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Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals¹

CAROL J. ADAMS

In this essay, I will argue that contemporary ecofeminist discourse, while potentially adequate to deal with the issue of animals, is now inadequate because it fails to give consistent conceptual place to the domination of animals as a significant aspect of the domination of nature. I will examine six answers ecofeminists could give for not including animals explicitly in ecofeminist analyses and show how a persistent patriarchal ideology regarding animals as instruments has kept the experience of animals from being fully incorporated within ecofeminism.²

Jean: Would you feel raping a woman's all right if it was happening to her and not to you?

Barbie: No, I'd feel like it was happening to me.

Jean: Well, that's how some of us feel about animals.

—1976 conversation about feminism and vegetarianism

Ecofeminism identifies a series of dualisms: culture/nature; male/female; self/other; rationality/emotion. Some include humans/animals in this series. According to ecofeminist theory, nature has been dominated by culture; female has been dominated by male; emotion has been dominated by rationality; animals . . .

Where are *animals* in ecofeminist theory and practice?³

SIX ECOFEMINIST OPTIONS

Animals are a part of nature. Ecofeminism posits that the domination of nature is linked to the domination of women and that both dominations must be eradicated. If animals are a part of nature, then why are they not intrinsically a part of ecofeminist analysis and their freedom from being instruments of

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humans an integral part of ecofeminist theory? Six answers suggest themselves. I discuss each in turn.

I. ECOFEMINISM EXPLICITLY CHALLENGES THE DOMINATION OF ANIMALS

A strong case can be made for the fact that ecofeminism confronts the issue of animals' suffering and incorporates it into a larger critique of the maltreatment of the natural world. Consider the "Nature" issue of *Woman of Power: A Magazine of Feminism, Spirituality, and Politics* (1988). In it we find articles on animal rights (Newkirk); guidelines for raising children as vegetarians (Moran); a feminist critique of the notion of animal "rights" that argues that the best way to help animals is by adopting broad ecofeminist values (Salamone); an interview with the coordinator of a grassroots animal rights organization (Albino); and Alice Walker's moving description of what it means for a human animal to perceive the beingness of a nonhuman animal.⁴ In addition to these articles, a resource section lists companies to boycott because they test their products on animals, identifies cruelty-free products, and gives the addresses of organizations that are vegetarian, antivivisection, and multi-issue animal advocacy groups. This resource list implicitly announces that praxis is an important aspect of ecofeminism.

Or consider one of the earliest anthologies on ecofeminism and one of the latest. *Reclaim the Earth* (1983) contains essays that speak to some of the major forms of environmental degradation, such as women's health, chemical plants, the nuclear age and public health, black ghetto ecology, greening the cities, and the Chipko movement. The anthology also includes an essay on animal rights (Benney 1983). The more recent anthology, *Reweaving the World* (1990), contains an essay proposing that "ritual and religion themselves might have been brought to birth by the necessity of propitiation for the killing of animals" (Abbott 1990, 36), as well as Marti Kheel's essay that explores the way hunting uses animals as instruments of human (male) self-definition (Kheel 1990).

Still other signs of ecofeminism's commitment to animals—as beings who ought not to be used as instruments—can be found. Greta Gaard identifies vegetarianism as one of the qualities of ecofeminist praxis, along with antimilitarism, sustainable agriculture, holistic health practices, and maintaining diversity (Gaard 1989). Ecofeminists carried a banner at the 1990 March for the Animals in Washington, D. C. Ecofeminist caucuses within feminist organizations have begun to articulate the issue of animal liberation as an essential aspect of their program. The Ecofeminist Task Force of the National Women's Studies Association recommended at the 1990 NWSA meeting that the Coordinating Council adopt a policy that no animal products be served at any future conferences, citing ecological, health, and humane issues.

Such ecofeminist attention to praxis involving the well-being of animals ought not to be surprising. Ecofeminism's roots in this country can be traced

to feminist-vegetarian communities. Charlene Spretnak identifies three ways the radical feminist communities of the mid-1970s came to ecofeminism: through study of political theory and history, through exposure to nature-based religion, especially Goddess religion, and from environmentalism (Spretnak 1990, 5-6). A good example of these communities is the Cambridge-Boston women's community. One of the initial ecofeminist texts—Françoise d'Eaubonne's 1974 book *Le féminisme ou la mort*—was introduced that year to scores of feminists who took Mary Daly's feminist ethics class at Boston College. That same year, Sheila Collins's *A Different Heaven and Earth* appeared and was discussed with interest in this community. Collins saw "racism, sexism, class exploitation, and ecological destruction" as "interlocking pillars upon which the structure of patriarchy rests" (Collins 1974, 161). In 1975, Rosemary Radford Ruether's *New Woman/New Earth* was also greeted with excitement. Ruether linked the ecological crisis with the status of women, arguing that the demands of the women's movement must be united with the ecological movement. The genesis of the two book-length ecofeminist texts that link women and animals can be traced to this community and its association with Daly during those years.⁵

Interviews with members of the Cambridge-Boston women's community reveal a prototypical ecofeminism that locates animals within its analysis. As one feminist said: "Animals and the earth and women have all been objectified and treated in the same way." Another explained she was "beginning to bond with the earth as a sister and with animals as subjects not to be objectified."

