



A Study on Feminism, Ecology and Economics: Modern Western Philosophy

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Abstract: 'Feminism refers to a broad spectrum of political groups, philosophies, and social movements with the shared objective of defining, establishing, and achieving sex equality in all spheres of society. Feminism is predicated on the idea that women should be treated with respect and given the same chances as men, and that they should have full access to the same resources. Since feminism encompasses a wide range of topics, from the history of women's oppression to strategies for overcoming the "anxiety of authorship" and creating a body of work that speaks for women alone, the field is inherently interdisciplinary. Since feminism attempts to analyse, comprehend, and clarify the many psychosocial and cultural constructions of femininity, it is a serious endeavour. This paper, however, tries to do just that by studying a few of seminal works in the field of feminist literary theory and outlining some of the fundamental assumptions and tenets of feminism.

Keywords: Feminism, Economics, Gynocriticism, Philosophy, Second wave feminism, Ecology.

Introduction:

The word "feminism" comes from the Latin word "femina," which means "woman," and was originally applied to the fight for women's rights and gender equality [1]. Feminism is a condition of being feminine or womanly, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Webster's describes feminism as the belief that women should enjoy the same civil and political rights as men. According to feminist theorist Toril Moi, "the words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels signifying sympathy for the goals of the new Woman's Movement which developed in the late 1960s." Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir claims that the symmetrical use of male and feminine pronouns in legal documents is merely for aesthetic purposes [2]. Feminism can mean different things to different people. 'Feminism in English Literature,' by Chaman Nahal, defines feminism as "a manner of existence whereby a woman is free of the dependent syndrome. There is a dependency syndrome, and it manifests in many ways depending on who or what you depend on. When women break free of the victim mentality and live independently, that's when my concept of feminism will come to fruition.

Feminist theory rests on the central tenet that, ever since the dawn of human civilization, women have been relegated to a secondary role in society, thanks to the dominance of masculine-dominated social discourse the western philosophical heritage. Women have been oppressed

throughout history, and they won't be able to reclaim their individuality unless they revisit, explore, and re-establish that history in light of their own experiences and discoveries [3]. Women have to find their own definition in contrast to the ideas and beliefs based on men's perspectives that have been passed down through the generations. By producing female subjects who are socialized to uphold the system's values, these beliefs have established a dominant system. Men degrade and abuse the physical cosmos in the same way they dishonour and exploit women, reducing them to submissive beings and selfless artefacts. In sum, men have used their superiority over women and the natural world to achieve a foothold in the realms of ecological inhalation, historical traces, and philosophy or epistemological tradition [4]. Put another way, women have been historically marginalized to the point where they can only survive in relation to men. Women have traditionally been treated in the epistemological and philosophical system as if they did not exist at all, as a second error, as a non-existent being, or as a sexual object whose value fluctuates between libido and jealousy. The third form of exploitation mirrors the exploitation of nature, as women have traditionally been compared to the earth and other inert natural phenomena such as the moon, the soil, clay, and reproduction. By protesting and resisting masculine codified standards of conduct, feminist theorists cast doubt on these ideas. They re-establish the emerging feminist literary canon by rebutting opposing arguments with a philosophical and theoretical framework and a reinterpretation of history [5]. Feminist literary theory, then, is the application of feminism to a theoretical or philosophical framework in order to investigate the history of women's writing and the factors that contribute to women's subordination in society. They went through a series of transitions as they de-centered phallogocentric ideas and forged their own independent identity. They were able to take back land that had been stolen from them for generations by using these methods of self-improvement.

Mainstream economics does not consider feminism or environmental concerns appropriate conversation starters. Discussions on women in the workforce or environmental and resource economics may be tolerated, but they are not important to the field of study. Most academic departments view inquiries regarding the subjugation of women or the devastation of ecosystems as a serious faux pas. Using the wrong fork at a dinner party is the intellectual equivalent of bringing up the idea that gender could structure economic activity or that natural constraints might set limits on economic progress [6]. You're a man-hater, a Moonie, a tree-hugger, a soft-in-the-head alarmist, or an anti-intellectual rabble-rouser if you think otherwise. And it's not only at the neoclassical dinner table; some feminists may have a dim view of "greens," and vice versa; and there are subcultures within both feminist and ecological communities where it's risky to come out as an economist or a mathematical ecologist.

