

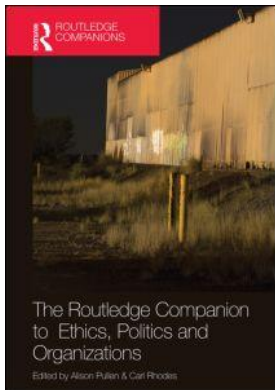
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### **Re-ethicizing corporate greening?**

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# Re-ethicizing corporate greening?

## Ecofeminism, activism and the ethics of care

Mary Phillips

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Over 20 years ago, W. Michael Hoffman wrote in *Business Ethics Quarterly* (1991) that corporations must develop urgently an environmental conscience and demonstrate moral leadership to solve a problem “that involves the very survival of the planet” (p. 173). We are now rapidly reaching a point of no return in terms of climate change while habitat and species continue to be lost at an alarming rate (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014). Yet, meaningful change appears no nearer than it was in the early 1990s. Politicians and the business community seem utterly paralysed while efforts to address ecological crises have been a dismal failure (Wittneben et al., 2012). Climate change was barely mentioned in the 2012 US Presidential election, and environmental issues in both the USA and Europe have been sidelined politically by a focus on restoring economic growth at a time of recession (Ellis and Bastin, 2011; Wittneben et al., 2012). Corporate responses are characterized, first, by a focus on a business case approach based on obtaining competitive advantage (Bansal and Roth, 2000; Christmann, 2000; Dibrell et al., 2011). Second, reliance is placed on finding technical or ‘scientific’ solutions to environmental challenges (Boiral et al., 2009; Harris and Crane, 2002) and, third, corporations are accused of ‘greenwashing’ such that there is a distinct gap between environmental commitments made in policy statements and actual policy implementation (Ramus and Montiel, 2005; Walker and Wan, 2012). The resulting apathy and inertia has led to calls from within organization studies for a radical transformation of socio-political structures, economic systems and cultural values and identities (e.g. Wittneben et al., 2012) but to bring this about requires what has been described as a groundswell of moral outrage (Wittneben et al., 2012), a paradigm shift in mindsets (Banerjee, 2002; Cherrier et al., 2012), the reclaiming and reinvigoration of the concept of ‘nature’ (Banerjee, 2003), a spiritual reawakening and personal, affective engagement with the natural environment (Crossman, 2011; Pruzan, 2008).

To determine whether a re-ethicization of the corporate and business world is possible, I will review the organization and management literature as it relates to corporate greening (also referred to as corporate environmentalism).<sup>1</sup> This concept encompasses “processes by which firms integrate environmental concerns into their decisions” (Banerjee, 2002: 177) and is defined as “the organization-wide recognition of the legitimacy and importance of the biophysical environment in the formulation of organization strategy and the integration of environmental issues into the strategic planning process” (Banerjee, 2002: 181). Environmental issues have long

been included under the banner of corporate social responsibility (Smith, 2003), but, according to Banerjee (2001), their rise up the corporate agenda has been driven by public concern and increased regulation (see also Banerjee et al., 2003). The review, which will be undertaken in the spirit of a critical essay rather than a systematic overview of the field (Prasad and Elmes, 2005), will demonstrate how the current discursive formations and material practices of corporate greening limit possibilities for transformative change. I cover three levels of analysis: I start by looking at the political context in which organizations operate, exploring the pressures and drivers for organizations to incorporate environmental considerations into the ways in which they conduct business. I then turn to the literature that interrogates practices at an organizational level, including that which promotes greening as an opportunity to improve competitive advantage but focusing on work that takes a more critical stance towards current organizational discourses of corporate environmentalism. Finally, I focus on research that has explored individual managers' responses to environmental issues and initiatives as, first, only individuals, rather than corporations, can experience a deeper affective engagement with nature that could bring about change (Starkey and Crane, 2003). Second, as Parker (2003) argues, although ethics is commonly held to relate to individuals and politics to the social structures in which individuals are located, there is a constant slippage between the two. Any exploration of the ethico-politics of corporate environmentalism thus has to include both structural and individual dimensions. I will argue that while corporate environmental discourses and practices are undoubtedly *political* in that they are aimed at maximizing the power and influence of corporations, they have been largely cleansed of *ethical* or *moral* considerations (cf. Pullen and Rhodes, 2008).

