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"Daring to Care": Challenging Corporate Environmentalism

Mary Phillips[1]

Abstract Corporate engagements with pressing environmental challenges focus on expanding the role of the market, seeking opportunities for growth and developing technologies to manage better environmental resources. Such approaches have proved ineffective. I suggest that a lack of meaningful response to ecological degradation and climate change is inevitable within a capitalist system underpinned by a logics of appropriation and an instrumental rationality that views the planet as a means to achieve economic ends. For ecofeminism, these logics are promulgated through sets of hierarchical and interrelated dualisms which define the human in opposition to the realm of "nature". This has led to the resilience of ecosystems, social reciprocity and care being unvalued or undervalued. An ecofeminist, care-sensitive ethics is proposed that focuses on the interconnections between human and non-human nature and on affective engagements with the living world. A practical morality is developed that sees the self not as atomized nor as self-optimizing, but as a self in relationship. Such an ethics is necessary to motivate action to contest capitalism's binary thinking, evident within corporate environmentalism, which has re-made the web of life in ways that are not conducive to planetary flourishing.

Keywords Corporate environmentalism · Ecofeminism · Ecological modernism · Ethics of care

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"The capacity to weep and then do something is worth everything. We want to remember that emotions are things we value" (Gaard 1993, p. 3).

Introduction

These words were spoken by an (unnamed) participant in a workshop on global economics at the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1991. They point to the importance of caring engagements with the ecological challenges the world currently faces and which are lacking from the practices of corporate environmentalism (CE) (Phillips 2014, 2015). CE is an approach that integrates environmental issues within business priorities; its focus is on expanding the role of the market, seeking opportunities for growth and developing technologies to manage better environmental resources. It thus reinforces the structural relationships and behaviour patterns that facilitate environmental appropriation resulting in a lack of meaningful response to continuing ecological devastation and to the dangers posed by climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014).

As the operation of markets and the increasing commodification of nature have been demonstrated as unable to ensure planetary flourishing, we need to seek more radical alternatives. Hoffman's (1991) call for corporations to develop urgently an environmental conscience and moral leadership in resolving the threats to "the very survival of the planet" (p. 173) has fallen on deaf ears. What is needed is a groundswell of moral outrage (Wittneben et al. 2012) and a paradigm shift in mindsets (Banerjee 2002) resulting from a more affective engagement with the natural environment (Phillips 2014). The main contribution of this

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paper is therefore to propose an ecofeminist ethics sensitive to care, which recognizes and celebrates relationship and embodied emotion (Plumwood 1993, 2006; Warren 2000), from which to critique CE and to envision alternatives.

Ecofeminism encompasses a breadth of issues and views (Cuomo 2002; Sturgeon 1997) but has developed the core position that a "logic of patriarchy" (e.g. Plumwood 1993; Warren 2000) promulgated through sets of interrelated dualisms such as mind/body, reason/nature and masculine/feminine has resulted in the conceptual linkage of "woman" (and other subordinated groups) and "nature" in Western thought. That which is authentically human conforms to the privileged first terms in these binaries, and is thus defined in opposition to the physical or biological realm such that processes of inferiorization have been mutually reinforcing (Plumwood 1993; Warren 2000). As ecofeminist scholar and activist Vandana Shiva has pointed out, the tenacity of such binary thinking has led to the powerful myth that "there is no alternative" so that current social, economic and environmental relations persist without deeper questioning (Shiva 2014). These relations, evident in CE, construct persons as *homo economicus* (Langley and Mellor 2002), and privilege the primacy of markets, competitive production and a continued commitment to growth. The resilience of ecosystems, unpaid and unrecognized forms of work, social reciprocity and care are unvalued or undervalued (Donath 2000; Mellor 1997, 2009; Waring 1988), and this has impacted on "the lives and work of women, the dispossession of peoples from their land and livelihood, the destruction of natural habitat and the general degradation of the environment" (Mellor 1997, p. 52). Ecofeminism seeks to expose and critique binary logic, but also strives to move from "unhealthy, life-denying systems and relationships to healthy, life-affirming ones" (Warren 2000, p. 200). Ecofeminists have therefore sought to develop the moral languages and practices of a feminist ethics of care as a way of challenging the *status quo*, engaging publics and individuals with the ecological and social challenges with which we are faced (e.g. Alaimo 2008; Kheel 1993), and as a social, political and moral resource from which to motivate action.

To date, there has been little work published in business, management and organization studies that draws on an explicitly ecofeminist lens. Exceptions include Marshall (2011) who focuses on the gendering of sustainability leadership and Cooper (1992) on the masculine discourses of accountancy which have treated nature as an externality. Bullis and Glaser (1992) point to the transformative possibilities for ecofeminism in creating alternatives to currently dominant discourses of managerialism, while Phillips (2014) suggests that languages of feeling could be developed as "guerrilla tactics" to challenge such discourses. Ecofeminism is thus suggested as a way of

exploring new possibilities that include a re-enchantment with nature and a revaluation and reorientation of humanity's place within it.

I therefore offer this paper as a response to CE that is grounded in finding a different way of living in the world (Gibson-Graham 2011) through developing a moral vision based in an ecofeminist ethics of care. Such an ethics views the self as part of a web of relationships and is committed to negotiating and promoting practices that enhance the flourishing of relevant parties. I have little hope that corporations will somehow be transformed; indeed, I suggest that they are hopelessly mired in a capitalist system that makes ecological destruction inevitable. However, I do hope that Western publics will increasingly call for and strive to achieve nourishing rather than destructive relationships within what ecofeminists have termed the "fullness of being" (Spretnak 1999, p. 11) and a recognition of the fundamental interconnectedness of life. This is beginning to happen, for example in anti-fracking demonstrations in the UK, the Leap manifesto,[1] and in the growth of groups and organizations such as Skipchen[2] which are striving to develop different ways of working. These are movements underpinned by a practical morality that sees the self not as atomized nor as self-optimizing, but as positioned in a web of caring relationships. This is the essence of care ethics.

