

## ***Towards an Epistemology of Ecofeminism***

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In recent decades the socio-philosophical movement known as 'ecofeminism' has accumulated considerable literature. One salient facet of the ecofeminist perspective attributes the current environmental and global crisis to the educational, political and institutional dispositions of a patriarchal society. Consistent with the ecofeminist presumption is the corollary view that the rape of nature and the rape of women are parallel socio-cultural manifestations of the patriarchal 'psyche' which conditions the way in which both nature and women have traditionally been valued and treated in western society (Laura & Heaney, 1992).

Although the authors concur with the fundamental intuition of the ecofeminist perspective, the burden of this piece is to supplement this intuition with a tolerably coherent epistemology within which the ecofeminist claims of social rape admit of more persuasive articulation than they have been given to date. We make no pretence of providing in the limited space available anything more than a sketch of how the epistemological foundations of ecofeminism might be set out. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, we are confident that the framework of argument to be enunciated is sufficiently substantive to accommodate the conceptual edifice we intend to build upon it at a later date.

In patriarchy, nature, animals and women are objectified, hunted, invaded, owned, consumed, and forced to yield and to produce (or not). This violation of the integrity of the wild spontaneous Being is rape. It is motivated by a fear and rejection of life and it allows the oppressor the illusion of control, of power, of being alive. As with women as a class, nature and animals have been kept in a state of inferiority and powerlessness in order to enable men as a class to believe and act upon their 'natural' superiority/dominance.

(Collard, 1988, p.i)

***Patriarchal Rape: The Animal Connection***

To suggest that the rape of nature and the rape of women reflect aspects of the same dominant patriarchal socio-cultural tradition of the West is indeed a provocative claim. The way in which ecofeminism has been marginalised in the mainstream socio-philosophical literature, for example, makes clear that more argument is needed to overcome not only the intellectual but the primarily visceral responses to the feminist position (Bielh 1991, for example, who provides a scathing review of the central ideologies of ecofeminism). The historical development of modern science and the technologies to which it gives rise reveal unequivocally that it is easier to rationalise the indiscretions of technology than to recant them. The nuclear bomb is a case in point (See, for example, Rifkin, 1992). This being so, it has been tempting to rationalise the way in which we have, as a society, treated nature and women by apportioning blame to an historically select group of immoral, uncaring, and socially deviant individuals who feel neither shame nor conscience in their violation of nature and the living things which inhabit it. Though there is no doubt whatsoever that such violations have taken place and continue to happen (See, for example, Laura and Cotton, 1999; Suzuki & Dressel, 1999), the ecofeminists have taught us that it would be naive to suppose that we can exonerate ourselves by simply blaming the leaders of corrupt governments or other powerful political groups. Underpinning what social leaders say and do is a far more comprehensive worldview or 'Weltbild' which not only informs but conditions how we define and value the world in which we dwell.

Reflection upon our treatment of animals, for instance, and of how we value or 'devalue' them demonstrates determinately that in nature rape takes many different forms, but is still a profound violation in all its subtle and sometimes not so subtle guises. The rape of animals comes at the hands of humans who feel that they have the right to do whatever they want to animals. This blatant lack of consideration of animal interest is all too well illustrated by the commercial slaughter of wildlife; by their use in animal experimentation and in the practice of factory farming. Singer (1989) makes lamentably clear that the most contact many people have with animals is at their dinner table. While it is no part of our purpose here to determine the tenability of vegetarianism, it is incontestable that many modern farming practices result in unnecessary cruelty and suffering to millions of animals each year. Due to the money driven exigencies of modern farming procedures (Gruzalski, 1989; Singer, 1989), our society allows animals to be treated as little more than fodder to be converted to flesh—and usually for no better purpose than to satisfy our own palate. Animals also suffer and die horribly each year in unnecessary animal experimentation. We literally torture animals in the name of medical research (Ryder, 1983). Animals are used for

our tests of oral toxicity and to determine the adverse effects to the eyes and skin rendered by products such as weed killers, cosmetics, toiletries, food additives, cleaning products, pesticides and anti-freeze (Ryder, 1983). Animals are cavalierly used for allegedly educational research as in their commonplace dissection for teaching purposes. In addition they are used as research subjects in agricultural studies, behavioural psychology, physiology and zoology. They have also been experimented on in the name of dental and pain research, as well as for weapons and crash/impact testing (Ryder, 1983).

