

**Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics. An Ecofeminist Perspective*
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This is an interesting, well researched, and well argued book. Even though I was familiar with a lot of the ideas in it and the literature Kheel refers to, I still learned a lot from reading it. By “nature ethics,” Kheel means an ethos or way of life that leads us to treat nature in particular ways. The phrase “nature ethics” is a more inclusive term than “environmental ethics,” which seems to separate humans from nature. By “an ecofeminist perspective,” Kheel means a perspective that not only rejects what she sees as the dominant masculinist ideology that regards nature either as wild, and hence to be conquered or killed, or lifeless, and hence to be used as a resource, but also as a positive vision of genuine inclusivity and how it might be attained. This masculinist ideology, a dominant way of thinking in our culture and historical time, also tends to regard women in an analogous way. After interesting chapters on the history of this ideology (and how we can avoid an essentialism that claims this must always be true of male thinking), Kheel undertakes to show how some of the main environmental thinkers of the last century reflect this point of view. She chooses Theodore Roosevelt, Aldous Leopold, Holmes Rolston III, and Warwick Fox as the thinkers and devotes a chapter to each. What they share is a disregard for individual non-human life. Kheel’s ethics, which she “gathers” from various feminists, focuses more on caring and compassion for individuals who are capable of feeling and suffering. What I expected, as I read this, was that she would end with a position like that of Sapontzis,¹ that we should be concerned about protecting nature (wilderness areas) because of their importance as wild-life habitats. But she adds to this the fact that individuals are also nature, including those used in laboratories for science and she avoids Sapontzis’s foundational approach to ethics, using instead the model of holistic health to understand what thwarts and nourishes empathy and care.

In the first chapter, Kheel explains what she means by *masculism*, a hegemonic ideal that has exerted a powerful influence on Western culture. Masculism contrasts rationality, universality, and autonomy, with emotionalism, particularity, and relation and

¹ *Morals, Reason, and Animals*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987, Ch. 14.

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dependence, the former being viewed as masculine traits and the latter feminine traits. From these contrasts come dualisms between male/female, culture/nature, good/evil, domestic/wild, etc. A common motif surrounding these dualisms is the idea of transcending the female-imagined biological world. It is this motif of transcendence that Kheel proposes to investigate. She does this by examining four representatives of holist philosophy that care more for the whole than the individuals that make it up. These representatives are Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, Holmes Roston III, and Warwick Fox. Kheel devotes a chapter to each. What they have in common in regard to their environmental philosophy is a care-taking rather than care giving approach to the natural environment. This is a distinction that I took note of from Kheel's (2004) selection in a book edited by S. Sapontzis, and I found it extremely useful in my forthcoming book on animal welfare. Care-taking implies a managerial conception of its object. Care takers take care of property that is valued by its owners. Care givers care for the individuals they care for and about. What the four holists that Kheel examines have in common is the use of notions of managerial control of a collectivity conceived as wilderness, the land, etc, while at the same time purporting to move beyond the idea of the land as property and nature as an object to conquer. Individuals that make up the whole are referred to only in the collective, e.g., the species "wolf" must be preserved. One of the working hypotheses of her book is that feelings of care for and about individual animals are best fostered when we have the opportunity to see them as subjective beings, and this is facilitated by learning their individual stories.

Kheel uses the term *ecofeminism* to refer to a rejection of masculinist ideology, which is oppressive both to individual animals and women, but she defends herself against charges of essentialism by seeing this ideology as historically and culturally specific and also as not characterizing all individual males or females. Before looking at the four holist figures, however, Kheel devotes a chapter to examining the feminist literature that "contends that this 'masculine' quest to renounce ties to the biological realm derives from a lack of a sense of connection and continuity with nature." In this literature, some have attributed the sense of disconnection to men's inability to give birth, so men try to have a second birth that is independent of the biological realm. Kheel proposes to examine this idea for conceptions of nature ethics in the following chapters. "For Roosevelt and Leopold, a sense of rebirth was found in the adventure and drama of the hunting experience, which they conceived as a cross-generational legacy to be 'conserved' for future generation of boys." Kheel also draws on the Gilligan inspired feminist literature on the ethics of care, and she argues that the four figures she studies in subsequent chapters emphasize transcendence and the devaluation of empathic ties to individuals, an analysis that this literature suggests. Her literature review (Chapter 2) is divided into several sections: Masculine identity: the construction of the "other" concludes by claiming that the analyses of de Beauvoir and Ortner provide "insights into the hegemonic conception of masculine identity." In the second section (The "heroic warrior" and the "transcendent perceiver") Kheel sees two images of nature, which lie along a single scale—the wild and the inert. She then devotes a section to an exploration of the literature that explains masculine identity as a psychological construction. This literature begins with Chodorow's object relations theory. Kheel follows this by looking at the literature that sees man's identity as enacting a second birth and how this birth results in the taming of violence through sport (as opposed to play), as in hunting. "Sport typically entails competition, defeat of an 'other,' and obedience to rules." She concludes this chapter by looking at masculine identity in moral theories, drawing on Gilligan's analysis of the difference between an ethic of justice and one of care, and concludes with the claim that masculine identity seeks to devalue the

natural world, kinship ties, and emotional bonds by elevating rational rules and universal principles and ideals over ties of affection. She will then go on to show how the four philosophers she will study reflect these ideas and themes.

