

Södertörns högskola | Institutionen för Kultur och Kommunikation
D-uppsats 15 hp | Filosofi | Höstterminen 2009

Anthropocentrism and Androcentrism

– An Ecofeminist Connection

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INTRODUCTION

The starting point of this paper is an ecofeminist claim, namely anthropocentrism has been androcentric. My purpose will be to discuss and explain this statement. Ecofeminism, anthropocentrism, and androcentrism will therefore be the central themes.

In the first chapter I shall introduce ecofeminism. It will be Karen J. Warren's version of it that I shall describe. Karen Warren (b. 1947) has significantly contributed to the development of the philosophical aspects of ecofeminism as well as to the establishment of ecofeminist philosophy as a scholarly field. She writes about ecofeminism in the West, and to the question 'what is ecofeminism?' she responds that it is the perspective that, despite differences and disagreements, asserts and presupposes that:

- (1) There exists a system of oppression that enforces the domination of nature.
- (2) There exists a system of oppression that enforces the domination of women.
- (3) The domination of nature and the domination of women are interconnected.
- (4) The domination of nature and the domination of women are unjustified and have to end.

In order to give a fairly comprehensive account of ecofeminism, I shall dissect these four claims and explain what Warren means by 'system of oppression,' 'nature,' 'the domination of nature,' 'women,' 'the domination of women,' 'interconnected,' 'unjustified,' and 'have to end.' When discussing the end of the dominations, I shall write shortly about both feminism and environmentalism to give a background to ecofeminism and the purpose of my essay. The last part of the chapter will be devoted

to Warren's views about anthropocentrism and androcentrism. Since she does not give a detailed explanation of these concepts, I shall have to turn to other authors to get a broader picture of them.

Ecofeminism is then an environmentalist perspective. Anthropocentrism is a fundamental concern in environmental philosophy. Unfortunately, it is not always clear what the term stands for. In the second chapter I shall try to discern the various senses that different authors have associated to it. I shall first discern between 'human bias,' 'human chauvinism,' and 'anthropocentrism.' Another ecofeminist, Val Plumwood (b. 1939 – d. 2008), will with her model of centrism be the basis for the survey.

Ecofeminism is a feminist perspective too. Androcentrism is a fundamental concern in feminism. In the third chapter I shall also make use of Plumwood's model of centrism. Sandra Lipsitz Bem (b. 1944) will be the other major source I shall employ to explicate the content of the term. Again, I shall begin by discerning between three main senses, namely male bias, male chauvinism, and androcentrism. Iddo Landau's article questioning the purported androcentrism of Western philosophy will help me to further the discussion and clarify some issues.

The distinctive trait of ecofeminism is that it advocates that environmental issues are feminist issues, and that feminist issues are environmental issues. The domination of nature and the domination of women are interconnected. According to Warren in the anthropocentric centre facing nature one will find a man. In the final chapter I shall bring together androcentrism, anthropocentrism, and Karen Warren, and describe three connections between androcentrism and anthropocentrism, as well as two examples of why I believe ecofeminism is a relevant theory.

One word about the bibliography: I have not only included in it the sources cited in the text, but also most of the texts that I have read during the process of writing the essay and that have helped to understand the issues examined in it.

KAREN WARREN'S ECOFEMINISM

What is Ecofeminism?

There is no simple answer to this question. Ecofeminism, Warren informs us, is a rather recent phenomenon. Its origins are to be found in the grassroots activism of women in the 1970s. The term 'éco-féminisme' was introduced in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death). One of the first writers who established the connection between the ecology movement and the women's movement was Rosemary R. Ruether in 1975 in her book *New woman, New earth*. Ecofeminist theory is consequently an almost brand new discipline. The first collection of philosophical articles on ecofeminism was published in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* in 1991, and the first time Karen Warren taught a seminar exclusively devoted to ecofeminism was in 1995. Thirty years have not been sufficient for ecofeminists to completely clarify the limits and distinctive traits of their perspective. Ecofeminism is still an ambiguous category. For example, according to Karen Warren all ecofeminist philosophers reject biological determinism, conceptual essentialism, and universalism, but at the same time it is still unclear which positions that identify themselves as ecofeminist do assume those notions. In addition to this, there is no just one ecofeminism. Ecofeminists come from different environmental backgrounds, different feminist backgrounds, and different cultural backgrounds.

If, however, a simple answer is demanded one could say that an activity qualifies for designation as ecofeminist whenever it grows out of or in some way reflects the following beliefs:

- (1) There exists a system of oppression that enforces the domination of nature.
- (2) There exists a system of oppression that enforces the domination of women.
- (3) The domination of nature and the domination of women are interconnected.
- (4) The domination of nature and the domination of women are unjustified and have to end.

System of oppression

For Warren a system of oppression is a social arrangement where interacting individuals and institutions partake in a certain type of power relations, namely unjustified *power-over* relations. *Power-over* power is one of the five types of power that Warren distinguishes and involves hierarchical relationships where one part exercises power over another. These relationships are not naturally unjustified. They become unjustified when that power is exercised in order to establish or preserve the unjustified subordination of one of the parts. Warren gives the example of the hierarchical features of the relationship between a parent and a child. The hierarchical relationship is justified as long as the power exercised by the parent over the child aims at benefiting the child, e.g. when it aims at protecting the child from danger.

It is important to underline that what Warren discusses is the interconnection between the *dominations* of nature and women, and not that between the *oppressions* of nature and women. These dominations are surely located within an oppressive system, but according to her while women can be dominated and oppressed, nature can only be dominated. More exactly, while there are some nonhuman animals that can be dominated and oppressed, most natural entities cannot be oppressed, like trees, rocks, mountains, and ecosystems. For Warren oppression takes place when some groups are “limited, inhibited, coerced, or prevented from mobilizing resources for self-determined goals by limiting their choices and options,” while domination is together with violence, exclusion, exploitation, and others a “tool of subjugation.”¹ Domination is one of the tools that some group within an oppressive system can make use of to uphold their power and privilege and the subordination of some other group. In this sense, the reason most natural entities cannot be oppressed is that they do not have choices or options.

Philosophy is mainly about conceptual and argumentative analysis. So as a philosopher Warren approaches the issues of oppression and domination from a

¹ KJ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford, 2000, p. 54.

conceptual and argumentative perspective. She theorizes about the role conceptual frameworks play in oppression and domination, that is, about how these are conceptually structured and justified.

A conceptual framework is “a socially constructed set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that shape and reflect how one views oneself and others.”² This framework becomes oppressive when that set includes the following features:

(1) *Value-hierarchical thinking*: A ranked organization of reality that assigns more “value, status, or prestige” to the elements occupying the higher levels than to those occupying the lower levels.³ For example, in the Western context men, culture, and humans have in this sense been considered to be superior to women, nature, and animals.

(2) *Oppositional value-dualisms*: Pairs made up of elements that oppose and exclude each other, and where more value, status, or prestige is assigned to one of them. For example, in the Western context reason and emotion are the elements of one such dualism. Reason and emotion do not complement each other. Westerners are represented as either rational or emotional, and there is no doubt what Westerners would rather be characterized as.

(3) Power is conceived as *power-over* power.

(4) *Privilege* is conceived as exclusively belonging to a certain social group, and this in order to protect the benefits this social group gets from the oppressive system.

(5) *Logic of domination*: This is the key feature of all oppressive conceptual frameworks. According to Warren the previous features are neither “inherently problematic” nor sufficient to justify subordination.⁴ For her it is their alliance with the logic of domination that is crucial. Without this logic, domination cannot be justified. A human group can, for instance, pick out some difference between themselves and some other group – e.g. rocks or dogs –, and they can even conceptualize this difference as morally relevant. This, however, does not imply that it is right for humans to dominate these groups. Humans may be considered to be morally superior to both rocks and dogs, but to justify subordination humans have to assume what the logic of domination states,

² KJ Warren, ‘Ecological Feminist Philosophies: An Overview of the Issues’ in KJ Warren (ed.), *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, Indiana University Press, 1996, p. xii.

³ KJ Warren, ‘The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism’ in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, p. 20.

⁴ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 47.

namely that “*superiority justifies subordination.*”⁵ It is only when superiority justifies subordination that domination is morally justified.

Nature

According to Warren what nature is varies from context to context. Depending on the methodological context – on the method used to study and describe it – nature might appear to be comprised of objects (individuals and populations) or processes (energy flow and relationships), and these objects and processes might appear to be stable or instable, temporary or enduring, static or dynamic, different or similar, connected or disconnected. What nature is depends also on the social context, particularly on the distinguishing conceptual framework. Nature can be seen as human property, as a resource and commodity, as sacred and spirited, as an uncontrollable menace, as a living organism, as inferior, as dead matter, as a generous Mother, as extraneous, etc.

In Warren’s texts ‘nature’ might describe either the planet Earth and all of its components, or just the nonhuman elements of the planet Earth – nonhuman animals, plants, the land, forests, rivers, species, communities, ecosystems, the biosphere, etc. In this case Warren often makes use of ‘nonhuman nature’ instead of just ‘nature.’ Warren’s natural world is conceived as a community that includes humans as its members – humans are animals –, and where nonhuman nature is seen as “independent, different, perhaps even indifferent to humans,”⁶ as an active subject that shapes the human world, and as deserving moral consideration.

The domination of nature

The domination of nature (or naturism) refers to the unjustified subordination of nonhuman nature by humans. At a conceptual level some of the elements of naturism are that value-hierarchical thinking and those value-dualisms that establish the superiority of culture over nature or that of humans over animals. At an everyday life level it is not at all clear what actions are to be considered naturist. Warren explains that ecofeminists disagree about this. It is not at all clear, for example, whether meat eating or hunting are naturist activities. What ecofeminists do seem to agree on is the belief that naturism has resulted in a series of environmental problems and crises – species extinction, habitat loss, deforestation, desertification, air and water pollution, resource

⁵ Warren, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, p. xii.

⁶ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 105.

depletion, climatic and atmospheric changes, etc. I believe, however, that one can find in Warren a rough guideline to determine whether an activity is naturist or not, namely an activity is naturist if it unnecessarily prevents the flourishing or well-being of the nonhuman natural world or some of its elements, or prevents their basic needs being met.⁷

Women

According to Warren women are not just women and what a woman is varies from context to context. Gender is not the only factor that shapes the societies in which women live. In these societies there are other features that are equally significant, e.g. race, class, religion, age, sexual orientation, and nationality. A woman is not just a woman; she is also white, middle class, spiritual, atheist, under age, heterosexual, Spanish, etc. Then what a woman is depends on the social context. Depending on the distinguishing conceptual framework women can be conceived in different ways. They can be seen as care practitioners, as child bearers, as privileged knowers, as closer to nature than men, as consumable objects, as inferior to men, as subjects, etc.

In Warren's texts 'women' is a practical term. It serves a particular purpose. Warren does not conceive women as a homogeneous group where there is either a female essence all members take part in or a collection of female experiences all of them share. She does acknowledge common properties and experiences, but these are neither universal nor exclusivist. There is a rich variety of female traits, experiences and voices, and 'women' is the concept that allows feminists to organize those traits, experiences and voices in order to theorize and fight.