At a conceptual level, this feminist-vegetarian connection can be seen as arising within an ecofeminist framework. To apprehend this, consider Karen Warren's (1987) four minimal conditions of ecofeminism. Appeal to them indicates a vegetarian application articulated by these activist ecofeminists in 1976 and still viable in the 1990s.

Ecofeminism argues that there is an important connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature. The women I interviewed perceived animals to be a part of that dominated nature and saw a similarity in the status of women and animals as subject to the authority or control of another, i.e., as subordinate:

Look at the way women have been treated. We've been completely controlled, raped, not given any credibility, not taken seriously. It's the same thing with animals. We've completely mutilated them, domesticated them. Their cycles, their entire beings are conformed to humans's needs. That's what men have done to women and the earth.

Since ecofeminism is distinguished by whether it arises from socialist feminism, radical feminism, or spiritual feminism, many of the ecofeminists of 1976 identified themselves within these classifications as they extended them

to include animals. Socialist feminists linked meat eating with capitalist forms of production and the classist nature of meat consumption; spiritual feminists emphasized the association of goddess worship, a belief in a matriarchy, harmony with the environment, and gentleness toward animals; radical feminists associated women's oppression and animals' oppression, and some held the position of "nature feminists" who see women as naturally more sensitive to animals.

The second of Warren's conditions of ecofeminism is that we must understand the connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. To do so we must critique "the sort of thinking which sanctions the oppression" (Warren 1987, 6), what Warren identifies as patriarchal thinking allegedly justified by a "logic of domination" according to which "superiority justifies subordination" (Warren 1987; 1990). The women I interviewed rejected a "logic of domination" that justifies killing animals: "A truly gynocentric way of being is being in harmony with the earth, and in harmony with your body, and obviously it doesn't include killing animals."

The testimonies of the women I interviewed offer an opportunity to develop a radical feminist epistemology by which the intuitive and experiential provide an important source of knowledge that serves to challenge the distortions of patriarchal ideology. Many women discussed trusting their body and learning from their body. They saw vegetarianism as "another extension of looking in and finding out who I really am and what I like." From this a process of identification with animals arose. Identification means that relationships with animals are redefined; they are no longer instruments, means to our ends, but beings who deserve to live and toward whom we act respectfully if not out of friendship.

Feminists realize what it's like to be exploited. Women as sex objects, animals as food. Women turned into patriarchal mothers, cows turned to milk machines. It's the same thing. I think that innately women aren't cannibals. I don't eat flesh for the same reason that I don't eat steel. It's not in my consciousness anymore that it could be eaten. For the same reason that when I'm hungry I don't start chomping on my own hand.

Another described the process of identification this way:

The objectifying of women, the metaphors of women as pieces of meat, here's this object to be exploited in a way. I resent that. I identify it with ways that especially beef and chickens also are really exploited. The way they stuff them and ruin their bodies all so that they can sell them on the capitalist market. That is disturbing to me in the same way that I feel that I am exploited.

From this process of identification with animals' experiences as instruments arises an ecofeminist argument on behalf of animals: it is not simply that we participate in a value hierarchy in which we place humans over animals and that we must now accede rights to animals, but that we have failed to understand what it means to be a "being"—the insight that propelled Alice Walker some years later to describe her recognition of a nonhuman animal's beingness (see note 4). Becoming a vegetarian after recognizing and identifying with the beingness of animals is a common occurrence described by this woman in 1976:

When I thought that this was an animal who lived and walked and met the day, and had water come into his eyes, and could make attachments and had affections and had dislikes, it disgusted me to think of slaughtering that animal and cooking it and eating it.

As women described animals, they recognized them as ends in themselves rather than simply as means to others' ends.

The third ecofeminist claim Warren identifies is that feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective. Ecofeminism reflects a praxis-based ethics: one's actions reveal one's beliefs. If you believe women are subordinated you will work for our liberation; if you believe that nature, among other things, is dominated you will judge personal behavior according to its potential exploitation of nature. In this regard, Frances Moore Lappé's powerful book *Diet for a Small Planet* had had a profound effect on numerous feminists I interviewed because it provided an understanding of the environmental costs of eating animals. One stated: "When I was doing my paper on ecology and feminism, the idea of women as earth, that men have exploited the earth just like they've exploited women and by eating meat you are exploiting earth and to be a feminist means to not accept the ethics of exploitation." What she recognizes is that ecofeminists must address the fact that our meat-advocating culture has successfully separated the *consequences* of eating animals from the *experience* of eating animals.⁶

2. THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF EATING ANIMALS

One of ecofeminism's attributes is its concern with the consequences of the domination of the earth. It recognizes that the patriarchal philosophy that links women and nature has measurable, negative effects that must be identified and addressed. When we consider the consequences of meat production—and the way by which each meat eater is implicated in these consequences—ecofeminism faces the necessity of taking sides: will it choose the ecocide and environmental disaster associated with eating animals or the environmental wisdom of vegetarianism?⁷

The relationship between meat eating and environmental disaster is measurable.⁸ In fact, advocates for a vegetarian diet have created images that translate the environmental profligacy of meat production to the level of the individual consumer: the average amount of water required daily to feed a person following a vegan diet is 300 gallons; the average amount of water required daily to feed a person following an ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet is 1,200 gallons; but the average amount of water required daily to feed a person following the standard United States meat-based diet is 4,200 gallons. Half of all water consumed in the United States is used in the crops fed to livestock, “and increasingly that water is drawn from underground lakes, some of which are not significantly renewed by rainfall” (Lappé 1982, 10). More than 50 percent of water pollution can be linked to wastes from the livestock industry (including manure, eroded soil, and synthetic pesticides and fertilizers).