I first describe CE and demonstrate that it is underpinned by imperatives that assume a self as individualistic, rational and separate from nature. I position CE within the wider context of capitalism to show how it is inevitable that capital accumulation results in the continuing destruction of the natural world. A different moral logic is required, and it is here that the contribution of the paper is made. I outline the principles of an ecofeminist, care-sensitive ethics that connects individual and general flourishing and which recognizes the importance of relationships and context. I offer such an ethics as a possibility that can underpin activism and the development of alternative modes of organization which can challenge CE.

A Reflexive Note

I am a white, middle-aged, middle-class woman living a materially comfortable life afforded by an academic career in the European Global North. I self-identify as an ecofeminist and an activist; outside academia, I am a

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[1] In Spring 2015, a group of 60 representatives from Canada's indigenous rights, social and food justice, environmental, faith-based and labour movements attended a 2-day meeting in Toronto to initiate The Leap Manifesto. This was an iterative process so that the final document was shaped by the contributions of dozens of people.

[2] See https://thebristolskipchen.wordpress.com/.

member of a collaboration seeking ways to bring about more sustainable ways of living, and of a specifically anti-fracking protest group and have taken part in direct actions. I am very discomforted by the ways in which I am complicit in the systems I critique despite my best efforts. I am aware that I do not and cannot speak for or to indigenous peoples and their local knowledges and practices and so my engagement here is with Western individual, corporate and political bodies, who have become disconnected from the natural world and who are responsible for much of the environmental damage which threatens our continued existence on the planet. I am also aware, as has rightly been pointed out by one of the reviewers of this paper, that I write "using the master's tools"—rationally derived argument—and not in a feminine writing style (see Phillips et al. 2014). This is partly from shyness and partly because the master's tools could be a more effective way to get these ideas in front of the audience of this particular journal and beyond. As ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood points out, ecofeminism by and large does not dismiss rationality, but seeks to develop it in a way that is less destructive (Plumwood 2002).

Corporate Environmentalism

Banerjee defines CE 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, p. 181). The strategic use of environmental policy has long been a central plank of CE. For example, Hart (1995) proposed a natural-resource-based view of the firm that offers a "theory of competitive advantage based on the firm's relationship to the natural environment" (Hart 1995, p. 986). Hart's starting place is the "immensity of the challenge posed *by* the natural environment" and the "constraints" that climate change and environmental degradation will place on businesses rather than the dangers *to* the natural environment originating from business and other human activities (p. 990 my emphasis). Hart proposes that emissions reduction and product stewardship can "sever the negative links between environment and economic activity" in developed markets, while "sustainable development" (reductions in raw materials, the development of markets that somehow ensure the integrity of ecological systems, plus technical innovations) will "leverage an environmentally conscious strategy *into* the developing world" (p. 998 my emphasis) whether the developing world wants it or not.

This corporate-centric approach still characterizes most business interaction with the environment. To illustrate, The World Business Council for Sustainable

Development's (WBCSD) report *From Challenge to Opportunity* (2006)[3] re-focuses issues relating to the environment as win–win opportunities that business can address through their activities and, at the same time, enhance profitability and growth: "The products are the purpose—the profits are the prize" (WBCSD 2006, p. 9). Likewise, a recent report from SustainAbility (2015)[4] refers to "unlocking business value" and "reaping benefits" from sustainability policies and practices. Other business groups such as the We Mean Business coalition[5] are calling for stronger action by business and government, also based in a business case approach that sees growth opportunities in climate change mitigation. Practitioner business advice also focuses on the business case. For example, Ethical Performance, an online resource badging itself as "inside intelligence for responsible business", published a digest of recent reports demonstrating the superior returns on investment and enhanced market capitalization achieved by "sustainable" businesses (Jones n.d.).

Much academic scholarship on the topic takes a similar approach. There is a substantial body of work that attempts to find a positive link between organizational environmental and economic performance (see Albertini 2013, for an overview). The management of environmental impacts is positioned as a strategy (e.g. Aragón-Correa et al. 2008; Orlitzky et al. 2011) which, it is claimed, can add to competitive advantage through stimulating product or process innovation (e.g. Bansal et al. 2014; Bansal and Roth 2000). There is a reliance on finding technical solutions to environmental challenges (e.g. Boiral et al. 2009; Harris and Crane 2002) and on the generation of economic benefits such as higher productivity or reduced costs (e.g. Christmann 2000). At the same time, scholars have accused business of "greenwashing" as there is a distinct gap between environmental commitments made in policy statements and actual policy implementation (Ramus and Montiel 2005; Walker and Wan 2012). CE is therefore an exercise in impression management (Fineman 2001; Harris and Crane 2002) as "greening" has become a hygiene issue that responsible management must be seen to espouse. Accompanied by a burgeoning panoply of award schemes, consultancies and glossy policy statements, greening attempts to provide largely symbolic reassurance that action is being taken (Greer and Bruno 1996; Milne et al.

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[3] The World Business Council for Sustainable Development is a CEO-led organisation of some 200 international companies.

[4] Founded in 1987, SustainAbility is a think tank and strategic advisory firm focusing on business leadership and sustainability—see http://www.sustainability.com/.

