contextual ethics to help us assess their significance in order to analyze the situation. The fact that Ecofeminist contextualism is a theory “at the cross-roads” makes it well equipped to do so. However, it needs to be more precise on these matters to be able to encompass the aspects of people’s lives in these situations. Not until this is done, can ecofeminist contextualism work properly as an action guiding theory.

The context-as-a-continuum approach that I offer as an alternative to the, either-universalism-or-contextualism approach, has been given four different positions. Although each position has been given the label of weak, strong, etc., contextualism, they should not be – although they can be - understood as four different versions of contextualism. Rather, the whole continuum should be understood as a contextualist standpoint.

However, although weak, moderate, strong, and radical contextualism ought not to be understood as different standpoints, a final question that needs to be discussed is whether one or some of these four positions on the context-continuum is preferable. In order to answer this question the meaning of “significance” needs to be elaborated.

The difference between qualitative and quantitative significance of contextual aspects is important. Some contextual aspects, such as for instance my childhood patriarchal family structure, or the fact that I spent my childhood outdoors most of the time, have high quantitative significance because I was exposed to them for many years. However, the time I spent together with environmentally conscious and engaged people at the Center for Environmental and Development Studies in Uppsala, has in spite of its low quantitative significance a high qualitative significance. That is to say, the impact a certain contextual aspect has on a person’s morals does not necessarily correspond with the amount of quantitative influence over time.

This point can be applied to the Chernobyl situation as well. A contextual ethical analysis of such a situation demands an awareness of the fact that sometimes geographical aspects with high qualitative significance, which often are presumed to have high qualitative significance, have a lower qualitative significance than aspects of low quantitative significance, such as for instance the fact that one recently has become a parent and developed a relationship to the child.

The importance of introducing the distinction between quantitative and qualitative influence is not that the ethicist should always consider the latter. Which way the ethicist should go regarding this, is a question that must be answered from case to case. Rather, the distinction can help to recognize that

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73 See for instance Norton, (1996) 1998, for a local, geographical contextual approach. See also the short comment on bio-regionalism in chapter two on Chris Cuomo’s view of nature.
from the fact that we are brought up in a certain “home place” does not necessarily follow that all our values are “home place-values.” That is to say, if we adopt a situation-oriented contextual approach, the contextual aspects that may be of importance in our home places will not be not limited to home place aspects. In this sense, this distinction also supports my choice of a situation-oriented contextual approach, because this approach recognizes potential importance of different, even global, aspects of our contexts. Following this, the most favorable position on the continuum is one that allows us as ethicists to regard all positions on the continuum as potentially equally justified, dependent on the situation in which we put it in practice.

According to this approach, the context-continuum is constructed as an analytical tool with which we can analyze the identity of the active aspects in the situation and the quantitative and qualitative significance of these aspects. Hence, the continuum as such is a point of departure for analysis rather than composed of positions that exclude one another.

In line with this thinking and from the perspective that an ethical contextualism ought to be action guiding in particular, and, from the perspective of a situation-oriented contextualism, these four positions may serve as four different analytical set of eyes that can identify different contextual approaches.

Following this, first, weak ethical contextualism, considers the significance of individually, geographically, socio/culturally as well as historically near and distant aspects of the context in the given situation, but favors the distant aspects. Second, a moderate contextualism considers the significance of near and distant contextual aspects equally. Third, a strong contextualism considers the significance of near aspects before distant aspects, and finally a radical contextualism only considers the significance of near aspects.

Thus, I would like to suggest that, following this and in the context of this study, the context-continuum can be further developed as follows. All positions on the continuum recognize the significance of all other positions including the significance of all potential contextual aspect. Moreover, a notion of distance, in terms of time, place, and identity, is introduced in order to fine-tune the continuum as an analytical tool.

Aspects of Ethical Theory
The fact that there is no consensus regarding the definition of which kind of contextualism ecofeminists and nonfeminists favor has been established in previous chapters. With this in mind, and in order to be as efficient as possible as an action guiding device ecofeminism ought to be more precise when it comes to the kind of ethical contextualism it is. Identification of contextual aspects and their significance is not enough, we also need to know what kind of moral, hence, ethical problems we are facing. In order to
do so, contextualism ought to differentiate between epistemological, value-ontological, and semantic contextualism. This is important from the perspective of action guidance since such differentiation can help us to determine to what extent the situation entails problems concerning primarily knowledge, norms and values, or meaning. Moreover, it will help us to understand how these theoretical aspects are interrelated in the situation, something that should be clarified in order for us to know what needs to be done from an ethical perspective.

