



**Feminism and the
Mastery of Nature**
Val Plumwood



FEMINISM FOR TODAY



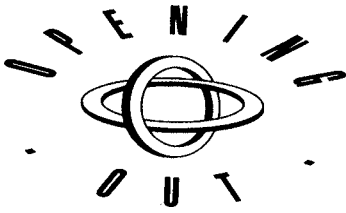
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Feminism and the Mastery of Nature

Feminism and the Mastery of Nature draws on the feminist critique of reason to argue that the master form of rationality of western culture has been systematically unable to acknowledge dependency on nature, the sphere of those it has defined as 'inferior' others. Because its knowledge of the world is systematically distorted by the elite domination which has shaped it, the master rationality has developed 'blind spots' which may threaten our survival. The future depends increasingly on our ability to create a truly democratic and ecological culture beyond dualism.

The book shows how the feminist critique of dominant forms of rationality can be extended to integrate theories of gender, race and class oppression with that of the domination of nature. Val Plumwood illuminates the relationship between women and nature, and between ecological feminism and other feminist theories. Exploring the contribution feminist theory can make to radical green thought and to the development of a better environmental philosophy, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* challenges much existing work in green theory and environmental philosophy, and engages with the heavily masculine presence which has inhabited many accounts of the area. It will be essential reading for those working in these areas, and for all those seeking to understand the historical, philosophical and cultural roots of the environmental crisis and the culture of denial which blocks response to it.

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Feminism and the Mastery of Nature

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Contents

Series preface	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
1 Feminism and ecofeminism	19
2 Dualism: the logic of colonisation	41
3 Plato and the philosophy of death	69
4 Descartes and the dream of power	104
5 Mechanism and mind/nature dualism	120
6 Ethics and the instrumentalising self	141
7 Deep ecology and the denial of difference	165
Conclusion: changing the master story	190
Notes	197
Bibliography	218
Name index	231
Subject index	234

Series preface

Feminist theory is the most innovative and truly living theory in today's academies, but the struggle between the living and the dead extends beyond feminism and far beyond institutions. *Opening Out* will apply the living insights of feminist critical theory in current social and political contexts. It will also use feminist theory to analyse the historical and cultural genealogies that shaped those contexts.

While feminist insights on modernity and postmodernity have become increasingly sophisticated, they have also become more distant from the *realpolitik* that made feminism a force in the first instance. This distance is apparent in three growing divisions. One is an evident division between feminist theory and feminist popular culture and politics. Another division is that between feminism and other social movements. Of course this second division is not new, but it has been exacerbated by the issue of whether the theoretical insights of feminism can be used to analyse current conflicts that extend beyond feminism's 'proper' field. In the postmodern theory he has helped build, the white male middle-class universal subject has had to relinquish his right to speak for all. By the same theoretical logic, he has also taken out a philosophical insurance policy against any voice uniting the different movements that oppose him, which means his power persists *de facto*, if not *de jure*. Currently, there are no theoretical means, except for fine sentiments and good will, that enable feminism to ally itself with other social movements that oppose the power networks that sustain the white, masculine universal subject. *Opening Out* aims at finding those means.

Of course, the analysis of the division between feminist and other social movements is a theoretical question in itself. It cannot be considered outside of the process whereby feminist theory and women's studies have become institutionalised, which returns us to the first division, between feminist practice and feminism in the academy. Is it simply the case that as women's studies becomes more institutionalised, feminist scholars are defining their concerns in relation to those of their colleagues in the existing disciplines? This could account both for an

often uncritical adherence to a postmodernism that negates the right to act, if not speak, and to the distance between feminism in the institution and outside it. But if this is the case, not only do the political concerns of feminism have to be reconsidered, but the disciplinary boundaries that restrict political thinking have to be crossed.