[5] The We Mean Business Coalition was formed in June 2014 and is made up of over 500 global companies—see http://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/.

2006) to legitimize corporate activities to stakeholders, including the wider public, that are increasingly disenchanted with corporate social and environmental performance (Boiral et al. 2009). Corporate literature and marketing draw on a rhetoric of greening allied to care while continuing business much as usual. For example, IKEA's publicized commitment to producing as much renewable energy as it consumes (The Guardian 2015) sits uncomfortably alongside a business model of retailing based on high volume which continues to encourage overconsumption through selling low-price items that are not designed to be durable and have no lasting meaning or value (Ruppell Shell 2009). A supplier of renewable energy such as Good Energy (in the UK) explicitly markets itself as "caring" and does offer a more attractive proposition than companies generating energy through burning fossil fuels, but is owned by and accountable to shareholders and is listed on the London Stock Exchange AIM.[6] Thus, CE offers an instrumental vision of engagement with "nature" that serves to support a predominantly economic rationale and results in the ineffective implementation of change.

Even where there is recognition of the disconnect between the limited actions around eco-efficiency and the continuing decline of ecosystems, there is little critique of the current incrementalist approach to CE or questioning of wider socio-political structures, economic systems or cultural values. Whiteman et al. (2013), for example, point to the concept of planetary boundaries, which quantify the safe limits to various interconnected Earth systems. Whiteman et al. argue that the concept could be used to enable policy makers and managers draw on evidence about the impact of organizational choices on the environment. While this is laudable to an extent, they use the example of Unilever (described as "a recognized front-runner in corporate sustainability", p. 324) as a potential candidate for using a planetary boundaries approach because Unilever is the largest international buyer of palm oil. However, it is difficult to accept that Unilever is not already aware of the devastating impact of palm oil production on the natural environment in Indonesia and should not require detailed scientific measurements at various scales to implement more far-reaching change.[7] Moreover,

the implication that such measurements are required in order for action to be taken could delay the amelioration or elimination of negative impacts (Shevchenko et al. 2016).

Indeed, the approach espoused by Whiteman et al. appears reasoned and reasonable; working with organizations such as the WBCSD, using the planetary boundaries approach as a yardstick for reporting and supplementing scientific knowledge with "firm- and market-based incentives" for change (p. 328). There is no challenge to the foundations of market-based enterprise, governed by the requirements of capital. It is what Prasad and Elmes (2005) would term a discourse of "practical relevance", working within the system, focusing on the value of economic utilitarianism and seemingly including stakeholders in strategic planning. However, such discourses inhibit alternative discourses that might mount greater challenges to the status quo by implying that they are foolish or naïve and therefore illegitimate (Prasad and Elmes 2005; see also Milne et al. 2006, 2009). For Prasad and Elmes, such discourses have done little to resolve ecological deterioration but instead are yet another variant of an instrumental rationality that views the planet as a means to achieve economic ends. For them, "practical" needs to be redefined to fully consider wider relationships within a re-conceptualized view of nature, rather than the current precedence given to economic and traditional managerialist objectives. The "web of life" (Moore 2015) should be valued in its totality rather than viewed as a resource from which to extract value.

Having outlined the parameters of CE and pointed to its limitations, in the next section, I will focus on the wider context of capitalism in which CE is positioned. I hope to make clear that CE's lack of meaningful engagement with ecological challenges is inevitable within a capitalist system, and to do this, I will draw mainly on critiques developed by ecofeminist scholars.

A Crisis of Capital, Rationality and Instrumentality

Ecofeminist economists and political scientists have pointed out that capitalism is a manifestation of and cannot function without being underpinned by patriarchal logics that operate through hierarchical and interrelated dualisms which divide mind from body, reason from nature and masculine from feminine. Those areas such as the nonhuman, reproduction, the body and the unpaid labour of those demarcated into nature's sphere become invisible inputs to a rationalized, capitalist economy which appropriates them (Mies 1986; Salleh 2009; Biesecker and von Winterfeld 2016). The capitalist economy, based on limitless growth and the infinite expansion of commodities and capital, is

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[6] AIM is the Alternative Investment market which offers smaller companies the opportunity to raise capital. It is not "alternative" in the sense of challenging "mainstream" business models.

[7] See "Testing Commitments to Cut Conflict Palm Oil", a Rainforest Action Network report published in May 2015. The Rainforest Action Network report praises Unilever as being "considered by many as the first company to recognise its conflict palm oil problem … However, it is now lagging behind its peers … it has failed to move beyond purchasing GreenPalm certificates. Unilever's reliance on GreenPalm certificates remains a critical shortfall in its approach, as this offset model does not directly improve the practices of the companies from which it sources palm oil".

thus dependent on the resources and labour of the "undeveloped other" in these dualisms (Mies and Shiva 2014, p. 39; Salleh 2003). For Plumwood (1993, 2002), a foregrounding of rationality and instrumentality is intertwined with the rise of capitalism and the creation of "nature" as a separate and external sphere (see also Shiva 1988). This has required the conceptualization of the idealized human subject as disembodied and disengaged, "free and rational to the extent that he [sic] has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds" (Taylor 1995, p. 7). The rational is identified with the human and therefore worth consideration, while nature is deemed not to possess the attribute of rationality and is, therefore, "othered" as nonhuman in order to confirm and justify its exploitation. In Western cultural traditions, humans thus conceptualize themselves as belonging to a rational and therefore superior sphere of ethics, technology and culture separate from nature (Plumwood 2002). As a result, the nonhuman is denied inherent value which results in "the kind of use of an earth other which treats it entirely as a means to another's ends, as one whose being creates no limits on use and which can be entirely shaped to ends not its own" (Plumwood 1993, p. 142) and it is appropriate that humans impose their own purpose upon it. Thus, the systems of appropriation and distribution which have emerged through capitalism turn on a concept of rationality which denies human and earth others. Instrumental relations with those others position them as interchangeable; defining them as resources in relation to the self and as homogenous if they produce equivalent satisfactions (Plumwood 1993). This enables a denial of dependence on any particular other, so that others are encountered as members of an already instrumentalized category. In instrumental relations with the other:

> … the self takes no risks but is not open to real interaction with the other, because the independence of its desires makes the dualised individual a closed system. The definition of the other entirely in relation to the self's needs means that it is encountered only as incorporated by the self. (Plumwood 1993, p. 145).