Let us take the situation after Chernobyl as an example once more. In 1987, a collection of critical, angry, frightened, professional, nonprofessional essays was published in Sweden as a reaction on the post-Chernobyl situation in the North of Sweden. The 56 short essays describe a situation that is an example of how Bruno Latour describes environmental problems in “We Have Never Been Modern,” four years later. A practical contextual ecofeminist ethics ought to help us to clarify situations like this, in which dilemmas concerning knowledge, norms, and values are mixed. In these essays, questions concerning whether the radiation is harmless or not and how we are to use the knowledge about radioactivity, are mixed with normative claims concerning how we ought to act, and what is of value. Different meanings of nature, homeland, of being a parent, of duties towards indigenous people, run through the essays.

One of the purposes with ethical contextualism is to clarify the nature of the problems that need to be solved in this and similar situations. Problems concerning whether we ought to trust a certain scientist who claims that the radiation is harmless on a certain level, or, those who claim the opposite, is an epistemological problem, which demands discussions informed by systems of reference. Problems considering people’s values and norms need to be addressed in terms of normative ethics. Finally, if a contextual analysis recognizes semantic constructivism, it is well suited to sort out the different meanings, which surface in such situations and that are implicated in essays such as the ones that are presented in the collection of articles I mentioned earlier. Moreover, if environmental ethics ought to be developed in relation to practice, a differentiation concerning theoretical aspects is in order.

In short, different environmental problems call for different ethical analyses. One thing that speaks in favor of ecofeminist contextualism is that because ecofeminism is rooted in the feminist movement and in feminist ethics, it belongs to an ethical tradition that is used to handle the complex

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74 Here I have left out descriptive contextualism since it is the most basic form of contextualism and thus is presupposed in any ethical contextual analysis of an environmental situation.
76 See the section on social constructivism above for a discussion concerning systems of reference.
matters that arise as soon as you are trying to construct practical theoretical approaches, such as a practical environmental ethics.

From Moral Contextualism to Ethical Contextualism – Concluding Remarks
This last question concerning contextualism, concerns the process of contextualization, that is, the shift from moral contextualism to ethical contextualism. In order for an ecofeminist contextualism to be acceptable, it ought to clarify the shift from a theory of moral contextualism to a theory of ethical contextualism. A theory or conception of ethical contextualism is always founded in some kind of moral contextualism. However, the fact that moral contextualism is true is not in itself a sufficient reason for ethical theories to consider contextual aspects. Moreover, in order to understand the meaning and importance of contextualizing ethical theories it is important to illuminate this process. This issue cannot be treated in the context of this study due to its limits. Thus, I must end this discussion in pointing out that this is an important question that demands attention in order for environmental ethical contextualism to be further developed.

To summarize, I suggest that ecofeminist ethical contextualism ought to follow a situation-oriented definition of context. Furthermore, it ought to recognize that our moral beliefs are under the influence of contextual aspects to a quantitatively and qualitatively different extent and that therefore, a contextual ethics ought to reflect this situation. Moreover, a contextual ecofeminist ethics ought to be so constructed that it helps to define when and why the problems in the situation is of an epistemological, normative, or semantic nature.

One of the advantages of ecofeminist contextualism is that it entails a variety of meanings of context, such as context as individual abstract and physical perspectives, as geographical, and as cultural aspects, while at the same time share a common basis; the twin domination thesis. However, in order to be action guiding, it ought to be more precise. Vague statements regarding the importance of “context” is not sufficient. This includes an explicated argumentation of why we as environmental ethicists ought to consider contextual aspects in the first place, as well as a clarification of the nature of practical ethics.

The Cyborg Self and Intrapersonal pluralism
The following discussion concerns if intrapersonal pluralism is an acceptable theoretical standpoint. Inspired by the ecofeminist conception of a cyborg
self, I will argue that intrapersonal pluralism can be acceptable if the consistency principle is regarded as one principle out of several possible principles of organization of the self and as such constitutes one out of several possible ways for a self to make sense to us. Furthermore, I will suggest that a mature moral agent may endure, or even enjoy, the inconsistencies in life.