Disciplinary specialisation might also be held accountable for a third growing division within feminism, between theoretical skills on the one hand, and literary analysis and socio-economic empirical research on the other. Poststructuralist or postmodern feminism is identified with the theoretical avant-garde, while historical, cultural feminism is associated with the study of how women are culturally represented, or what women are meant to have really done.

Opening Out is based on the belief that such divisions are unhelpful. There is small advantage in uncritical cultural descriptions, or an unreflective politics of experience; without the theoretical tools found in poststructuralist, psychoanalytical and other contemporary critical theories, our social and cultural analyses, and perhaps our political activity, may be severely curtailed. On the other hand, unless these theoretical tools are applied to present conflicts and the histories that shaped them, feminist theory itself may become moribund. Not only that, but the opportunity feminist theories afford for reworking the theories currently available for understanding the world (such as they are) may be bypassed.

None of this means that *Opening Out* will always be easy reading in the first instance; the distance between developed theory and practical feminism is too great for that at present. But it does mean that *Opening Out* is committed to returning theory to present political questions, and this just might make the value of theoretical pursuits for feminism plainer in the long term.

Opening Out will develop feminist theories that bear on the social construction of the body, environmental degradation, ethnocentrism, neocolonialism, and the fall of socialism. *Opening Out* will draw freely on various contemporary critical theories in these analyses, and on social as well as literary material. *Opening Out* will try to cross disciplinary boundaries, and subordinate the institutionalised concerns of particular disciplines to the political concerns of the times.

Teresa Brennan

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An adequate acknowledgement of debts has to begin with the basic but culturally unacknowledged life-debt to the earth. To this I add gratitude for the stimulation and sustenance my forest home daily provides. Without these things this book would not have been possible.

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The participants in the great dialogue of western philosophy, which extends now some two and a half thousand years into the past, have been almost entirely male, white and drawn from the privileged sections of society. That they have not seen this as relevant to their philosophical pursuits indicates how much they have spoken of and for one another, and how incompletely they have, despite their pretensions as philosophers to press the ultimate questions, critically examined themselves and their political relationship to the world about them. In the last twenty years some excitingly different voices have begun to make themselves heard as, for the first time in the history of this tradition, a significant number of women have begun not only to engage with philosophy, but speak from a distinctively feminist standpoint which critically acknowledges women's different positioning. To this newly emerging wing of the 'Invisible College' I give respect and thanks. Their interventions have not only exposed the hidden gender agenda in the philosophical canon, but have brought to the fore new issues and

approaches which place the conceptual foundations of oppression at the very centre of inquiry. This new focus includes the commonalities as well as the specifics of oppression for, as bell hooks has said,

Feminism, as liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as a part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact.

(hooks 1989:22)

Introduction

It is usually at the edges where the great tectonic plates of theory meet and shift that we find the most dramatic developments and upheavals. When four tectonic plates of liberation theory—those concerned with the oppressions of gender, race, class and nature—finally come together, the resulting tremors could shake the conceptual structures of oppression to their foundations. Feminism has undergone major conflict, transformation and enrichment as a result of its encounters with other forms of domination and their theories, especially those of race and class. A feminist account of the domination of nature presents an essential but difficult further frontier for feminist theory, all the more testing and controversial because the problematic of nature has been so closely interwoven with that of gender. Because ‘nature’ has been a very broad and shifting category and has encompassed many different sorts of colonisation, an adequate account of the domination of nature must draw widely on accounts of other forms of oppression, and has an important integrating role.

Ecofeminism has contributed a great deal both to activist struggle and to theorising links between women’s oppression and the domination of nature over the last two decades. In some versions it has engaged with all four forms of exploitation encompassed in race, class, gender and nature. At the same time, ecofeminism has been stereotyped in some quarters both as theoretically weak and as doubtfully liberated, and also as exclusively linked to what is often now termed cultural feminism. My objective in this book is to help develop an environmental feminism that can be termed a critical ecological feminism, one which is thoroughly compatible with and can be strongly based in feminist theory.