The domination of women

The domination of women (or sexism) refers to the unjustified subordination of women by men. At a conceptual level some of the elements of sexism are that value-hierarchical thinking and those value-dualisms that establish the superiority of men over women. At an everyday life level it is not at all clear what actions are to be considered sexist. Warren explains that feminists, including ecofeminists, disagree about this. It is not at all clear, for example, whether heterosexual sex and pornography are sexist activities. What feminists do seem to agree on is the belief that the relationship of

⁷ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 206.

domination connecting men and women is a social feature that manifests itself in numerous spheres and in culturally characteristic ways – domestic violence, rape, legal inequality, differing worlds, economic inequality, confining gender roles, power and decision-making inequality, etc. I believe, however, that one can find in Warren a rough guideline to determine whether an activity is sexist or not, namely an activity is sexist if it prevents equal access for women to the necessary resources to achieve goals and get the basic needs met.

Interconnections

Warren describes ten interconnections existing between the domination of nature and the domination of women. Actually, it is not only the domination of nature and the domination of women that are interconnected. Warren explains that even if ecofeminists as feminists centralize sexism they acknowledge that there are other groups that have historically been dominated and whose dominations are also connected to the domination of nature. There are other unjustifiably subordinated groups (e.g. non-white peoples, children, the poor, and the underclass) that have been identified with nonhuman nature and have been conceptualized as morally inferior to those groups identified with culture or rationality.

These are some of the interconnections:

(i) Empirical interconnections: These are the “real, felt, lived” interconnections and they show how the domination of nature, specifically environmental destruction, affects women (and other subordinated groups) more severely than it affects men (and other dominating groups).⁸ Two examples:

(1) In the Third World the lack of “sanitary water is of special concern for women and children since, as the primary providers of household water, they experience disproportionately higher health risks in the presence of unsanitary water.”⁹

(2) “Pregnant Native American women and children face unique health risks because of the presence of uranium mining on or near Indian reservations, suffering higher rates of miscarriages [...], bone and gynecological cancers, and cleft palate and other birth defects in newborns.”¹⁰

⁸ Warren, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, p. xiii.

⁹ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 7.

¹⁰ KJ Warren, ‘Environmental Justice: Some Ecofeminist Worries about a Distributive Model’, *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1999, pp.152-153.

(ii) Historical-Causal interconnections: In Western history there have been some periods that are considered the origin of or the fundamental factors that brought about the connection between the dominations of nature and women. Some of the events or processes that have been suggested as crucial are: (1) “The invasion of Indo-European societies by nomadic tribes from Eurasia between the sixth and third millennia B.C.E.,”¹¹ (2) “The scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,”¹² and (3) “Classical Greek philosophy and the rationalist tradition.”¹³

(iii) Linguistic interconnections: Some ecofeminists discuss the role language plays in the organization and preservation of naturism and sexism. Within a sexist context language can contribute to the devaluation of nature with expressions such as Mother Nature or Virgin timber that feminize nature. Within a naturist context it can contribute to the devaluation of women with descriptive terms such as bunnies, cows, chicks, or serpents that naturalize women.

(iv) Socioeconomic interconnections: Some ecofeminists point out how the capitalist system transforms and reduces both nature and women to essential resources for the dominating men, and how the peculiar conception of productive work cherished by that system neglects and categorizes as unproductive all work that does not yield profits, commodities, or capital, e.g. the self-regenerating work that is distinctive of nature and the work aimed at meeting human basic needs that has traditionally been performed by women.

These dominations are unjustified

Naturism and sexism represent subordinations that are faultily justified. At least some of the relationships of subordination connecting humans and nature and, I would assume, all the relationships of subordination connecting men and women as men and women are morally impermissible or inappropriate. Since for Warren nature deserves moral consideration, there are at least some relationships of subordination connecting humans and nature that have to be considered morally unacceptable or wrong. I have mentioned above the criterion which Warren indirectly offers to determine which activities fall under that category. I have also mentioned above the criterion which Warren indirectly offers to explain why certain activities are to be considered sexist.

¹¹ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 22.

¹² Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 22.

¹³ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 23.

In addition to this, the argumentative justification of these dominations has been deficient. This justification relies on certain beliefs, values, and assumptions that are, according to Warren, unsound, e.g. men are superior to women, humans are superior to animals and the rest of nature, culture is superior to nature, women are closer to nature than men, men are closer to culture than women, nature is feminine, and superiority justifies subordination.

These dominations have to end: Feminism and Environmentalism

Feminism is the movement that works to end sexism. Feminists assert that the domination of women by men exists and that this domination is wrong. Within feminism there is, however, disagreement on how to explain the nature and the sources of this relationship of domination, as well as on how to dissolve it and generate a new one. For example, the liberal position identifies the traditional conception of women – women as not entirely rational – and the related legal and social inequalities as the source of domination; while for the traditional Marxist position the source of domination is the capitalist class society and the sexual division of labour – “women are excluded from the public realm of production and occupy dependent economic positions in the traditional monogamous family.”¹⁴

Some feminists carry out the work to end sexism from the discipline of philosophy. Feminist philosophy is therefore work carried out within some philosophical field that is motivated by the general political goal of feminism. Despite the differences between the various positions, there are two assumptions shared by most feminist philosophers, namely the interrelatedness of theorizing and politics, and that all theoretical work is context-dependent work. Thinkers build their theories neither neutrally nor abstractly. In the case of Karen Warren the philosophical production is moulded after the practical objective of creating healthy, life-affirming, intentional, respectful communities of commonalities and differences that are based on non-dominating interaction and cooperation.¹⁵ Then since the Western context is structured by relationships of oppression and domination – e.g. gender relations, race relations, and class relations – feminists consider essential in theorizing to bring those relationships to light. As feminist, feminist philosophers centralize the gender relations and as philosophers they

¹⁴ KJ Warren, ‘Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections’, *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1987, p. 11.

¹⁵ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 212.

set themselves the task of identifying how these relations manifest themselves in philosophy, that is, of countering when philosophers deliberately or accidentally articulate the already privileged worlds of men maintaining their authority and rejecting those who hold deviant experiences, concerns, or modes of thinking.

The particular feminist philosophical landscape which Warren's texts help to depict includes a number of conceptualizations that constitute an alternative to those of the dominant philosophy. For example, the way the subject is conceived. These feminist subjects are process; they are not fixed. They are situated in concrete geographical, historical, social, economic, and material contexts; they are not dislocated. They are connected to friends, family, the community, and the environment; and these relationships are constitutive of them, and not merely accidental; they are not detached from everyone or everything. Their body is essential to them; they are not disembodied pure minds. They are emotional; they are not dispassionate. They have interests, desires, and values. They depend on others for becoming humans, for attaining truths, and for surviving; they are not self-sufficient. They are partly a product of language. Their minds are not totally transparent and their acts are not totally intentional. They may share a lot, but there are things that make each one of them unique; they are not interchangeable.¹⁶

Environmentalism is the movement that works to end naturism. Environmentalists assert that the domination of nature by humans exists and that this domination is wrong. Some environmentalists carry out the work to end naturism from the discipline of philosophy. Environmental philosophy is work carried out within some philosophical field – mainly ethics – that is motivated by the general goal of the environmental movement. Despite the differences between the various positions, there is one assumption shared by most environmental philosophers, namely nature deserves moral consideration in its own right. As Warren explains, mainstream Western ethics has traditionally neglected nature. The standard notion has been that humans only have moral obligations towards humans. Nature has merely had instrumental value.

¹⁶ KP Addelson, 'Knower/Doers and Their Moral Problems' in L Alcoff & E Potter (eds), *Feminist Epistemologies*, Routledge, New York, 1993. D Curtin, 'Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care', in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. M Fricker & J Hornsby, 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000. M Friedman, 'Feminism in ethics: Conceptions of autonomy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. A Jaggar, 'Feminism in ethics: Moral Justification' in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. A Jaggar & I M Young (eds), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998.

Environmental philosophers endeavour to elucidate the connections between environmental problems and traditional philosophical conceptions. They set themselves the task of identifying how naturism manifest itself in philosophy, that is, of countering when philosophers deliberately or accidentally articulate the already privileged world of humans maintaining its status over nature.

Some of the environmental ethical positions are: (1) the individualistic approaches of Peter Singer and Tom Regan: moral consideration is due to all those individuals who possess the morally relevant capacities, namely sentience (Singer) and to be the subject of a life (Regan); (2) the holistic approach of Aldo Leopold whose focus is on populations, species, ecosystems, and the biosphere: it is not only individual animals that enjoy moral value, but also plants and the non-living elements of the natural world; (3) deep ecology that expects humans to develop an ecological sensitivity: a respect that reflects the fact that each organism is essentially related to the other elements of the “biospherical net” and the fact that every life form possesses an intrinsic value independently of the instrumental values that it may possess in the eyes of a human beholder; (4) social ecology that identifies a structural and institutional root of the environmental crisis, specifically a society that has been permeated by authoritarian hierarchies and a capitalist market economy, and a natural world that has been arranged in accordance with a hierarchical order of beings: it underlines then the vital connection between social problems and environmental problems, that is, between the way humans relate to humans and the way humans relate to nature.

Ecofeminism is the approach that merges the goal of the environmental movement with the goal of the feminist movement. Warren explains that it does this because ecofeminists believe that both environmentalism and feminism have their shortcomings, and that they should complement each other. According to her environmentalists will not be able to fully and correctly understand, and consequently successfully abolish, naturism unless they cease to disregard the connections existing between the domination of nature and the domination of women. They will not be able to elaborate theories that do not contribute to oppression unless they recognize the role and configuration of oppressive conceptual frameworks and the conceptual connections between naturism and sexism they give rise to. They will not be sensitive to the specific realities and perspectives of women unless they admit gender as a fundamental category of analysis. Feminism needs, in a similar way, to understand the connections between sexism and naturism.

Ecofeminists as environmentalists claim that the Western context is structured by a further relationship of domination, namely that of nature by humans. But they do not only acknowledge this additional domination. Likewise some feminists – e.g. some Third World feminists – they acknowledge the interconnections between the different systems of domination. Naturism exists and it cohabits with sexism, racism, classism, and so on. Ecofeminists declare that feminism should consequently be a movement to end naturism and all other forms of domination too. If feminists want to help real women, they have to take into account all the elements that make up the women they are. Gender is unavoidably the prime concern for feminism, but if it wants to liberate real people it cannot confine itself to it. Since, for example, the concept of women has historically been associated with the concept of nature, it is essential for them to incorporate an analysis of naturism. At an argumentative level, Warren assumes that feminism should reject the logic of domination, since feminism aims at ending sexism and sexism relies on the justificatory powers of the logic of domination. But since naturism also relies on the logic of domination, feminism should aim at ending naturism too. Actually, since all systems of domination – sexism, naturism, racism, classism, hetero-sexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, and all the rest – rely on the same logic of domination, for Warren feminism should be the movement that endeavours to undermine them all.

Warren on anthropocentrism and androcentrism

Warren claims that “for ecofeminists, the historical manifestation of anthropocentrism, at least in Western societies, has been androcentric,”¹⁷ and that “at least in Western societies, *anthropocentrism* has *historically functioned* as *androcentrism*.”¹⁸ These two statements are to be considered the starting point of my paper. The purpose will be to elucidate what these statements mean. I want to understand the relationships connecting anthropocentrism and androcentrism.