Given that western society displays little if any compunction in its treatment of animals, it is unsurprising that the same presumptions used to rationalise the rape of animals serve implicitly to legitimise the more general rape of nature, and ultimately, as we shall endeavour to show, the social rape of women. Despite protestations to the contrary, a consensus view is emerging within science that our persistent technological violations of the environment have contributed significantly to the immanent catastrophe of global warming which now threatens the existence of every living thing upon this earth (Laura & Cotton, 1999; Suzuki & Dressel, 1999; Coward & Hurka, 1993). By having disrupted the delicate equilibrium and natural rhythm of greenhouse variables which make life on earth possible, humanity is in effect jeopardising its continued prospect for well being by having 'set the thermostat too high' (Coward, 1993, p.1). Restricting the output of greenhouse gases to those emitted from the use of coal in electricity production and from oil, *simply* as fuel for cars, an astonishing three billion tons of carbon are added to the atmosphere each year. In addition to global warming, other practices of mankind result in the annual destruction of billions of tonnes of topsoil, the decimation of 100 acres of tropical rainforest each minute, and the disappearance of 20 000 flora and fauna species each year (Laura & Cotton, 1999, pp.5-39). These vital elements of the living earth are in turn replaced with pollutants, toxins and radiation released by the tonne into the natural environment. Coward likens this to 'adding new panes of glass to the greenhouse' (1993, p.1).

### ***Patriarchal Rape: The Female Connection***

Recognition of the mindless rape of animals and nature makes it easier to appreciate the argument that the social value placed on women has historically been largely utilitarian. Women have not infrequently been regarded as little more than animals or living chattels, to be bought, sold, or traded in accord with the caprice of men, and recent research that such violations of women are less rare than the conventional patriarchal wisdom suggests. Amnesty International (1995) asserts that millions of women all over the globe each year are mutilated, beaten, burnt alive, battered

to death, stripped of their legal rights and treated like market commodities. For example, Amnesty International describes how women in some Islamic countries after enduring the horror of being raped, are then murdered by their own families for having brought shame upon the community.

Feminists writing in a number of fields have shown that females are also still pathetically socially disadvantaged and subordinated in comparison to their male counterparts (Warren, 1998). To keep this paper within manageable bounds, however, we shall confine ourselves to a brief description of a few of the economic disadvantages suffered by women. Warren (1997) writes that while women constitute roughly 50 per cent of the world's population they, and their children, produce over half the world's food, (estimates vary from 59 to 80 per cent). Salleh (1998) notes they receive less than one per cent of the aid distributed by the UN and own less than one per cent of the world's property. Women also receive a mere 10 per cent of the world's income (Kelly, 1997). Salleh (1998) also writes that most of the work done by women is 'invisible'. For example, on the continent of Africa women, along with their children, produce 70 per cent of the food— yet, only five per cent of women are described as employed. In developed countries women perform an estimated 70 hours of housework a week (approximately twice the time of the average working week). They are neither paid nor socially acknowledged for this work, notwithstanding the fact that in some cases such work represents 25 to 33 per cent of the GNP (Salleh, 1998). Since these actual matters are well established and elaborated elsewhere in the literature, there would be little point in protracting this discussion here. Suffice to say that even cursory reflection of the relevant literature makes clear that the disparity which exists between the sexes in respect of the financial benefits made available to them respectively cannot be explained by appeal to any presumption of equity or even equal consideration of interest.

### ***The Historical Connection Between Women and Nature***

But can it be plausibly shown that the twin domination of nature and women share the same aetiology and that this aetiology can be traced to the framework of social patriarchy? If the rape of nature and the rape of women do have a causal link which is itself grounded in the disposition of a patriarchal society, it should be possible to demonstrate that such a society has traditionally valued women in much the same way as it values nature. One of the most readily accessible parallels between the patriarchal view of women and nature can be characterised in historical terms. For example, Eisler (1988) identifies the invasion of the agrarian Indo-European settlements in 4500 B.C. by nomadic tribes from Eurasia as the beginning of patriarchal domination of both women and nature. The idea is that prior to these invasions such societies could properly be described as peaceful,

matrifocal, matrilineal and agrarian. With the onslaught of the invading tribes, however, the matriarchal posture of these agrarian societies was undermined and replaced by 'masculine values of conquest and domination' which in turn led to the domination of the earth and of women (Eisler, 1990, p.24).