Besides depleting water supplies, meat production places demands on energy sources: the 500 calories of food energy from one pound of steak requires 20,000 calories of fossil fuel. Sixty percent of our imported oil requirements would be cut if the U. S. population switched to a vegetarian diet (Hur and Fields 1985b, 25).

Vegetarians also point to other aspects of livestock production that precipitate ecocide: cattle are responsible for 85 percent of topsoil erosion. Beef consumption accounts for about 5 to 10 percent of the human contribution to the greenhouse effect. Among the reasons that our water, soil, and air are damaged by meat production are the hidden aspects of raising animals for food. Before *we* can eat animals, *they* must eat and live and drink water (and even burp).⁹ Producing the crops to feed animals taxes the natural world. Frances Moore Lappé reports that “*the value of raw material consumed to produce food from livestock is greater than the value of all oil, gas, and coal consumed in this country. . . . One-third of the value of all raw materials consumed for all purposes in the United States is consumed in livestock foods*” (Lappé 1982, 66). Eighty-seven percent of United States agricultural land is used for livestock production (including pasture, rangeland, and cropland).

Not only is the analysis of consequences an important aspect of ecofeminist thought, but for ecofeminists a failure to consider consequences results from the dualisms that characterize patriarchal culture: consumption is experienced separately from production, and production is valued over maintenance. By this I mean that as a result of the fetishization of commodities associated with capitalist production, we see consumption as an end in itself, and we do not consider what have been the means to that end: eating (a dead) chicken is disassociated from the experience of black women who as “lung gunners” must each hour scrape the insides of 5,000 chickens’ cavities and pull out the recently slaughtered chickens’ lungs.¹⁰ Both women workers and the chickens themselves are means to the end of consumption, but because consumption has been disembodied, their oppressions as worker and consumable body are

invisible. This disembodied production of a tangible product is viewed as a positive indication of the economy, but maintenance—those actions necessary to sustain the environment—is neither measured nor valued. Currently, maintenance of domestic space or environmental space is not calculated in economic terms—housework is not calculated in the Gross National Product in the United States, nor are the environmental resources we value (Waring 1988). We do not measure the negative environmental effects of raising animals to be our food, such as the costs to our topsoil and our groundwater. Maintenance of resources is sacrificed to “meat” production.

An ethic that links maintenance with production, that refuses to disembody the commodity produced from the costs of such production, would identify the loss of topsoil, water, and the demands on fossil fuels that meat production requires and factor the costs of maintaining these aspects of the natural world into the end product, the meat. It would not enforce a split between maintenance and production. The cheapness of a diet based on grain-fed terminal animals exists because it does not include the cost of depleting the environment. Not only does the cost of meat not include the loss of topsoil, the pollution of water, and other environmental effects, but price supports of the dairy and beef “industry” mean that the government actively prevents the price of eating animals from being reflected in the commodity of meat. My tax money subsidizes war, but it also subsidizes the eating of animals. For instance, the estimated costs of subsidizing the meat industry with water in California alone is \$26 billion annually (Hur and Fields 1985a, 17). If water used by the meat industry were not subsidized by United States taxpayers, “hamburger” would cost \$35 per pound and “beefsteak” would be \$89.

The hidden costs to the environment of meat production and the subsidizing of this production by the government maintain the disembodiment of this production process. It also means that environmentally concerned individuals are implicated, even if unknowingly and unwittingly, in this process despite their own disavowals through vegetarianism. Individual tax monies perpetuate the cheapness of animals’ bodies as a food source; consequently meat eaters are not required to confront the reality of meat production. Tax monies are used to develop growth hormones like “bovine somatotropin” to increase cows’ milk production rather than to help people learn the benefits and tastes of soyfoods such as soymilk—products that are not ecologically destructive.

The problem of seeing maintenance as productive occurs on an individual level as well. Activism is judged productive; maintenance as in cooking, especially vegetarian cooking, is usually considered time-consuming. “We don’t have time for it— it impedes our activism” protest many feminists in conversations. By not viewing maintenance as productive, the fact that the years of one’s activist life may be cut short by reliance on dead animals for food is not addressed.¹¹ The order we place at a restaurant or the purchase of “meat” at the meat counter also sends the message that maintaining our environment

is not important either. A cycle of destruction continues on both a personal and economic-political level for the same reason, the invisible costs of meat eating.

After conducting the most detailed diet survey in history—the Chinese Health Project—Dr. T. Colin Campbell concluded that we are basically a vegetarian species. High consumption of “meat” and dairy products is associated with the risk of chronic illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other diseases. For women, eating animals and animal products appears to be especially dangerous. A diet high in animal fats lowers the age of menstruation—which increases the incidence of cancer of the breast and reproductive organs while also lowering the age of fertility (Brody 1990; “Leaps Forward” 1990; Mead 1990).