This discussion will focus on three monist arguments against intrapersonal pluralism. First, that mental sanity requires a life in normative self-consistence.77 Second, that a criterion for being a mature moral person is that he or she is consistent in his or her moral outlook. Third, that our normative ethical standpoints are internally related to our identities, or, selves.

A Sense of an Organized Cyborg Self

The ecofeminist idea of a social self that does not exist prior or independently of its relationships is not a controversial idea. That is to say, it is represented as well as defended in development psychology78 as well as in deep ecology.79 However, the major difference between the ecofeminist self and the deep ecological social self is that according to the latter the relationship between the self and nature tends to be identical rather than internal.80 In addition, the ecofeminist social self - actually ecosocial self is a more appropriate term because ecofeminists claim that the self is ecologically as well as socially contextually constituted - is also advocated from a perspective of development psychology.81

The fact that the self is constituted by its relationships is not in itself an argument against the idea of a core-self. Development psychologist Daniel Stern claims that certain “…invariant properties of interpersonal experience…specify that the self versus the other is a single, coherent, bounded physical entity…” and that “[w]ithout a sense of a self and other as coherent entities unto themselves, a sense of a core self or core other would not be possible, and agency would have no place of residence.”82 According to Stern, this sense of a coherent self is one constituent part of “The Nature of an Organized Sense Of Self.”83

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77 Callicott, 1999, pp. 172-173. “He or she cannot comfortably live in a perpetual state of self-contradiction or as the philosophical equivalent of an individual with a multiple personality disorder.”
79 See Sessions, 1993, pp. 165-166, for a deep ecology perspective on the self.
81 Stern, 2000, pp. 61-64. Daniel Stern explains here the idea that the infant’s sense of its self and other selves is socially constructed in relation to objects, things as well as to people.
82 Stern, (1985) 2000, p. 82.
Following Stern, I would like to suggest that from the fact that we need a sense of a coherent self does not follow that mental health primarily requires a sense of internal consistency of the self. Rather it seems to require a sense of an organized self. The principle of organization that Stern puts forward is not consistency but coherence, which he defines as “...having a sense of being a nonfragmented, physical whole with boundaries and a locus of integrated action, both while moving (behaving) and when still.”84 Although Monists, as for instance Callicott, would agree with this, the way in which consistency is used in Callicott’s argumentation, indicates that what follows from the anti-intrapersonal pluralism is that consistency of the self is a necessary requisite of a mature and sane person.

Following this, I would like to suggest that the fact that monism argues against intrapersonal pluralism on the grounds that intrapersonal pluralism implies a conception of an inconsistent self, can be understood as if monism has chosen one principle of organization of the self as an ideal principle of organization. In addition, I would like to suggest that the principle of consistency is not the only valid principle of organization of the self.

In this context, I would like to introduce that “consistency” can be interpreted in several ways and that we can speak of logical, functional, and contextual consistency (coherence). It seems as if monism primarily rejects logical inconsistency. This seems to be the case since monism presupposes that the self cannot endure having simultaneous contradictive normative standpoints, for instance, the standpoints that it is morally wrong to kill person (x) and that it is morally right to kill person (x). However, if we follow a functional or teleological consistency, two standpoints are only inconsistent if they fail to achieve a certain goal. According to the ecofeminist idea of a cyborg self, it is possible to imagine that the life of the cyborg, which shows logically inconsistent behaviors and standpoints, might function to achieve a certain goal. One such goal is for instance to illuminate the complexities of the relationships between humans and nonhumans. This could amount to a conception of the self as, although logically inconsistent, teleologically consistent.

In addition, contextual consistency means that contradictive standpoints can only be inconsistent if they fail to make sense for the person in question. According to a contextual principle of organization of the self, it could be possible to accept that the self is logically inconsistent as long as its behavior and normative standpoints make sense to him or her and/or to us. Hence, the cyborg-self, which is constituted by creatures and objects that are of different natures, may very well form a coherent sense of her self that makes sense while being logically inconsistent. According to this argument, the principle of logical consistency should be viewed as a reflexion of a “self”

that makes sense for the monists, and that is founded on a certain ideal of the moral self.

Thus, I suggest that the monist claim that logical inconsistency of the self is a symptom of mental illness is questionable because it can be seen as only one among many potentially valid principles of organizing of the self. Moreover, it seems as even if a principle of consistency should be regarded as the only valid principle on the grounds of Callicott’s arguments, the principle of logical consistency that he advocates is challenged by other principles of consistency such as the principles of teleological and contextual consistency.