Moore (2015) highlights how all human civilizations have interacted with and interpenetrated nonhuman nature such that both have re-made the wider "web of life". Civilizations reproduce nature in certain ways, and nature, as part of the web of life in which civilizations are also situated, reproduces and shapes them. However, Moore shows how capitalism differs in global and temporal scales to re-make ecologies in decades rather than the more localized changes that took place over centuries in pre-modern civilizations and that this process has been ongoing and increasing in pace since the seventeenth century. Gould et al.'s (2004)

work on treadmill theory is also instructive here in explaining how a focus on capital accumulation has been so ecologically destructive. Historically, capital accumulation in Western economies led to investments in technology that increased demand for natural resources and decreased demand for production labour:

> Each round of investment weakened the employment situation for production workers and worsened environmental conditions, but it increased profits. For workers, this treadmill implied that increasing investment was needed to employ each production worker. For ecosystems, each level of resource extraction became commodified into new profits and new investments, which led to still more rapid increases in demand for ecosystem elements. (Gould et al. 2004, p. 297)

Capitalism's survival has therefore thus far depended on the appropriation of the work of nature, work that has been co-opted for free and transformed into capital (Biesecker and Von Winterfeld 2016; Moore 2015; Mies 1986). Ecofeminists (Salleh 2003; Biesecker and Von Winterfeld 2016) have pointed to the inherent contradictions within capitalism, such as those between the conditions of production and the social relations of production (for example, damage to worker's health undermines their function as productive labour) and particularly between the forces of production and an externalized nature (ongoing resource extraction undermines the availability of future inputs). These have led to repeated systemic crises which have been resolved, temporarily, by harnessing nature in new ways. Capitalism, even if is part of the nature that it denies, has extracted value from the web of life in ways that have resulted in the ecological checks and balances of the planet being degraded. This has led to anthropogenic climate change and the destruction of habitat for other species and for many humans who are denied their own opportunities to build an environment conducive to their flourishing. Capitalism has reproduced nature by "manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter" which has resulted in the reduction in "nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal" (Mies and Shiva 2014, p. 23). While, as Moore points out, the web of life cannot be saved nor destroyed, CE cannot work any other way than through a capitalist system that is ultimately radically changing the web of life such that it is becoming more oppressive to humanity in nature and nature in humanity (Moore 2015).

Effort has been made to develop a more caring capitalism that seeks to address its impacts on the finite resources of the planet. This so-called ecological modernism makes claims for an effective ecological stewardship capable of overcoming the tensions inherent between

the economy/economic growth and the environment (Murphy 2000; Juniper 2014[8]) and is posited as a means to reduce the environmental impact of industrial activity. This is to be achieved by incorporating the natural world within the orbit of capital accumulation; resources and ecosystems will be conserved by privatizing and marketizing them (Böhm et al. 2012). In addition, ecological modernization promotes technological innovation to develop production methods that are less damaging and through macroeconomic restructuring that "seeks to shift the emphasis of the macro-economy away from energy and resource intensive industries towards service and knowledge intensive industries" (Gouldson and Murphy 1997, p. 75). This is an ostensibly greener capitalism (Christoff 1996; Newell and Paterson 2010). Ecological modernism is clearly linked to CE in terms of seeking market-based solutions, the development of innovative technologies and striving for win–win eco-efficiencies. Indeed, Joseph Huber, often acknowledged as the "father" of ecological modernism, identified economic actors as the most important players in achieving the transformations promised by ecological modernism (Murphy 2000), a position with which business itself has often concurred (Forbes and Jermier 2010; Jermier et al. 2006; Rossi et al. 2000).

However, the promises of ecological modernism or CE to protect the environment have not been met. The transformation of ecological resources into monetized assets has resulted in minimal mitigation of environmental damage and increasing flows of assets, wealth and income to an increasingly small elite and to richer countries (Böhm et al. 2012). Even those who argue for ecological modernization do not see it as an unproblematic means to overcome environmental problems (Murphy 2000); technological/market solutions to, for example, loss of species are unavailable, there are powerful vested interests who might lose out from and who resist innovation (such as fossil fuel industries), and gains in eco-efficiency can be neutralized by economic growth (Janicke 2008). Ecofeminist critics of ecological modernism, and, by extension, of CE, point to the ways in which capitalism is harnessing "the global ecological crisis to revive its failing financial system. Whereas environmental degradation was once seen as imposing a limit on economic accumulation, the new 'green economy' appears to offer a rationale for extending market activity". (Goodman and Salleh 2013, p. 411; see also McCarthy and Prudham 2004).