Others (Griffin, 1978; Plumwood, 1993, 1991; Ruether, 1975) believe that the historical connections between women and nature can be traced from the values of dualism and rationality, which sprang from Greek philosophy. The process of dualism divides the fundamental elements of the world into two opposing and mutually exclusive categories, one of this being considered the 'norm' while, according to Plumwood, 'the qualities ... associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior' (1993, p.47). This is evident in the conceptual basis found in sex-gender differences—masculinity is viewed as the norm, while femininity is viewed as being the passive other. In turn dualisms such as these become entrenched as paradigmatic exemplars that are uncritically oriented towards the western and masculine way of experiencing the world (Collard, 1988). The masculine disposition defines the male mindset as rational and objective, while the female mindset is characterised as subjective and steeped in emotion. Given its preoccupation with objectivity, it has been argued that science thus becomes the socially endorsed institutional expression of the male psyche (Laura & Cotton, 1999). Within the resultant philosophical framework of dualisms the Greeks—and later, as we shall see, Francis Bacon, the father of modern science deemed man, armed with his with the superior tools of technology and reason, to be the master of both women and nature.

### ***Conceptual Connections between Women and Nature***

Warren (1998) argues that the historical connections between nature and women are inextricably linked to the conceptual connections which have come to identify them. These conceptual connections reveal a covert commitment to structures of domination that depict women and nature in ways that are distinctly male biased. One example of this process can be found in the *value dualisms* that stem from Greek philosophy as intimated earlier. The values of women and nature are conceptualised in such a way that they are viewed as being inferior to the masculine and more dominant values of culture, namely, rationality and reason (Warren, 1998; Plumwood, 1993; Collard, 1988). Value dualisms have been characterised as the structural components of value hierarchies, which construct 'central cultural concepts and identities' within our society (Plumwood, 1993, p.47; but also Warren, 1998, p.266). Value dualisms now come to represent

normative categories of judgemental discernment, making them an invidious tool for the continued marginalisation of women and nature.

For Warren (1998) it is the existence of this oppressive hierarchical framework which generates an allegedly moral premise designed to justify the domination of one group over another. Within the categories of hierarchical thinking one social group or gender can be valued above another, by way of which power and privilege can in turn be granted to a favoured group and denied to those groups located at a lower level on the hierarchy. Within this context of thinking emerges a bizarre *logic of domination*, as Warren terms it, which is used to justify the power and privilege of those best positioned on the hierarchy. In this sense society is guided by a patriarchal conceptual framework which not only explains and justifies, but also maintains the social and institutional structures which determine relationships of subordination and domination of men over women and nature (Warren, 1998).

### ***The Empirical and Experiential Connections Between Women and Nature***

A number of Ecofeminists have concentrated on making out an empirical case which links women with the adverse effects of environmental destruction. Salleh (1998) notes that women, (children and racial minorities) bear the majority of the health and risk factors associated with the growing presence of radiation, pesticides, toxins and other pollutants (Salleh, 1998, pp. 315–324). For instance, the radiation dispersed across Europe as a result of the accident at Chernobyl is affecting single mothers by way of the resultant rising in community health costs. She also describes how global economies not only harm the environment, but also peculiarly disadvantage women. For example, she describes the situation in Central America where deforestation is causing dispossession of family land, for the benefit of the American fast food market, supported by 'a World Bank-funded enclosure movement [which] subsidises big cattle ranchers in the hamburger snack business' (Salleh, 1998, p.319). In such cases, the husband is encouraged to abandon the family farm and to go to the city to find work, while the wife soon discovers that she is unable to manage both farm and family. The consequent financial hardship serves as a strong incentive to sell-out to the vested interest groups who have set their sights on growing beef in the area.

The purpose of collating this empirical data is to demonstrate that the exploitation and abuse of women are sponsored on the same presumption which legitimates our exploitation of nature and animals. One example given by Collard (1988) is concerned to show that the sexual exploitation experienced by women is not unlike the research exploitation experienced

by animals. In the case of rape, rapists often try to justify the violations by protesting that the victim 'asked for it', despite the fact that she said 'no' and fought against her attacker. Still others feel assuaged in their guilt by the ubiquitous symbols within western culture which define women as 'tools' for men's pleasure (Collard, 1988, p.64). She compares this symbolic language with the attitude of the animal experimenter, for whom animals are 'animated instruments' (p.64), to which researchers have a right of use in their quest for knowledge. The implicit acceptability of both these forms of social behaviour exists because they fall within cultural norms that have been defined by patriarchal values. Collard also notes that smaller brain size has sometimes been used as justification for animal research, just as smaller brain size has been used to justify sexism and racism. Women, blacks and animals, for example, have at different times each been characterised as having smaller brains than those who have oppressed them (Collard, 1988).