Current corporate practices and discourses relating to the environment are entwined within the structures and systems that are the causes of ecological crises. To empower individuals and groups to challenge such structures, radical alternatives need to be considered. I will therefore present the ecofeminist argument for an ethics of care (Cudworth, 2005; Glazebrook, 2005; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000) which seeks to ensure that efforts to effect change are underpinned by a politics informed by ethics, and by an ethics that results in action. To recast our relationships with the human and more-than-human others with whom we share the planet, ecofeminism has developed a particular take on the moral significance of care:

An ecofeminist ethic provides a central place for values typically unnoticed, underplayed, or misrepresented in traditional ethics (e.g. values of care, love, friendship, and appropriate trust). These are values that presuppose that our relationships to others are central to an understanding of who we are.

(Warren, 2000: 100)

To ensure the survival of planet earth, it is imperative that the myth that business as usual is possible, albeit with some greening around the edges, is challenged. Moreover, the notion that some aspects of nature have economic value and therefore should be preserved or that rational argument will curb the destruction of the natural world has failed because it replicates the same instrumental rationality that has characterized such destruction. Instead, we have to 'dare to care' (Warren, 2000: 212) and to recognize our connections to our others, human and more-than-human. Such caring dissolves the sense of denial in the face of overwhelming environmental problems felt by many individuals within and without organizations (Wright et al., 2012) and leads to a sense of empowerment such that we are willing to act for ourselves and others (Curtin, 1991). However, the chapter will conclude, somewhat gloomily, that conventional political institutions and corporations are so entrenched in a system that prioritizes the market and continued growth that transformative change from within is highly unlikely.

Instead grassroots activism and a community-based politics, and here I use the United Kingdom anti-fracking and Transition Towns movements as examples, that draw on an ecofeminist ethic of care are suggested as a more effective means of challenging organizational and political inertia.

### The political context of greening

Rossi et al. (2000) report that the corporate sector confidently positions itself as the leading change agent in the environmental arena, claiming to define and implement a sustainability agenda focused on technological innovation, production and product marketing. An alternative view argues that governments and civil society, operating on aggregate and community levels, have the power to develop an agenda to promote radical change while governments can ensure its implementation through passing and enforcing regulations. However, this is to conceptualize relationships between business and government as dichotomous. Moon and Vogel (2008) point out that much public policy and regulation is grounded in frameworks developed in partnership with corporations. At the same time, public policy is also influenced by business through, for example, lobbying activities while government officials routinely engage business, and other organized interests, to define and implement policy objectives. Moreover, it is argued that corporations proactively seek to expand their political influence and legitimacy in a range of arenas, including greening, by promoting legislation that serves their own interests, by participating in the activities of regulatory bodies and through increasing privatization of government functions (Barley, 2007; Crouch, 2011).

In terms of civil society, corporations represent their relationships with some environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as in the broader public interest while such links confer business legitimacy in environmental arenas (Hanlon, 2008). This notwithstanding, environmental NGOs can bring political leverage to bear through lobbying, litigation, protests and boycotts to effect corporate change and, importantly, to influence governments when setting policy and drawing up regulations (Carmin and Balsler, 2002). NGOs such as Greenpeace have become adept at using effective communication strategies aimed at powerful corporate customers and/or consumers of the target company using a variety of media to promote their causes (Hendry, 2005). The Greenpeace 'Dirty Laundry' campaign is a case in point (Greenpeace, 2011a) where public embarrassment was used as a potent driver for change. However, for Nyberg et al. (2013), business involvement in government and the ways in which they engage with NGOs amounts to an incorporation of social and environmental citizenship to benefit corporations' own political agendas.

As Hanlon (2008) reports, business regards some sensitivity to social and environmental issues as important in terms of defending itself from adverse public sentiment, legitimizing activities and as a means to open new markets. The next section will demonstrate that the primacy of the market and profit making is the main focus of the practices and discourses of corporate greening.

### Practices and discourses of corporate greening

An instrumentalist approach to the environment that puts business first is pervasive in the broader management literature. There is a large body of work that attempts to find a positive link between organizational environmental and financial performance (see Lockett et al., 2006, for an overview). Management and reduction of environmental impacts is positioned as a strategy (Aragón-Correa et al., 2008; Orlitzky et al., 2011) which, it is claimed, can add to competitive advantage through stimulating product or process innovation (Bansal and Roth, 2000; Dibrell

et al., 2011) or bringing economic benefits such as higher productivity or reduced material and energy costs (Christmann, 2000). The World Business Council on Sustainable Development's report *From Challenge to Opportunity* (2006)<sup>2</sup> is an example of how global issues such as the environment, poverty and globalization are re-focused as win-win opportunities. The report claims that business can address such issues through their activities and generate profit: "The products are the purpose – the profits are the prize" (WBCSD, 2006: 9).