As an introduction to the next two chapters, she says that she will explore the historical background to holist philosophy by examining the origins of the conservation movement by focusing on the ideas of Roosevelt and Leopold. Chapter 3 is devoted to Roosevelt. Here, she argues that the philosophy of sport hunting that he supported “provided an important foundation for subsequent holist philosophy.” The sports hunter conservationist exemplifies the link between a holist orientation and masculine identity, and reveals a feature common to holist philosophies—they want to conserve species rather than individuals. Roosevelt believed that nature was an arena of Darwinian conflict and that sport hunting was an evolutionary advance over subsistence hunting practiced by the lower class since it demonstrated restraint (and hence a transcendence of biological drives) and a better way of developing a manly character. He also believed that rational rules and regulations and detached science were important means for managing nature, and these were superior to sentiment governed means. Hunting was a means of exercising self-restraint. Before discussing Roosevelt, however, Kheel devotes an interesting section of chapter 3 to providing us with the historical background to sport hunting. She then argues that both conservationists and preservationists were interested in protecting the whole. She also devotes a section to the battles of notable conservationist against what they called “nature fakers,” the authors that provided us with narratives about individual animal lives, an important instrument, as Kheel said earlier, for engendering compassion. In concluding this interesting chapter, Kheel claims that the legacy of the conservationists is today’s collective orientation toward nature other-than humans.

The next chapter is on Leopold. It is rich in detail and presents a conclusive set of arguments that Leopold held an instrumental view of nature that continued the Christian tradition that we should love the creator, not the creation. This idea is symbolized by “thinking like a mountain.” Like Roosevelt, Leopold was an advocate of sports hunting and saw the preservation of species and ecosystems as a means for continuing this harvesting. While he advanced the idea of the fragility of ecosystems and the need for an ecological conscience, his philosophy never extended this idea to compassion for individual animals. This chapter has a section from Leopold’s early period followed by a section on his transition to thinking like a mountain. But the famous mother wolf story, that calls out for us to defend the earth, does not indicate a sympathy for the mother wolf but for an ethic that sees things from the perspective of the mountain. And disagreeing with those who see Leopold as arguing for the rights of all living things, Kheel sees him as arguing only for the rights of all life forms. This is “the hole in his holism.” Wildlife must be conserved not because of the animal’s right to life but rather because of “man’s” (here men) inalienable right to hunt and kill. And the good sportsman moves beyond reliance on external authority “to engage in a personal communion with God, manifested as his conscience.” In short, Leopold “perpetuated a masculinist orientation that subordinates affective ties to individual beings to larger, more enduring constructs.”

Chapter 5 is devoted to Holmes Rolston, the first professional philosopher that Kheel considers in this book. And although he takes the position that humans discover value in the world rather than bring it to the world, he still reinforces the traditional masculinist dualisms, such as conscious/unconscious, rational/nonrational, human/other than humans, and spirit/nature, and only humans have the capacity to grasp the divine creativity within nature. His masculinist orientation places objective ecological awareness over care for individual beings. Kheel starts this chapter with an account of Rolston’s philosophical

background and his basic position, which is that duties to the ecosystem will almost always override duties to the individuals that make it up. Many of the metaphors that Rolston uses, Kheel says, reflect a masculinist orientation, especially the metaphors of production and fertility, which see nature as the feminine raw material out of which the superior realm of spirit and ethical values emerges. Kheel finds particularly objectionable (as do I), Rolston's callous attitude toward non-human animals, allowing them to be hunted, to suffer, to be used for food by humans, and even to be valued less than plants under certain conditions. Domestic animals are bred to be eaten, etc. Rolston also considers hunting to be a virtue, a submission to ecology.