We can begin with Warren’s reference to history and social context. I think that her point is to make clear that anthropocentrism is not necessarily androcentric. Conceptually anthropocentrism is, I would say, genderless. In a non-Western context anthropocentrism could be gynocentric.

¹⁷ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 38.

¹⁸ KJ Warren, ‘Ecofeminist Philosophy and Deep Ecology’ in N Witoszek and A Brennan (eds), *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Ecophilosophy*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford, 1999, p. 257.

Regarding the content of the terms, Warren provides, unfortunately, no detailed definition of either ‘anthropocentrism’ or ‘androcentrism.’ According to the only explicit descriptions that she offers ‘anthropocentrism’ is “human-centeredness” or “human-centered thinking that assumes the superiority of humans over nature,”¹⁹ while ‘androcentrism’ is “male-centeredness” or “male-centered thinking that assumes the superiority of men over women.”²⁰

Regarding their use, I would say that their presence in Warren’s texts is not particularly overwhelming. There are, however, several instances where one can get some further information about her understanding of them. For example, she considers an androcentric social organization to be “structured around male dominance hierarchies,”²¹ and an androcentric conceptual bias to be one that denies or overlooks claims about the situation of women, like that about the connections among systems of domination.

There are also certain expressions and formulations that indirectly shed light on these concepts. ‘Human chauvinism’ describes, for instance, the assumption that “only humans are morally considerable.”²² When discussing models of social justice and equality based on sameness, Warren quotes Eva Feder Kittay: “The implicit use of men – more specifically, white, middle-class men – as the standard against which equality is assessed.”²³ ‘Male bias’ and ‘male-gender bias’ are used to describe both false claims about women and faulty generalizations about humanity; to characterize a science that in its observations pays no or less attention to female behaviour, assigns traditional roles to both sexes, and assumes that the objects of investigation are structured according to a male dominance hierarchy; to describe canonical Western philosophy because it neglects “the significance of care and care practices;”²⁴ and to qualify oppressive conceptual frameworks when the beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions “reinforce or maintain socially constructed views of females and males in ways that inferiorize female behavior.”²⁵

¹⁹ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 24.

²⁰ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 24.

²¹ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 158.

²² Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 88.

²³ EF Kittay, ‘Taking Dependence Seriously’, *Hypatia*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1995, pp. 8-29, cited in Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 188.

²⁴ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 113.

²⁵ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 158.

ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Elisa K. Campbell tells us that the word ‘anthropocentrism’ was coined in the 1860s in the context of the first debates about Darwin’s theory of evolution and the implications for humans of this theory. The term described the prevalent assumption that humans occupied the centre of the universe.

Anthropocentrism is a key concept in environmental philosophy. The reality it depicts, and purportedly describes and elucidates, is seen by many as one of the main causes of the current ecological crisis. It is, however, surprising that in the literature it is not always entirely clear what ‘anthropocentrism’ actually means. Sometimes authors do not give any useful definition or explanation whatsoever. Sometimes they use that one term to refer to different phenomena.

In this section I shall therefore try to provide some clarity in the matter. I am in fact going to distinguish between anthropocentrism (or human-centrism or human-centeredness) and two other terms, namely human chauvinism, and human bias. All these terms appear continually in the environmental literature and they are even used as synonyms at times. Here I want them to describe the various senses I have found associated to the word ‘anthropocentrism.’

Human bias

Drawing on Karen Warren’s analysis of bias, I shall use the expression ‘human bias’ to describe that sense associated to ‘anthropocentrism’ that is generally deemed harmless. In *Ecofeminist Philosophy* Warren discusses three ways in which philosophies and

perspectives can be said to be biased. One of them is contextual bias. According to it all theories, all observations, all conceptual frameworks, all points of view are biased, because “they are never context-free.”²⁶ According to her all philosophies as well as all perspectives, including ecofeminism, are context-biased, since they are all inescapably developed within a particular location.

‘Human bias’ shall then describe a contextual bias. It shall describe the fact that anything humans do is inescapably human. It shall substitute expressions such as ‘trivial anthropocentrism’ (William Grey), ‘weak anthropocentrism’ (Andrew Dobson), ‘cosmic anthropocentrism’ (Val Plumwood), and ‘unavoidable human-centeredness’ (Tim Hayward). As William Grey explains, “our perspectives, values, and judgements are necessarily human perspectives, values, and judgements.”²⁷ ‘Human bias’ will describe an unavoidable and necessary feature of every human undertaking (Andrew Dobson). Every judgement could be claimed to be human biased, since every judgement “can be made to reveal any evidence of dependency on a human location in the cosmos, on human scale.”²⁸ Humans, as a group and as individuals, as well as every other species, occupy and constitute a centre. Their perspective on the world is “shaped and limited” by the characteristics and location of that centre (Tim Hayward).

Human chauvinism

‘Chauvinism’ could be defined as “the strong and unreasonable belief that your own country or race is the best or most important,” and male chauvinism would then be the belief that “women are naturally less important, intelligent or able than men.”²⁹ Drawing on these definitions, ‘human chauvinism’ shall describe the belief that humans are in some respect superior to the rest of nature.

For example, according to George Sessions’s account of Aristotle’s “Great Chain of Being” the Aristotelian philosophy would include a human-chauvinistic element. Humans, due to their rationality, are there separated from and considered superior to

²⁶ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 154.

²⁷ W Grey, ‘Anthropocentrism and Deep Ecology’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 71, no. 4, 1993, pp. 464-465.

²⁸ V Plumwood, ‘Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics’, in K Warren (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 330.

²⁹ *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

plants and animals; and plants are said to be made for the use of animals, and animals for the sake of humans.³⁰

It is important to distinguish here between the belief, which can be reasonable or unreasonable, that humans are superior to the rest, or to a part, of nature and the moral implications that this belief may have. As Karen Warren points out humans, due to some capacity, may be considered superior to the rest of nature, but this superiority does not necessarily entail that humans are justified in dominating nature. For instance, adults' superiority over children makes them actually responsible for their security and well-being. I shall then use 'human chauvinism' to describe just those claims that *unfairly* imply that humans are superior to nature. In this sense Aristotle's philosophy would be human chauvinist, if his reasons to conceive humans as superior turn out to be unsatisfactory.

Anthropocentrism / Human-centrism / Human-centeredness

These three terms suggest a spatial image. Something, in this case humanity, is situated at the centre of something. There are numerous settings in which humans can be claimed to occupy the centre. For example, an anthropocentric cosmology would claim that humanity occupies the physical centre of the universe.³¹ In environmental philosophy the terms are mainly applied to morality. Here I shall analyze the ways in which humans are said to occupy the privileged spot of that specific universe.

The starting point shall be Val Plumwood's liberation model of anthropocentrism. I am beginning with Plumwood because she offers a detailed account of what centrism and anthropocentrism is.

Plumwood defines centrism as a structure that is common to and underlies different forms of oppression, like colonialism, racism, and sexism. The role of this structure is to generate a Centre and the Periphery, an oppressor and the oppressed, a Centre and the Other. The shared features are:

1. *Radical exclusion*: Those in the centre are represented as radically separated from and superior to the Other. The Centre is represented as free from the features of an inferiorized Other, and the Other as lacking the defining features of the Centre.

³⁰ G Sessions, 'Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour' in G Sessions (ed.), *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston, 1995, pp. 159-60.

³¹ Grey, p. 464.

Differences are exaggerated to the point of preventing or hindering any sense of connection or continuity, to the point that “identification and sympathy are cancelled.”³²

2. *Homogenization*: Those on the periphery are represented as alike and replaceable. Similarities are exaggerated and differences are disregarded within that group. “The Other is not an individual but is related to as a member of a class of interchangeable items.”³³ Differences are only acknowledged when they affect or are deemed relevant to the desires and well-being of those in the centre.

3. *Denial*: The Other is represented as inessential. Those in the centre deny their own dependency on those on the periphery.

4. *Incorporation*: Those in the centre do not admit the autonomy of the Other. The Other is represented as a function of the qualities of the Centre. The Other either lacks or is the negation of those qualities that characterize those in the centre, being these qualities at the same time the most cherished and esteemed socially and culturally.

5. *Instrumentalism*: Those in the centre deny the Other its independent agency. Those on the periphery are represented as lacking, for instance, ends of its own. The Centre can consequently impose its own ends upon them without any conflict. The Other becomes a means or a resource the Centre can make use of to satisfy its own needs, and is accordingly valued for the usefulness the Centre can find in it.

This centric structure can, Plumwood explains, be applied to a further form of oppression, namely naturism. This centric model can help us to elucidate how humans relate to nature and understand what is wrong with this kind of relationship. With the following five points Plumwood wants to clarify what anthropocentrism is and why it is so devastating.

1. *Radical exclusion*: Humans are represented as radically separated from nature. Human identity is practically reduced to those features that make humanity different from nature, neglecting those that both share. Nature is represented as lacking the defining human features. Humans then experience no continuity or kinship with nature, and their virtue is often identified with those features that are categorized as exclusively human, excluding those that remind them of their own animality.

2. *Homogenization*: Nature and animals are represented as all alike. Differences are only acknowledged when they are believed to affect human desires and well-being.

³² Plumwood, p. 339.

³³ Plumwood, p. 337.

Nature is seen as a system of interchangeable and replaceable parts, and its complexity is as a result seriously underestimated.

3. *Denial*: Nature is represented as inessential, as the background to human life. Humans disregard its needs and encounter consequently no constraints to their agency. They cannot either admit their dependence upon it.

4. *Incorporation*: Humans do not admit the autonomy of nature. Nature is represented as either lacking or being the negation of those qualities that are construed as characteristically human. Nature is, for example, disorder and unreason, upon which human order and reason is to be imposed.

5. *Instrumentalism*: Humans deny nature its independent agency. Nature is represented as lacking, for instance, ends of its own. Humanity can consequently impose its own ends upon it without any conflict. Nature becomes a means or a resource that humans can make use of to satisfy their own needs, and is accordingly only valued for the usefulness they can find in it.

A second reason for beginning with Plumwood is that all the iniquitous senses of anthropocentrism that I have come across in the literature can, I think, be identified as either instrumentalism or denial.

Warwick Fox's *passive sense* of anthropocentrism would be an example of denial. In this sense he speaks of anthropocentric ecophilosophy as one that focuses on social issues only, on interhuman affairs and problems. For these environmentalists "the nonhuman world retains its traditional status as the background against which the significant action – human action – takes place."³⁴ According to them the environmental crisis would then be solved within that human sphere by ensuring the well-being of humanity. There would be no need to deal with the way humanity relates to nature.

The other senses would be examples of either instrumentalism or of outcomes of instrumentalism: Andrew Dobson's *strong* anthropocentrism ("The injustice and unfairness involved in the instrumental use of the non-human world"³⁵); the account Robert Sessions gives of how deep ecology describes the anthropocentric attitude ("(1) Nonhuman nature has no value in itself, (2) humans (and/or God, if theistic) create what value there is, and (3) humans have the right (some would say the *obligation*) to do as

³⁴ W Fox, 'The Deep Ecology – Ecofeminism Debate and Its Parallels' in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, p. 277.