A better theory can, I believe, greatly increase the critical and analytical force of ecological feminism and make it a far more powerful political tool. It can provide a basis for a connected and co-operative political practice for liberation movements. We need a common, integrated framework for the critique of both human domination and the domination of nature—integrating nature as a fourth category of

analysis into the framework of an extended feminist theory which employs a race, class and gender analysis. I try to show the importance of nature as the missing piece in this framework, and its vital contribution to a more complete understanding of domination and colonisation.

A further major aim of the book is to provide a thorough grounding for a feminist environmental philosophy. The book engages with the heavily masculine presence which has inhabited most accounts of environmental philosophy, including those of many deep ecologists. Their accounts, I show, often retain a dualistic dynamic, although frequently this has appeared in subtle ways and in unlikely guises. I show how a different and improved basis for environmental politics and philosophy might be constructed by taking better account of the ethics and politics of mutuality as developed by a number of feminist thinkers. On this basis, I try to show how the treatment of nature can be thought of in political terms as well as ethical terms. It is here especially that male theorists (for example, Chase 1991) have typically overlooked feminist thought and the contribution the 'third position' of ecofeminist theory can make to a resolution of the problems behind the bitter 'ecopolitics debate' between 'deep ecologists' and 'social ecologists', problems which continue to preoccupy and divide the green movement.

Forms of oppression from both the present and the past have left their traces in western culture as a network of dualisms, and the logical structure of dualism forms a major basis for the connection between forms of oppression. The second chapter of this book begins to develop a new analysis of dualism which explicates the concept carefully in logical terms and shows what can be made good in it. The implications of this analysis are pursued throughout the remaining chapters. The concept of dualism has been crucial to much philosophical and feminist thought, yet is usually only vaguely articulated. My argument examines this concept in a more connected, complete and rigorous way than heretofore, and presses home the political and cultural critique it underpins. I argue that western culture has treated the human/nature relation as a dualism and that this explains many of the problematic features of the west's treatment of nature which underlie the environmental crisis, especially the western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature. A detailed analysis of dualism also shows that its characteristic logical structure of otherness and negation corresponds closely to classical propositional logic, the leading logical theory of modernity. I argue that classical logic, as the logic of instrumental reason, approximates this structure, and that is a major reason why it has been selected out of alternative theoretical possibilities. Moreover, the logic of dualism yields a common conceptual

framework which structures otherwise different categories of oppression.

In feminist and liberation theory, the misty, forbidding passes of the Mountains of Dualism have swallowed many an unwary traveller in their mazes and chasms. In these mountains, a well-trodden path leads through a steep defile to the Cavern of Reversal, where travellers fall into an upside-down world which strangely resembles the one they seek to escape. Trapped Romantics wander here, lamenting their exile, as do various tribes of Arcadians, Earth Mothers, Noble Savages and Working-Class Heroes whose identities are defined by reversing the valuations of the dominant culture. Postmodernist thinkers have found a way to avoid this cavern, and have erected a sign pointing out the danger, but have not yet discovered another path across the mountains to the promised land of liberatory politics on the other side. Mostly they linger by the Well of Discourse near the cavern, gazing in dismay into the fearful and bottomless Abyss of Relativism beyond it. The path to the promised land of reflective practice passes over the Swamp of Affirmation, which careful and critical travellers, picking their way through, can with some difficulty cross. Intrepid travellers who have found their way across the Swamp of Affirmation into the lands beyond often either fall into the Ocean of Continuity on the one side or stray into the waterless and alien Desert of Difference on the other, there to perish. The pilgrim's path to the promised land leads along a narrow way between these two hazards, and involves heeding both difference and continuity.

