
ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF MEN AND MASCULINITIES:

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

(Contribution A)

Good Green Guys: Towards an ecomasculinism

Key Words: anthropocentrism, androcentrism, nature, ecofeminism, ecology, ecomasculinism, ecomasculinity, environmental philosophy, environmentalism, feminism, gender studies, masculinities, science, reduction, Western Europe.

Rarely are inquiries into masculinities and more-than-human nature viewed together. The former is foreshadowed by explorations of violence, racial and sexual identification, and the urban and suburban experiences of men's lives that make little if any mention of environmental concerns (Allister (ed), 2004:9). The later is generally framed through aloof scientific studies that downplay sexist gender biases (Bordo, 1999:29). While E.O. Wilson's 'biophilia hypothesis' popularized the notion that humans are inseparably affiliated with their surroundings, ecofeminism has assumed the primary role of investigating the human:nature relationship relative to gender. Within masculinities theory, communicating endearing exchanges between men and nature through creative eco-narratives, advocating environmental agendas through the 'green' politics oft-championed by men, opening to emotionally charged engagements with nature through backcountry expeditions, and working with the intimate cycles of the land through organic farming – to name but a few examples – are easily perceived as radical, alternative, hyper-sensitive or 'feminised' pursuits that fall outside traditional notions of masculinity. This is particularly true in the West.

Western cultures layout prescribed and hegemonic ways of being, thinking and doing for men as individuals, as well as masculine political agendas. The cultural norms that result

are constructed around fixed notions of reality first posited by the Babylonians, and later formalized by Greek philosophers such as Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle. From these foundations, Galileo, Descartes, Bacon, Newton, Hume, and Einstein formulated mechanistic, rational, empirical, experiential, deterministic and relativistic understandings of causality that permeate throughout all aspects of the modern West. Humans have been positioned as masters over non-human phenomena; second only to God. Feminist scholars have noted that this habitual anthropocentrism is also androcentric (Plumwood, 2002:29-30). A long list of male scientists, advisors, industrialists and educators have been implicated in pushing for this rational and utilitarian approach towards nature; one that subjugates women along with nature, and has resulted in the systematic privileging of masculinities throughout European history (Merchant, 1980:238-239).

For profeminist masculinities scholars, the hegemonisation of Western masculinities has been selective and socially sanctioned. Certain groups of men and renditions of masculinity are afforded and internalize advantages over subordinated groups (Connell, 1987:183). These individuals and conceptual frameworks are intertwined with the ethics that drive 'malestream' thinking (O'Brien, 1981:6). Malestream ethics dare any challenges to the power and authority bestowed upon hegemonised men and masculinities to direct confrontation and reprimand. This ethically driven defensiveness preserves the hegemony, and is consequently referred to as an ethics of daring. Ethics of daring are the set of moral standards and principles such as rational, reductionist, emotionless (except for anger and aggression), powerful, controlling, confident, conceited, selfish, outspoken, strong, competitive, virile, objective, chivalrous, and condescending expressions of the self that feature in advantaged masculinities, and gain expression on both the personal and political level. In addition to subordinating inferiorised groups of men and masculinities such as gays and queers, these ethics infuse an attitude of stewardship over subordinated groups as the only expression of caring that hegemonically masculine identities can exhibit.

Given nature is generally viewed as feminine, more-than-human nature and women are similarly subordinated. Ecofeminists have noted the ethics that drive a feminised 'ability-to-care' for, and be 'cared-for-by' wider natural phenomena (Warren, 2000:108). These ethics of caring are reflective of a 'fuller', 'wider' and 'deeper' human experience, and favour love, friendship, trust, compassion, consideration, reciprocity and co-operation towards engagements with human and more-than-human life (Noddings, 1984:3-6). In contrast to

hegemonic masculinities, these virtues represent easier, deeper and more effective access to fuller flourishing of the self. They also compliment social and environmental justice agendas since caring for the wider biota supports developmental policies and practices that meet the needs of current and future generations of humans and non-humans. Therefore, ethics of caring encourage the concurrent mainstreaming of environmental preservation, social equanimity and economic prosperity that is consistent with sustainability.