The moment in which I realized that maintenance must be valued as productive was while I was cooking vegetarian food; thus I was doing what we generally consider to be maintenance. The problem is to escape from maintenance to produce these or any “productive” thoughts. Seeing maintenance as productive is the other side of recognizing the ethical importance of the consequences of our actions.

3. THE INVISIBLE ANIMAL MACHINES

A child’s puzzle called “Barn” displays chickens wandering freely, cows looking out the barnyard door, and smiling pigs frolicking in mud. But this is not an accurate depiction of life down on the farm these days. The fissure between image and reality is perpetuated by agribusiness that does not conduct its farming practices in this homespun way. Laws are being passed in various states that prevent the filming of animals who are living in intensive farming situations. (This phrasing is itself representative of the problem of image and reality: “intensive farming situation” usually means imprisonment in windowless buildings.) As Peter Singer points out, television programs about animals focus on animals in the wild rather than animals in the “factory farms”; frequently the only information on these “animal machines” comes from paid advertising. “The average viewer must know more about the lives of cheetahs and sharks than he or she knows about the lives of chickens or veal calves” (Singer 1990, 216). The majority of animals dominated by humans no longer appear to be a part of nature; they are domesticated, terminal animals who are maintained in intensive farming situations until slaughtered and consumed. Perhaps as a result, some ecofeminists and most meat eaters simply do not see farm animals at all, and thus cannot see them as a part of nature.

It is instructive, then, to remind ourselves of the lives of individual animals. Consider the case of pigs. A breeding sow is viewed, according to one meat company manager, as “a valuable piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine” (Coats 1989, 32). Indeed, she does: about

100 piglets, averaging “2 1/2 litters a year, and 10 litters in a lifetime” (Coats 1989, 34). Since about 80 million pigs are slaughtered in the United States yearly, this means that at least 3.5 million pig “mother machines” are pregnant twice during any given year. For at least ten months of each year, the pregnant and nursing sow will be restricted in movement, unable to walk around. Though pigs are extremely social beings, sows “are generally kept isolated in individual narrow pens in which they are unable to turn round” (Serpell 1986, 9). She is impregnated forcefully either by physical restraint and mounting by a boar, artificial insemination, being tethered to a “rape rack” for easy access; or through “the surgical transplant of embryos from ‘supersows’ to ordinary sows” (Coats 1989, 34).

The now-pregnant sow resides in a delivery crate about two feet by six feet (60 cm x 182 cm) (Coats 1989, 36). In this narrow steel cage, “she is able to stand up or lie down but is unable to do much else. Despite this, sows appear to make frustrated attempts at nest-building” (Serpell 1986, 7). Prostaglandin hormone, injected into the sows to induce labor, also “causes an intense increase in motivation to build a nest” (Fox 1984, 66). After delivering her piglets, “she is commonly strapped to the floor with a leather band, or held down in a lying position by steel bars, to keep her teats continuously exposed” (Coats 1989, 39). The newborn piglets are allowed to suckle from their incarcerated mother for anything from a few hours to several weeks:

In the most intensive systems the piglets are generally isolated within hours of birth in small individual cages which are stacked, row upon row, in tiers. . . . At 7 to 14 days, the piglets are moved again to new quarters where they are housed in groups in slightly larger cages (Serpell 1986, 8).

Often farmers clip the pigs’ tails shortly after birth to avoid the widespread problem of tail-biting (Fraser 1987). It is probable that tail-biting results from both a monotonous diet and the pigs’ natural tendencies to root and chew on objects in their environment. In essence, “the telos of a hog is the will to root,” which is frustrated by their existence in confinement sheds (Comstock 1990, 5).

Once onto solid food, the . . . “weaners” are grown on in small groups in pens until they reach slaughtering weight at around six to eight months of age. For ease of cleaning, the pens have concrete or slatted metal floors, and no bedding is provided. . . . Foot deformities and lameness are common in animals raised on hard floors without access to softer bedding areas (Serpell 1986, 8-9).

Ninety percent of all pigs are now raised in indoor, near-dark, windowless confinement sheds (Mason and Singer 1980, 8), a stressful existence that includes being underfed (Lawrence et al. 1988) and living in a saunalike

atmosphere of high humidity (meant to induce lethargy). Porcine stress syndrome—a form of sudden death likened to human heart attacks—and mycoplasmic pneumonia are common. Once they are the appropriate size and weight, pigs are herded into a crowded livestock truck and transported to the slaughterhouse, where they are killed.

This information on the life cycle of these pigs requires some sort of response from each of us, and the sort of response one has matters on several levels. I respond on an emotional level with horror at what each individual pig is subjected to and sympathize with each pig, whose extreme sociability is evidenced by these animals' increased popularity as pets (Elson 1990). On an intellectual level I marvel at the language of automation, factory farming, and high-tech production that provides the vehicle and license for one to fail to see these animals as living, feeling beings who experience frustration and terror in the face of their treatment. As a lactating mother, I empathize with the sow whose reproductive freedoms have been denied and whose nursing experience seems so wretched. As a consumer and a vegetarian, I visualize this information when I witness people buying or eating "ham," "bacon," or "sausage."