Dualism has formed the modern political landscape of the west as much as the ancient one. In this landscape, nature must be seen as a *political* rather than a descriptive category, a sphere formed from the multiple exclusions of the protagonist-superhero of the western psyche, reason, whose adventures and encounters form the stuff of western intellectual history. The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him. The continual and cumulative overcoming of the domain of nature by reason engenders the western concept of progress and development. But as in other patriarchal reproductive contexts, it is the father who takes credit for and possession of this misbegotten child, and who guides its subsequent development in ways which continue to deny and devalue the maternal role.

The account I develop here links environmental philosophy

strongly to the important contemporary critique of reason and of rationalist philosophy, which has emerged especially from feminist and some postmodernist philosophy. Since defenders of the western tradition (and even some nervous old guard critics of it) persistently and vociferously portray criticism of the dominant forms of reason as the rejection of all reason and the embrace of irrationality, it is still necessary to stress that critiquing the dominant forms of reason which embody the master identity and oppose themselves to the sphere of nature does not imply abandoning all forms of reason, science and individuality. Rather, it involves their redefinition or reconstruction in less oppositional and hierarchical ways. To uncover the political identity behind these dominant forms of reason is not to decrease, but rather greatly to increase, the scope and power of political analysis.

Thus it is also exclusion from the master category of reason which in liberation struggles provides and explains the conceptual links between different categories of domination, and links the domination of humans to the domination of nature. The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture. As Vandana Shiva points out (1989, 1991), it is not only women's labour which traditionally gets subsumed 'by definition' into nature, but the labour of colonised non-western, non-white people also. The connections between these forms of domination in the west are thus partly the result of chance and of specific historical evolution, and partly formed from a necessity inherent in the dynamic and logic of domination between self and other, reason and nature.

To be defined as 'nature' in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place. It is to be defined as a *terra nullius*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes. It means being seen as part of a sharply separate, even alien lower realm, whose domination is simply 'natural', flowing from nature itself and the nature(s) of things. Such treatment, standard in the west for nature since at least the Enlightenment, has since that time been opposed and officially condemned for humans (while all the while normalised for

marginalised groups such as women and the colonised). Western culture is only just coming to realise that the same construction might also be problematic for non-human nature.

Much feminist theory has detected a masculine presence in the officially gender-neutral concept of reason. In contrast, my account suggests that it is not a masculine identity pure and simple, but the multiple, complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race species and gender domination, which is at issue. This cultural identity has framed the dominant concepts of western thought, especially those of reason and nature. The recognition of a more complex dominator identity is, I would argue, essential if feminism is not to repeat the mistakes of a reductionist programme such as Marxism, which treats one form of domination as central and aims to reduce all others to subsidiary forms of it which will 'wither away' once the 'fundamental' form is overcome. It is necessary also if we are to give proper emphasis to the role of culture and uncover the deep structures of oppression in culture which help account for the persistence of domination through political and economic change.

The first chapter of this book outlines the relations between feminism and ecological feminism, while the second establishes a basis for my analysis of dualism. I support my account of the role and formation of reason/nature dualism in terms of the master identity by a reexamination of the western rationalist tradition and of the exclusions present in the Platonic account of reason (chapter 3). I argue that many elements of Platonic reason/nature dualism remain unresolved in modern approaches to reason, human identity and death. This analysis of the philosophical past throws into the foreground the many conflicts and tensions in feminist, ecophilosophical and ecofeminist historical accounts of the origins of the domination of nature and of women, especially those which locate the entire problem in the Enlightenment and the rise of atomistic science.

These accounts are commonly supplemented in green thought by an account of mechanism which equates it with atomism. My account presented in chapters 4 and 5 upsets some of this conventional wisdom in green thought on mechanism by focusing on dualism rather than atomism. Breaking the dualism involves both affirming and reconceptualising the underside, nature. Cartesian thought has stripped nature of the intentional and mindlike qualities which make an ethical response to it possible. Once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human identity is reconceived in less polarised and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears. This approach means that

my account leans less heavily on the saving grace of 'new' science than does the conventional account, and does not rely so much on the rather overworked holistic paradigm, which is of course also enormously problematic as a political framework.