Construing the nonhuman world instrumentally and as a means to human ends immiserates our relationships within it and leads us to ignore the interconnections and

interdependencies between human and nonhuman. It has led to corporations, as rational and self-interested agents, being oriented towards a view of the environment wherein it can be exploited for competitive advantage. Where the environment is taken into account, it is in terms of how the corporation would benefit or be impacted. Thus, concern is reduced to issues regarding the depletion of resources needed for production processes, making eco-efficiencies or enhancing corporate image. There is little space given to alternative moral considerations that value ecosystems for themselves.

Plumwood noted (2002, p. 100) that "Human-centred culture springs from an impoverished and inadequate conceptual and rational world; it is helping to create in its image a real world that is not only ecologically, biologically and aesthetically damaged, but is also rationally damaged". Thus, humans and nonhumans face a "crisis of rationality, morality and imagination" (Plumwood 2002, p. 98). This is so because if humanity regards itself as superior, nonanimal and outside nature, where natural, ecological systems are taken into account only when they fail to perform as expected and there to be exploited with little or no real constraint, then that is an irrational position as it has endangered planetary flourishing, including our own. In the context of this paper, the interests of capital and specifically corporate interests trump those of the rest of the living world that are part of the web of life, and so environmental degradation, the loss of species that amounts to a genocide against the animal kingdom (World Wildlife Fund 2016) and the catastrophic impacts of climate change, will continue.

A Moral Response

Within management and organization studies, there have been calls for an explicitly moral response to CE. Fineman argues that the moral status of CE is contestable, fluid and subjective such that it is lacking in moral substance:

> CE is revealed to be morally hollow, while ethically pragmatic … We see shades of Bauman's 1989 views on the modern organization which encloses its members in a self-sustaining rationality, rendering morality invisible beyond a limited organizational boundary (1998, p. 243).

Crane (2000) also points to the lack of a "personal, affective morality" in the processes of CE such that they are effectively amoralized. To counter this, there have long been calls for corporations to develop an environmental conscience (Hoffman 1991) achievable only with a complete moral transformation (Shrivastava 1994) that would replace the instrumental valuation of the environment. This

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[8] Tony Juniper was formerly the Director of Friends of the Earth and Vice-Chair of Friends of the Earth International. See his website at http://www.tonyjuniper.com/.

requires a fundamental change in mindsets (Banerjee 2002; Cherrier et al. 2012), a groundswell of public moral outrage (Wittneben et al. 2012), a reclaiming of the concept of nature (Banerjee 2003) and a personal, spiritual and affective engagement with the natural environment (Crossman 2011; Pruzan 2008).

However, while welcoming the critical insights developed by this literature, it is notable that many, even those arguing that some kind of moral transformation is necessary, do not develop an alternative ethical position that might inform more radical changes. Indeed, although Crane laments that an "affective morality" is missing from CE, he concludes that those who espouse more radical change must "accommodate better the political and cultural realities of modern corporate life" (Crane 2000, p. 692), even though those realities are trapped within the binary of human/nature that has been so damaging. I thus share the concern voiced by Jermier and Forbes (2016) that critiques of anthropocentric bias (e.g. Purser et al. 1995; Shivastava) in the fields of Management and Organization Studies have become muted, while debates focus on light green, incrementalist politics and around scientific topics such as Whiteman et al.'s article critiqued above.

It is also not the case that CE, as an expression of capitalism, is amoral. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue that capitalism is detached from the moral sphere because its purpose, capital accumulation, is identified as an end in itself, and thus, legitimacy for its activities has to be sought by drawing on "resources external to it" (Boltanski and Chiapello, p. 20). These have at their core the principle that the pursuit of individual interest serves the common good. This utilitarian argument posits that the moral costs of an acquisitive society are offset by the benefits arising from increased material and other goods such as, for example, health care. The success of modern capitalism is thus attributed to the benefits accruing to most of those who participate, at least in the global North, in the commodified economy and not only to the capitalist owners of the means of production.

An alternative moral position is therefore required that focuses not on the individual, acquisitive, hyper-rational human actor, but which sees humans as members of a collectivity that encompasses the nonhuman and which challenges the human/nature binary. Thus, I propose an ecofeminist, care-sensitive ethics that focuses on the interconnections between human and nonhuman nature and on affective engagements with the living world that are valorized alongside the rational. This is a practical morality that sees the self not as atomized nor as self-optimizing, but as a self in relationship. Such an ethics is necessary to motivate action to contest what Moore has termed a "political imagination … captive to capitalism's either/or organization of reality" (2015, p. 2) and the resulting transformation of human and nonhuman nature to a state that is not conducive to its flourishing.

An Ethics of Care

In this section, I will first briefly outline the main elements of an ethics of care before turning to a specifically ecofeminist version to consider its potential for underpinning a vision of a different future. Carol Gilligan's foundational work *In a Different Voice* (1982) marked the emergence of feminist care ethics as a response to what was perceived as the gender bias of dominant moral theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism (Held 2006). Her particular target was Lawrence Kohlberg's scale of moral development, which was based in the Kantian concept that morality should be grounded in rationality and which promoted the concept of the self as disembodied and detached. Although *In a Different Voice* and the work of other early care ethicists have been widely critiqued for promoting feminine essentialism, Borgerson (2007) suggests that care ethics is *feminist* rather than *feminine* and "calls attention to relationships, responsibility and experience and their cultural, historical and psychological contexts" (Borgerson 2007, p. 479). Such concerns exceed women's oppressions and encompass all who are impacted by exclusionary or subordinating processes and practices.