Intensive factory farming involves the denial of the beingness of six billion animals yearly. The impersonal names bestowed on them—such as food-producing unit, protein harvester, computerized unit in a factory environment, egg-producing machine, converting machine, biomachine, crop—proclaim that they have been removed from nature. But this is no reason for ecofeminism to fail to reclaim farm animals from this oppressive system. It merely explains one reason some ecofeminists fail to do so.

4. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF EDIBLE BODIES AND HUMANS AS PREDATORS

Ecofeminism at times evidences a confusion about human nature. Are we predators or are we not? In an attempt to see ourselves as natural beings, some argue that humans are simply predators like some other animals. Vegetarianism is then seen to be unnatural while the carnivorousness of other animals is made paradigmatic. Animal rights is criticized "for it does not understand that one species supporting or being supported by another is nature's way of sustaining life" (Ahlers 1990, 433). The deeper disanalogies with carnivorous animals remain unexamined because the notion of humans as predators is consonant with the idea that we need to eat meat. In fact, carnivorousness is true for only about 20 percent of nonhuman animals. Can we really generalize from this experience and claim to know precisely what "nature's way" is, or can we extrapolate the role of humans according to this paradigm?

Some feminists have argued that the eating of animals is natural because we do not have the herbivore's double stomach or flat grinders and because chimpanzees eat meat and regard it as a treat (Kevles 1990). This argument

from anatomy involves selective filtering. In fact, all primates are primarily herbivorous. Though some chimpanzees have been observed eating dead flesh—at the most, six times in a month—some never eat meat. Dead flesh constitutes less than 4 percent of chimpanzees' diet; many eat insects, and they do not eat dairy products (Barnard 1990). Does this sound like the diet of human beings?

Chimpanzees, like most carnivorous animals, are apparently far better suited to catching animals than are human beings. We are much slower than they. They have long-projecting canine teeth for tearing hide; all the hominids lost their long-projecting canines 3.5 million years ago, apparently to allow more crushing action consistent with a diet of fruits, leaves, nuts, shoots, and legumes. If we do manage to get a hold of prey animals we cannot rip into their skin. It is true that chimpanzees act as if meat were a treat. When humans lived as foragers and when oil was rare, the flesh of dead animals was a good source of calories. It may be that the "treat" aspect of meat has to do with an ability to recognize dense sources of calories. However, we no longer have a need for such dense sources of calories as animal fat, since our problem is not lack of fat but rather too much fat.

When the argument is made that eating animals is natural, the presumption is that we must continue consuming animals because this is what we require to survive, to survive in a way consonant with living unimpeded by artificial cultural constraints that deprive us of the experience of our real selves. The paradigm of carnivorous animals provides the reassurance that eating animals is natural. But how do we know what is natural when it comes to eating, both because of the social construction of reality and the fact that our history indicates a very mixed message about eating animals? Some did; the majority did not, at least to any great degree.

The argument about what is natural—that is, according to one meaning of it, not culturally constructed, not artificial, but something that returns us to our true selves—appears in a different context that always arouses feminists' suspicions. It is often argued that women's subordination to men is natural. This argument attempts to deny social reality by appealing to the "natural." The "natural" predator argument ignores social construction as well. Since we eat corpses in a way quite differently from any other animals—dismembered, not freshly killed, not raw, and with other foods present—what makes it natural?

Meat is a cultural construct made to seem natural and inevitable. By the time the argument from analogy with carnivorous animals is made, the individual making such an argument has probably consumed animals since before the time she or he could talk. Rationalizations for consuming animals were probably offered when this individual at age four or five was discomforted upon discovering that meat came from dead animals. The taste of dead flesh preceded the rationalizations, and offered a strong foundation for believing the

rationalizations to be true. And baby boomers face the additional problem that as they grew up, meat and dairy products had been canonized as two of the four basic food groups. (This occurred in the 1950s and resulted from active lobbying by the dairy and beef industry. At the turn of the century there were twelve basic food groups.) Thus individuals have not only experienced the gratification of taste in eating animals but may truly believe what they have been told endlessly since childhood—that dead animals are necessary for human survival. The idea that meat eating is natural develops in this context. Ideology makes the artifact appear natural, predestined. In fact, the ideology itself disappears behind the facade that this is a “food” issue.

We interact with individual animals daily if we eat them. However, this statement and its implications are repositioned so that the animal disappears and it is said that we are interacting with a form of food that has been named “meat.” In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I call this conceptual process in which the animal disappears the structure of the absent referent. Animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal and animals become absent referents. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food.

Animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them. The absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity. The roast on the plate is disembodied from the pig who she or he once was. The absent referent also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present, perpetuating a means-end hierarchy.

The absent referent results from and reinforces ideological captivity: patriarchal ideology establishes the cultural set of human/animal, creates criteria that posit the species difference as important in considering who may be means and who may be ends, and then indoctrinates us into believing that we need to eat animals. Simultaneously, the structure of the absent referent keeps animals absent from our understanding of patriarchal ideology and makes us resistant to having animals made present. This means that we continue to interpret animals from the perspective of human needs and interests: we see them as usable and consumable. Much of feminist discourse participates in this structure when failing to make animals visible.