Later sections of the book carry the analysis of reason/nature dualism and its impact on human relations to nature into the further areas of self/other, public/private and reason/emotion dualism (chapter 6). I also show how a dualised conception of self and other, reason and emotion, universal and particular, underlies the instrumental treatment of nature and its exclusion from ethical significance in western (now global) culture, and how a dualist dynamic is often retained in positions such as deep ecology which claim to have escaped it (chapter 7). Overcoming the dualistic dynamic requires recognition of both continuity and difference; this means acknowledging the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of self. I relate this account to contemporary political theory, with its dominant problematic of selfhood and rationality.

In this period of crisis, time taken for the development of theory seems a luxury indeed. But if we do not understand the development and the defects in the western story of reason and nature, we may remain trapped within it or settle for one of its new versions. The contemporary human and environmental crisis underlines the cultural centrality of the reason/nature story, and the urgency of resolving the western network of dualisms. Much modern environmental wisdom from such thinkers as David Suzuki has as its main theme the message that humans are animals and have the same dependence on a healthy biosphere as other forms of life. On the surface, it is puzzling that an apparent truism should find so much resistance and should need to be stressed so much. But the reason why this message of continuity and dependency is so revolutionary in the context of the modern world is that the dominant strands of western culture have for so long denied it, and have given us a model of human identity as only minimally and accidentally connected to the earth.

For all the formal knowledge of evolutionary biology, this model of disconnection remains deeply and fatally entrenched in modern conceptions of the human and of nature, inscribed in culture as a result of a dynamic which sought to naturalise domination in both human and non-human spheres. We must find ways to rework our concepts and practices of human virtue and identity as they have been conceived, since at least the time of the Greeks, as exclusive of and discontinuous with the devalued orders of the feminine, of subsistence, of materiality and of non-human nature. The master culture must now make its long-overdue homecoming to the earth. This is no longer simply a matter of justice, but now also a matter of survival.

THE VISION OF ECOLOGICAL FEMINISM: PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

The story of a land where women live at peace with themselves and with the natural world is a recurrent theme of feminist utopias. This is a land where there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals, where people care for one another and for nature, where the earth and the forest retain their mystery, power and wholeness, where the power of technology and of military and economic force does not rule the earth, or at least that part of it controlled by women. For usually this state is seen as a beleaguered one, surviving against the hostile intent of men, who control a world of power and inequality, of military and technological might and screaming poverty, where power is the game and power means domination of both nature and people. Feminist vision often draws the contrasts starkly—it is life versus death, Gaia versus Mars, mysterious forest versus technological desert, women versus men.

It is hard to deny the power of that vision, or its ability to harness the hope and the sorrow the present world holds for those who can bear to confront its current course. We do live in a world increasingly and distressingly like the feminist dystopias, where technological mastery extinguishes both nature and less technologically 'rational' cultures, where we face the imminent prospect of loss of the world's forests along with the bulk of its species diversity and human cultural diversity, where already many cultures have had the whole basis of ancient survival patterns destroyed by a species of development and 'progress' which produces inequality as inexorably as it produces pollution and waste, and where the dominance of 'rational' man threatens ultimately to produce the most irrational of results, the extinction of our species along with many others. Ecological feminism tells us that it is no accident that this world is dominated by men.

If we are women, we have as a group an interest in escaping our ancient domination. We women also have an interest, which we share with all other living creatures, and among them with men, in a sound and healthy planet, in sound, healthy and balanced ecosystems and in a sustainable and satisfying way of living on the earth. But according to ecological feminism there is more to it than that, and more to the connection of the movements than this accidental one, of women who happen to be green. Gender is at least a major part of the problem, and there is a way of relating to the other that is especially associated with women, which contains the seeds of a different human relationship to the earth and perhaps too of human survival on it and with it.

But as it is often stated the ecofeminist vision, so sane and so attractive, seems to raise many problems and questions. Is ecofeminism giving us a version of the story that the goodness of women will save us?