³⁵ A Dobson, *Green Political Thought: An Introduction*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 51, Ebrary.

they please with and in the nonhuman world as long as they do not harm other human's interests"³⁶); Tim Hayward's account of the ethical criticism of anthropocentrism ("The mistake of giving exclusive or arbitrarily preferential consideration to human interests as opposed to the interests of other beings"³⁷); Andrew Dobson's description of what environmentalists consider a basic cause of ecological degradation and a potential cause of disaster ("Concern for ourselves at the expense of concern for the non-human world"³⁸); and Warwick Fox's *aggressive sense* of anthropocentrism, according to which anthropocentrism is the overt discrimination against the nonhuman world.

William Grey on anthropocentrism

There is one author who has been excluded from the previous account, namely William Grey and his stance on the value of nature. Grey's explicit statements appear to support Plumwood's reading of him as anthropocentrist. For Grey "anthropocentrism is natural and inevitable, and when properly qualified turns out to be perfectly benign."³⁹ The issue here is what 'anthropocentrism' means, what is natural and inevitable. There are actually, as I shall show, several features regarding human moral concern that Grey considers inevitable and somehow anthropocentric. I believe that these are relatively unproblematic, and that they could easily be classified as human bias. The sense of anthropocentrism hinted in Grey's text that has attracted my interest is rather a seemingly natural and inevitable feature regarding human moral valuing.

We have already seen that Grey acknowledges a sense of anthropocentrism that he himself describes as trivial, and that I have renamed 'human bias.' Though this human bias may be natural and inevitable, Grey makes it very clear that it is not this anthropocentrism that has to be qualified.

His call for an "enriched and enlightened" anthropocentrism is a reaction to the "short term and narrow" conception of human interests and concerns that is currently dominant. Grey believes that we should take into consideration other species' interests, and that we should avoid those activities that upset the environment. An enlightened anthropocentrism realizes that humans are an integral part of the biological world, that they are a knot in what the science of ecology describes as a life-supporting complex

³⁶ R Sessions, 'Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?' in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, p. 138.

³⁷ T Hayward, 'Anthropocentrism: a misunderstood problem', *Environmental Values*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1997, p. 51.

³⁸ Dobson, p. 51.

³⁹ Grey, p. 470.

web of interdependencies. An enlightened anthropocentrism realizes what the well-being of humanity actually depends on. Once this is truly understood anthropocentrism has necessarily to take in the concern for the well-being of the nonhuman world. Grey insists, however, that this concern for the nonhuman world is still a “human concern,” since it expresses “anthropocentric values from an anthropocentric perspective.”⁴⁰

The object of enrichment and enlightenment seems to be then the concern humans have for themselves. Humans have to care about nature merely because their future is depending on nature’s well-being. This does certainly not seem to refute the instrumentalist reading of Grey’s claims, and does seem quite problematic. I am not so sure that Grey really withholds independent value from other species. That the future of humanity is depending on nature’s well-being does not necessarily mean that nature is to be reduced to a means or resource. Nevertheless, the interesting thing here is that reference to anthropocentric values. Grey makes a similar reference when he discusses the non-anthropocentric bases for value in nature that have been proposed by different ecophilosophies.

For Grey these bases – e.g. biodiversity, beauty, harmony, stability, integrity, and autonomy – are in fact nothing but “covert anthropocentrism.” For example, ecocentrism (Earth-centeredness) and biocentrism (life-centeredness), which both insist on the need to reject anthropocentrism, must according to him assume some “anthropocentric bearings,” otherwise they leave us without any reasonable way to choose between different outcomes. If we are to eliminate all human values, interests, and preferences from our moral decisions, we are rendered unable to decide which among all the possible alternatives is to be preferred. To make his point Grey makes use of among others the following cases:

i) Suppose that astronomers detect an asteroid on collision course with the Earth. The impending collision would probably destroy most of the current large life forms, including ours. This would, however, provide an opportunity for smaller, flexible organisms to radiate into vacated niches.

ii) Suppose that we are entering an ice age that would cause massive disruptions to the agriculturally productive temperate zones. Suppose further that by carefully controlled emissions of greenhouse gases it would be possible to maintain a stable and productive agriculture, but to the detriment of arctic plant and animal species.

⁴⁰ Grey, pp. 469-470.

iii) Smallpox and HIV have their own viral autonomy, but the interests of these goal-directed entities do sometimes conflict with our own human interests.

If we adopt a biocentric or ecocentric perspective we will not be able to decide which of these possible courses of action are to be preferred. Grey claims that it will only be legitimate to stop the asteroid, to prevent the ice age, or to disregard the interests of smallpox and HIV if we adopt a perspective that sets a high value on our own human interests. “Our demise, and the demise of the ecosystem which currently supports us, would be a matter of regret. But clearly it would be regrettable because of a decidedly anthropocentric set of values, interests and perceptions.”⁴¹ Grey explains that the biocentric and ecocentric perspectives would in certain cases even advocate a course of action or an evaluation that is openly disadvantageous for us. For example, “if biodiversity is taken as a basic value-giving characteristic, then the state of the planet just after the Cambrian explosion [...] would be rated much more highly than the world of the present, as it was far richer in terms of the range and diversity of its constituent creatures.”⁴²

The impartial concern for the interests of at least every living being, which for Grey seems to be something that both biocentrism and ecocentrism demand, creates an impasse that we will not be able to resolve outside an anthropocentric frame. Beauty is an openly anthropocentric value. The only reason we could give to preserve the actual ecosystem and to consequently prefer it to others that might be at least as harmonious and stable as our own, or that might exhibit an equally impressive biodiversity and integrity, is that the actual ecosystem is the ecosystem we humans inhabit. In a conflict of interests we will only respect the autonomy of the nonhuman beings when we are sure that our own well-being or interests are not going to be seriously affected.

Here we can identify some of the relatively unproblematic obstacles to a non-anthropocentric, or impartial, extension of our human moral concern. Humans do occupy, as Grey claims, a “privileged position” within the moral world. Our concern for the well-being and flourishing of our ecosystem not only should include the human well-being and flourishing as legitimate parts, this concern has to be compatible with the reasonable claim that humans are justified in pursuing and in some cases prioritizing their own human interests.

⁴¹ Grey, p. 473.

⁴² Grey, p. 471.

It is also here that I envisage a further obstacle, that further sense of anthropocentrism that, I believe, might be renamed 'human bias.' Here I perceive that sense in the expression "anthropocentric bearings." I am aware, by the way, that I am giving a rather hesitant impression by using these verbs – to envisage and to perceive. The reason for this is that I am not really sure if Grey himself has this in mind when he writes about anthropocentric values and bearings. In his article he does not explicitly express this sense. He does claim, for example, that the extension of concern to other interests than our own has to be developed within the limits of a scale that is "recognisably human," and that if we do not respect the limits of that scale we will render our concern "meaningless." But he introduces these thoughts when discussing the so-called billion-year-time and the galactic-spatial perspectives. These untold perspectives turn human existence into a seemingly temporal and spatial futility. These expansive perspectives make our human concerns insignificant. What Grey remarks regarding these perspectives is that by subverting every anthropocentric scale they become completely useless for deciding issues of human agency such as what is to be considered significant and important. This is not only because human concern is limited by our human powers, that is, that our concern cannot be extended to embrace, for example, the fate of the planet in several billion years, since "there's nothing we can do to affect the fate of the planet in the very long term."⁴³ These perspectives are also meaningless, because they involve a time scale and space scale that are "far beyond those of experiential familiarity."⁴⁴ They involve scales that are impossible for us to take in.

In conclusion, with expressions such as "anthropocentric values," "anthropocentric bearings," and "recognisably human," Grey might suggest that human moral concern presupposes human values, that we cannot be concerned for something that lies outside every anthropocentric value frame, that nature in and of itself is not something that can be valued independently of human values. Or he might merely suggest that there is no other value in nature than the value that derives from human interests, that concern for the ecosystem overlaps with our concern for the things we value.

⁴³ Grey, p. 467.

⁴⁴ Grey, p. 464.

Plumwood on Grey

Val Plumwood does not observe any other ambition in Grey than to defend the instrumental view of nature. She discusses his argument for the inevitability and naturalness of anthropocentrism and finds it faulty. Anthropocentrism is not benign. For her it is still a serious threat to human survival.

She formalizes Grey's reasoning in the following way:

- i) To avoid anthropocentrism one has to avoid any reference to human bearings, that is, to human location, interests, perception, values, preferences, and concerns.
- ii) This is an impossible task.
- iii) Anthropocentrism is therefore unavoidable.
- iv) Therefore only humans and their interests are morally considerable.

And she explains that the reason why this argument fails is that it relies on the following erroneous assumptions:

i) *Moral consideration requires the total elimination of our own location*: Plumwood agrees that moral consideration implies a kind of "transcending" our own location. But this transcendence does not mean that total elimination, or the obliteration of our own purposes, projects, needs, and interests. Moral consideration just implies "seeing the world from the perspective of a creature with its own needs and experiences."⁴⁵ Human locatedness is surely inevitable. But, as Plumwood indicates, the environmentalist demand for the end of anthropocentrism is not a request to eliminate all reference to human bearings and to extend human concern impartially to all creatures. This demand merely calls for recognition for the purposes, projects, needs, and interests of the nonhuman world and beings.

Plumwood argues also that if Grey explains the impossibility of altruistic concern for nature by noting the inevitability of human-centeredness, he likewise has to deny the possibility of concern for other humans. Self-centeredness seems as inevitable as human-centeredness, so if concern for other humans implies the elimination of any reference to personal bearings altruistic moral consideration for others turns out to be unfeasible.

ii) *There is only one morally relevant sense of anthropocentrism, namely cosmic anthropocentrism*: The demand to transcend anthropocentrism, Plumwood claims, can

⁴⁵ Plumwood, p. 331.

only be understood as a demand for detachment from our human location if one recognizes solely that sense of anthropocentrism.

The question is once again which sense of anthropocentrism is unavoidable. According to Plumwood what is inevitable for Grey is that humans cannot step out from their human location. We have, however, already seen that for him this does not only mean that humans cannot take a pause and cease to be human. Cosmic anthropocentrism is not for Grey a morally relevant sense of anthropocentrism. He writes, for instance:

“What deep ecology seeks to promote, and what deep ecologists seek to condemn, needs to be articulated from a distinctively human perspective. And this is more than the trivial claim that our perspectives, values and judgements are necessarily human perspectives, values and judgements.”⁴⁶

I agree that one of the problems with Grey’s reasoning is that he seems to equate moral consideration for nature with impartial consideration for every earthly being. Another problem is that Grey makes use of a series of examples that are not really representative. We are requested to consider solely cases where conflicts of interests occur, our own survival is at stake, and it is either nonhuman interests or ours that have to prevail. Conflict does not always arise between human and nonhuman interests. These interests do even coincide sometimes. Besides, human interests are not necessarily approvable. Then the fact that conflict sometimes arises between human and nonhuman interests does not imply that nonhuman interests are not worthy of consideration. Conflict arises sometimes between my and other people’s interests, but this does not mean that I am to deny other people their moral value, or that mine shall be denied.

The key issue is still the meaning of some of Grey’s expressions, like “the attempt to provide a genuinely non-anthropocentric set of values, or preferences seems to be a hopeless quest.”⁴⁷ For Plumwood these expressions merely mean that seeing the world from the perspective of a nonhuman creature with its own needs and experiences is either morally useless or meaningless since only humans and their interests are morally considerable. I suggest another possibility, namely that seeing the world from the

⁴⁶ Grey, p. 464-465.