Ontology recapitulates ideology. In other words, ideology creates what appears to be ontological: if women are ontologized as sexual beings (or rapeable, as some feminists argue), animals are ontologized as carriers of meat. In ontologizing women and animals as objects, our language simultaneously eliminates the fact that someone else is acting as a subject/agent/perpetrator of violence. Sarah Hoagland demonstrates how this works: “John beat Mary,” becomes “Mary was beaten by John,” then “Mary was beaten,” and finally, “women beaten,” and thus “battered women” (Hoagland 1988, 17-18).

Regarding violence against women and the creation of the term “battered women,” Hoagland observes that “now something *men do to women* has become instead something that is a part of *women’s nature*. And we lose consideration of John entirely.”

The notion of the animal’s body as edible occurs in a similar way and removes the agency of humans who buy dead animals to consume them: “Someone kills animals so that I can eat their corpses as meat,” becomes “animals are killed to be eaten as meat,” then “animals are meat,” and finally “meat animals,” thus “meat.” Something we do to animals has become instead something that is a part of animals’ nature, and we lose consideration of our role entirely. When ecofeminism acknowledges that animals are absent referents but that we are meant to be predators, it still perpetuates the ontologizing of animals as consumable bodies.

5. CAN HUNTING BE RECONCILED TO ECOFEMINIST ETHICS?

Ecofeminism has the potential of situating both animals and vegetarianism within its theory and practice. But should vegetarianism become an *essential* aspect of ecofeminism? Are some forms of hunting acceptable ecofeminist alternatives to intensive farming? To answer this question we need to recognize that many ecofeminists (e.g., Warren) see the necessity of refusing to absolutize, a position consistent with a resistance to authoritarianism and power-over. Thus we can find a refusal to categorically condemn all killing. Issues are situated within their specific environments. I will call this emphasis on the specific over the universal a “philosophy of contingency.”

An ecofeminist method complements this ecofeminist philosophy of contingency—it is the method of contextualization. It may be entirely appropriate to refuse to say “All killing is wrong” and point to human examples of instances when killing is acceptable, such as euthanasia, abortion (if abortion is seen as killing), and the struggles of colonized people to overthrow their oppressors. Similarly, it is argued that the way in which an animal is killed to be food affects whether the action of killing and the consumption of the dead animal are acceptable or not. Killing animals in a respectful act of appreciation for their sacrifice, this argument proposes, does not create animals as instrumentalities. Instead, it is argued, this method of killing animals is characterized by relationship and reflects reciprocity between humans and the hunted animals. Essentially, there are no absent referents. I will call this interpretation of the killing of animals the “relational hunt.”

The issue of method provides a way to critique the argument for the relational hunt. But first let us acknowledge that the relational hunt’s ideological premise involves ontologizing animals as edible. The method may be different—“I kill for myself an animal I wish to eat as meat”—but neither the violence of the act nor the end result, meat, is eliminated by this change in

actors and method.¹² As I argue in the preceding section, the ontologizing of animals as edible bodies creates them as instruments of human beings; animals' lives are thus subordinated to the human's desire to eat them even though there is, in general, no need to be eating animals. Ecofeminists who wish to respect a philosophy of contingency yet resist the ontologizing of animals could choose the alternative position of saying "Eating an animal after a successful hunt, like cannibalism in emergency situations, is sometimes necessary, but like cannibalism, is morally repugnant." This acknowledges that eating animal (including human) flesh may occur at rare times, but resists the ontologizing of (some) animals as edible.

Applying the method of contextualization to the ideal of the relational hunt reveals inconsistencies. Because ecofeminist theory is theory in process, I offer these critiques sympathetically. It is never pointed out that this is *not* how the majority of people are obtaining their food from dead animals. Though the ecofeminist ethic is a contextualizing one, the context describing how we relate to animals is not provided. Just as environmentalists mystify women's oppression when they fail to address it directly, so ecofeminists mystify humans' relations with animals when they fail to describe them precisely.

Ecofeminism has not relied on the notion of speciesism to critique current treatment of animals, though its condemnation of naturism, explicitly and implicitly, offers a broadly similar critique. The word *speciesism* has been contaminated in some ecofeminists' eyes by its close association with the movement that resists it, the animal rights movement, which they view as perpetuating patriarchal discourse regarding rights. Animal rights, though, does recognize the right of each individual animal to continue living and this is its virtue. An anti-naturism position does not provide a similar recognition; as a result the individual animal killed in a hunt can be interpreted "to be in relationship." In other words, hunting is not seen as inconsistent with an anti-naturist position, though it would be judged so from an anti-speciesist position.

An antinaturist position emphasizes relationships, not individuals; the relational hunt is said to be a relationship of reciprocity. But reciprocity involves a mutual or cooperative interchange of favors or privileges. What does the animal who dies receive in this exchange?