To sum up, for Rolston, respect for nature enjoins humans not only to hunt non-human animals, but to raise and kill animals for food. In response to claims made by Jim Cheney and Christopher Preston that Rolston's discussion of local narratives demonstrates a common ground between Rolston's philosophy and ecofeminists, Kheel notes that "even within Rolston's local perspective, emotional attachments are still directed to larger phenomena, like 'species' and the 'ecosystem,' not individual beings."² In Chapter 6, Kheel finds similar objections to the masculinist ideology of the transpersonal ecology of Warwick Fox, especially in his development of Arne Naess's ecophilosophy T and the notion of Self-realization. Fox is interesting because although he does not advocate hunting like the other three figures or directly advance the notions of human superiority or managerial control, he still devalues personal affective ties. In so doing he demonstrates his own form of managerial control (over natural feelings of affection). Kheel finds the contrast between his expanded Self and the feminist notion of narrowing perception so as to carefully attend to the needs of other living beings of particular interest.

For me, the final chapter (Chapter 7) is the most interesting. It is by far the longest and is divided into a number of sections. Kheel starts off by contrasting ecofeminist holism from the holisms she has examined in the previous chapters that subsume other than human individuals under the whole. She proposes that an ecofeminist holist philosophy might emphasize six themes: (1) an attempt to understand the current domination of women and nature in its varying social, political, and historical contexts; (2) an acknowledgment of the role of the unconscious influences, and in particular the role of gender identity, in shaping attitudes toward nature; (3) an appreciation of the potential of metaphors to impede and facilitate ethical consciousness; (4) a recognition of the importance of appropriate feelings of care and attention in promoting ethical conduct and thought; (5) an affirmation of the moral significance of both individuals *and* larger "wholes"; and (6) support for the practice of veganism as an important means of expressing care toward other animals. (p. 208)

She argues that the role of the unconscious must be explored in order to understand the source of the aggressiveness of males and their desire to dominate women (and nature) and she claims that although ecofeminists have explored the conceptual foundations of abuse, by and large ecofeminists have overlooked the influence of the unconscious as a factor in perpetuating domination. If domination has historical roots, then it is not necessarily inevitable, but the provocative study of these roots by, for example, Carolyn Merchant and others, fail to examine the role of social constructions of masculine identity in violence against women and nature, etc. If one looks at the images and metaphors that restrain human aggression, then one assumes that this aggression is natural. But if they have deeper roots in the unconscious, then one can ask how we can avoid socializing aggressiveness in

² Note that Preston and Ouderkirk have recently edited a collection of critiques of Rolston that include essays by Davion and Palmer on Rolston and feminism. Christopher J. Preston and Wayne Ouderkirk, eds., *Nature, Value, Duty: Life on Earth with Holmes Rolston, III*. Berlin: Springer, 2007.

males. The underlying metaphor in the masculinist holisms examined in previous chapters is the *hunt* and *the sacrifice*. What images can ecofeminists draw on to inspire their own philosophy? Commonly invoked metaphors for ecofeminist theorizing are the *quilt* and the *fruit bowl* and part of the work of ecofeminist theorists is to identify what practices and ideas are appropriate for the quilt or fruit bowl, and any ethical tradition “that does not make room for the emotional intelligence, particularly the importance of caring about oneself and others, in ethical reasoning and conduct will not qualify.” (Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 109) Kheel also suggests replacing the metaphor of the hunt with that of gathering, of sport with play, and of allopathic health care with holistic healing.

Kheel then reviews various ecofeminist reflections on an ethic of care, starting with the tradition that Gilligan initiated and the various ways it has been interpreted both by Gilligan and by others and the various feminist critiques of it. Kheel thinks that, despite its flaws, Gilligan’s work laid important groundwork for what a feminist ethic might mean. After distinguishing between four trends among feminist ethics about how to reframe the relation between an ethic of care and an ethic of justice, the predominant strategy, she says, is to join the two, while still disagreeing about how to answer certain questions, including whether gender differences correspond to the two ethical positions. But Kheel thinks that the preoccupation with forging a new ethic linking the two has distracted us from an examination of the deeper dimensions of the care ethic in its own right. Kheel then goes on to look at some of the possible meanings of care and a care ethic. What is needed, she says, is not care as a universal norm but *appropriate* care. Some have argued for the notion of attentive love, which has the power to transform perceptions so that many oppressive acts cease to make sense. This power to change perceptions shifts the discussion of ethics into the realm of epistemology—from knowing what is right or good to deciding what to pay attention to. Kheel commends the four masculinist authors in the previous chapters for helping us see things differently and caring about new things. “However, for all four authors, ‘undistorted perception’ entails directing these feelings toward larger, impartial constructs that constitute larger ‘wholes.’”

Kheel then goes on to discuss attending to non-human animals (she calls them “other-than-human animals”). Her version of ecofeminist philosophy proposes an alternative understanding of care to the holist philosophies of the four authors, one that affirms the integrity of individuals other-than-human animals, both domestic and wild, and this caring can only flourish with the aid of empathy, which requires attention. She is not just calling for greater empathy and care for the natural world but (using the model of holistic health) for understanding why empathy and care are absent in our culture to begin with and what can be done to nourish them.