Is it only women (and perhaps only certain properly womanly women) who can know the mysterious forest, or is that knowledge, and that love, in principle, accessible to us all? Do we have to renounce the achievements of culture and technology to come to inhabit the enchanted forest? Can we affirm women's special qualities without endorsing their traditional role and confinement to a 'woman's sphere'? Can a reign of women possibly be the answer to the earth's destruction and to all the other related problems? Is ecofeminism giving us another version of the story that all problems will cease when the powerless take over power? Is ecofeminism inevitably based in gynocentric essentialism?

I come from a background in both environmental philosophy and activism, and feminist philosophy and activism, yet my initial reaction to the position asserting such a link, like that of many people, was one of mistrust. It seemed to combine a romantic conception of both women and nature, the idea that women have special powers and capacities of nurturance, empathy and 'closeness to nature', which are unsharable by men and which justify their special treatment, which of course nearly always turns out to be inferior treatment. It seemed to be the antithesis of feminism, giving positive value to the 'barefoot and pregnant' image of women and validating their exclusion from the world of culture and relegation to that of nature, a position which is perhaps best represented in modern times by the masculinist writer D.H. Lawrence. It appeared to provide a green version of the 'good woman' argument of the suffragettes, in which good and moral women, who are nurturant, empathic and life-orientated, confront and reclaim the world from bad men, who are immersed in power, hierarchy and a culture of death. Later reading showed me the diversity of the position and that, while an element of this is present in some accounts, by no means all of them conform to this romantic picture, nor is it a necessary part of a position which takes seriously the idea of a non-accidental connection between the liberation movements.

One essential feature of all ecological feminist positions is that they give positive value to a connection of women with nature which was previously, in the west, given negative cultural value and which was the main ground of women's devaluation and oppression. Ecological feminists are involved in a great cultural revaluation of the status of women, the feminine and the natural, a revaluation which must recognise the way in which their historical connection in western culture has influenced the construction of feminine identity and, as I shall try to show, of both masculine and human identity. Beyond that there is a great deal of diversity; ecological feminists differ on how and even whether women are connected to nature, on whether such connection is in principle sharable by men, on how to treat the exclusion of women from culture, and on how the revaluing of the connection with nature

connects with the revaluing of traditional feminine characteristics generally, to mention a few areas. There is enormous variation in ecological feminist literature on all these areas.¹

Like any other diverse position, ecological feminism is amenable to careful and less careful statements, and some versions of ecofeminism do provide a version of the argument that it is the goodness of women which will save us. This is an argument, with its Christian overtones of fall and feminine redemption, which appeared in Victorian times as the view that women's moral goodness, their purity, patience, self-sacrifice, spirituality and maternal instinct, meant either that they would redeem fallen political life (if given the vote), or, on the alternate version, that they were too good for fallen political life and so should not have the vote. The first version ignores the way in which these sterling qualities are formed by powerlessness and will fail to survive translation to a context of power; the second covertly acknowledges this, but insists that in order to maintain these qualities for the benefit of men, women must remain powerless.

A popular contemporary green version attributes to women a range of different but related virtues, those of empathy, nurturance, cooperativeness and connectedness to others and to nature, and usually finds the basis for these also in women's reproductive capacity. It replaces the 'angel in the house' version of women by the 'angel in the ecosystem' version. The myth of this angel is, like the Victorian version, of dubious value for women; unlike the more usual misogynist accounts which western culture provides of women, it recognises strengths in women's way of being, but it does so in an unsatisfactory and unrealistic way, and again fails to recognise the dynamic of power.