The goal of this paper is to examine how feminist and ecological economics might move forward by clarifying some of the intellectual underpinnings of the resistance of mainstream economic theory to these concerns. By "mainstream," I mean the predominant school of economic thought in the United States and Canada, which I define as "neoclassical" economics. Feminist and ecological thought, far from being illogical or anti-intellectual, can provide a more nuanced understanding of human nature and scientific practice. Current economic thought is shown to be restricted and prejudiced in the light of this more adequate understanding [7]. Feminist and environmentally concerned economists may propose alternative economics; however, these ideas may also fall short of what is needed. The goal of this work is not to demonize neoclassical economics but rather to lay out criticisms, counter-criticisms, and suggestions for how ecological

economics might advance in the most fruitful manner. My own educational and professional background is in neoclassical economics, and my interest in ecological studies is quite recent.

Unfortunately, the paper will gloss over the more tangible aspects of women's role in the economy and the environment. Another issue is how little attention will be paid to the role that racism and colonialism played in the spread of western economic ideas. I can only recommend reading Vandana Shiva's seminal work from 1988 and Bina Agarwal's current introspective analysis of similar topics (1992). This study is limited to discussing how ideas about science, women, and nature contributed to the development of contemporary economics.

Feminism and Economics

Just to be clear, feminism in economics does not equate to the exclusive practise of economics by women or to the exclusive application of soft techniques or cooperative models. Feminist research contends that the field of economics has lost credibility because it unwittingly promotes a skewed image of masculinity through its models, techniques, subjects, and teaching. Feminist academics think that economics would be a more fruitful field of study if more resources were devoted to studying and teaching a broader variety of economic activities.

Many readers may have come to the realisation that they are, in fact, practising "feminist economics," even if they have always referred to their work as "good economics." For anyone who feels defensive when their work is labelled "feminist," it's worth exploring why they feel the need to do so. This defensiveness may be indicative of well ingrained but potentially problematic societal norms on gender roles and the relative merits of men and women.

The role of women and the environment in classical economics:

In neoclassical economics, women and the environment are treated similarly. They are, at various times, viewed as unimportant, ignored, a "resource" to be exploited for the benefit of males or humans, a part of a realm that "takes care of itself," a source of renewal rather than creation, a passive subject of male or human authority, and so on. The subject of what is not researched in economics is more illuminating than the study of topics like "natural resources" or the economic status of women and families. These concerns are not central to the field, but have been added to its periphery. There is total silence.

You won't find any hint of where the resources utilized in production came from or where the trash from the production process goes in the most archetypal models of economic production or growth. Production is understood to occur when just labor and capital are utilized. For instance, Paul Ehrlich (1989) and Paul Christensen (1989) both drew attention to the disappearance of energy and material assets from theoretical economics in the inaugural issue of this journal, arguing that economists' "circular flow" diagram is a perpetual motion machine requiring no inputs.

Similarly, the origins of economic agents and the destinations of broken or exhausted ones are seldom discussed at length in most accounts of human agents. Economic agents appear "... as if but even now erupted out of the earth, then suddenly, like mushroom, come to full development, without all type of engagement to each other," to paraphrase Thomas Hobbes. Traditional female roles, such as childbearing and caregiving (even for the elderly and the sick), are as

unremarkable as the weather. Several feminist economists, including Nancy Folbre, have recently provided excellent treatments of this problem within the economics profession (1994). The long-held assumption that nature and the home can "take care of itself" is, of course, being called into question with increasing frequency in recent years. Concerns regarding the wisdom of such benign neglect are warranted in light of issues like resource depletion, pollution, population growth consumption, free childcare crises, and female and child poverty [8]. While there has been and will be valuable work done on these topics by those operating within the mainstream economy, their scope and scope of inquiry will always be constrained by their outlier status and the theoretical and methodological tools at their disposal. It is not accidental that neoclassical analysis treats women and the natural world as interchangeable, exploitable resources. This method of thinking has historical roots and is part of a larger cultural worldview.

Western ideas on women and the natural world:

Feminist philosophy has produced a large body of writing that traces the origins of western science and culture back to the dominance of hierarchical, dualistic conceptions of human identity and gender. Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason: 'Male' & 'Female' in Western Philosophy* begins with the ancient Greeks and continues all the way up to Augustine and Aquinas, while Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* is an early, ground-breaking work that examines notions of nature and gender beginning in the 15th century. Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), Sandra Harding (1986), Brian Easlea (1980), Catherine Keller (1986), and Susan Bordo (1990) have all contributed to and refined this analysis (1987). A recent book by Val Plumwood that is an excellent example of this study is *Feminist and the Mastery of Nature*, which focuses on debates that have arisen in the field of ecology. It has been assumed that what sets humans unique from other animals and from nature at large is their higher level of thought and awareness. Since then, human identity has been predicated on distancing oneself from nature rather than reaffirming one's place within it. However, only males of the species are included in the definition of "human". Western philosophy consistently places women (and slaves or "barbarians") in a lower order than (dominant) men, reasoning, thought, and activity by associating them with nature, substance, passivity, and the body. For instance, Aristotle believed that "although the body is from the female, it is the spirit that is from the male" while discussing the process of reproduction. "the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and eternal, and intellectual [9]. while the body is in the very image of the human, and mortal, and unintelligent," as Plato puts it. As the Greek male is to rule over "children and women and slaves," so too must the soul and reason rule over the body and appetites. Descartes, at the dawn of the scientific revolution, conceptualized the ultimate separation of body and mind through his distinction between both the *res cogitans* (thinking non-matter) as well as the *res extensa* (external matter) (nonthin king matter). Francis Bacon believed in exploring and using the natural world. Bacon said, "I am coming in very reality, leading to you Nature with all her offspring to bind her to your service and render her your slave." Nature was rendered not just inert, but dead, during the scientific revolution, making it fair game for extraction and exploitation. According to this prevailing Western view, 'real' human existence occurs in the male intellect or soul, while women and nature make up an inferior but essential order for the nourishment of the (more despised) mortal, physical self.

One possible conclusion to be derived from such anecdotes is that women are the 'natural' demographic to take up the ecological cause and preserve the earth since they are more in tune with nature. However, rather than challenging prevailing dualisms and stereotypes, a "earth mother" image reinforces them. Rather than the presumed rationality of actual men (which would be remedied by more feelings on the part of actual women), the central problem, according to the aforementioned feminist interpreters of modern western philosophy, lies deeper, in the patterns of trying to define male as being opposed to it and superior to female, as well as rationality as being opposed to it and superior to nature, matter, & emotion. The issue is with defining humans in terms of what sets them apart from nature rather than what they have in common with it. "What is involved in the gapless playback of nature is the denial of dependency on biosphere processes and a vision of people as apart, outside of nature," writes Plumwood (1993, p. 21). Nature is seen as an endless provider with no needs of its own. The dominant Western culture has routinely devalued, marginalized, and ignored the importance of the reproductive and survival sectors of society.

In this theoretical understanding of 'human' identity, representations of women as natural and of environment as female have a significant symbolic function. Woman, traditionally depicted as immersed in nature, mediates between "man" and "nature" in popular culture. Women do the unrecognized work of bodily care and everyday provisioning that is essential to the upkeep of the masculine self-image of active autonomy. When women's needs aren't acknowledged, they become an invisible social endeavour.

Characterization of Ecofeminist Philosophy

Françoise 'Eaubonne, a French feminist, first used the phrase "ecological feminisme" to highlight the role that women may play in bringing about an ecological revolution in 1974. At its inception, the term "ecofeminism" referred to a broad spectrum of "women-nature" connections, often from the vantage point of various academic disciplines (including History, Literary Criticism, Political Science, Sociology, and Theology). It was not until the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s that ecofeminism emerged as a separate philosophical perspective, therefore this is relevant information.

For the purposes of this essay, an overarching, unifying definition of "ecofeminist philosophy" is that it (1) investigates the links between unjustified dominance of women and the natural world; (2) criticises male-biased Western canonical philosophical views (assumptions, concepts, claims, distinctions, positions, theories) about women and the natural world; and (3) develops alternatives to and solutions for these problems.

In this context, a word regarding nomenclature is necessary. In their philosophical work, many ecofeminists draw a line between sexism and the (unjustified) dominance of nature. They justify their actions by arguing that oppression is only possible between entities endowed with logic, cognitive ability, or sentience. The Western world tends to assume that inanimate objects like rocks, plants, rivers, and (more generally) nature lack such qualities. Therefore, unlike women, they are immune to oppression (though they are still vulnerable to unfair dominance). Where do non-human animals stand? Despite their belief that nature is incapable of oppression, many ecofeminist thinkers extend this idea to animals, particularly domesticated animals. Animal (but not environmental) oppression is discussed. The term "oppression" will not be used in reference

to animals in this article; rather, its use in that context will be kept as an open topic. This means phrases like "the oppression of nature" or "the twin oppressions of women and nature" or "the mutually reinforcing oppressions of women and nature" are not going to be found in ecofeminist intellectual ideas on women-nature linkages. They will, however, make reference to the unfair subjugation of women, nonhuman creatures, and the natural world.