Moral Mature People Endure Inconsistency

According to Callicott, “[a] mature moral agent...wants a coherent outlook—the one that seems true.” 85 Peter Wenz supports this claim and writes, “In sum, Callicott’s criticisms of what I call extreme pluralism are justified. Such pluralism [...] invites inconsistency and incoherence where consistency and reason are needed most—in our moral lives.” 86

I would like to suggest that the idea that moral maturity requires a consistent outlook is questionable. I agree with Callicott and Wentz that most of us “wants a coherent outlook” and need “consistency and reason” in our moral lives. However, if we were to follow another route and accept that life, as Latour’s view of environmental problems and Cuomo’s conception of the cyborg suggest, is inconsistent, is it not then possible to conclude that what is needed is an ethics that affirms a conception of a self that endures inconsistency rather than one that excludes inconsistency?

I would like to put forward two reasons why we need a conception of the self that endures inconsistency in life rather than one that excludes inconsistency. First, our descriptive views, ideas, and conceptions of the self are synonymous with the views, ideas, and conceptions of the self that we find acceptable. That is to say, the conception of a consistent self entails the ideal of a consistent self. This means that, that monists put forward that consistency is “needed” can be explained by the fact that according to the conception of self that is implied in this argument, inconsistency is best avoided. Hence, based on an ideal of a consistent self and a sense of a consistent moral life, what are considered as inconsistent elements of theory and context will be excluded. That is to say, if consistency is considered to be the only acceptable principle of organization of the moral self and of moral life (moral consistency), any aspect of the situation, theories, and of ourselves that we perceive as inconsistent in relation to this ideal will be cut

86 Wenz, 1993, p. 69.
off as unreasonable, irrelevant, and insignificant. From this follows that this is also true about conceptions of inconsistent selves. However, if inconsistency and consistency are considered as two out of many possible principles of organization of the self, neither “the consistent” nor “the inconsistent” will be cut off in beforehand.

Second, as a consequence, such a monist ethical theory becomes less action guiding because as a result, (inconsistent) perspectives that might prove to be important for analyzing and handling a specific moral dilemma in the situation might be excluded.

The cyborg ideal is not the only ideal of a moral self that is presented in ecofeminism. However, the fact that the cyborg-self, allows contradiction and inconsistency of self and moral life, might prove to be useful as we are trying to handle environmental problems. The reason for this conclusion is that if we accept a sense of the self that endures the inconsistent reality, the result will be a conception of the self that help us map the situation and is more sensible to the complex nature of environmental problems as well as of our selves.

Normative Theories are External to the Self

Callicott claims that intrapersonal pluralism is a symptom of moral immaturity and mental illness. The reason for this claim is that he regards that “[e]thical theories are embedded in moral philosophies…” Callicott presupposes that we can only regard one moral philosophy at the time to be valid. I will argue that this view, which presupposes that normative theories are internal to the self, is questionable.

Following Daniel Stern, our experiences of other people constitute our selves rather than the philosophies that we embrace. Stern claims that it is when we experience others, existing in time, space, and motion, that a sense of coherence of our selves is manifested. This means that it seems reasonable to assume that it is our relationships with others that are internal to the self, and not, normative theories or philosophies. That is to say, it is the continued experiences of other coherent core-selves that are the constituents of ones own core-self, or, in Stern’s words, of “…a sense of a coherent, dynamic physical entity to which the sense of agency can belong.”

With this in mind, it can be argued that if those whom we experience are for instance ontologically inconsistent, a sense of a reasonable, yet logically

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87 Stone, 1995. This reasoning follows Christopher Stone’s idea that theories are external to the self.
89 Stern (1985) 2000, pp. 82-89.
90 Stern, (1985) 2000, p. 82.
91 Example of ontological inconsistent relationships may be the relationships between organisms and machines, that is, creatures and entities that we perceive as having in relation
inconsistent core-self is constructed. Chris Cuomo’s view on the cyborg’s capability of taking contradicting standpoints and Merchant’s idea that moral agents are disorded point towards a conception of a social inconsistent self.92 The idea of an eco/social self that is represented in Cuomo’s work accords with Stern’s claim that the relationships that constitute our beliefs and standpoints are internal to the self. We are who we are in power of our relationships and not in power of our theoretical opinions. Thus, what this ecofeminist conception of a self rejects is that normative theories are internal to the self.