⁴⁷ Grey, p. 474.

perspective of a nonhuman creature with its own needs and experiences presupposes that those needs and experiences are recognizably human.

Tim Hayward on anthropocentrism

That last sense of anthropocentrism is not, as I have explained, explicit in Grey. I have, however, found it properly articulated in Tim Hayward's article "Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem."

Hayward distinguishes between objectionable and unobjectionable senses of anthropocentrism. There are for him, as we have already seen, even respects in which anthropocentrism is unavoidable. It is unavoidable that humans occupy and constitute a centre; and that their perspective on the world is shaped and limited by the characteristics and location of that centre. It is also unavoidable that humans are interested in themselves and their kind. The unobjectionable sense of anthropocentrism, which I would rather call the unobjectionable sense of centrism since it applies to any being, refers to humans having and pursuing their legitimate interests.

According to Hayward these innocuous senses of anthropocentrism induce an ambiguity in that term that renders it inappropriate. He suggests that 'speciesism' and 'human chauvinism' should replace it. For him these terms can perfectly capture the objectionable sense of anthropocentrism, which for him refers to "the various illegitimate ways of giving preference to human interests," without evoking the unobjectionable ones.⁴⁸

Hayward identifies therefore two such illegitimate ways. The first one, speciesism, would be the "arbitrary discrimination on the basis of species."⁴⁹ For example, if moral consideration is due to non-humans, to give different treatment to similar cases or to ignore the independent value of those non-humans merely because we and our interests are human would be speciesist. Human chauvinism would describe a particular disposition or attitude regarding the criteria of moral consideration. That disposition or attitude assumes that humans shall always prioritize human interests, that there are no morally relevant similarities between humans and nonhumans, and that there is only one necessary and sufficient condition of moral concern, namely being human. Human chauvinism is the disposition or attitude to again and again reject those attempts that aim at defending the moral worth of nonhuman beings. It is the disposition or attitude

⁴⁸ Hayward, p. 52.

⁴⁹ Hayward, p. 52.

that, always aiming at benefiting humans, obstinately hunts for relevant differences between humans and non-humans, or conveniently redefines the criteria of legitimate discrimination.

These senses that Hayward has made ‘speciesism’ and ‘human chauvinism’ take over from ‘anthropocentrism’ reflect once again the traditional ethical stance regarding non-human beings, namely either only humans or always humans first. These senses include radical exclusion, instrumentalism, and outcomes of instrumentalism.

Among the unavoidable senses of anthropocentrism that Hayward discusses we can ultimately find that which I originally discerned in Grey’s text. Hayward explicates this sense in the following way. It is impossible to give “meaningful moral consideration to cases which bear no similarity to any aspect of human cases.”⁵⁰ It is inevitable that humans assign moral value on the basis of human criteria of value. It is impossible for us to value something on the basis of some criterion that does not relate to any existing human value. “As long as the valuer is a human, the very selection of criteria of value will be limited by this fact.”⁵¹ These values are necessarily human values, since “values are always the values *of* the valuer.”⁵² Ecocentrism, for example, advocates non-anthropocentric bases for value. According to the present sense of anthropocentrism this would mean that in our interaction with nature, or at least some parts of it, we are in fact expected to implement criteria of value that do not relate to any existing human value. That certain natural elements such as rocks, rivers, and mountains deserve moral consideration would mean that they are to be valued for their own sake, that is, due to human-independent reasons.

The wrongness of anthropocentrism

Finally, I would like to summarize some of the reasons why anthropocentrism is open to criticism. I shall focus on those that Val Plumwood adduces. According to her anthropocentrism is basically a framework of beliefs and perceptions that generates a myriad of illusions.

Nature is perceived as discontinuous from the human realm, as subordinate, as inessential, as a denied and disorderly Other, as passive, and so on. Anthropocentrism

⁵⁰ Hayward, p. 56.

⁵¹ Hayward, p. 56.

⁵² Hayward, p. 57.

disregards nature's complexity, her uniqueness as a life-sustaining whole, and the plurality of legitimate centres with genuine interests and needs that it comprises.

Humans are perceived as discontinuous from the natural realm, as essentially rational, and are reduced to being masters and conquerors. Humans, as physical and biological beings, can, of course, be allowed to remain within nature. What anthropocentrism especially consigns to an area outside and above nature is that part of the human self that is considered authentically human, i.e. rationality and freedom. Human identity is in such a way construed in opposition to the natural, the physical, the biological, and the animal, including those human traits associated with animality, that the authentically human includes also the "desire to exclude and distance" from the nonhuman. This conception of the human self as separate from, or if anything "*accidentally* related" to, nature together with the conception of the nonhuman as inferior and antagonistic renders humanity a legitimate oppressor and nature a means to human ends. Anthropocentrism disregards humanity's vital dependence on nature, the essential character of genuine human traits such as the emotions and the body, as well as other attitudes towards nature than that to master and conquer it.

ANDROCENTRISM

Sandra Lipsitz tells us that the concept of androcentrism was first articulated in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture* from 1911. There Gilman exposes some of the structural elements of this concept. For example, in an androcentric culture men are considered the human type, while women are solely an accompaniment and subordinate assistant. In an androcentric culture the only area of human life where women play the main part and are considered essential is that of reproduction.

Androcentrism is a key concept in feminism. Even if the term is not always present in the literature, the reality it depicts is seen as one of the fundamental constituents of sexism.

In order to explicate some of the senses associated to 'androcentrism' I am, as in the previous section, going to distinguish between three terms: male bias, male chauvinism, and androcentrism (or male-centrism or male-centeredness).

Male bias

Drawing again on Karen Warren's analysis of bias, I shall use the expression 'male bias' to describe a contextual bias. Here it would be convenient, however, to distinguish between two kinds of contextual biases, namely sex-context bias and gender-context bias. I am aware that sex and gender are contentious concepts. But I believe that as long as they are not construed dualistically, for instance, as long as we are aware that neither the science of biology nor the body are phenomena that hover around outside the grip of

culture these terms can appropriately be used to describe two fairly distinguishable realities. Sex belongs thus to the realm of biology, that is, the realm of genes and hormones, bones and tissues; while gender to the realm of culture, that is, the realm of roles and experiences, expectations and treatment.

‘Male bias’ – describing a sex-context bias – would imply that men, as a group and as individuals, as well as any other sex group and their members, occupy and constitute a centre. The characteristics and location of this biological centre would shape and limit men’s perspectives on the world. It is, of course, still unsettled whether the characteristically male actually affects men’s perspectives, values, judgements, and undertakings, and in that case the way and degree in which it does that. ‘Male bias’ shall describe the claim that at least some things men are and/or do inescapably or contingently belong to the male sex. Similarly, for example, ‘female bias’ shall describe the claim that at least some things women are and/or do inescapably or contingently belong to the female sex.

‘Male bias’ – describing a gender-context bias – would imply that males, as a group and as individuals, as well as any other gender group and their members, occupy and constitute a centre. The characteristics and location of this cultural centre would shape and limit males’ perspectives on the world. I believe that most feminists agree that the distinctively male do affect males’ perspectives, values, judgements, and undertakings. Likewise, the distinctively female affects females’ perspectives, values, judgements, and undertakings. ‘Male bias’ shall describe the claim that at least some things males are and/or do belong to the male gender.

It is this contextual sense of ‘androcentrism’ that, for example, Val Plumwood refers to when she expresses both the impossibility and desirability of equating the eradication of “androcentric bias” with the achievement of gender neutrality. The end of androcentrism cannot presuppose detachment from all male and female location. For her, as we shall see, the end of androcentrism shall be the end of a centric model of relationships, which rather than requiring removal of all bearings calls for, among other things, “a stronger assertion of certain locations and their admission in explicit terms.”⁵³

⁵³ Plumwood, p. 336.

Male chauvinism

We have seen how male chauvinism could be defined as the belief that women are naturally less important, intelligent, or able than men. 'Male chauvinism' shall then describe the belief that males are in some respect superior to women.

For example, the philosophies of Aristotle and Rousseau seem to include some male chauvinistic elements. For Aristotle the male is braver and more intelligent than the female, and his body represents a higher developmental stage than the female body.⁵⁴ He claims also that "for although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female."⁵⁵ For Rousseau, "the search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in science, for all that tends to wide generalisation, is beyond a woman's grasp; [...] the works of genius are beyond her reach, and she has neither the accuracy nor the attention for success in the exact sciences."⁵⁶

The male chauvinist belief that women have lower status than men or that the life of a girl has less value than the life of a boy partly explain phenomena such as female infanticide, sex-selective abortion – which almost exclusively targets female foetuses –, and the abandonment and neglect of girl children – which implies that the needs of a boy are more valued than the needs of a girl, like his health, his nutrition, and his education.⁵⁷

I would like to note that the belief that males are in some respect superior to women does not at all exclude the belief that women are in some other respect superior to males, that is, male chauvinism and female chauvinism are perfectly complementary realities that can coexist harmoniously. Maud Eduards explains, for example, that while the male intellect is for Rousseau superior to that of the female, women are fitter for feeling and care-giving than men.⁵⁸ And Genevieve Lloyd points out that, according to

⁵⁴ M Eduards & H Gunneng, 'Medborgaren och hans hustru: Om Aristoteles' syn på kvinnan' in M Eduards et al. (eds), *Kön, Makt, Medborgarskap: Kvinnan i politiskt tänkande från Platon till Engels*, Gleerups, Malmö, 1983, p. 35.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Part XII, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html>>, cited in Eduards & Gunneng, p. 32. The quotation in Eduards & Gunneng is in Swedish. Here I have taken the quotation from a text in English.

⁵⁶ JJ Rousseau, *Emile*, Book V, Part 6, <http://www.web-books.com/Classics/Nonfiction/Philosophy/Rousseau_Emile/Rousseau_EmileC6P6.htm>.

⁵⁷ *Case Study: Female Infanticide*, <http://www.gendercide.org/case_infanticide.html>.

⁵⁸ M Eduards, 'Politisk teori och patriarkalt tänkande', *Kön, Makt, Medborgarskap*, p. 145.

Kant, what the female lacks in the way of a grasp of universals, she makes up in her possession of other mental traits, like taste, sensibility, practical sense, and feeling.⁵⁹

It is also important here to distinguish between the belief, which can be justified or unjustified, that males are superior to women, the reason why they might be superior – which can be contingent –, and the moral implications that this belief may have. I shall use ‘male chauvinism’ to describe those claims that *unfairly* imply that men are superior to women.

Androcentrism / Male-centrism / Male-centeredness

These terms suggest a spatial image. Something, in this case a man, is situated at the centre of something. There are numerous settings in which males can be claimed to occupy the centre, e.g. androcentric society, androcentric culture, and androcentric philosophy. Here I shall analyze the ways in which men are said to occupy the privileged spot in the social and philosophical universes.

I shall begin with Val Plumwood’s model of centrism and what it conveys when applied to the relationship between men and women. This centric structure reveals a masculine Centre and a feminine Other, and includes the following elements:

1. *Radical exclusion*: Men are represented as radically separated from and superior to women. Their male identity is practically reduced to those features that supposedly make men different from women. The male virtue is the result of excluding those features that are categorized as exclusively female. Women are represented as lacking the defining male characteristics. All this lessens men’s experience of continuity or kinship with women.

