

ECOFEMINISM VERSUS PATRIARCHY

Basic insights of ecofeminism

- Conceptions of nature and of women have been linked: earth as female, female as earthly/animal-like.
- Devaluation and abuse of nature and women have gone hand in hand.
- To overcome this problem, we must analyze and resist both together, and devise an ideal which liberates both.
- Expansion often made: all oppressions (race, class, gender, environment) are linked and need to be fought together.

Cultural Ecofeminism

- Women do have an essential and distinctive connection to nature that men do not have.
- Women should recognize and celebrate these unique qualities.
- The earth is inherently feminine: “Mother Earth”
- A form of “essentialism.”

Constructivist Ecofeminism

- The link between women and nature is a social construction. Essentialism is:
 - *Not true*: women do not have an essential relationship to nature that men do not.
 - *Bad*: any positive affirmation of women’s essential link to nature ultimately reinforces transcendental dualism that is at the root of oppression.
- Culture has inculcated the “feminine” qualities in women and the “masculine” qualities in men. While these are not essential, they have to be recognized and dealt with. In many cases the socially constructed feminine qualities are superior to masculinism.

Nondualistic and nonhierarchical

- The world is fundamentally an interrelated web of relationships.
- The world is fundamentally egalitarian rather than hierarchical.
- Dualities and hierarchies are social constructions of patriarchy, not essential qualities of the world.

Holistic understanding (versus rationalism)

- We are emotional and bodily beings as much as we are rational beings.
- Emotions are essential to being fully human and they offer us a critical window to the world.
- The body and the senses are essential to being fully human and they are necessary to realizing our connection with the world.
- A rationalist approach that cuts itself off from emotions and the body will be distorted.
- We need to affirm our emotional and bodily existence and integrate reason into that.

Situated, contextual knowledge (versus objective, universal view)

- We are always embedded in specific contexts: social relationships, historical moments, specific cultures, and local environments.
- The attempt to “transcend” those contexts by achieving an objective, universal view is impossible.
- A supposedly objective view also cuts us off from our essential relatedness, giving a false view of the world and keeps us from fulfilling our relationships.

Pluralism (versus single perspective)

- There is no single true perspective. That idea and ideal has been associated with imperialism and colonialism.
- We need to recognize the validity of various views and affirm a multiplicity of voices.
- What we should seek is an open dialogue among these views and views.
- An attempt to achieve a single, monolithic view silences those who lack cultural power (e.g., women, minorities, third world).

Communitarianism (versus individualism)

- People are essentially selves in relationship to others – other people and the earth.
- We are distinct individuals, but in the sense of having a unique set of relationships, not in being autonomous and independent of others.
- These relationships mean that our identity is complex and multiple.
- The ideal is to realize our individuality – as an integral part of the communities we live within.

Ethics of care (versus justice)

- Ethics begins with our essential interrelatedness, not autonomy as individuals.
- Our interrelatedness locates us in a situation of responsibility to, naturally caring for them (as long as we are open to our connections).
- Ethics are developed not by rationally determining justice but by deepening our awareness of our interrelatedness and extending our natural caring.

Power-with (versus power-over)

- The urge for “power-over” comes from a desire for domination. It is top down and authoritarian.
- Power-*with* is an alternative, the power that comes from collaboration of fellow members of a community.
- Democracy is inherently a system of power-with, from the ground up, inclusive of all groups.
- Our culture, politics, and economics should reflect power-with rather than power-over.

A different kind of progress

- The spread of patriarchal civilization is not true progress but rather the extension of the domination of those in power.
- Individual and cultural diversity, like biodiversity, are the basis for cultural health and richness.
- True progress comes from a multiplicity of individuals and cultures working in dialogue and cooperation.
- The ideal is to empower diverse individuals and cultures and empower them in cultural, political, and environmental processes.