The ethics of care has since developed as a way of foregrounding human interaction as an immersion in relationship rather than as a maximization of individual interest by rational actors. Indeed personhood itself is primarily relational, a becoming-in-the-world-with-others (Price and Shildrick 2002) where the capacity to build new relations is seen as a mark of autonomy rather than the "unencumbered abstract rational self of liberal political and moral theories" (Held 2006, p. 14). It is an ethics that values interdependencies and caring relations that connect persons to one another, rather than privilege independence and individualization. It emphasizes ethics as a process of making judgements based in real, lived experiences and in the constellation of relationships and institutions in which caring is positioned. Thus, Tronto has outlined four phases of care which point to it as a continuous process: caring about, involving attentiveness to needs and deciding whether a response is required; taking care of, meaning making a commitment to and planning on how to meet a need; caregiving, indicating direct interaction with others; and care-receiving, meaning that givers evaluate whether their actions have been sufficient and developing responsiveness to the needs and vulnerabilities of others (Tronto 1995).

As a practice it is evident that care underpins all human life; all humans (and most nonhumans) give and receive care over their lifespans. For Tronto:

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a *species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible.* That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (1993, p. 103, emphasis in original)

An account of care grounded in a concept of interconnection should therefore be seen in terms of social practice as much as individual moral disposition, as something larger than the province of the individual, and as a collective responsibility (Tronto 1993) in which humans are inherently involved as both caregivers and care-recipients (see also Skeggs 2014). Care recognizes the social basis of human life and the interdependency of human beings. These social dimensions of care ethics have thus been invoked as a basis for radical political thinking as a means to envisioning a better world (Beasley and Bacchi 2005; Svenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1995). Care ethics provides a framework not just for understanding interpersonal experiences of caring, but for how approaches informed by care could enlighten entire modes of collective and individual being (Held 2006).

Tronto, however, points to the ways in which currently dominant values create what she terms "moral boundaries" that exclude groups whose voices are silenced and values such as care and relationship. Issues impacting on such groups are relegated to the private sphere and dismissed as personal rather than public concerns, while morality is separated from politics. By such boundary setting, existing structures of power and privilege are maintained (Tronto 1993). For Tronto, the breaking down of such moral boundaries is essential if moralities based in caring relatedness are to inform a more positive imaginary of the community. This would contrast with what Ghassan Hage (cited in Beasley and Bacchi 2005) argues is the perception that states care for increasingly smaller groups of their citizens and that corporations care only for themselves. The resulting insecurity, hyper-competition and scapegoating of "others" that results is socially destructive such that it becomes increasingly difficult to care for each other or for the environment (Beasley and Bacchi 2005).

Ecofeminist Care-Sensitive Ethics

Through its application to the interrelationships between the human and nonhuman world, sensitivity to care, to interconnectedness and to affective attachment can underpin a challenge to CE and the envisioning of alternatives. Ecofeminist philosophers have taken the lead in applying care ethics to the relationships between human and nonhuman to recast relationships with and between human and nonhuman others:

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, p. 100).

This starts from the premise that humans are ultrasocial and display an enhanced capacity for care and sensitivity to the needs of others as opposed to the conception of *homo economicus*.[9] Care and compassion together with imagination mean that the suffering caused by injustice can be visualized, and this motivates and inspires political action. Thus, care involves "a complex weaving of imaginative processes with embodied practices" (Hamington 2004, p. 5). Ecofeminists, and indeed other feminists, have pointed to a distrust of the body and embodiment, and particularly the female body (Twine 2001; Alaimo 2008, 2009; Phillips 2016). This has been noted in management studies also, such as in studies of leadership (e.g. Sinclair 2005) of women in academia (e.g. Fotaki 2013) and extends to the writing of research in organization studies (e.g. Phillips et al. 2014). However, feminist and ecofeminist care ethics have also largely neglected embodied aspects of care, and their potential for subversion and disruption. As Neimanis and Walker point out, embracing the materiality of bodies, "the fleshy damp immediacy of our own embodied existences" (2014, p. 2) can remind us that we are organic beings embedded in nature. Recognizing and embracing the vulnerability of the body and its precarity within a material world can lead to a recognition of the vulnerability of nature of which humans are a part, and a destabilization of positions that separate the human from the natural world (Alaimo 2008, 2009). Barad (2007) has talked about taking account of the materializations in which humans and nonhumans are entangled as a form of ethics. This can open up "new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities" (Barad 2007, p. 384) such that, for Bennett (2004, p. 365), the "thing-ness of things", bodies, objects and the ways in which they are arranged are always in the process of becoming and "humans are always in composition with nonhumanity, never outside of a sticky web of connections or an ecology [of matter]". A recognition of these connections is a starting place from which to develop ethical and political positions that can

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[9] This is a position supported by recent research in behavioural science; for example, see review article by Jensen et al. (2014).

contend with the ecological realities with which we are faced.

Embodied materiality includes visceral sensations and emotions which are experienced through the body, and Glazebrook (2005) points to the importance of emotional attachments and engagements to develop caring relationships with other humans and within the natural world. Such attachments impact the things we *do* as a result of those feelings. The interplay between mind and body produces embodied experiences which enable individuals to develop empathy and the understanding of the other. Embodied experiences combine with a caring imagination to create points of departure for developing responsive interconnections that inform action. It is the imagination that leads to care even for fictional characters, while the "concretization" (Benhabib 1992) of the other also emerges from indirect experience such as news media and through engagement with poetry or visual art (Gayá and Phillips 2015; Phillips 2015, 2014). Care can thus extend beyond the limitations of personal experience to reach out to the other over time, space and difference (Hamington 2004) such that we can "dare to care" (Warren 2000, p. 212), as an essential precursor to political action which could challenge dominant political and economic structures.