2. *Homogenization*: Women are represented as all alike. They are all said to share a uniform and unalterable nature. Differences between them are only acknowledged when they are believed to affect the desires and well-being of men. For example, class, ethnical, cultural, and, of course, individual diversities are seriously underestimated.

3. *Denial*: Women are represented as inessential, as the background to male life. Their work and contributions are disregarded or devalued. Their work as caregivers for children, the sick, and the elderly, the housework they carry out, the love and intimacy they provide, their contributions to the culture, the arts, and the history are systematically downgraded or ignored.

⁵⁹ G Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ & ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy*, 2nd edn, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 76.

4. *Incorporation*: Women are defined in relation to men. They are represented as lacking or being the negation of those qualities that are construed as characteristically male.

5. *Instrumentalism*: Women are deprived of any independent agency. They are represented as, for instance, lacking ends of their own. They are to take on the ends of others, primarily their husbands and children. Women become a means or a resource that men can make use of to satisfy their own needs and interests. They are only valued for the usefulness men can find in them and not in their own right. They are reduced to good wives and good mothers. For example, according to Rousseau the duties of woman are “to be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy.”⁶⁰

Sandra Lipsitz Bem is the other major source that I shall employ to cast light on what androcentrism involves. For Lipsitz androcentrism is one of the “gender lenses” that organize reality together with gender polarization and biological essentialism. Gender lenses are those “hidden assumptions about sex and gender [...] embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches that invisibly and systematically reproduce male power.”⁶¹

‘Androcentrism’ describes for Lipsitz the enthronement of males and male experiences and male activities as neutral standards, norms, or reference points of a culture, and sometimes even of the human species. Females and female experiences and female activities as well as actually anything else are defined in relation to that vantage point, and not in their own right. Everything is interpreted through male eyes, and is defined in terms of its similarity to or instrumental significance for that male centre. Females are then considered to be an “inferior departure” or a “deviation” from the male standard or norm.

The reproduction of male power is therefore aided by the androcentric assumption that the male and his world are to be privileged, while the female and her world are to

⁶⁰ Rousseau, Book V, Part 2, <http://www.web-books.com/Classics/Nonfiction/Philosophy/Rousseau_Emile/Rousseau_EmileC6P2.htm>, cited in E Hammar, ‘Fostran till foglighet: Om kvinnans villkor i Rousseaus tänkande’, *Kön, Makt, Medborgarskap*, p. 92. The quotation in Hammar is in Swedish. Here I have taken the quotation from a text in English.

⁶¹ S Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 2.

be otherized. This assumption is instilled in cultural discourses and social institutions by those who control them, namely men in power.

An example of how the male standard is concealed behind the veil of neutrality is, Lipsitz explains, the USA Supreme Court's alleged gender neutral concept of equality. Protection is not granted to all those cases where correspondence between the particular and a neutral standard is verified. Protection is only granted when correspondence between the particular and a male standard is verified. According to Lipsitz this is why the USA Supreme Court refuses to include pregnancy in the disabilities covered by an employer's disability insurance package. This insurance ensures that those workers suffering from certain disabilities get some compensation for the salary that they are not able to earn. The Court defines, however, the standard human body in terms of the male body. The disability insurance package covers as a result each and every condition that this body may suffer from. Women will enjoy the benefits of this insurance as far as their bodies resemble the standard body. This is why prostatectomies and circumcisions are covered, while pregnancy is not.

In Lipsitz's version of androcentrism I cannot only recognize Plumwood's incorporation and instrumentalism, but also the phenomenon that I above have identified with the term 'male bias.' Every gender and sex group occupies and constitutes a centre. Since in our societies the group that overwhelmingly has power is men, cultural discourses and social institutions incorporates, in Lipsitz's words, "whatever fundamental assumptions about reality they came to have in virtue of their particular position in the social structure."⁶² A clear example of this, Lipsitz explains, is the definition of the institution of paid employment. Three distinctively female experiences, which are so fundamental in human life, are excluded from the definition of a normal work life, namely pregnancy, childcare, and housework. Women encounter numerous difficulties in combining those experiences with a career. Pregnant women encounter numerous difficulties in getting a job. Women encounter numerous difficulties in getting back to the workplace after their maternity leave. A normal work life is built around childlessness and homelessness.

This institution of paid employment does, of course, also include androcentrism in the sense of a centric model of relationships. Women tend to do jobs that revolve around

⁶² Lipsitz, p. 132.

male activities and needs – e.g. secretary, research assistance, nurse, and sex worker – and these women’s jobs are low-status and low-paid jobs.

Gender polarization is the second gender lens that Lipsitz distinguishes. This lens involves several assumptions. First, there are two and only two sexes, namely the male sex and the female sex. A person can therefore only be either man or woman. A “script” is then assigned to each of these sexes. These scripts are mutually exclusive and they define what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman. A person cannot be both masculine and feminine. Second, any person or behaviour that does not stick to the pertaining script is seen as problematic, unnatural, anomalous, immoral, or pathological. These two first assumptions manage to bond an individual’s sex, psyche, behaviour, and sexuality into a close whole. Third, this male-female difference is so central in our culture that Lipsitz describes it as “an organizing principle for the social life.”⁶³ It permeates almost every social manifestation. People of different sexes are identified with, for example, different hobbies, sports, occupations, skills, personalities, communication styles, expectations, treatment, beauty ideals, body and physical appearance, roles, dressing, hairstyles, toys, voice inflection, life experiences, values, body mannerism, sexual and affectional partners, and the way of experiencing and expressing sexual desire.

Gender polarization and androcentrism are, according to Lipsitz, inextricably linked together. The male-female division is actually the very foundation upon which androcentrism exists. This division plays three main roles in the reproduction of male power. First, gender polarization sets up a world of labour where paid employment is seceded from housework and childcare, and the former is identified with the male, while the latter with the female. Since each sex is responsible for its own domain, there is no need to devise a mechanism that enables a person to combine both activities. This arrangement precludes therefore the possibility of an equitable access to economic and political power. Second, gender polarization forces individuals to develop their identity around either a masculine or feminine pole. This dualism suits perfectly the hierarchy that an androcentric model of relationship generates. Men are to be dominant. Women are to be deferential. Third, gender polarization does not only underpin androcentrism. It renders it invisible. The male-female difference turns that sexual inequality into just

⁶³ Lipsitz, p. 2.

plain sexual difference. Men and women are like that. They are different. They like different things.

The function performed by the third gender lens is to rationalize and legitimize the other two. *Biological essentialism* adds the further assumption that androcentrism and gender polarization, that is, inequality and difference, are the natural and inevitable consequences of women's and men's biological natures. Lipsitz identifies three general ways in which the unequal and different natures of women and men have been rationalized: (i) God (e.g. Judeo-Christian theology) or nature (e.g. ancient Greek philosophy) has created human beings and has given the sexes unequal and different natures; (ii) these unequal and different natures are the result of our species' particular course of biological evolution (e.g. Sociobiology); and (iii) these unequal and different natures are the result of women's and men's psychological development (e.g. Freud).

Within feminism there is, of course, disagreement about the cause of sexual inequality. There is also disagreement about how this inequality is to be eliminated. Feminists have as well different ideals of what equality should involve. However, I would say that most of them would agree with the androcentric picture drawn by Plumwood and Lipsitz. Probably the main conflict would arise over the meaning of gender polarization. The discussion would revolve around whether men and women are essentially same or different. Lipsitz explains actually that this has been a longstanding ingredient of the history of feminism. There have always been a group of feminists that have minimized the male-female difference and tried to remove any sign, or at least most signs, of gender polarization; together with a group that have maximized that difference and both tried to upgrade the female while criticising masculinity. Lipsitz, for example, belongs to the former group. She does not though reject each and every difference between men and women. What she claims is that we should seek to restrict their significance to those spheres where the differences really matter, essentially biological contexts like reproduction. Gender polarization cannot be an organizing principle for our social world, our culture, and our psyche. She notes also that difference is not in fact the real problem. For her the cause of inequality is not gender polarization, but rather androcentrism. It is the fact that our social life is "so organized from a male perspective that men's special needs are automatically taken care of while women's special needs

are either treated as special cases or left unmet.”⁶⁴ It is androcentrism that is responsible for the transformation of the genuine and fabricated male-female differences into male advantage and female disadvantage.

Landau on androcentrism

I did not want to end this section without considering some deeply critical words against androcentrism so I searched outside feminism, and I found Iddo Landau. Well, it was outside feminism I initially placed him after I had read a couple of his articles, but as a matter of fact he considers himself a liberal feminist. Despite the labels, his discussion about the androcentrism of Western philosophy is actually interesting and relevant to the issues elaborated in this chapter. First, because after considering a number of feminist arguments employed for claiming that Western philosophy is androcentric, he concludes that no Western philosophy is “pervasively androcentric” and that some Western philosophies are at most “non-pervasively androcentric.” For Landau to claim that a philosophy is androcentric means that it “suits men’s experiences and minds more than women’s, or involves discrimination against women, or is geared towards dominating them.”⁶⁵ For him androcentrism is not a serious problem for philosophy. No philosophy deserves complete rejection. No philosophy requires substantial reform, replacement, or complement. For him there are just some philosophies that merely require elimination of specific themes and passages. And second, because, as he points out, some of his analyses regarding the supposed androcentrism of Western philosophy are relevant also for claims about the supposed androcentrism of other fields, like “Western culture as a whole.”

The only feminist argument that succeeds in showing that some Western philosophies are androcentric is therefore the one that refers to the existence in philosophical theories of androcentric themes or misogynist passages. Landau admits the presence of these themes and passages. He notes, for example, Kant’s claim that women cannot be citizens of the state due to their being more prone to inclination. What he does is to explain that for most philosophical systems, and Western philosophy as a whole, these passages and themes are not central and they can consequently and without difficulty be ignored. The androcentric blots within particular theories or systems, or

⁶⁴ Lipsitz, p. 183.

⁶⁵ I Landau, ‘How Androcentric is Western Philosophy?’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 182, 1996, p. 48.

Western philosophy as a whole, do not affect the whole. One can still make sense of, employ, and benefit from most part of those theories and systems.

Then there are those feminist arguments that do not succeed in proving any androcentrism at all:

(1) Some feminists refer to the existence in Western philosophy of androcentric or sexist metaphors and expressions. Landau responds that theory is one thing, and metaphor and phraseology another. Metaphors and philosophical contents are independent of each other. Metaphors are just “literary embellishments” that can easily be replaced with, in this case, other non-androcentric expressions.

(2) Some Western philosophies are claimed to encourage and aid the social and cultural discrimination against women. Landau responds that it is important to distinguish between a theory and both the purposes for which it might be used and the ideas with which it might be associated. This argument fails because one thing is the philosophical theory, which might be androcentric or not, and another the androcentric purposes it has been used for or the androcentric ideas it has been associated with.