The experience of sacrifice? How can the reciprocity of the relational hunt be verified since the other partner is both voiceless in terms of human speech and furthermore rendered voiceless through his or her death? Once the question of the willingness of the silent and silenced partner is raised, so too is the connection between the relational hunt and what I will call the "aggressive hunt." Ostensibly the relational hunt is different from the aggressive hunt, which is seen to aggrandize the hunter's sense of (male) self rather than valuing any relationship with the hunted animal. Yet we can find in discussions of the relational hunt and the aggressive hunt a common

phenomenon: the eliding of responsibility or agency. Consider the aggressive hunters' bible, *Meditations on Hunting*. In this book, José Ortega y Gasset writes:

To the sportsman the death of the game is not what interests him; that is not his purpose. What interests him is everything that he had to do to achieve that death—that is, the hunt. Therefore what was before only a means to an end is now an end in itself. Death is essential because without it there is no authentic hunting: the killing of the animal is the natural end of the hunt and that goal of hunting itself; *not* of the hunter (1985, 96).

The erasure of the subject in this passage is fascinating. In the end the hunter is not really responsible for willing the animal's death, just as the stereotypic batterer is presumed to be unable, at some point, to stop battering; it is said that he loses all agency. In the construction of the aggressive hunt, we are told that the killing takes place not because the hunter wills it but because the hunt itself requires it. This is the batterer model. In the construction of the relational hunt, it is argued that at some point the animal willingly gives up his or her life so that the human being can be sustained. This is the rapist model. In each case the violence is mitigated. In the rapist model, as with uncriminalized marital rape, the presumption is that in entering into the relationship the woman has said one unequivocal yes; so too in the relational hunt it is presupposed that the animal espied by the hunter at some point also said a nonverbal but equally binding unequivocal yes. The relational hunt and the aggressive hunt simply provide alternative means for erasing agency and denying violation.

I have not as yet discussed the fact that the relational hunt is based on ecofeminists' understanding of some Native American hunting practices and beliefs. But given that many indigenous cultures experienced their relationship with animals very differently than we do today, even nonhierarchically, why do environmentalists gravitate to illustrations from Native American cultures that were hunting rather than horticultural and predominantly vegetarian? Why not hold up as a counterexample to our ecocidal culture gatherer societies that demonstrate humans can live happily without animals' bodies as food?

Furthermore, what method will allow us to accomplish the relational hunt on any large scale? Can we create as an ideal method one developed in a sparsely populated continent and impose it upon an urban population that has by and large eliminated the wilderness in which Native American cultures flourished? The wilderness no longer exists to allow for duplication. As Rosemary Ruether poses the question: "Since there could be no return to the unmanaged wilderness, in which humans compete with animals as one species among others, without an enormous reduction of the human population from its present 5.6 billion back to perhaps a million or so, one wonders what kind

of mass destruction of humans is expected to accomplish this goal?" (Ruether 1990, 19).

The problem with the relational hunt is that it is a highly sentimentalized individual solution to a corporate problem: what are we to do about the eating of animals? We either see animals as edible bodies or we do not.¹³

6. AUTONOMY AND ECOFEMINIST-VEGETARIANISM

As long as animals are culturally constructed as edible, the issue of vegetarianism will be seen as a conflict over autonomy (to determine on one's own what one will eat versus being told not to eat animals). The question, "Who decided that animals should be food?" remains unaddressed. Rather than being seen as agents of consciousness, raising legitimate issues, ecofeminist-vegetarians are seen as violating others' rights to their own pleasures. This may represent the true "daughter's seduction" in our culture—to believe that pleasure is apolitical and to perpetuate a personalized autonomy derived from dominance. The way autonomy works in this instance appears to be: "By choosing to eat meat, I acquire my 'I-ness.' If you say *I can't* eat meat then I lose my 'I-ness.'" Often the basic premise of the supposed gender-neutrality of autonomy is accepted, leaving both the notion of autonomy and the social construction of animals unexamined. As a result, animals remain absent referents.

The ecofeminist-vegetarian response to this idea of autonomy is: "Let's redefine our 'I-ness.' Does it require dominance of others? Who determined that meat is food? How do we constitute ourselves as 'I's' in this world?"

Giving conceptual place to the significance of individual animals restores the absent referent. This ecofeminist response derives not from a rights-based philosophy but from one arising from relationships that bring about identification and thus solidarity. We must see ourselves in relationship with animals. To eat animals is to make of them instruments; this proclaims dominance and power-over. The subordination of animals is not a given but a decision resulting from an ideology that participates in the very dualisms that ecofeminism seeks to eliminate. We achieve autonomy by acting independently of such an ideology.

Ecofeminism affirms that individuals can change, and in changing we reposition our relationship with the environment. This form of empowerment is precisely what is needed in approaching the issue of where animals stand in our lives. Many connections can be made between our food and our environment, our politics and our personal lives. Essentially, the existence of terminal animals is paradigmatic of, as well as contributing to the inevitability of, a terminal earth.

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at two conferences: "Ecofeminism: The Woman/Earth Connection," April 1990, Douglass College (sponsored by the Rutgers School of Law-Newark and *Women's Rights Law Reporter*), and "Women's Worlds: Realities and Choices, Fourth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women," June 1990, Hunter College. Thanks to Karen Warren, Nancy Tuana, Melinda Vadas, Marti Kheel, Batya Bauman, Greta Gaard, Tom Regan, Neal Barnard, and Teal Willoughby for assistance in thinking and writing on this topic.