The largely instrumental discourses referred to above are presented as responses grounded in the economics of the market and the calculation of costs and benefits. This has been critiqued as incrementalist or 'weak sustainability' (Turner, 1993) which promotes corporate interests over those of the environment (Banerjee, 2003, 2008) or provides symbolic reassurance (Greer and Bruno, 1996) as an exercise in impression management (Fineman, 2001; Harris and Crane, 2002). Although rising public concern and increased legislation has led many organizations to review their relationship with the environment, the burgeoning panoply of award schemes, consultancies and policy statements rarely appears to be translated into the effective implementation of change (Fineman, 2001; Milne et al., 2006; Ramus and Montiel, 2005; Wittneben et al., 2012). Instead, greening has become a hygiene issue that responsible management must be seen to espouse.

The approaches advocated by corporate environmentalism are presented as reasonable and practical steps toward resolving environmental problems but by working within existing systems. However, this discourse of 'practical relevance' (Prasad and Elmes, 2005) serves to limit the possibilities to achieve a more ecologically viable position by inhibiting alternative discourses that might mount greater challenges to the status quo. It does this by presenting them as foolish or naive and therefore illegitimate (Prasad and Elmes, 2005). While the rhetoric of corporate environmentalism appears to be emancipatory, it serves to legitimize the interests and power of corporations while curtailing the interests and voices of external stakeholders (Banerjee, 2008). Banerjee (2008) thus notes how environmental discourses are becoming increasingly corporatized. For example, he points to the definition of the sustainable corporation offered by the Dow Jones Sustainability Group Index as one "that aims at increasing long-term shareholder value by integrating, economic, environmental and social growth opportunities into its corporate and business strategies" (p. 66). Milne et al. (2006) also find that the concept of sustainability that can be achieved through corporate environmentalism is very vaguely defined. It is often metaphorized as a journey which suggests a process rather than an end-state, where the end of the journey is left unspecified and the map is often missing. It is suggestive of progress over time but, as with 'practical relevance', it defers more radical change and deflects dissenting voices who might wish to debate what changes are required (see also Fineman, 2001; Milne et al., 2009).

The environment is thus regarded from a corporate-centric viewpoint such that any discussion of radical shifts in, for example, socio-political structures, technical or economic systems or cultural values, all of which would threaten many organizations, never make it onto the agenda (Wittneben et al., 2012; Ramus and Montiel, 2005). This has been exacerbated by global recession where restarting growth has become a priority. Attention to environmental issues focuses on whether they are optional extras that can be dropped when times are hard, or can be used as the basis of proactive business tools which aid survival in difficult times. Either way, the environment is regarded in a largely instrumental fashion.

## **Greening and the individual manager**

Stephen Fineman's article on 'Constructing the Green Manager' (1997) concluded that a substantial shift in the belief systems and values of key organizational actors amounting to a

paradigm shift was required to challenge significantly current practices. However, little seems to have changed. Most studies of organization since suggest that managers rarely consider environmental questions in relation to moral or ecological issues, only to economic, strategic and technical implications. Managers generally consider eco-initiatives marginal to a firm's business, even in organizations that have developed environmental policies and goals. Crane (2000: 674) argues that this focus on the dominant economic rationale results in "a denial of moral status for the environment, or the avoidance of moral reflection or attachment in relation to greening", and that the possibilities for reversing this seem to be extremely limited. It would therefore appear that such managers identify strongly with corporate frames of reference that privilege the economic bottom line.

This gloomy picture persists when considering the possible tensions and ambiguities between privately held moral views on environmental issues and the ways in which these are enacted (or otherwise) at work. Fineman (1996, 1997) found that managers take a pragmatic, unimpassioned view of their role, actual or potential, in rising to the challenges of environmental issues. They want to avoid being seen as radical environmentalists and rationalize away any concerns by positioning their work as essential to economic and social life, expressing confidence in a competitive economic system to provide a solution, or trust in technical resolutions to environmental problems. Cherrier et al. (2012) report that managers and senior executives fail to recognize connections, positive or negative, between economic growth, environmental stewardship and social welfare, and regard nature as something separate from economic development or from organizations. Corporate sustainability specialists appear to find it particularly difficult to bridge wider social environmental concerns and the values expressed in corporate culture (Wright and Nyberg, 2012; Wright et al., 2012). Most believe that environmental issues have to be presented as a strategic business opportunity that emphasizes efficiency or productivity gains or the enhancement of brand value. Although this is often in conflict with their own, deeply felt passion for the environment, personal emotions have to be constrained. Thus, going green has to be a strategic, commercial choice, however individuals might feel about it.