From this we can conclude that the monist idea that normative theories are internal to the self can be contested. The fact that relationships rather than normative theories are internal to the self speaks in favor of an ecofeminist ecosocial self that views normative theories as external to the self, as, for instance is the case with Warren’s idea of the self. Moreover, the fact that we have the possibility to change perspectives (frame works, observation sets), which is a trait in Warren’s ecofeminism accords with Stone’s idea that normative theories, map the situation rather than change the person. Moreover, from the fact that the ecofeminist cyborg self is constituted by its experiences of ontologically inconsistent entities, we can conclude that it is possible to imagine that such an ecosocial self endures inconsistency, which, at least, speaks in favor of a theoretical acceptance of intrapersonal pluralism.

Ecofeminist Ethical Theory Contested – Concluding Remarks on the Study

In the introduction of this study, three main questions were introduced:

1. What are the characteristics of ecofeminist ethical theory?
2. What are the significant differences between ecofeminist and nonfeminist environmental ethical theory?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory?

In the following, a summary of the answers to these questions will be presented.
Characteristics of Ecofeminist Ethical Theory

In the following four general characteristics of ecofeminist ethical theory will be highlighted. The first characteristic regards the heterogeneous nature of ecofeminist ethical theory. Ecofeminist ethics entails several ontological, value theoretical, epistemological, and normative standpoints. The fact that this is the case is illustrated in the preceding chapters, which show that ecofeminism entails a variety of standpoints regarding the five issues addressed in this study. Although they sometimes agree on these standpoints, the variety regarding views of nature, different kinds of social constructivism, different ideas concerning values of nature, different contextual aspects, and different ideas of the self is evident.

Even though Cuomo, Warren, Merchant, and McFague have different standpoints within the main categories, they have some standpoints in common. For instance, regarding views of nature, ecofeminism emphasizes that nature is active, from which follows that nature ought to be respected. Regarding values of nature, ecofeminism takes a nonanthropocentric standpoint. This becomes evident since Cuomo, Warren, McFague, and Merchant all share a basic claim that nonhumans have value beyond their utility and external value for humans. Regarding social constructivism, ecofeminism acknowledges the idea of nature-as-it-is as well as the idea that certain aspects of nature-as-it-is such as knowledge, meaning, and physical aspects are products of social processes. Moreover, considering ethical contextualism, ecofeminism is associated with ethical contextualism, and as such embraces descriptive contextualism but also normative and epistemic contextualism. Finally, regarding intrapersonal pluralism and conceptions of the self, ecofeminism supports the idea that the self is ecosocially constituted and opposes the idea that the human self is externally related to other human selves and to nonhuman others. Moreover, ecofeminism opposes the idea of the self as identically related to human and nonhuman others, including wholes.

The fact that ecofeminism displays a variety of theoretical positions can be explained by the second characteristic, that ecofeminism is an environmental philosophy at the crossroads. The fact that ecofeminism explicitly takes as starting point a concern for nonhumans based on nonanthropocentric stand points, and a concern for oppressed humans, based on feminist standpoints is one of the reasons why ecofeminism exhibits this variety. The fact that ecofeminism has this double nature, is highlighted in the introduction of this thesis and further developed in the concluding remarks in chapter six. This characteristic is constitutive of ecofeminism, and I suggest that this is one of the reasons why ecofeminism shows such great theoretical variety yet maintains a common focus.

A third characteristic is that ecofeminism holds that environmental ethical theory and practice are internally related. This is most evident in the different variants of ethical contextualism that have been illuminated.
Moreover, this is also evident in the different kinds of social constructivism, but also in some of the ecofeminist conceptions of value of nature.

The ecofeminist standpoint that theory and practice are internally related means first, that our theoretical standpoints have important impact on practice. This is illustrated by the fact that for instance, McFague and Merchant stress that views of nature, and models and metaphors determine how we regard ourselves, others, and our values. Second, this means that ecofeminist ethical theory is more properly described as a practical ethics rather than an applied ethics. That is, ecofeminism sets the ideal that theoretical standpoints ought to be developed in close relationship to different practice. Examples of such practices are rock climbing, touching nature-others, and experiences of membership in oppressive communities.