Many factors play a role in blocking the sort of attention that empathy requires, including not being able to see something as an individual but only a thing of a certain kind (“look, it’s a cardinal”). And, as the Four have pointed out, while science can teach us how to minimize our negative influence upon the rest of nature, how to support natural habitats, and give us biological and ecological knowledge of particular species that help us understand the needs of individuals within those species, it cannot teach us empathy for and understanding of these individual beings.

Kheel then goes on to criticize the use of zoos to preserve species, saying that the money spent here would be better spent in preserving natural habitats and those in them. I have made the same point elsewhere. While it is one thing to use zoos with adequately enriched environments as a haven for rescued animals that cannot be returned to the wild, zoo breeding programs designed to perpetuate a species for exhibit are using these animals as a mere means to our ends. I did see a PBS documentary recently that argued that zoos

with suitably enriched environments with breeding programs are being used to heighten the awareness of its visitors of the importance of saving these animals in their threatened natural habitat and then the visitors are asked to contribute money to serve those ends. Apparently such a program has been very successful in getting visitors to appreciate the importance of preserving these animals and in developing empathy for them as individuals, which is then transferred to individuals in the wild. I think such a program can succeed in justifying breeding programs only under two conditions: (1) the zoo environment is adequately rich, and (2) being able to mate and raise young make important contributions to the richness of these animals' lives.

While the Four want to protect animals in the wild as species, domestic animals such as the cow are considered, in the words of Rolston, meat factories. Kheel wants to eliminate the use of animals for food and devotes the remainder of this chapter arguing for veganism as a practice of contextualizing care. Here I agree with her completely. But I was unclear about her solution to the problems of dealing with the current population of domesticated animals. She says that we can provide them with homes as we advocate a world in which other animals no longer live in captivity. She says, "It requires only that domesticated animals not be allowed to be mate." I wasn't sure here whether she meant "mated." She does go on to criticize the practice of keeping pets such as cats and dogs because keeping them has resulted in an enormous overpopulation that can be controlled only by spaying and neutering, which she calls an unnatural but necessary solution. In regard to animals in the wild, she says that often the most caring thing we can do is leave them alone. What is not clear is the degree to which she agrees with Regan about this, although she criticizes Regan for arriving at his position through the use of abstract reasoning rather than empathy. My problem with Regan is that he seems to have no theory of wildlife management, which, I think, is sometimes necessary to control feral animals (such as pigs) and an overpopulation of predators such as raccoons, etc. Here, I think, that sterilization is the most humane means of doing this. Granted that much of this overpopulation is the result of human overpopulation and expansion into wildlife habitats, we still have to deal with this problem. As a side note, Kheel also criticizes Singer for using abstract reasoning for reaching his position rather than empathy, but perhaps his reason for using reason rather than sentiment to criticize speciesism is (1) if we live in a speciesist society, then our sentiments may have been socialized to not care about animal suffering, and (2) defenders of the use of animals have criticized liberationists for relying on sentiment rather than reason (science).

Kheel then argues for a contextualized vegetarianism that does not so much rely on imposing a universal injunction against eating meat but on shedding greater awareness of the social and cultural structures upon which meat eating rests, thus reversing the burden from those who advocate veganism to those who advocate meat eating. What is the rational foundation for meat eating? She sees meat eating as part of a masculinist ideology in which meat functions as a symbol of dominance over the natural world. She concludes this final chapter with many reasons for seeing meat consumption as reinforced by this ideology, but she first addresses three arguments that arise when veganism is proposed: (1) that it is culturally insensitive, (2) that there is predation within ecology, and (3) that we should be concerned about the suffering of plants. On the second point, she notes that disregarding those slaughtered by humans, only five percent of all animals are killed by other animals.

She concludes this chapter by inviting dialog with those she has previously criticized, saying that her purpose has not been to drive a wedge between the two perspectives and that she does not wish to deny the important contributions that the Four have made to our

awareness of what happens in the natural environments and to our caring about how our practices affects what happens. She invites dialog.

I think that this is a wonderful book. As I said above, I feel especially indebted to its author for a distinction I learned from her in her article in the Sapontzis collection cited above. It is the distinction between care giving and caretaking. Caretaking implies a managerial perspective. We take care of someone property. She further develops this distinction in the current work. I found this distinction useful in my own work, which went to press before I had a chance to read the current book, as a way of repudiating animals users who claim to be animal caretakers who are best informed about the welfare of the animals they care for. I cite Kheel's article in the Sapontzis collection several times in my forthcoming book.

Reference

Kheel, M. (2004). Vegetarianism and ecofeminism. In S. F. Sapontzis (Ed.), *Food for thought. The debate over eating meat* (pp. 327–341). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.