### The ethico-politics of corporate greening

What is clear from the above discussion is that the discourses and material practices of corporate environmentalism do little to challenge existing organizational paradigms focused on achieving economic goals and these outweigh any concern regarding the environment. Concepts such as environmentalism or sustainability have been captured by organizations and re-presented in their own terms so that business as usual is not threatened (Banerjee, 2008; Milne et al., 2006; Fineman, 2001). Thus, corporations see the issue in terms of developing new technologies, opportunities for further growth and expanding the role of the market to allocate increasingly scarce environmental resources. For Banerjee, such a focus on economic outcomes is to assume that putting a price on the natural environment is the only way to protect it and that little attempt is made to reshape markets and production processes to "fit the logic of nature . . . sustainable development uses the logic of markets and capitalist accumulation to determine the future of nature" (Banerjee, 2008: 65, see also Marshall, 2011). Deeply rooted behaviour patterns and structural relationships that have caused the growing crisis are therefore unchallenged and continue to facilitate the conditions for environmental appropriation and degradation. Barriers to more transformative change are based in a politics that regards business as having a central role in achieving "economic growth and ecological rationality" (Jermier et al., 2006: 618) and an instrumental engagement with environmental issues ensures corporations are at the heart of, and thus impact, local and global political debates (Crane et al., 2008).

However, this review begs the question of how the more radical changes needed to avert ecological disaster (e.g. Dobson, 2007; Meadowcroft, 2000) can be achieved if the market does not operate to achieve them, or if market exchanges cannot sustain more than limited corporate environmentalism (Rossi et al., 2000). The key assumptions that limitless growth is possible and that scientific and technological solutions can be found to resolve environmental problems have to be challenged and overcome. Thus, a shift in mindsets is called for (Banerjee, 2002; Cherrier et al., 2012) which would re-evaluate existing economic paradigms to allow new ecocentric paradigms to emerge. It is the sense that nature has a value over and above economic considerations and that taking action to meet concerns regarding risks to the planet is a universal moral imperative that is lacking from the discourses and practices of corporate greening and indeed has led to its 'amoralization' (Crane, 2000: 674). The green message has been, in Fineman's terms, 'slimmed' or ethically purged by its association with more acceptable management concepts such as competitive advantage (Fineman, 2001; see also Boiral et al., 2009; Hoffmann, 1991). Moreover, it appears that any emotional engagement with nature also has to be cleansed from the instrumental and rationalist discourses of corporate environmentalism (cf. Pullen and Rhodes, 2008) such that organizational actors view the world and our relationships to it only as a means to achieve narrow rational and instrumental ends. The world is reduced to an economic object and any sense that a value beyond price might reside in its beauty or its possibilities as a source of inspiration is discouraged and any sense of obligation to the planet is eroded (Hoffman, 1991).

Parker (2003) shows us that the political always has an ethical dimension, while ethics should include the political arena within its deliberations. To counter the amoralization of corporate greening influenced by economic and managerialist objectives that are infused with politics, we must 'dare to care' so that nature and human relationships take precedence. Individuals and aggregates of individuals can overcome the sense of disempowerment in the face of the threats posed by climate change and institutional inertia by a moral identification of action as a public good (Wright et al., 2012). An ecofeminist ethics of care offers a radical means to think through alternatives to corporate greening and a basis for political action to challenge the cleansing of any ethical dimension from business approaches to nature.

### **Ecofeminism and the ethics of care**

Ecofeminism emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s partly as a response to what was perceived as a masculine bias in existing environmental philosophies and groups, and partly from women's experiences of anti-nuclear (weapons and power) direct action. As an activist movement, it was at first centred in the United States, but gained momentum in Australia and Europe also, and covered a range of issues such as toxic waste, deforestation, reproductive rights and technologies and animal liberation. Theorization was developed primarily by scholars in the USA and Australia and in a range of disciplines over the social sciences and humanities.<sup>3</sup>

A central tenet of ecofeminism is that systems of domination that justify colonialism, racism, sexism and the subordination of nature are interwoven and cross-cutting (Cudworth, 2005; Glazebrook, 2005; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). The ecofeminist project seeks to illuminate how a 'patriarchal logic' (Plumwood, 1993) grounded in sets of interrelated dualisms have led to the privileging of rationality and instrumentalism that supports such systems of oppression. A 'culturally exalted hegemonic ideal' (Kheel, 2008: 3) of masculinity is promoted through a set of interrelated dualisms such as mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine or human/nature. These dualisms posit what can be regarded as authentically human, and masculine is defined in opposition and superior to the natural, physical or biological realm.