Past the limits of dualism:

The environmental catastrophe has prompted a number of remedies, most of which are grounded in western philosophical canons. The technocratic worldview, in the most obvious sense, is one that accepts the idea of human mastery over nature and perceives the problem as originating solely from a lack of mastery. If this theory is correct, environmental problems will be solved by the next big scientific breakthrough or a rise in the economy (which will allow people to afford environmental protection products). Less visibly, 'holism' or 'culture ecofeminism' (the word I use to refer to the view which supports the identification of women and nature) also stay within the dualism structure, in ways that will be studied more below.

I have created a diagram to illustrate the suggestions made by Val Plumwood (1993) & Catherine Keller (1986) for moving beyond these dualisms. Men in the West have always been encouraged to value their uniqueness by emphasizing their independence from the group and from nature. To an extreme degree, however, the need of maintaining social and natural ties has been downplayed, and the myth of self-sufficiency has been upheld. Both Keller and Plumwood refer to this phenomenon as the myth of the "separative" self. However, women have traditionally been categorized solely by their connections to men and to the environment, to the point where it is commonly held that females have no unique identity of their own. Keller refers to this as one's "soluble self," whereas Plumwood calls it "union." The masculine version places more emphasis on what sets individuals apart from one another and what sets human consciousness apart from other forms of consciousness or unconsciousness, while the feminine version places more emphasis on continuity and connection and less on what makes each person unique.

Humans are relationally formed, capable of independent thought and action, yet embedded in the natural world. Isolation results from failing to acknowledge interdependence, whereas engulfment stems from failing to appreciate diversity. • Neither cultural ecofeminism's celebration of women's identification with nature nor the ideology of merging with nature (holism) make this departure from strict dualism. • Holism essentially swaps out one extreme (isolation) for another (engulfment), and the 'culture' ecofeminism adds a gender stereotype on top of that. In an article for Environmental Ethics, Jim Cheney drew out the following implications of the larger feminist idea of separation & connection for the discussion of ecological ethics. Ecological ethics grounded in simple dualisms alternate between Cheney's "atomistically defined self-•., like a sponge, collecting the gift of the other," and "oceanic fusion," in which the individual is united with the entire. Both choices strip 'the other' of their unique identity and individuality. Either the self widens to encompass the other or it dissolves into them.

Humans-over-nature views, on the one hand, and holistic, human-submerged-in-nature views, on the other, both reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the I-Thou relationship and the ways in

which an individual can be both organically and socially formed and uniquely their own. According to feminist theory, the isolation/engulfment perspective on human identity is extremely narrow and potentially detrimental, with negative effects on the way people view their place in the natural world and the way men view women. We human beings, both sexes, share a continuous and intertwined existence with the natural world in which we find ourselves.

Readers of this publication may be better familiar with the similar concept of human identity proposed by Herman Daly & James Cobb, Jr. They state that "does not preclude an element of individualism" from their concept of the "person-in-community." However, they overlook the importance of personal relationships, and especially family relationships, as the foundation for human identity by focusing on relations primarily at the societal or political level. To illustrate: We are individual consumers in nuclear families but we are social producers. " by Lester Thurow (1988). It is quite possible to make arguments for the socioeconomic nature of human existence while working well within a dualism that makes male encounter public and important, trivializes female experience, as well as ignores gender as an important social and cognitive force. Keep in mind that for Thurow, a person's social existence begins at home, with everything inside (the realm of women) still subsumed under the umbrella term "individual." Several feminist political theorists, including Susan Moller Okin (1989), have provided extensive critiques of such "communitarian" and liberal viewpoints. In addition to leaving room for internal inconsistencies, failing to account for the gendered aspect of the separation/connection split may be indicative of a lack of understanding of the historical, cognitive, as well as psycho-sexual depth and breadth of dualistic thought.

Economics as defined:

Many features of modern economics can be added to the list of hierarchy dualisms that underpin much of modern western thought. The field of mainstream economics prioritizes public (market & government) over private (family) interests, agents over institutions, self-interest over other-interest, independence over dependence, quantitative over qualitative analysis, abstract models over empirical research, positivism over normativism, and efficiency over equity. In addition, it favors analysis using 'arithmomorphic' concepts placed above a white analysis using 'dialectical' concepts, which is what Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen meant when he said that such an approach privileges a notion of understanding as analogous to math equation over broader notions of knowledge (such as those that include pattern recognition or gestalts). To be soft, of course, is to risk being associated with femininity, and this holds true for all the favoured elements. The common person's conception of economics differs significantly from the economists' own understanding of the field. Many people associate economics with production and consumption, or with earning a living wage to provide for one's family. However, one of the primary goals of an Economics 1A course is to introduce the concepts of scarcity and choice to the student and disabuse them of such a concrete, real-world perspective. In other words, one yanks them away from worrying about the lower-order *res exrensas* and onto the more prized *res cogitans*. The neoclassical model's agent has a lot of separation from its context and body. For instance, using the word "needs" in relation to these types of models is taboo. When agents' insatiable desires run up against the stinginess of nature, they are faced with the economic problem, which is defined as the cognitive process (actually, not so much a procedure as a static optimization method) of making rational choices.