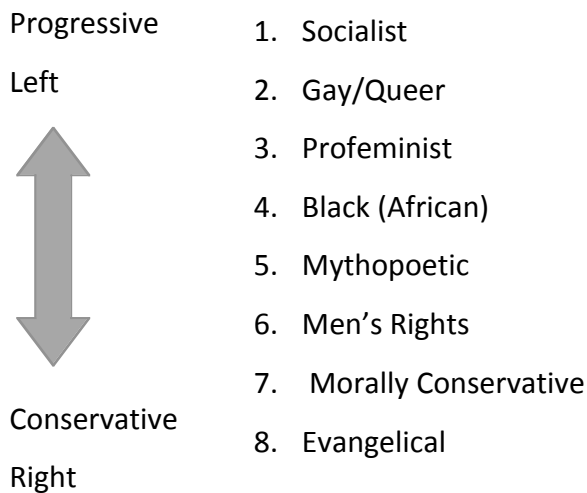
Within hegemonic masculinities, the capacity to 'care' is typically restricted to caring-for that which brings about close and immediate gain. The hegemony tends to encourage isolation and anti-ecological sentiment that not only pervades traditional masculine identities, but also has detrimental impacts on personal and societal health. The resultant depression, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and suicide, when combined with notably increasing ecological devastation suggest that being a 'bloke' and participating in a hegemonic assault on society and environment, is detrimental to personal, interpersonal, physiological and spiritual health, even if certain socio-political and economic rewards are accorded. Coupled with a view of nature as 'resource', the utilitarian bias of hegemonic masculinities creates a forum for bolstering the ego-self at the expense of the more-than-human world. Proving one's manhood or salving personal insecurities by conquering physical nature is not an uncommon occurrence in the West. In this sense, hegemonic masculinities produce an unhealthy masculinities praxis; one where nature provides a substrate for rationalised masculinities to push up against in a misguided attempt to (re-)claim the fuller flourishing self. This heavy dependence upon logos in the absence of eros is the primary source of what is now widely considered to be a harsh and irreversible exchange that has become characteristic of Western engagements with nature.

Justice movements rightly point to Western masculinities in seeking accountability for these social and environmental woes. But heaping blame on all men and masculinities is narrow-minded and inaccurate. Hegemonic behavioural traits can arise in both men and women's lives even though individuals are predisposed to adopt certain behavioural norms. Further, the majority of men and masculinities are not hegemonic, and while being invariably privileged by a seemingly immovable hegemony in both major and minor ways, may not support its survival. The individuals, institutions, policies and practices that perpetuate masculinist hegemonies are not fixed and immovable, nor should they 'let men off the hook'. Through empathy and compassion, the mechanisms of hegemonisation within

masculinities theory could become the primary focus of a deconstructive analysis rather than men and masculinities per se. This strategy could avoid ongoing conflict between the hegemony and marginalized caucuses by softening the boundaries between conceptual frameworks within masculinities theory. The intention is to make social and environmental justice agendas more accessible to a larger number of men and masculinities by focusing on inclusive exchanges between traditionally disparate masculinities. This approach is guided by the centralization of an ethics of caring and defers to an ecological metaphor and praxis.

The promise of ecofeminism in guiding an ecologised masculinities theory towards an ecologised ethics of caring is alluring. Beyond gendered social divisions and power differentials dwells a dominion-free and inclusive concept of fairness and respect, where the oppression of women and nature is eliminated (Warren, 2000:187-189). In this sense, the liberation of women and nature share much in-common, and draw liberatory discourses closer to a 'trans-gendered' (as in 'beyond-gendered') expression of fuller-humanness where broader caring becomes reflex. However, masculinities theorists have lagged behind in this regard. To date, no specific ecologisation of masculinities theory has been attempted, and consequently has held up the march towards a trans-gendered liberation for all life. Additionally, some ecocritics have noted that the liberation of women and nature from masculine oppression has at times conveyed angry, self-righteous, and disenfranchising sentiments towards many men and masculine identities (Allister (ed.), op. cit.:71). Potential (mainly but not exclusively male) allies to astute ecofeminist critiques of the malestream have at times felt excluded from the pro-feminist human:nature debate. However, that ecofeminism is seen by some as exclusive 'women's business' is similarly narrow-minded, inaccurate and additionally isolating towards the discourse. It is the lack of an ecologised gender:nature discourse in existing masculinities theory that must be taken to task; not ecologically inclined feminists. Due to the opposing power differentials in operation, masculinities theorists must initiate a liberatory masculinities theory that seeks justice for the broadest spectrum of society. Such a liberatory masculinities theory needs to address both personal and political concerns concurrently.