Idealized masculinity transcends this realm, while women, nature and all else that does not conform is rendered as abject and 'othered' to confirm and justify masculine domination. This insight is common to much feminist thinking (e.g. Butler, 1990; Cixous, 1975/1997; Kristeva, 1982; Benhabib, 1992) and indeed has been presented within organization studies where a wealth of discussion has exposed the inherent masculinity of organizational realities (e.g. Bendl, 2008; Gherardi and Poggio, 2002; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Knights and Surman, 2008; Linstead and Brewis, 2004; Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004). However, the dominance of masculine rationality in the discourses and practices of corporate environmentalism remains largely unspoken, even by those who critique such discourses. Most accounts, within and without organization studies, remain anthropocentric as they do not address connections between the subordination of nature and that of other oppressed groups (Cudworth, 2005).

While ecofeminism encompasses a breadth of issues and views (Cuomo, 2002), for most versions this interrelationship and the integration of the personal, social and environmental are key. The oppression of women, nature and other groups cannot be overcome in an atomistic way, but through the radical restructuring of social and political institutions to obtain a more just world for all (Lahar, 1991). Ecofeminists thus largely reject a 'reformist' approach that assumes that any changes in policy and lifestyle required to address mounting problems can be achieved within present social and economic structures (Hopwood et al., 2005). Instead, ecofeminism upholds a transformative agenda and has initiated and supported social and political action that involves those outside the centres of power such as indigenous groups, the poor and working class, and women.

In organizations, the rationality of economics and the market reflects and supports the sense that organizations and those who work for them are disconnected and separate from nature, based in the systems of difference established by dualism. Regarding nature in this way has justified seeing it only as a resource to be consumed, granted little status in its own right and positioned as secondary to the (usually) short-term interests of organizations. As organizations position themselves as outside nature, the destructive potential of overproduction and consumption can be largely ignored and disregarded. Moreover, caring has no place in a system that privileges rationality. Plumwood points to:

the familiar view of reason and emotion as sharply separated and opposed, and of 'desire,' caring, and love as merely 'personal' and 'particular' as opposed to the universality and impartiality of understanding and of 'feminine' emotions as essentially unreliable, untrustworthy, and morally irrelevant, an inferior domain to be dominated by a superior, disinterested (and of course masculine) reason.

(Plumwood, 1991: 5)

Thus a genuinely human self is one that is essentially rational and sharply differentiated from what is presented as merely emotional. Such attributes are linked to what is 'natural', not to the properly human realm of reason such that emotions, bodies and nature are construed as inferior and given instrumental value only. The ideal human self is defined as separate from and in opposition to nature so that the human sphere and that of nature cannot be allowed to overlap in any significant way (Phillips, 2014).

The discourses and material practices of corporate environmentalism deny nature's multiplicity and connectedness with human life and activity. This sense that organizations are separate from nature has led them to de-nature nature, and render it instead as 'the environment' which can be managed through techno-rational practices (Banerjee, 2003). Reason is presented as the only way to achieve the limited changes believed to be required, while the emergence of ecocentric



perspectives and values that might arise from a greater emotional connectivity with nature must be suppressed. All this can be recognized in Kheel's argument that patriarchal culture has signally failed and "looks but doesn't see, acts but doesn't feel, thinks but doesn't know" (Kheel, 1993: 257).

In contrast, ecofeminism proposes an alternative holist philosophy that incorporates care and respect for individual beings as well as the totality of ecological processes.<sup>4</sup> It does not disavow rationality but, if rationality is to contribute to long-term survival, it has to be remade in a form that recognizes and is sensitive to currently denied relationships of dependency on all those others which sustain us (Plumwood, 1993). It asserts the fundamental connectedness of all life and offers a foundation for an ecological ethical theory that does not operate on the basis of a self/other distinction. It does not simply invert patriarchal logic, but proposes an ecologies (Glazebrook, 2005) that is open to and respects difference but which resists rationality's excessive claim to universal truth. Glazebrook suggests that our knowledge of and engagement with nature should extend beyond the rational and involve responsive, emotional engagement, valuing knowledge "that cannot be fully articulated according to the demands of objectivity . . . knowledge guided by and responsive to the physical environment in which it is practiced" (Glazebrook, 2005: 80).