A fourth characteristic of ecofeminism is that theoretical standpoints are not only a matter of general theory acceptance but also a matter of personal moral responsibility. That this is the case can be regarded as a result of the third characteristic since our theoretical standpoints have significant impact on how we will act towards nature. Accordingly, the question concerning which theoretical standpoint that we choose becomes a normative moral matter. The fact that we have to be personally responsible for our theoretical standpoints is illustrated by the fact that ecofeminism stresses the theoretical as well as the practical consequences of our attitudes against nature. This is further illustrated by the stress on the importance of making a reflected choice to pay attention to nature-others as subjects of their own worlds. In addition, this is illustrated by the emphasis on the possibility to utilize experiences of being a member of oppressed groups as and to use these experiences as critical perspectives out of which oppressive moral orders and ethical theories can be criticized. Finally, this is also illustrated by ecofeminist individualistic social constructivism.

Significant Differences between Ecofeminist and Nonfeminist Environmental Ethical Theory

In one sense, there are no significant differences between ecofeminist and nonfeminist environmental ethical theory regarding the issues in focus in this study. This is explained by the fact that the main theoretical standpoints that are represented in ecofeminism are also represented in nonfeminist environmental ethics. However, within these main standpoints, differences can be found.

Regarding views of nature, the main theoretical standpoints in ecofeminism are also found in nonfeminist environmental ethics. Therefore, one may argue that there are no significant differences regarding this issue. However, this is not the case. There are significant differences within the main categories. One such difference is that ecofeminism emphasizes physical relationships between humans and nonhuman others and stresses
that these relationships ought to be the starting points for ethical theorizing. Another difference is that ecofeminism, despite the claim that we need views of nature that do not regard humanity as fundamentally different from nature, does not develop an explicit non-dualistic view of nature, a view that can be found in nonfeminist environmental philosophy. In fact, dualistic thinking is sometimes taken for granted and utilized in ecofeminist analyses of the connections between oppression of women and exploitation of nature.

Regarding social constructivism, one obvious difference between nonfeminist environmental philosophy and ecofeminism is of course that the former criticizes social constructivism and the latter embraces social constructivism. Even so, there are differences between the standpoints that these critics presuppose and the kinds of social constructivism that ecofeminism supports. One such difference is that ecofeminism does not advocate ontological constructivism, something that the nonfeminist environmental philosophers seem to presuppose regarding social constructivism. A second difference is that ecofeminist social constructivism is not as homogenous that these critics presuppose that social constructivism is. For instance, ecofeminist social constructivism entails social construism, constructionism, and inventionism. A third difference is, as the analysis of ecofeminist social constructivism illuminates, a variety regarding aspects of nature-as-it-is that are socially construed, constructed, or invented. Thus, the idea that “all” nature is constituted by social processes as Peterson claims, is not supported by ecofeminism. According to ecofeminism, these aspects of nature are knowledge, meaning, and physical aspects. Moreover, ecofeminist social constructivism sometimes highlights individual constructivism rather than social constructivism, which is something that the critics do not take into account.

An interesting aspect in this context is that Anna Peterson is more keen to criticize social inventionism, which she presupposes amounts to ontological inventions of nature, and regards construism to be rather harmless. This view is clearly challenged by ecofeminism, since ecofeminism regards that models, views, and language have significant social power, actually the power to change the course of entire societies and cultures.

Regarding values of nature, the first and obvious difference is that ecofeminism does not dedicate itself to value theoretical debacles and often stipulates a nonanthropocentric standpoint regarding nature’s value out of which they theorize. From this follows that ecofeminism does not support anthropocentrism, and furthermore there is a certain focus on the standpoint that, whether nature has intrinsic value or worth is not primarily a matter of reasons good enough for such a stand point but rather, a matter of how we ought to regard nonhumans. There seems to be an ecofeminist consensus regarding that from an ecofeminist perspective, taking contextual aspects into consideration, anthropocentrism is immoral rather than theoretically unacceptable. That this is the case is explained by the fact that ecofeminism
holds that justificatory discussions concerning the matter of nature’s “intrinsic value” should be avoided for the same reason as such discussions concerning the “intrinsic values” of women should be avoided. They would be morally outrageous.