Collard, describes an experiment where the experimenter probes with a needle 'millimetre by millimetre' into the brains of live monkeys in order to pinpoint the area of the brain responsible for human sexual aggression, with the aim of extrapolating the same organic causal factors to explain the behaviour in men (1988, p.64). She maintains that this experiment encourages the continuation of the rape of women in two ways: first, by declaring that the cause of sexual violations is a biological response over which the perpetrator has no control, and secondly, by failing to acknowledge that the act of experimenting on the monkey is itself a hideous form of rape. The fact that we are, as a society, not cognizant of the violation or choose not to acknowledge it, betrays that women and animals are implicitly valued such that their physical rape is not only covertly encouraged, but is also implicitly socially sanctioned.

A further way in which animals and women experience rape (Collard, 1988) is through the distortion of their natural method of motherhood. Animals bred for both experimentation and agriculture are no longer allowed to breed naturally. They are both artificially inseminated and artificially induced into labour. The experience of many women is not much different to that of those animals. As Collard puts it, the only difference in the birthing experience of the average American mother—who is strapped down, drugged and worked on by a doctor who refers to her child as 'the intrauterine patient'—and the gravid rodent—whose offspring will be the subject of animal experimentation—is that the woman is not sacrificed after the birth (Collard, 1988, pp. 73–74).

Yet another change in social attitudes towards women was conceptually linked with the radically different concept of nature ushered in by the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Prior to the industrial revolution Nature was regarded as a wholesome organic mother,

providing mankind with everything required for the sustenance of life, 'a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered planned universe' (Merchant, 1980, p.2). The solemn regard in which nature was held thus encouraged a view of nature as something to be protected, a view which accordingly did much to prevent the mindless and wholesale destruction of nature. The existing cultural restrictions associated with the concept of 'mother earth', the source of *all* life weighed heavily against its deliberate degradation.

It was the writings of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), (to who we referred earlier), which did much on the one hand to discredit the guardianship view of nature and the rules by way of which human interaction with 'her' were guided on the other. Bacon was highly skilled in his redescriptions of mother nature as a resource to be exploited rather than the source of all resources (Merchant, 1980). To achieve his aim he cleverly employed a language descriptive of nature which was in itself tantamount to a political instrument designed to reduce nature into a sexualised female; a resource for economic production and reproduction. It was no accident that Bacon referred to nature as a woman whose secrets *must be penetrated*, and the treasures from her womb *expropriated* to man's advantage to reveal the 'hard facts' (Merchant, 1980). Warren (1998) writes that within language women are firstly neutralised, while nature is feminised thereby distracting us from the deeper truth that feminisation equates to neutralisation. In reality, both women and nature are dominated and debased. Women are often referred to as animals—chicks, bitches, broads—i.e. a pregnant cow. On the other hand nature is sexualised as when we talk of nature as a woman whose 'Virgin' timber is felled; whose 'fertile' soil is ploughed; whose land does not yield and is thus 'barren'; whose secrets are 'penetrated' by science, and her 'womb' mined by technology (Warren, 1998, p.268). With the advent of Bacon's writings the orthodox concept of science as the 'servant of nature' was supplanted with a radically different concept of science as the master subjugator of nature.

It would be presumptuous to suggest that Bacon alone can be held responsible for the consequent devaluation and progressive exploitation of nature. Nonetheless, his writings have done much to establish in institutional terms the patriarchal presumptions which reinforce the accepted social view of women as objects of exploitation, consonant with his patriarchal perceptions of nature as a female object of expropriation. In the new perception of nature the earth was no longer viewed as a benign benefactor, but as a contrary female in need of being tamed and subdued. By 'unearthing' her inner secrets, it would become possible, Bacon assumed, to ensure the advancement of mankind's control of nature without insuperable resistance from its forces (Merchant, 1980). Thus emerged a contrasting image of nature as a wild female—irrational and capable of mass



destruction in the form of droughts, earthquakes and floods, to name only a few of her disruptive manifestations. This being so, the organic methods of gentle interaction with nature gave way to mechanistic methods of scientific technology, methods with the power to impact upon nature profoundly. Inasmuch as nature was described by Bacon on the model of a machine, the sense of moral conscience that would otherwise be invoked when manipulating and violating her was thereby diminishing.