Masculinities on the Progressive Left attempt to transform the negative impacts of malestream ethics upon men and women's lives (Pease, 2000:1). They highlight eight key conceptual frameworks that can be positioned across a political spectrum (Clatterbaugh, 1990:9-15). They are:



... masculinities. These conceptual frameworks give little if any consideration to the connection between masculinities and more-than-human-nature. 'Ecologising' existing masculinities provides a wider spectrum of men with the opportunity to become more informed and develop closer affiliations with liberatory movements that can lend considerable purchase to the removal of masculinist hegemonies. For this to happen, a personal conceptual framework within masculinities theory that is metaphorically ecological must first emerge. This 'ecomasculinity' values the relationships between existing personal conceptual frameworks through active listening throughout masculinities theory, and paves the way for 'good green guys' to narrow the existing divisiveness within the discourse. Ecomasculinity is an inclusionary men's liberation that works towards freeing men from the inner isolation that a dominator mentality instills.

However, ecomasculinity runs the risk of avoiding an ecological praxis if it remains metaphoric and personally focused. To personally liberate and politically ecologise masculinities theory, three crucial axioms must be addressed. Firstly, if hegemonic masculinities are complicit in the decline of global environmental health, a specific and on-going examination of the intersection between masculinities and more-than-human nature is essential. Secondly, obscuring social and environmental policies and practices with self-liberating 'personal-work' will not bring about swift enough nor broad enough change to improve social and ecological health. Pursuits of justice in both arenas emphasize the need for long-term solutions to the problems that exist between humans and the more-than-human world. Enlisting the support of all men and masculinities as allies for global ecological sustainability must be pursued, but this can only arise through heightened self-reflection in

harmony with a societal analysis that also stresses accountability. Thirdly, bringing social and ecological justice agendas to the widest spectrum of men and masculinities will best be achieved if leftist leaning masculinities continue to play key roles in an evolving and dynamic masculinities discourse. All three axioms have been severely overshadowed by ethics of daring. This raises a crucial question: how can a socially and environmentally sensitive ecomasculinism politic develop beyond 'personal work' to recruit the widest sympathies for social and environmental justice?

Giving consideration to a variety of social and environmental discourses beyond ecofeminism may be of assistance. A number of scientific, social and philosophical concepts exist that are also feminised, and specifically examine liberatory ideals in sympathy with Leftist politics. They are:

1. Feminist Sociobiology
2. Deep Ecology
3. Social Ecology
4. Ecopsychology
5. Gaia Theory
6. Inclusional Theory
7. General Systems Theory

When examined in combination with ecofeminism, these discourses offer a substantial wealth of knowledge about how to formulate an ecologised masculinities politics. Feminist sociobiologists critique biological determinism, suggesting that traditional interpretations of evolutionary theory are patriarchal and erroneously lean on biological arguments to force females into roles of passive and nurturing mothers (Hrady, 1999:xiv). Deep ecology cultivates an expanded ecological and personal consciousness that promotes the emergence of an 'ecological-Self' whose intimate connection with the more-than-human environment permits an individual to acknowledge the 'intrinsic value' of all life (Naess, 1989:11). Social ecology seeks the creation of ecologically benign societies that function on decentralized libertarian ideals and works towards building 'rounded' human communities that prioritize the resolution of deep-seated social problems while also addressing the ecological future of the planet (Bookchin, 1993:354). Where ecology illuminates the relationships between