Regarding ethical contextualism, this standpoint is represented in both ecofeminism and nonfeminist environmental ethics. However, contextualism seems to be more common in ecofeminism than in nonfeminist environmental ethics. One difference regarding the meaning of context is that ecofeminism stresses the ethical significance of particular physical relationships. For example, the ecofeminist claim that the physical touch of nonhuman others is the primary way to gain informed disinterested nature knowledge is unique in this context. In addition, the ecofeminist history-oriented conception of context is not represented in the nonfeminist material.

Regarding ethical pluralism, the main difference is that there are tendencies within ecofeminism towards a conception of an inconsistent self, which is not the case with nonfeminist environmental ethics. The analysis regarding this matter shows that the ideal self that nonfeminist ethical monism reflects can be questioned based on my interpretation of the ecofeminist conception of a cyborg self. Thus, in contrast with nonfeminist ethical monism and pluralism, ecofeminism entails conceptions of the self that can serve as starting points for a development of a concept of an alternative, inconsistent self, based on which intrapersonal pluralism may be defended.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Ecofeminist Ethical Theory

The main aim of this chapter is to illuminate and critically discuss the advantages and disadvantages of ecofeminist ethical theory. This is done mainly in terms of the criteria listed in the introduction of this chapter, which state that an acceptable environmental ethical theory ought to be action guiding, precise, comprehensive, and that it ought to reflect reality.

In the following, I will address the aspects of the five issues that I find to be the most interesting aspects following the standpoint that an acceptable environmental ethics ought to be a practical ethics rather than an applied ethics. I discuss the ecofeminist standpoints in relation to each criterion in terms of theoretical advantages and disadvantages in the following order: comprehensiveness, precision, reality reflection, and extent of action guidance.

Regarding comprehensiveness, one advantage of ecofeminism is that it illuminates that the variety of contextual aspects to consider and that the aspects of nature that are or may be products of social processes, are vast and overlapping. It is important that a practical contextual environmental ethics is comprehensive because, once it acknowledges the significance of certain contextual aspects, it follows that it must acknowledge the potential
significance of all contextual aspects. If it fails to do this, it becomes less trustworthy because it favors certain contextual aspects for what seems to be no other reason than that these are important for the ethicist in question or in a specific situation.

This also means that a properly comprehensive environmental ethics ought not only be a theory for one specific case. This claim is informed by the two different functions of action guidance. According to the first function, ethical theories ought to be directly informed by and inform particular cases. The second function is indirect, in the sense that ethical theories help us to recognize different types of environmental dilemmas, hence, provide a way of training our moral decision-making capabilities. In this latter sense, environmental ethical theories ought to comprehend reflections that are the result of ethical standpoints derived from several contextual aspects and cases. This means that it ought to acknowledge the potential ethical significance of other contextual aspects than the one particularly favored. Accordingly, the fact that other contexts as well as normative standpoints are acknowledged as significant should be clearly explicated, which is the case with ecofeminism.

Regarding precision, this is perhaps the greatest disadvantage of ecofeminism and its theoretical claims. On this note, the fact that the ecofeminists in focus represent environmental philosophy, theology, and history of ideas, hence work in different traditions than ethics, is taken into consideration here.

Several examples illustrate the fact that ecofeminism is not sufficiently precise. For example, regarding the view of nature as active. What are the possible consequences for people situated in different societies and cultures around the globe of viewing nature as an active agent? Is nature always active in the same way and does its activeness affect us in the same way all the time? Should we consider this characteristic of nature equally in every situation? These and other questions need to be specified in order for us to be able to evaluate the kind of “mapping” the theory in question can provide in a given case. On the matter of social constructivism, we need to know in what ways and to what extent different aspects of nature are products of social processes in order to understand and estimate the meaning and significance of claims like, “nature is a social construct.” The point is not that these answers are absent in the material, rather the point is that they are seldom explicated, or, more accurately, that there sometimes are so many different answers to account for.

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93 This latter function is defended by Eugene Hargrove in Hargrove, 1989. See his introduction on “Applied Ethics and Environmental Concern.”

94 Here I primarily refer to McFague and Cuomo, but it seems as if this line of thought is a common trait within ecofeminism, or, at least that this follows from ecofeminist contextualism.
The same conclusion follows from the analysis of ecofeminist ethical contextualism. All the aspects of contexts that exist within ecofeminism should be explicated. The same critique can be offered against the ecofeminist conceptions of value. “Intrinsic” and “inherent” value and worth are often only defined in contrast to what they are not, e.g. in contrast to “instrumental” – what is generally referred to as utility – value. Furthermore, the differences between different kinds of instrumental values are often not explicated. In defense for ecofeminism it can be argued that it often carefully states that it is not engaged in the so called “intrinsic value project” that is typical for nonfeminist nonanthropocentric environmental ethics at large.