In addition to this highly mechanistic characterisation of nature Bacon further denigrated women through his clever orchestration of the language of the courtroom. Inasmuch as witch trials were taking place in Bacon's society at this time, Bacon availed himself of the opportunity to compare nature to a witch on trial. Collard writes that the 'importance of language can hardly be overrated since, as one acquires a language, one acquires the mental dispositions implicit in it' (Collard, 1988, p.16). Through Bacon's portrayal of nature in feminine terms, coupled with this highly prejudicial language of the courtroom, he thereby adumbrated the presumptions by way of which the rape and exploitation of nature could be culturally sanctioned (Merchant, 1980). Bacon's descriptions were often couched in metaphors likening nature to the witches of the time on trial; where mechanical inventions and technologies were cast as interrogators dragging forth her most intimate confessions and guarded secrets (Collard, 1988). By describing nature in the feminine terms which characterised the acceptable social exploitation of women, and vice versa, the processes of the culturally sanctioned rape of nature by science and the social rape of women by men was elevated to a whole new level.

### ***Epistemology and Ecofeminism***

Notwithstanding the insightful contribution we have been considering above, the explication of patriarchy as the institutional source of the rape of women and nature remains to be grounded in a coherent and comprehensive framework of ecofeminist understanding. Let us now turn our attention towards the provision of an overarching conceptual scheme capable of integrating the various facets of ecofeminist illumination presently under examination. Our claim is that such a framework is to be found not so much in the institutional expressions of patriarchy as in the covert philosophical presumptions which define the dominant epistemology by way of which our patriarchal institutions have themselves come to be identified.

Our argument is that the primary epistemological paradigm which serves to characterise western education is gratuitously selective in a way that favours patriarchy. The problem is that, the particular form of knowledge propagated in our educational institutions is one from amongst a wide array of possible forms. The institutional priority given to this form of knowledge

is less a function of its endemic logical character than the fact that our dominant educational epistemology is motivated by society's insatiable appetite for power. To put the point more strongly, the form of educational knowledge which monopolises the mind-set of our teaching institutions is conditioned and informed by the obsession with power as a primary means of control: control of the earth and control of every non-living and living thing on it.

Far from being 'value-free' or 'neutral' independently of how we use knowledge, it is clear that knowledge enshrines a complex set of presuppositions which either explicitly deny or implicitly marginalise the intrinsic value not only of nature but of women, and transforms both into objects of desire to be manipulated by the will of men or those *in power*. Such a form of knowledge, which is itself motivated by the lust for power, in turn, engenders technologies of power, themselves defined by a preoccupation with domination, subjugation and expropriation. The way in which technologies of power achieve control depends upon their capacity to recast the face and the things of the earth into a form which makes the behaviour of those things predictable in ways which allegedly suit man's needs and desires. The process by way of which technology achieves this measure of control depends upon what we shall here call 'transformative subjugation'. (For a full account of this theory see Laura & Cotton, 1999). The technological process of control through *transformative subjugation* involves manipulating the animate and inanimate things of nature by converting them into commodities or fabricated 'things' to be bought or sold in the economic marketplace, as indeed women still are. In essence, technology gives us power over nature by systematically synthesising and reconstructing it into things of our own making, and what better way for a man to control a women than by fabricating institutional structures which make her into just another of the 'things' he has subdued, this time by virtue of the impoverished social role ascribed to women.

Let us consider this process more determinately. Our technological interventions are designed predominantly to gain us control over nature by extracting the resources which we find in nature and then transforming them into highly synthesised products to be traded to the highest bidder. To put the point of *transformative subjugation* in theological terms, one might say that technology is driven by a deep desire within the human psyche to re-order God's creation in such a way that the resultant world is a world of man's creation. The face of God is thus recast definitely not in God's image (however that might be construed theologically) and certainly not in the face of man (as perverse as that might be) but rather in the image of man's technology, in the image of things which become coned by the Shirtcliffe (Economy) Commission in 1932 (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, pp.247-248). All four training colleges in New Zealand were closed in 1934; two were re-

opened in the following year and the remainder began admitting teacher trainees from 1936 (Allan, 1971, p.126).