Ecofeminists have therefore criticized philosophical positions focusing on abstract and universalized ethics that seek to impose obligations and rights while failing to recognize values such as love, friendship and appropriate trust that develop empathy and care. For Warren traditional ethics "denigrate emotion, maintain a firm reason *versus* emotion dichotomy, [and] fail to make a central place for emotions and emotional intelligence" (Warren, 2002: 44). They also ignore the ways that humans are organically embodied and are part of and interconnected to the natural world (Kheel, 2008).

Ecofeminism distinguishes itself from other ethical positions on the environment as well as from traditional ethics. Ecofeminist philosophers such as Marti Kheel (1993, 2008) argue that nature ethicists (which she defines as referring broadly to those working in the fields of environmental ethics and animal liberation) rely on reason and rationality to make a moral case for nature. Some nature ethicists (e.g. Regan, 1982) maintain that where nature has value in terms of sentience, consciousness or autonomy, it can be granted 'moral considerability'. Without such value, that part of nature is an object and has no rights. Others believe that nature can only be protected by constraining what they see as humanity's inherent aggression. To do this, they seek to curb environmental degradation through rational argument which must be distinct from the personal inclinations and desires it is designed to control. In both cases, feelings and emotions are irrelevant or interfere with rational purpose such that an argument based in love and compassion is not considered legitimate (Kheel, 1993). Issue is also taken with those such as deep ecologists whose approach is not grounded in rationality, but in an expansion of consciousness. Consciousness is suggested as being an expanded self such that the self will protect nature because to harm it would be to harm the self. However, this view also sees aggression as a 'natural' human tendency that must be constrained instead of asking how compassion and moral behaviour can be sustained. Moreover, the social contexts in which environmental degradation occurs and its social impacts are ignored. Thus, for ecofeminists there is a need to find an alternative way that fosters a positive desire to create a just society which focuses on mutual respect and cooperation rather than a view that humanity is inherently destructive towards our selves and towards nature (Heller, 1993).

To facilitate the emergence of ecological ways of knowing and engagement, and in contrast to the ethical positions outlined above, ecofeminism proposes a focus on an ethics of care which does not seek to find rational ways to control an inherently aggressive will, but is grounded in

a loving regard for a person, thing or situation. It posits that care and justice are not mutually exclusive but should be a polyphony, blended together to form a harmonious whole (Kheel, 2008). This ethics promotes an understanding of all life in which it is recognized that humans do not have a monopoly on feelings, needs and desires. Thus an ecofeminist ethics of care is not about the imposition of obligations and rights, or of abstract principles and universal rules, but emphasizes how the self and its relation to the rest of the world is viewed. This is grounded in a capacity to care and to see connections to others, including non-human others, who would not necessarily be regarded as equal in terms of rights based on notions such as sentience or autonomy. Warren (2000) illustrates this with an account of a rock-climbing expedition where she realized the need to develop a 'language' of ethics different to the traditional philosophical language of rights, rules and duties. She notes how climbing the mountain could be conceptualized as an act of conquering or mastering, but instead she feels a connection to the rock:

I had come to *care about* this cliff which was so different from me, so unmovable and invincible, independent and seemingly indifferent to my presence. I wanted to be *with the rock* as I climbed. Gone was the fierce determination to conquer the rock, to forcefully impose my will on it; I wanted simply to work respectfully with the rock as I climbed.

(Warren, 2000: 103, emphasis in the original)

It is this sensitivity to a conception of the self as fundamentally being in relationship with others that results in caring for them. Warren (2000) locates the moral significance of care in three features of what she terms 'care-sensitive' ethics, which also link personal care to wider political action. First, the ability to care about oneself and others is an essential feature of ethical deliberation because without it, there can be no motivation to reason or act morally. Caring is therefore a precursor to political action. Second, while Warren argues that the values of rights, utility, duty and so forth are still important and have a place in moral reflection, she refutes their claims to ethical monism as ahistorical, transcendent and absolute. Instead, she believes that universality should lie in particularity, or 'situated universalism' (Warren, 2000: 113). To care about and understand general issues such as sexism, racism and so forth, we must understand how they impact on the felt experience of particular people's lives. Equally, to care about and understand such particular experiences, we must recognize and understand the general issues as features of contemporary social structures. The personal and the political are therefore intertwined. Third, to determine which principle (which might include rights, utility, duty and so forth) should be selected as providing appropriate guidance for action in a given context, consideration should be given to the extent to which it reflects, creates or maintains 'care practices'. Care linked to action and practice is therefore critically important (Warren, 2000: 115). Such practices are those that maintain, promote or enhance the flourishing and well-being of relevant parties and which recognize that flourishing of the particular is connected to the flourishing of the general and vice versa. Warren states:

Use of a practices condition for choosing among alternative, perhaps competing principles, and for assessing human conduct reinforces the view that the main function and serviceability of an ethical principle is to help guide the decision-making and actions of real people, in actual social and material realities, in the prefeminist present. Theory-making is not just an exercise in logic, and good theories are not just those that have logical consistency. By making the practices condition one of care, the importance of care to moral deliberation, action, and theory is highlighted.