Regarding reflection of reality, this criterion refers to the fact that in order for an environmental ethical theory to be acceptable, it ought to reflect, or at least ought not to contradict, basic ideas concerning the conditions it is supposed to be of relevance for, or, presuppose. From this does not follow that the theory ought to reflect every aspect of the cases in question. Rather, it means that environmental ethical theory ought to presuppose acceptable views of the relationships between nature and culture. What I am concerned with here is that environmental ethical theories ought to reflect the fact that as quoted above, natural, cultural, and discursive entities and events are “…neither objective nor social, nor are they effects of discourse, even though they are real, and collective, and discursive.”

In a sense, ecofeminist ethics reflects reality because it is almost as complex as moral life. However, a complex ethical theory is of course not an ideal theory. From the fact that the theory in question ought to illuminate and clarify the situation, it ought to reflect complex relationships between nature-culture-discourse, rather than mirror that complexity.

As for any acceptable theory, it ought to be as simple and precise as possible in relation to its purposes. One purpose of environmental ethical theories is that they ought to be action guiding. It is important that we can trust action guiding theories to, so to speak, “know what they are talking about,” (otherwise we would disregard them in favor for some other more trustworthy theory). Consequently, in order to act upon ecofeminist ethical theories, we need them to reflect the fact that environmental problems are clusters of simultaneous manifestations of nature-culture-discourse.

The conclusion to be drawn from the analysis in this study is that ecofeminist ethics does not reflect reality with the preciseness that is needed. I am aware of the fact that ecofeminist ethics can favorably be read as an effort to overcome the presupposed boundaries between nature-as-it-is

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96 According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978), 1991, the verb “reflect” means "to throw back (heat, light, sound, or an image).” As in for example, “[t]he mountains were reflected in the lake.” Hence, an ethical theory that “reflects” reality is not an exact representation of reality.
(nature), the social processes that produce construes, constructions, and inventions of aspects of nature (culture), and the theories and bodies of ideas that make coherent sense of these aspects (discourse). However, none of the authors engage in a systematic reflection on the relationship between text, nature, and culture in such a manner that it further illuminates the fact that environmental problems need to be expressed in a way that does not presuppose and further maintain the false idea that nature and culture are separable.

The reason why the issue of a maintained dichotomy (or, trichotomy) is important is not simply because this is an inaccurate description of environmental problems. I am convinced that if we in practice and in theory foster the idea that humans and nonhumans are not uniquely different we will be more cautious regarding our actions towards nature, which would limit the global and future damages that are the consequences of some of these actions.

As I stated earlier, this study illuminates the fact that ecofeminism entails disparate reflections of the complexity of reality. However, without at least teleological theoretical consistency ecofeminism will fail to capture the structures of environmental problems, which is a great disadvantage especially since ecofeminism already has proved that its double nature may be part of what is needed as basis for a theorizing that acknowledges the existence of nature-culture-discourse clusters.

Regarding action guidance, I would like to add the following. One advantage of ecofeminism is that it is action guiding in the general sense because it, when reflected upon, provides us with an understanding of different kinds of relationships between humans and nonhumans. Moreover, the fact that its general map of environmental problems and their ethical and moral issues are numerous makes it well equipped to help develop a sensitivity toward environmental cases as composed of social and economical structures of oppression and liberation, individual responsibilities, patriarchal oppressive frameworks, and historical powers, etc.

On the other hand, one disadvantage of ecofeminism is that it seems less focused on particular action guidance. I am reluctant to answer the question if ecofeminist ethical theory is relevant for particular environmental moral dilemmas, affirmatively. Of course, the way in which some of the authors outline their standpoints highlights that it is important that we become aware of our individual choices because we are all bearers of attitudes and are all “touchers” of nonhuman nature-others. However, these standpoints are quite general in their particularities and therefore their instruction value is quite low.

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97 According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978), 1991, the verb “mirror” means, “to give an exact and close representation of.”
This concludes this study on ecofeminism and its contribution to environmental ethical theory. Whether it has contributed to a less stereotyped and misrepresentative presentation of ecofeminism is for the reader to decide.
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