2. I will defend these claims by appealing, in part, to interviews I conducted in 1976 of more than seventy vegetarians in the Boston-area women's community. These interviews are intended as testimony to the fact that ecofeminism's theoretical potential, as well as its history, is clearly on the side of animals. They also attest to the importance of first-person narrative in (eco)feminist theory building (see Warren 1990). Among those interviewed were activists and writers such as Judy Norsigian and Wendy Sanford of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Lisa Leghorn, Kate Cloud, Karen Lindsey, Pat Hynes, Mary Sue Henifin, Kathy Maio, Susan Leigh Starr, and many others.

3. My starting point in this essay is not that of animal rights theory, which seeks to extend to animals moral considerations based on their interests, sentience, and similarity with humans. My writing is *informed* by this argument, but my starting point here is that ecofeminists seek to end the pernicious logic of domination that has resulted in the interconnected subordination of women and nature. From this starting point, I recognize many other issues besides that of animals' subordination as problematic. In fact, my thesis arises because the ecofeminist analysis of nature requires a more vocal naming of animals as a part of that subordinated nature. Thus I am not patching animals onto an undisturbed notion of human rights, but am examining the place of animals in the fabric of ecofeminist ethics—a starting point that already presumes that the exploitation of nature entails more than the exploitation of animals.

My emphasis here is on *ideology*. An ideology that ontologizes what are called "terminal" animals as edible bodies precedes the issues associated with animal rights discourse and ecofeminist theory. My attempt is to expose this ideology, not through what ecofeminists and environmentalists see as the animal rights strategy of ethical extensionism from humans to some nonhumans, but by exploring the result of the human-animal dualism that has precipitated both the animal rights movement as well as the suspicions of it among those who favor a more biotic way of framing the problem of the oppression of nature. The problem is that each time the biotic environmentalist discourse is willing to sacrifice individual animals as edible bodies, it demonstrates the reason that arguments for rights and interests of individual animals have been so insistently raised and endorses an ideology that is a part of the logic of domination they ostensibly resist, while participating in the human-animal dualism.

4. Walker appears to mean by this concept that each animal possesses a unique individuality, sentience, and completeness of self in one's self and not through others, and should exist as such for human beings, not as images or as food. Since the concept of personhood is extremely problematic from the perspective of feminist philosophy, I will not use that term though I think that in a general, less philosophically based discourse, this is what my sources mean when talking about "beingness."

5. My own *The Sexual Politics of Meat* began as a paper for Daly's class on feminist ethics (see Adams 1975). In her book *The Rape of the Wild*, Daly's close friend Andrée

Collard applies Daly's feminist philosophy of biophilia to animals. As early as 1975 Collard was working on the intersection of the oppression of women and oppression of animals.

6. Warren's fourth point, that ecological movements must include a feminist perspective, is not as apparent in the 1976 interviews. The animal liberation movement traces its roots to Singer's 1975 text *Animal Liberation*; thus the feminist critique of this movement was not readily apparent in 1976 because the movement itself was in its gestational period. Subsequent feminist writings apply a feminist critique to the animal liberation movement while agreeing with the premise that the exploitation of animals must be challenged (Kheel, Collard, Corea, Donovan, Salamone). The politics of identification is a de facto critique of arguments on behalf of animals based on dominant philosophies, since it does not attempt to establish criteria for rights but speaks to responsibility and relationships. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I use feminist literary criticism as an antidote to "rights" language. I am currently developing an (eco)feminist philosophy of animal rights.

7. Some environmentalists have argued that the complete conversion to vegetarianism will precipitate a population crisis and thus is less ecologically responsible than meat eating (Callicott 1989, 35). This assumes that we are all heterosexual and that women never will have reproductive freedom.

8. For environmental issues associated with meat production see Akers (1983), Pimental (1975, 1976), Hur and Field (1984, 1985), Krizmanic (1990a and 1990b).

9. A by-product of livestock production is methane, a greenhouse gas that can trap twenty to thirty times more solar heat than carbon dioxide. Largely because of their burps, "ruminant animals are the largest producers of methane, accounting for 12 to 15 percent of emissions, according to the E.P.A." (O'Neill 1990, 4).

10. Ninety-five percent of all poultry workers are black women who face carpal tunnel syndrome and other disorders caused by repetitive motion and stress (Cliff 1990; Lewis 1990, 175).

11. On this see Robbins (1987) and poet Audre Lorde's (1980) description of the relationship between breast cancer and high-fat diets.

12. While some might argue that the method of the relational hunt eliminates the *violence* inherent in other forms of meat eating, I do not see how that term, as it is commonly used today, can be seen to be illegitimately applied in the context in which I use it here. I use *violent* in the sense of the *American Heritage Dictionary's* definition: "caused by unexpected force or injury rather than by natural causes." Even if the animal acquiesces to her/his death, which I argue we simply do not know, this death is still not a result of natural causes but of external force that requires the use of implements and the intent of which is to cause mortal injury. This is violence, which kills by wounding a being who would otherwise continue to live.

13. One of the anonymous reviewers raised the issue that plants have life, too. Due to space constraints my response to this point had to be omitted; interested readers may write to me for this information. It is important to acknowledge however that the greatest amount of plant exploitation is due to the growing of plant foods to feed terminal animals.

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