(Warren, 2000: 116)

In this way, care is central to ecofeminist theoretical conceptualizations of ethics and to ecofeminist political interventions and action.

For many ecofeminists (e.g. Heller, 1993; Mellor, 1997; Merchant, 1996; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Salleh, 1997), there are interconnections between caring as a set of values or ethics and caring as something done, as a set of material practices (MacGregor, 2004). Ethical practice does not arise in isolation or from abstract sentiment but from 'care for' the other (Heller, 1993) in which a relational way of knowing and loving develops that is informed by appreciation and knowledge of the needs and experiences of the cared-for. There are risks to such a conception of care. As MacGregor has eloquently pointed out (2004, 2006), caring is often burdensome and undervalued, care is becoming increasingly privatized under neoliberal regimes, care can be damaging to individuals (for example, to women in abusive relationships) and there is a danger that a focus on care will reinforce it as a feminine activity that normalizes the oppression of women by positioning them as primary caregivers.

The ecofeminist response to such critiques is that an ethics of care does not seek to reify women's position as carers but to point to the potentially liberatory and radical aspects of relatedness which is available to men as it is to women. As Curtin (1991) points out, caring must be understood as an element of a political agenda which develops caring-for as non-abusive and non-exploitative such that a relational sense of self and the willingness to embrace the difference of the other and to care for them includes contexts outside those already established as appropriate arenas for caring. Such an agenda would seek not just to make a private ethic public but to dissolve the hierarchical separations between privatized home and alienated and alienating public realm; between 'ethics' and 'politics'. Moreover, this is an actively caring-for that does not reduce emotion to the denigrated side of the reason/emotion dichotomy but which emphasizes the importance of feeling strongly about and reflecting on convictions and on those feelings. The resulting understanding of self, humanity and nature encourages the sense of 'daring to care' (Warren, 2000: 212). This is essential to get care-sensitive ethics off the ground, and as a precursor to political action which could challenge the dominant discourses and practices of corporate environmentalism.

### **From care to action**

Is there any hope that business or the government institutions with which it has become so deeply interconnected and entrenched can dare to care? Sadly, the review with which this chapter opened would suggest that there is little evidence that they will care about much beyond existing economic paradigms focused on growth and profit maximization. This leads to the conclusion that corporate environmentalism offers very little that can transform existing modes of production and consumption that are so environmentally and socially damaging and that business has played so great a part in creating. Business as usual will continue.

So it is to activist groups and communities, and not to business, that we must look to foster what must seem like a utopian vision. Increasingly, this is happening. To give brief examples from the United Kingdom, below is an extract from a booklet produced by Transition. The Transition Network originated in Ireland in 2005, but is best known through its work in Totnes, Devon. It aims to "support community-led responses to climate change and shrinking supplies of cheap energy, and to build resilience and happiness" (Transition Network, n.d.). There are now over 300 transition towns and initiatives in England and Wales with further activity in Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and the USA. It is a movement that would not necessarily describe itself as ecofeminist, but which espouses the same values of caring-for:

Transition is about learning together. Learning how to undo the effects of centuries of fossil-fuel dependency. Learning how to imagine and co-create alternative to growth-driven economies. Learning how to make happiness and cooperation the basis of society, not competitiveness and greed. Learning how to live and work together as meaningful communities. Learning how to feed, shelter, care for and educate ourselves and each other – without preventing others from doing the same, and without destroying the natural wealth of the planet.

(Henfrey and Brangwyn, 2013)

Initiatives such as local currencies (LETSlinc UK, n.d.), local energy schemes (e.g. FRECo, n.d.) or the incredible edible movement (Incredible Edible Network, 2014) all indicate that alternatives to business as usual are not only possible but are being actively developed (see also Parker et al., 2014).