organisms 'out there', psychology explores dysfunctions of the mind 'in here' which when combined through ecopsychology unifies this outer/inner division and argues that nature critically determines human physical, mental and emotional wellbeing (Roszak et al. (eds.), 1995:4). Gaia theory offers a scientific study of the interactions between the atmosphere, lithosphere and hydrosphere, noting that cybernetic geophysiological macro-systems are comprised of tightly coupled subsystems, which enable the Earth to function as a single self-regulating organism (Lovelock, 1979:119-123). Gaia theory also substantiates cryptic and anthropomorphic agitations of the mainstream by using scientifically valid evidence to suggest that assaults upon the planet's ecological integrity can be replaced with a reverence for the Earth's unique emergent properties (Sautoris, 1989:19-28). Inclusionality theory views all living and non-living entities as 'dynamic inclusions' by noting the complex couplings between inner individuals and outer collectives through reciprocal perceptions of the self imbedded in nature (Rayner, 2003:10). General systems theory juxtaposes open, interpenetrating and self-regulating dynamic systems against entropically rigid closed systems, using physics to prove that living systems are adaptively self-organizing and therefore contradict the second law of thermodynamics (Bertalanffy, 1950:23). Each of these disciplines formulate unique insights into the human:nature relationship; they also support a shift away from hegemonic masculinities and towards long-term ecological sustainability. Ecomasculinism may crucially contribute to this shift. Increased ecological understanding within personal and politically sensitive masculinities may facilitate a teleological view of natural phenomena and a broader sense of caring for self in relationship with human and more-than-human others, over the long-term. For such an ecomasculinism to join existing liberatory movements, 'good green guys' must pay particular attention and consciously resist the temptation to co-opt the discourse, while also standing side-by-side with existing social and environmental justice agendas as equals. In so doing, the ecologisation of masculinities theory may not only play a crucial role in achieving fuller humanness for men and masculinities, it may provide a missing link in reawakening the perception of humanity as natural.

References

- Allister, M. (ed) (2004) Ecoman:New Perspectives on Masculinity and Nature. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.
- Bookchin, M. (1993) 'What is Social Ecology', in Zimmerman M., et al. (eds) Environmental Philosophy. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall. pp.354-373.
- Bertalanffy, L. von (1950) [1969] 'The Theory of Open and Closed Systems in Physics and Biology', *Science*, vol 111, pp.23 – 9.
- Clatterbaugh, K. (1997). Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinities. Boulder:Westview Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1987) Gender and Power:Society, the Person and Sexual Politics. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Bordo, S. (1999) 'Feminist Skepticism and the "Maleness" of Philosophy', in Hesse-Biber. S., Gilmartin, C., Lydenberg, R. (eds) Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology:An Interdisciplinary Reader. Oxford, Oxford University Press. pp.2-44.
- Hrdy, S. (1999) Mother Nature:Natural Selection and the Female of the Species. London, Chatto & Windus.
- Lovelock, J. (1979). Gaia:A New Look at Life on Earth. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Merchant, C. (1980). The Death of Nature:Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution. New York, Harper Collins Publishers.
- Naess, A. (1989) Ecology, Community and Lifestyle. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Noddings, N. (1984) Caring:A Female Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Pease, B. (2000). Recreating Men:Postmodern Masculinity Politics. London, Sage Publications.
- Plumwood, V. (2002) Environmental Culture:The Ecological Crisis of Reason. London, Routledge.
- Rayner, A. D. M. (2003) 'Inclusionality - An Immersive Philosophy of Environmental Relationships'. in A. Winnett & A. Warhurst (eds), Towards an Environment Research Agenda:A Second Selection of Papers. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.5-19.
- Sahtouris, E. (1989) Gaia:The Human Journey From Chaos to Cosmos. New York, Pocket Books.
- Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., and Kanner, A. D. (1995) Ecopsychology:Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books.
- Warren, K. (2000) Ecofeminist Philosophy:A Western Perspective On What It Is and Why It Matters. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Wilson, E. O. (1984) Biophilia. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.