(3) Western philosophy is said to be pervaded by hierarchical binary oppositions whose elements are related to each other. For example, reality, essence, soul, culture, and masculine are related, and at the same time opposed to appearance, accident, body, nature, and feminine. Landau responds that (i) not all Western philosophies include such oppositions, e.g. the philosophies of Socrates, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard; (ii) there is no such internal link between the elements of either group, since “women, like men, have been associated with both nature and culture, goodness and evil, desire and temperance;”⁶⁶ and (iii) such argumentation would entail that Western philosophy is also guilty of enhancing goodness and justice, since goodness and evil as well as justice and injustice are seen as binary oppositions, whose first elements are preferred to the second. For Landau, dualism, that is, distinguishing and preferring, is not a symptom of androcentrism but actually an unavoidable feature of human thinking.

(4) Western philosophy is accused of suiting men’s experiences, minds, and interests more than women’s. Due to their different life-experiences, some feminists claim, women’s minds differ from men’s. Men are considered to be dualistic, non-contextual, objective, universal, uninfluenced by emotions, precise, and certain. Women are non-dualistic, contextual, subjective, influenced by emotional and social concerns, and less

⁶⁶ Lipsitz, p. 54.

geared towards precision and certainty. Since it is overwhelmingly men who have done Western philosophy, this philosophy necessarily mirrors the male traits. Landau responds that (i) not all Western philosophies incarnate those male traits or have them as ideals, and most, if not all, of the philosophies that do it are not androcentric either, since there is no single one that has succeeded in achieving them; (ii) it is wrong to associate certain traits to women and certain traits to men, since there are no significant differences between women's and men's intellectual abilities, and the factors that have an effect are rather social and economical, like class and level of education; and (iii) what is essential for a person having a particular mentality is the life-experiences that form that person rather than that person being a man or a woman, and since there are, for example, numerous men who are exploited economically, socially, and sexually, in some cases more than many women are, one should talk about the mentality of exploited people and not the mentality of women. Landau adds that the argument that Western philosophy does not fit women's mentality fails also to show that this philosophy should be rejected, because if we think Western philosophy as a whole, or a particular theory, is rewarding but does not fit women's minds, "we may still choose to change [their] nurture or life-experience rather than reject the philosophy."⁶⁷

When Landau examines these "central arguments" for the androcentricity of Western philosophy, he illustrates each of them with claims and arguments from several scholars. I am acquainted with some of them, but not well enough. So I shall not be able to assess Landau's reading and critique of them. I shall therefore comment on his reasoning from the feminist frame I have built up through the pages of this essay.

Landau does not give any detailed account of what androcentrism implies. His definition does nonetheless incorporate some of the relevant features. Something is to be considered androcentric if it suits men better than women, it includes a different and unequal treatment of the sexes, and it helps to preserve male power. According to this definition some of the factors that would make a philosophy androcentric are, for example, that the philosophy includes the experiences, interests, and concerns of men, while either excluding or disregarding those of women; that the philosophy portrays the sexes, the relationships between them, or what is associated to them in such a way that they get different and unequal treatment; and that the philosophy portrays the sexes, the

⁶⁷ Lipsitz, p. 58.

relationships between them, or what is associated with them in such a way that male power gets reinforced. Landau seems to focus on arguments for the first two conditions. He explicitly discusses whether Western philosophy suits men more than women and whether it encourages discrimination. Unfortunately, he does not examine any argument that tries to prove that Western philosophy underpins domination and male power.

The centrality of misogynist passages is not a matter that can be solved generally. It requires an analysis of the theories and systems of the particular philosophers. What is important to point out is that to prove that Western philosophy is androcentric and to substantially reform or reject it are not universal feminist goals. There are a lot of feminists who have no interest in getting rid of Western philosophy or in banning specific philosophers. In fact a significant part of the work carried out by these philosophers includes a revision of our Western philosophical tradition in order to try to make sense of, employ, and benefit from it. A general critique of the way Landau deals with arguments for androcentricity would therefore be that it is misleading to isolate these feminist arguments from the feminist projects and goals. The main purpose of feminists' work within philosophy is to investigate the role philosophical assumptions and ideas play in the reproduction of male power. It is not to stigmatize all of Western philosophy. Sharon Crasnow expresses perfectly what feminists are saying: "It is quite plausible that these categories *are* androcentric in some contexts and, if so, feminists suggest we should be cautious of and self-conscious about their use."⁶⁸

The issue of sexist metaphors and their role in philosophical discourse is not a simple one. As Susan Mendus notes, "the status of metaphor in philosophical theory is highly contentious."⁶⁹ For example, Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty question that metaphors are merely literary embellishments. Regardless of the status of philosophical metaphors, I believe that their presence in philosophical texts reveals something about the authors, namely an attitude that might surface somewhere else affecting their production.

Landau's call for keeping theories separated from associations and uses seems to disregard the fact that feminists are perfectly aware of that distinction. That is why they, in their efforts to encourage equality, look after allies among the traditional philosophers. And again, what they are recommending is carefulness and awareness.

⁶⁸ S Crasnow, 'Iddo Landau, *Is Philosophy Androcentric?: A Review*', <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=8623>>.

⁶⁹ S Mendus, 'How Androcentric is Western Philosophy? A Reply', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, p. 61.

Regarding the discussion of dualism, I want to point out three things. First, I believe feminists are quite aware of the richness of Western philosophy. They are, for instance, aware of the existence of female and feminist philosophers through out the whole history of that philosophy. The central issue here is not, I believe, the existence of non-dualist philosophers, but their actual significance for Western philosophy and culture as a whole. Second, not all feminist philosophers consider that binary oppositions are evil. Third, feminists do not only draw attention to the preferences that dominant Western philosophers have made. In the West good and justice may be preferred to evil and injustice, what feminists draw attention to as well is the way these terms have been construed. Consider, for example, the Aristotelian notion of a good life. Aristotle did without doubt prefer this life to the bad one. The problem is that his way of conceiving the good life excluded the material necessities, and consequently made it impossible for women and slaves to take part in it. Of course, these groups were, as Lena Gemzöe explains, excluded due to their lack of adequate intellectual abilities, but also because the free and satisfactory life devoted to intellectual and political activities presupposed and required their toil.⁷⁰

I believe the most powerful counterarguments offered by Landau are those concerning the claim that Western philosophy suits men more than women. I have the following to say about them:

(1) Landau proposes that if we think Western philosophy is rewarding but does not fit women's minds we might change their nurture or life-experience rather than reject the philosophy. This might be wise. The feminist call for carefulness and awareness suggests, however, that we first have to question what exactly it is rewarding, what it is rewarding for, and for whom it is rewarding.

(2) Landau denies any difference between men's and women's mentalities. I cannot here determine here whether this is true or not. What I can do is to try to clarify what this controversy is about. That Western philosophy suits men more than women does not mean that philosophy is a complicated business that requires special abilities that surpass those possessed by women. It can mean that women and their worlds are excluded from or disregarded in the philosophical production. Landau does not address this interpretation. Another way of understanding the feminist claim would be, as we have seen, to assert that Western philosophy is dualistic, non-contextual, objective, and

⁷⁰ L Gemzöe, *Feminism*, Bilda Förlag, Stocholm, 2003, p. 121-122.

so on, while women are non-dualistic, contextual, subjective, and so on. This does not imply, however, that women are not dualistic, objective, etc; but that, like men, they have been trained to master those abilities that are considered suitable for their own realm. This might make women, for example, describe and solve concrete philosophical issues in a different way than men. Landau does address this interpretation. For him men are not more dualistic or objective than women.

(3) Landau denies the relevance of the category of woman. He claims that there is no women's mentality, and that we should rather speak about the mentality of exploited people. This reply is not new. Feminists have been debating the appropriateness of that category for at least three decades. I believe that most feminists, despite the richness of women's experiences and the fact that some experiences are shared by several groups, consider the category of woman to be a useful analytical and political tool. Numerous men are surely more exploited economically, socially, and sexually than many women are. This would still not imply that among the group of the exploited people men and women are exploited in the same way, by the same structures, or that they experience the exploitation in a similar way.

As we have seen, Landau explains that at least part of this whole discussion is relevant for claims about the androcentricity of Western culture. I do not know what Landau understands by culture. I do not know either which specific analyses regarding Western philosophy would apply also to such arguments. Here I shall just briefly mention what Landau would really have to focus on if he wants to refute the feminist claim that Western culture is androcentric without misconstruing its meaning and intention. Drawing on Lipsitz, I would say that Landau has to prove, for example, that in our societies there is no unequal distribution of power that favours men, that certain cultural expressions – e.g. sexist phraseology and misogynist utterances – do not contribute to sustain this power imbalance between the sexes, that some cultural expressions – independently of the intentions of the persons behind them, or of their meaning in other contexts – do not assist the reproduction of male power, that the cultural male-female difference is not a social organizing principle, or that the dominant culture does not have males as norm. It would not suffice to prove that there are no significant differences between the intellectual abilities of men and women, or that there are experiences that some men share with some women.

The wrongness of androcentrism

Finally, to round off this section, I would like to describe some of the reasons why androcentrism is open to criticism. In addition to women suffering from the tangible effects of such a social inequality, one could claim, following Val Plumwood, that androcentrism is basically a framework of beliefs and perceptions that generates a myriad of illusions.

Instead of repeating and adapting what I did at the end of the previous chapter, I would like to focus on Lipsitz. Lipsitz describes some of the subtle effects of artificially splitting human experience into a masculine realm and a feminine realm:

(i) It takes place a homogenization of both sexes ignoring the facts that neither all men nor all women are identical and that neither all men nor all women follow the scripts assigned to their own gender slavishly. People do cross the gender barrier.

(ii) It takes place a dichotomization of the ways of relating to the world into a masculine way and feminine way. It opposes, for example, the autonomous way of males to the interdependent way of females, the rational way of males to the emotional way of females. Androcentrism conceals the fact that people are actually autonomous and connected, rational and emotional.

(iii) A pair of intriguing concepts is created – a *real man* and a *real woman* – over and above that of a biological man and a biological woman. Androcentrism persuades people that they cannot take their maleness or femaleness for granted, and consequently that it is something they have to work at, something they have to accomplish, and something they have to be sure not to lose.

(iv) Men and women are prevented from developing their full potential as human beings. Men and women have to repress those human impulses that do not fit in with their own script. For example, as Plumwood argues, male identity and virtue are in such a way construed in opposition to the emotional that the authentically male incorporates “the desire to exclude and distance from the feminine.”⁷¹ Particularly, the core component around which male identity and value have traditionally been construed, namely Reason. As Genevieve Lloyd explains, rationality has been construed as “transcendence of the feminine.”⁷² The feminine representing the passions, the body, the

⁷¹ V Plumwood, ‘Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism’, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, p. 164.

⁷² Lloyd, p. 104.

sensual and temporal, the particular and contingent, while the masculine representing the universal, the necessary, and the eternal.

ANDROCENTRISM, ANTHROPOCENTRISM, AND WARREN

I shall begin this last chapter by bringing together all the various senses of androcentrism and anthropocentrism that I have discussed throughout this essay. This shall allow me to present a comprehensive picture of the two concepts.

In Warren I found the following senses and cases of androcentrism and anthropocentrism:

- (1) Male-centred thinking that assumes the superiority of men over women.
- (2) An arrangement structured around male dominance hierarchy.
- (3) To deny or overlook claims about the situation of women.
- (4) Those senses and cases associated to male-gender bias: (i) faulty generalizations, (ii) false claims about women, (iii) no or less attention to female behaviour, (iv) the assignment of traditional roles, (v) the exclusion of the significance of care, and (vi) female behaviour being inferiorized.
- (5) Men as the standard to assess phenomena.