There are also countless global examples where local communities have resisted the activities of business and governments where these have been perceived to have a negative impact on their environments. Examples range from direct action to stop road building, particularly through environmentally sensitive areas, but current campaigners in Melbourne, Australia, specifically link a project to build a road tunnel to government failure to commit to climate protection (*The Guardian*, 2013). The growth of powerful community-based movements in the United States against activities that produce toxic waste has been documented by Szasz (1994) while in Apaxco, Mexico, a community blockaded a toxic waste processing plant run by Ecoltec, a Swiss company (Upside Down World, 2011). Examples of protests against deforestation and tree-felling can be found in India, including the national Chipco movement (Shiva, 1988), and in Africa (e.g. Greenpeace, 2011b), Indonesia (Illegal Logging Portal, 2011) and Brazil (OPEAL, 2012). High profile in the United Kingdom at the time of writing are protests against fracking for shale gas. Local residents and environmental activists in Balcombe, a small village in a rural part of East Sussex, combined to try to prevent a multinational company from carrying out test drilling to explore the possibilities for fracking. A poll undertaken by the parish council found there was a small minority of local residents who support the company's actions, and others who oppose it because they believe it will have an adverse effect on property values, but the majority of reasons given for opposition reflect concern for the environment.<sup>5</sup> Not all such campaigns have been successful, but they have raised awareness of environmental issues and called business and governments to account. I must stress here that I am not claiming that those involved in these campaigns would describe themselves as ecofeminist nor that they have knowingly drawn on ecofeminist principles. The point is that caring for a particular environment has politicized local residents and empowered them to take action that could have wider impacts. Moreover, Sheryllyn MacGregor reports that such politicization can have a lasting effect as those who participate in campaigns gain insight and understanding of wider political systems and the ways in which power 'works' (MacGregor, 2006). Thus, an ethics of care that takes root at the level of the individual – for it is at the individual level that affect, emotion and love are felt – provides the basis for building and developing community and other forms of activism that operate in the public arena, which challenge current economic and political institutions and structures such as business and which are already providing models for transformative change.

## Final thoughts

Ecofeminism's emphasis on care offers a much-needed alternative to the sterile, instrumental rationality in which discourses of corporate environmentalism are grounded and which have

thus far abjectly failed to make any significant, positive impact on pressing issues such as climate change or environmental degradation. For Curtin (1991), if we can dare to care, we will become empowered to act so that ecofeminism offers a ‘practice of hope’ which Ynestra King explains thus: “to have hope . . . is to believe that [the] future can be created by intentional human beings who now take responsibility [for it]” (cited in Lahar, 1991: 32), a responsibility that will result in political involvement and action. A philosophy of care can extend social critique and a vision of hope into imperatives for action such that values and policies that preserve life, enhance well-being and foster flourishing are promoted and enacted beyond the confines of academia or the personal, private realm and into public arenas. At the same time, ecofeminism is not an overarching or absolutist position that prescribes what individuals or communities should do in any particular situation, and it is not a single political platform. It does, however, advocate a politics that combines resistance with generative projects to bring about transformative change. It offers an ethico-politics towards an understanding of the interconnections between all forms of oppression, including that of nature. Its promotion of an interconnected sense of self and other also helps us to understand how the divisions of public and private, human and non-human, reason and nature evident within corporate environmentalism are false dichotomies that have impacted so negatively on nature and on human society.

Scholars in the field of organization studies who work on environmental issues too must dare to care and, of course, many do care passionately. But perhaps scholars also need to take this further for care to translate into action. In her opening chapter to *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993), Greta Gaard called for “theorists to meet with activists to exchange information and to create political strategy; ideally, theorists must also be activists, thereby enacting the goal of ecofeminist praxis” (Gaard, 1993: 3). For academics then, the challenge is to create theory that informs and empowers action. And to realize that we too have “the capacity to weep and then do something [which is] worth everything. We want to remember that emotions are things we value” (Gaard, 1993: 3).

## Notes

- 1 I have drawn specifically on literature from the field of management and organization studies for this review. This is overwhelmingly focused on profit-maximizing corporations and governments in western, developed economies. There appears to be little difference in the findings of research as to the actual location of those corporations; for example, research on individual managers came to very similar conclusions whether the managers were based in the United Kingdom, Australia or the United States.
- 2 The World Business Council for Sustainable Development is a CEO-led organization of some 200 international companies.
- 3 For a history of ecofeminism, see Sturgeon (1997).
- 4 Ecofeminism has never sought to develop a single, unified ethic of care. What follows here is necessarily a synthesis of the common features of what are subtly different positions. For example, Kheel (2008) disavows Plumwood’s (1993) acceptance of a modified rationality. Moreover, there is a branch of ecofeminism that grounds care in what is regarded as women’s spiritual connection to nature which has not been included in this discussion.
- 5 For an outline of what fracking involves, the likely impact on Balcombe and a survey of residents’ views produced by the local parish council see: <http://balcombeparishcouncil.com/fracking/>.

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