For ecofeminist philosopher Warren (2000), care, and the ability to empathize through care, is a moral emotion that is essential to motivation, reflection and action. This results in a care-sensitive ethics where principles such as duty, utility or justice are not abandoned as in some construals of care (e.g. Hardwig 1984) but can provide guidance for action. It is context which is important here as appropriate principles are those which take into account the maintenance, promotion or enhancement of flourishing of relevant parties. Practices that cause unnecessary and avoidable harm to selves and relevant others such as the destruction of the stability, diversity and sustainability of, for example, first people's cultures or natural ecosystems are not care practices and neither are those that oppress or exploit others or violate their civil rights (Warren 2000).

Ecofeminist care-sensitive ethics emphasize respect for individual beings, human and nonhuman, as well as the totality of ecological processes. In this way, it makes connections between the well-being and flourishing of the particular, including the self, as intimately intertwined with the well-being and flourishing of the general (Curtin 1991; Gaard 1993; Plumwood 1993; Warren 2000). To care about and understand the particular environmental, social and economic struggles of humans and nonhumans, we must recognize and have some level of understanding of those issues as features of contemporary social structures. To care about and understand such structural features, we must recognize how they exist in particular lives and experiences. Care is thus an ability to see connections to others

who are different from us, perhaps indifferent to us and not necessarily equal or not equal.

A Personal Interjection

I climb up and over the iron-age hill fort, tickle my way through cow parsley and buttercups and sit beside the river where I picnicked with my children when they were young. I have come to know and love these green spaces, and have seen them change through seasons and over years. I have formed relationships with the plants, trees, water and animals through sensual encounter. I know their colours, smells and music. The breeze that ruffles the leaves and the grass and ripples the surface of the river touches my skin too. This is a form of affective knowing in and through my body. But this particular piece of countryside is now endangered.

Although I have long been an opponent of fracking on environmental grounds, when my local area was threatened I joined in more radical protest. The group I have joined is made up of people of all ages and from all walks of life, all determined to do what they can. In the event, the company that was planning to frack here has decided not to go ahead—for the time being. However, the group's awareness of the dangers of fracking and the ways in which the voices of local communities are drowned out by vested interests has been significantly enhanced. We remain active and support other groups in areas still under threat. There has been an iterative movement between our concern for, and our love for, our local area, for rural areas more generally and a realization of the wider structural context in which such threats occur. This is not NIMBYism[10] although for some, it may have started out that way, but a visceral need to protect precious places—wherever they may be.

Care-Full Practices

To build societies grounded in care will require re-conceptualizing the human self in mutualistic terms—"a self-in-relationship with nature, formed not in the drive for mastery and control of the other but in a balance of mutual transformation and negotiation" (Plumwood 2006, p. 142). This is based in self-knowledge and an ability to distinguish self-interests from those of others, and a willingness to pay attention to the independence of the other. This is a relationship built on foundations of respect, care and love as we strive to replace more instrumental and mechanistic models that have not served thus far to mitigate disastrous

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[10] Not In My Back Yard.

outcomes for humans and nonhumans alike. As a first step along this road, we need to recognize that it took time and political will to achieve capitalism's current position of dominance and that "there is no alternative" is a powerful myth presenting our current models as natural so that they can continue without questioning (Shiva 2014). We need to look, albeit critically, at those "transformational spaces" (Langley and Mellor 2002) grounded in care practices that can challenge and subvert the status quo. These stress the importance of local context, reflexive self-awareness and empathetic identification, or in other words, care-sensitive ethics, to build institutions and social structures which facilitate change for a better social and ecological future (MacGregor 2006). Such ethics are evident in, for example, direct action against environmentally destructive projects such as fracking in the UK or the Standing Rock protest against the extension of the North Dakota Access Pipeline. Macgregor (2006) had reported how those who get involved in local campaigns of this sort are often politicized in that they begin to question existing forms and systems of domination and power and to become more interested in environmental and social issues beyond their own neighbourhood (see also Cloke et al. 2016; May and Cloke 2014; Williams et al. 2016). Equally, the sense of outrage at the abuse of corporate power by, for example, Volkswagen who have been found to be fitting diesel vehicles with software designed to cheat US pollution emissions tests[11] is one generated through a sense of care for self and others combined with an emotional as well as rational sense of the injustice of such abuses of corporate power. This is a morality that motivates the contestation of such power, and through which corporations are called to account for their lack of care for the individuals and communities, human and nonhuman, who are impacted by their activities.

As well as forms of activism that involve protest, other care-full initiatives are seeking to develop "alternative" ways of organizing. These would include alternative food networks such as community-supported agriculture, vegetable box schemes and farmers markets (e.g. Wilson 2013), or the community gardens in New York City that "present a defiant and provocative alternative to the dominant social space; an alternative that redresses the right to public space" (Eizenberg 2012, p. 779). Other examples can be found in community renewable energy schemes (e.g. Seyfang et al. 2013) or the development of local currencies, time banks or peer-to-peer exchange networks. Gibson-Graham (2011) point to the Evergreen

Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio, that combine the employment of neighbourhood residents and care for environment as their priorities and they outline other local initiatives that can be understood as resisting and attempting to reform, circumnavigate or transform market-orientated systems. The extent to which "truly" alternative ethical and economic relations can be developed by these initiatives has been questioned (e.g. Guthman 2008), and it is claimed that they might unwittingly perpetuate unequal social relations (e.g. Allen 2010). For Gibson-Graham, however, representing capitalism as a monolithic hegemony is a mistake. The economy is instead heterogeneous and diverse. While other ways of, for example, remunerating labour, distributing surplus and establishing commensurability in exchange might not be acknowledged within capitalism, they do exist as glimmers of a different future, and as forms and practices in the here and now. They could be built on to develop ways of being that are focused more on social, cultural and environmental flourishing and less on growth and profitability (Gibson-Graham 2003, 2008). They are openings for a politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham et al. 2014). Gibson-Graham also point out that it is difficult to describe what might be "alternative" without referring to what is already known and that trying to posit local practices of care and experimentation as radically discontinuous with oppressive norms is bound to disappoint. Instead, there should be a critical but positive focus on the ethical and political possibilities emerging on the ground where performances of care are seen as potential sites for the nourishing of social practices, values and subjectivities that deviate from and challenge capitalist norms. This is not to diminish the power of capitalism to co-opt and dilute difference, but to avoid a self-fulfilling critique where spaces of care become labelled as inextricably mired in a capitalist system such that any recognition of hopeful change becomes impossible and they are completely rejected. Gibson-Graham (2011) tell us that there are no blueprints, no standard cookbook recipes to guide how these might evolve, but instead a continuous debate over ethical considerations and the difficult decisions that will need to be made is necessary. Through this process, visions can crystallize into material practices and institutions.

However, whether through small, local initiatives, or public outcry and demonstrations against corporate abuses and ecologically damaging activities, care for particular human and nonhuman others enhances wider and more generalized concerns. We can see and understand the connections between the degradation of the particular ecosystems in which we live and that of the global ecosystem, and between the wider impoverishment of social and natural life and that of our own lives. The more strongly we feel about our commitment to those close to us,

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[11] Ironically, one of VW's publications extolling their commitments to CSR is titled 'Responsibility knows no boundaries', see http://www.volkswagenag.com/content/vwcorp/info_center/en/publications/2013/01/Responsibility_knows_no_bounds.bin.html/binarystorageitem/file/VW_CSR_Weltweit_engl_eBook_DS.pdf.

the greater the basis for expanding that concern to others to express wider forms of care in political consciousness and social action. Thus, care is the basis which drives resistance to the dominant constructions of public and social life as self-centred, driven by market relations and consumption. The environmental campaigner George Monbiot has written that we care about the living world because we love it. Acknowledging this love engages the imagination and the intellect and inspires belief and action in a way that appeals to self-interest or to cold rationality cannot (Monbiot 2015).

Conclusion

My aim in this paper is to argue that current corporate responses to the ecological challenges which face the inhabitants of this planet are the logical outcome of capitalist systems that regard humans as atomized, instrumentalist and self-serving and which see the economic rationality of the market as providing solutions. This offers little challenge to the relentless pursuit of economic growth and increased consumption.

We therefore need an approach that "recognizes and accommodates the denied relationships of dependency and enables us to acknowledge our debt to the sustaining others of the earth" (Plumwood 1993, p. 196). Caring offers us a way of being in the world that is beyond exchange and in which compassionate and attentive relationships with human and nonhuman others can flourish. Care provides us with at least a starting point from which to building meaningful and moral relations with nature and with each other where nature is present in conscious human life. We should not be ashamed of our emotional attachments to forests, animals, landscapes and ecosystems, but these feelings should be included in our moral realities and recognized as active caring accompanied by a reflexivity which can prompt deeper understandings of self, humanity and its place in nature which encourages the sense of "daring to care" (Warren 2000, p. 212). This is essential to mobilize a care-sensitive ethics and as a precursor to political action to challenge the dominant discourses and practices of CE. I have also suggested that examples of politicized, caring practice can be found in spaces of alternative organization to illustrate that enacted ethics of care are not only possible in the present but are already in existence. I therefore call for researchers in management and business ethics to pay more heed to these and to add to the work already being done in this area [e.g. special issues of *ephemera* (forthcoming), *Organization* (forthcoming)]. This would include recording and mapping what is being done, critically but constructively engaging with successes and failures, and moving to what Gibson-Graham et al.

(2014) call a new spirit of criticism to nourish those spaces where the beginnings of a different way of living might be emerging.

Care will not provide us with neat solutions, and it will be conflicting and ambiguous. For example, critiques levelled at care ethics include claims that it constitutes some individuals or groups as dependent and fragile and others as beneficent and altruistic and glosses over the possibilities for exploitation and the idealizations, both good and bad, of others in care relationships (Hughes et al. 2005). It has also been pointed out that institutional and state violence has been and continues to be justified by a rhetoric of care that, for Narayan (1995, p. 135) sometimes functions "ideologically to justify or conceal relationships of power and domination". However, it can inform the development of alternatives to the dominant models which have proved so damaging to nature, and to humanity within nature. Care is above all a practice of hope which environmental feminist 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, p. 32). It is a resource on which to draw against the hopelessness, disenchantment and alienation promoted by CE. It is the recognition that all those on this planet are connected—human and nonhuman—that enables us to envisage a more hopeful future where we care and are attentive to others. Without such hopeful possibility, we will continue to be separated from, and will ultimately destroy, ourselves and the myriad other beings which sustain us.

I draw this article to a close with the words of Val Plumwood:

> If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure to imagine and work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves and our high energy, high consumption and hyper-instrumental societies adaptively … We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity or not at all. (Plumwood 2007, p. 1).

And so I have attempted here to imagine a different ethic to inform organization. I do not pretend to offer definitive solutions to the pressing environmental challenges with which we are faced, but I do argue that attempts must be made, and urgently, to redraw humanity's relationships, including organizational relationships, in ways that recognize the "fullness of being" and the web of life of which humanity is a part.

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