- (1) Human-centred thinking that assumes the superiority of humans over nature.
- (2) Only humans are morally considerable.
- (3) The only relevant values are human values.
- (4) Humans as the standard to assess phenomena.

Although the term “naturist bias” is not used a great deal by Warren, it can be easy to squeeze some further senses of anthropocentrism by drawing on her words about male-gender bias: (i) to overlook the richness and complexity of the natural world, (ii) to

reinforce or maintain views of humans and the natural world that inferiorize nature, (iii) faulty generalizations, and (iv) false claims about the natural world.

It is not difficult to recognize here some of the themes that I have discussed in the sections about androcentrism and anthropocentrism. I can see my male chauvinism, Lipsitz's androcentrism and gender polarization, Plumwood's radical exclusion, denial, and incorporation, my human chauvinism, and the environmentalist definition of anthropocentrism. There are, however, several senses for which there are no correlatives in Warren: (i) my human bias, (ii) the supposedly unavoidable or unobjectionable meanings of anthropocentrism, (iii) Plumwood's instrumentalism and homogenization, and (iv) my male bias.

In the endeavour to understand androcentrism and anthropocentrism I believe that it can also be helpful to compare how authors deal with the issue of androcentrism to how authors deal with the issue of anthropocentrism. I think it can be enlightening to take elements from one of the discussions and translate them into or adapt them to the other. I can give you a couple of examples:

(1) Drawing on Lipsitz's gender lenses, we could coin the term 'human lenses.' This will describe the hidden assumptions about humans and nature that are embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches that invisibly and systematically reproduce human power over nature.

(2) Drawing on Lipsitz's gender polarization, we could examine, for instance, whether there is a similar organizing principle for the interaction between humans and the natural world, whether there is a script assigned to each of them, whether there exists a barrier that is not supposed to be crossed, whether there exists the concept "real human being" over and above a biological human that infuses insecurity in us, and whether humans are prevented from developing their full potential as human beings due to repressing those impulses that do not fit in with their human script.

Now I shall describe three of the connections linking androcentrism and anthropocentrism.

Warren claims that "sexism (and male-gender bias) and naturism (and naturist bias) are conceptually linked."⁷³ They are linked through an oppressive conceptual framework. Since Warren's male-gender and naturist bias include elements of

⁷³ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 63.

androcentrism and anthropocentrism, I am inclined to affirm that for her androcentrism and anthropocentrism are linked through an oppressive conceptual framework. This, I believe, means that they share the same oppressive conceptual structure, that is, that there is an androcentric oppressive conceptual framework and an anthropocentric oppressive conceptual framework.

Besides the logic of domination, an androcentric oppressive conceptual framework would include:

- (1) A value-hierarchical thinking consisting of the following hierarchies: man/ woman, culture/instinct, mind/body, reason/emotion, technology/labour, and so on.
- (2) The following oppositional value-dualisms: man-woman, culture-instinct, mind-body, reason-emotion, technology-labour, and so on.
- (3) Men exercise power over women.
- (4) Men's privileges: for example, status jobs, violence, and authority.

Besides the logic of domination, an anthropocentric oppressive conceptual framework would include:

- (1) A value-hierarchical thinking consisting of the following hierarchies: humans/nature, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, humans/animals, and so on.
- (2) The following oppositional value-dualisms: humans-nature, culture-nature, mind-body, reason-emotion, humans-animals, and so on.
- (3) Humans exercise power over the natural world.
- (4) Humans' privileges: for example, moral consideration, subjectivity, integrity, and rights.

I would like to add one word about oppressive conceptual frameworks, more precisely, about the logic of domination. According to Warren, this logic is a necessary condition of subordination. However, this logic does not automatically ensure subordination. For example, I have already mentioned female chauvinism, but there is also animal chauvinism. The superiority has to be embedded in a structure where it is valued. Women are supposedly better care givers than men, but this superiority is in the androcentric framework simply overlooked and confined to a devalued sphere. As Warren claims, what characterizes women in an androcentric society is that they are excluded from or have less access than men to political and economic institutions of power and privilege. Their superiorities do not enable them, in fact they hamper, attaining a similar access than men.

A second connection is to be found in the statement that the anthropocentric human is an androcentric man. One of the linking elements is, as we have seen, rationality. Both the anthropocentric human and the androcentric man are rational entities, and reason has traditionally been construed oppositionally. Reason is opposed to the sensual, the emotional, the temporal, the particular, the contingent, and the subjective. Since both the natural and the female world incorporate these wicked features, the anthropocentric human and the androcentric man are expected to transcend nature and women.

A second structural connection between androcentrism and anthropocentrism is offered by Plumwood's model of centrism. I am not going to explain again here what this connection entails. What is interesting about this model is that it also shows that there exist similarities between how humans and men are conceived and between how nature and women are conceived. The humans the anthropocentric relationship presupposes and the men the androcentric relationship presupposes share certain traits. The nature the anthropocentric relationship creates and the women the androcentric relationship creates share also certain traits.

Some of the traits that humans and men share are: isolation (humans/men are radically different from nature/women), disdain (humans/men are superior to nature/women), control (humans/men are masters of nature/women), identity of difference (humans/men identify themselves exclusively with what distinguishes them from nature/women), self-righteousness (humans/men are better than nature/women), simplicity (humans/men overlook natural/female differences), contradiction (humans/men deny their dependence on nature/women, while they reduce them to a resource they can make use of), and parochialism (humans/men ignore the idiosyncrasies of nature/women).

Some of the traits that nature and women share are: alienation (nature/women have no connection with humans/men), difference (nature/women possess no human/male attributes), simplicity (nature is a whole that is impossible to tell apart, women are all the same), passivity (nature/women lack ends of their own), restraint (nature is reduced to a be resource, women are not allowed to develop their full potential), inferiority (nature/women are not as good as humans/men), dependency (nature/women are reduced to a human/male dimension), futility (nature/women achieve nothing that is worthy), and subordination (nature/women have no access to power).

The purpose of this paper has been to clarify the two concepts that are fundamental to the ecofeminist connection. Though similarities and common features have been the object of my analysis, differences and peculiarities also play a part. Androcentrism and anthropocentrism have some structural configuration in common. It could, however, be worthwhile to examine further what androcentrism adds to anthropocentrism, and vice versa.

I shall end this essay with a brief account of this issue. I would like to do this at the same time as I describe two examples of the relevance of the ecofeminist contribution to environmentalism and feminism.

The use of gender as a category of analysis enables us to establish how environmental destruction and environmental issues can affect women and men differently, as well as to discriminate between women's and men's environmental impact. Warren illustrates this perfectly. In rural areas in developing countries women, being the primary managers of household economies, have a different relationship to forests than men. This implies that, for instance, development policies leading to forest resource depletion affect them in specific ways. It becomes more difficult for them to sustain their households when the source of food, fuel, fodder, products for the home, and income-generating activities is diminished. Droughts and floods are also examples of how environmental issues can have a particular effect on women, since the world's poor population is mainly female and it is this population that is the prime victim of environmental disasters. In Western countries, toxic chemicals, pesticides, and industrial pollutants can injure pregnant women causing miscarriages and foetal health problems.

Here one can identify some of the ways in which androcentrism enters the environment. Division of labour, unequal rights and liberties, economic inequality, different education, and power and decision-making inequality are some of the factors that place women in a dissimilar environmental position to that of men, and sometimes in a more disadvantageous one. It is, for example, usually less hard for men to deal with local environmental changes. As Warren explains, they can move to towns and cities in search for work, and they have better access to training, land, and credit.

Carolyn Merchant, in her book *The Death of Nature*, describes how during the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a mechanical world view transformed and replaced the traditional organic reality. Merchant highlights the

part of women and of images of femininity in that process; a process which resulted in the “death of nature.” Here, we find then a historical illustration of the alliance between androcentrism and anthropocentrism.

In the organic reality nature was considered a sacred organism, alive and sensitive, and female. There were at that time two key images of nature. The dominant one was that of nature as a beneficent, benevolent, and nurturing mother that gave life to every being. The other portrayed nature as a wild, unruly, and violent force that caused plagues, famines, and tempests. Each image gave rise to a particular attitude towards nature: (1) Humans felt respect and reverence for their mother; and (2) humans felt a need to control and master the menace of natural disasters.

In that reality women, on the one hand, and due to their physiological functions of reproduction and nurture, were considered to be closer to nature than men, and due to their supposedly greater sexual passion they were to blame for the bodily corruption of men, and they were subordinate in the social hierarchy. At the same time, they were an economic resource for their families. They brewed beer, healed the sick, worked in crafts and trades, owned shops, supervised the economic activities of the estate, owned and managed property, and kept accounts. At that time there were two key images of women: (1) Woman as a virgin representing true beauty and the good; and (2) woman as a witch that raised storms, caused illnesses, destroyed crops, and brought plagues.

The 16th and 17th Century Europe was a time of great unrest and disorder. Copernicus’s heliocentric theory, Galileo’s observations of craters on the moon and spots on the sun, the new technologies such as cranes and pumps, the Protestant Reformation, the new economy of commercial capitalism, and the emergence of female rulers were some of the events that shattered the organic world.

In the new mechanic order nature became an inanimate dead physical system, a machine. The prevailing image now was that of an unruly force that was to be dominated, scrutinized, and manipulated for the sake of humanity. The female earth was no longer a mother. She had become a female with plots and secrets, a stepmother who wickedly concealed her bounty from her children. Nature was reduced to an economic resource.

Women were now depicted as insolent and violent. The Scientific Revolution was the time of the witch trials. The role of women in society shrank. Upper-class and bourgeois wives were supposed to enjoy a life of leisure. The wives of servants and day labourers were no longer to participate in daily farm work. The married woman became

therefore more dependent on and subordinate to her husband. She lost status and rights. The passive role ascribed to them in biological reproduction was reasserted. Man was the parent. Woman was just an incubator.

There were, of course, other elements that opened the door to the exploitation of nature. The Christian God's words about the place of man in creation, or the peoples of the New World as symbols of wilderness and chaos, for example. Women, and female images, were one element. But it was not simply that the status of both nature and women were demoted, and that as the crusade against nature was carried out a parallel crusade against women took place. The fact is that these processes advanced each other. The sort of feminization of nature that in the organic period had indeed been favourable for nature, since it had functioned as a kind of "ethical constraint" against human ecological harm, was, and had to be, transformed in the name of progress, growth, and profit. Nature was as a result converted into a dangerous and evil female in a social and cultural context where witches spread fear, women were reduced to biological resources, and female heads of state threatened the established order. At the same time the age-old naturalization of women had entered an era where nature was crumbling down before humanity's anxious eyes and its inner life and activity had become an obstacle in the male path to prosperity.

Merchant, as a feminist historian, makes use of gender to get a more comprehensive grip of a past event. As an ecofeminist historian, she brings together the history of women and the history of nature. This allows us, for example, to understand how the mechanic conceptualization of nature, which generates a gap between the natural and the human worlds and converts nature into a passive resource, found support in the androcentric conceptualizations of women, which represent them as a hostile and inferior figure.

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