The new Minister of Education in the first New Zealand Labour government, Peter Fraser, was keen to assign control of the four training colleges to their local universities, in keeping with one of the Bodkin Committee's recommendations (a committee on which he is conditioned upon their being lifeless. Man gladly embraces the things he manufactures, along with the machines he has made to manufacture those things. Consistent with this theme, he far too readily tolerates the chemically toxic by-products of the industries that produce the artefacts which adorn the artificial environment he has synthesised for himself.

Technology achieves its promise of control and subjugation by taking the living things of nature and transforming them, without conscience, into inert, chemicalised lifeless things of man's own fabrication. Technology is driven to do this, because the less alive something is, the more predictable and controllable it is. This is the sense in which technological transformations are tantamount to subjugations. The more chemically inert a thing is, the easier it becomes to subsume that thing under the aegis of mathematical and scientific laws designed to quantify its behaviour in the countless circumstances of our interactions with it both personally and by way of our machines. The more alive and conscious something is, the more incalculable its behavioural outcomes. This being so, the world of technological control determines that the world be reconstituted by things which have, by way of technology, had the very life within them systematically withdrawn from them. Technology has, at one level of comprehension, indeed made us powerful, but the world over which it has bequeathed us power is a world of increasingly dead and inert things.

One particular ramification of *transformative subjugation* which is of special relevance to the ecofeminist thesis is sponsored on the assumption that the more lifeless and inert something becomes, the less *moral responsibility* needs to be exercised when such things are exploited, manipulated, or for that matter violated. In this regard the technological transformation of the world is not only mechanical, but institutional. Consistent with our all-consuming preoccupation with power, we create and sustain institutional structures, which transform people by disempowering them; by depriving them of their autonomy, their rights, their hope. The less control we have over our lives, the less alive we are and the easier we are to control. Our predictability represents a fundamental condition of our lifelessness.

It is easier to appreciate the extent to which this sense of 'transformative disempowerment' or institutional degradation of personhood is an endogenous feature of our educational epistemology by making its methodological configuration explicit. The methodology by way of

which *transformative subjugation* provides increasing measures of control through predictable or probabilistic outcomes is *reductionism* in the service of mechanical or institutional technologisation. The most efficient way to secure power over nature, in this view, is to ensure its fragmentation by taking things which are found as integrated wholes and breaking them down into their constituent parts. The methodological transformation becomes subjugative by virtue of the fact that the qualitative dimensions of nature are discarded from the quantitative associations of which they form a part. The more quantitative we can make the objects of our investigation, the less difficult it is to predict the outcome of our interaction with them and their interactions with each other. What the methodology of 'qualitative extirpation', as it has elsewhere been called, (Laura & Cotton, 1999, p.102) depends upon is the reconceptualisation of nature as a machine made up of smaller and smaller parts, down to its most basic elemental parts, each of which is governed by a physical law of concatenation. This being so, the idea is that the specification of these logical relations is tantamount to a decipherable blueprint of the thing in itself. The role to be played by the methodology of this power-based epistemology is thus to analyse and reduce the things of nature in such a way that what remains is simply a collection of quantifiable, inert, lifeless or chemicalised components, devoid of intrinsic value or purpose. The more inert or lifeless a thing is, the less relevant are moral considerations in respect of our manipulations and exploitation of it. Transformative subjugation renders women as inert and lifeless by reducing their intrinsic values as *persons* to their utilitarian value as women: as objects, that is, of pleasure, reproduction, or as a source of labour. The value women have is thus recast in the reductionist methodology as utilitarian, not endogenous.

To endeavour to liberate women from the bonds of institutional oppression is not, as has generally been supposed, a matter primarily of educating men and women to the ideals of justice and morality by way of which equal consideration of interest can be extended. The paradox is that the very system of education to which one appeals for such edification is by its very nature biased in favour of a patriarchal framework which devalues women. What is needed is a reconceptualisation of the concept of knowledge which defines education. One way forward is to substitute epistemologies of power for epistemologies of empathy; to seek to connect rather than control, and to participate in nature rather than to separate ourselves from it. The liberation of women perhaps depends less upon how education describes them than upon how it conceptualises them. But that is a topic for another occasion.

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## NOTE

1. The term 'ecofeminism' was first coined by Francoise D'eaubonne in 1974 to bring attention to the feminist potential to bring about an 'ecological revolution' (Warren, 1990 p.125).