An anorexic I read about once justified her decision to stop eating by calling it a "lifestyle habit." Having probably prioritized the benefits of her 'wants,' she probably got the most out of her life. Probably, she did not make it. This could serve as a fitting analogy for humanity. Such disregard for the physical basis of our survival is perilous, as readers of this journal undoubtedly well know. Feminist and ecological ideas would be more in keeping with a definition of economics as the study of "provisioning," as opposed to the study of "choice," which places economics above and divorced from physical, emotional, & social realities. While it's easy to forget, Georgescu-Roegen argued that keeping the human race alive should be the driving force behind any economic activity. The necessities for "purposeful action and enjoyment of life," as pointed out by Georgescu-Roegen, are included in such a formulation. This concept of a world in which human needs can be met is also central to Amartya Sen's idea of "capabilities" (Sen, 1984). Models of choice behavior may play a part within such a focus on provisioning, but they are not the central, defining function.

The current demands for adherence to formal, mathematical modeling of self-interested, autonomous selection should not be taken as simply prerequisites for great rigor, rather as demands that masculine-biased preferences be indulged, if we are to move beyond the dualistic, hierarchical thinking regarding models and methods. An enlarged notion of knowledge in which a range of ways of knowing are regarded beneficial should be examined rather than continuing in dualistic thinking by assuming that the superior option is all on the other side (informal, qualitative, etc.). As an illustration of the need to broaden our economic tools, think about the ongoing discussions about how to calculate GDP. Feminists have argued that the value of housework, which has historically been done by women, should be included in metrics of national production, while ecological economists have argued for modifying national production measures to account for resource depletion. Both have been attempted in some studies. While these estimates may be helpful, they also raise questions about how much weight to give to GDP figures. It smells of methodological reductionism to use such a primitive, singular metric of production, no matter how refined, as a yardstick for economic well-being. Economic research and national policy-making & evaluation might benefit from a more comprehensive set of metrics, including measurements of distribution or sustainability as well as human outcomes like educational attainment and health. For instance, in regions where sex and age discrimination are common, it may be crucial to account for the division of labor as well as of goods within the household when assessing human outcomes.

The feminist critique of dualistic worldviews has applications beyond feminist political economy. For instance, Daniel A. Underwood & Paul G. King from a previous issue of this journal argue that we need a new ethic that takes into account "rights to intergenerational welfare. That's why we need to elevate the moral calculus of moral good and wrong to the "lowest ranks of feelings" as the driving force behind homo economics. Take note of the high/low and calculus/emotions dualisms at play here. In this case, logic is still superior to passion. Take note, too, that the concept of justice is based entirely on rights. Recent feminist theory has focused extensively on the problems with a rights-based understanding of justice and the separation of thought and feeling. Much of this writing combines the idea of rights with the idea of responsibility in relationships, so that we don't just focus on the rights of the individual to, say, property or the freedom to act on our own accord, but also on the web of relationships that binds us together as a moral community and examines the caring connections among us.

Conclusions:

This article argues that ecological economics would benefit greatly from including feminist perspectives on traditional modern western notions of human nature as well as the relationship between humans and nature. Social scorn for ecological economics becomes a little more reasonable when one considers the strong, gendered, historical characterization of humans as apart from nature. Ecological thinking is considered too "soft" and "feminine" by the economic elite (except possibly in its most mathematicised form). However, the holist philosophers & cultural ecofeminism proponents may find economics to be too "hard" and masculine. However, feminism argues that it is possible to transcend such dualism. Recognizing that human survival is inextricably linked to ecological stability should be a natural component of any economist's line of work. Concern for the environment, caring, and passion can coexist with an openness to analytical thought and even markets, if they are placed appropriately. For two reasons, I avoid calling these actions eco-feminism. First, although having common theoretical grounding, feminist and ecological movements are not always identical in their actual implementation. Second, this term doesn't fight the stereotype that women are soft on crime but rather promotes it. Economics and ecology have an entomological basis, from which we get the English word "housekeeping," as noted by Ehrlich (1989) in the first issue of this magazine. Remembering who is still typically held responsible for actual housekeeping and how much respect is still accorded to such job is not irrelevant to theoretical debates of ecological economics.

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