Simplistic versions of this story attribute these qualities to women directly and universally. But it is only plausible to do this if one practises a denial of the reality of women's lives, and not least a denial of the divisions between women themselves, both within the women's movement and in the wider society. Not all women are empathic, nurturant and co-operative. And while many of these virtues have been real, they have been restricted to a small circle of close others. Women do not necessarily treat other women as sisters or the earth as a mother; women are capable of conflict, of domination and even, in the right circumstances, of violence. Western women may not have been in the forefront of the attack on nature, driving the bulldozers and operating the chainsaws, but many of them have been support troops, or have been participants, often unwitting but still enthusiastic, in a modern consumer culture of which they are the main symbols, and which assaults nature in myriad direct and indirect ways daily. And of course women have also played a major role, largely unacknowledged, in a male-led and male-

dominated environment movement, in resisting and organising against the assault on nature. The invisible, undervalued alternative economy which has for so long framed their identity is less strongly based on disregard for the earth than the masculinecentred official economy of the developed world. As we shall see, the western mapping of a gender hierarchy on to the nature/culture distinction has been a major culprit in the destruction of the biosphere. But if we think that the fact of being female guarantees that we are automatically provided with an ecological consciousness and can do no wrong to nature or to one another, we are going to be badly disappointed.

The 'angel in the ecosystem' is a simplistic version of the affirmation of feminine qualities, both individual and cultural, which has been such a marked feature of this century's second wave of feminism, especially that which has stressed difference. The link is not nearly as simple as the 'angel' version of women's character takes it to be—in fact the 'angel' argument involves a classic sex/gender confusion, since to say that there are connections, for instance, between phallocentrism and anthropocentrism, is not to say anything at all about women in general being 'close to nature'. Nevertheless, there is an important point in the linkage of women to many of these qualities which our culture needs now to affirm, and a vitally important critique in the addition of the critical dimension of gender to the story of human, and especially western, relations to nature. Clarifying and refining what it is that is liberatory and defensible about this affirmation of the feminine, and clarifying just how these qualities are connected to women, has been the major task of the search for a feminist identity and for feminist theory and scholarship in the last twenty years, and this task continues to challenge our political and philosophical understandings and frontiers.

The need to clarify and refine the statement and meaning of this affirmation for the case of ecological feminism is one of the major themes in the next two chapters. An ecological feminist analysis of these problems may help in turn to advance our understanding of some of these questions, which have been difficult and often divisive for feminist theory. Clarification and development of an ecofeminist position in a way that is both strategically useful (for the social movements involved) and theoretically rigorous is one of the central intellectual endeavours of our time. Ecological feminism is essentially a response to a set of key problems thrown up by the two great social currents of the later part of this century—feminism and the environment movement—and addresses a number of shared problems. There is the problem of how to reintegrate nature and culture across the great western division between them and of how to give a positive value to what has been traditionally devalued and excluded as nature

without simply reversing values and rejecting the sphere of culture. There is the problem of how (and whether) to try to reconcile the movements and their associated theoretical critiques (of phallogentrism and anthropocentrism), which have many areas of conflict as well as some common ground. These are central problems for the theories, strategies and alliances of both movements.

GREEN CRITIQUES AND CULTURAL UNIVERSALISM

There is also the need to rid both critiques of the arrogant ethnocentrism which has been such a marked feature of western world-views. Accounts of a generalised 'patriarchy' as the villain behind the ecological crisis implicitly assume that western culture is human culture. But the gendered character of nature/culture dualism, and of the whole web of other dualisms interconnected with it, is not a feature of human thought or culture *per se*, and does not relate the universal man to the universal woman; it is specifically a feature of *western* thought. It is important that a critical ecological feminist analysis recognises this, and some have failed to do so clearly. Women in certain New Guinea cultures, for example, are seen as aligned with the domestic or cultivated sphere, men with the forest and with wild land (McCormack and Strathern 1980). We cannot therefore see the alignment of women to nature as the entire basis and source of women's oppression, as some accounts have done, since women often stand in relatively powerless positions even in cultures which have not made the connection of women to nature or which have a different set of genderised dichotomies. Nevertheless the association of women with nature and men with culture or reason can still be seen as providing much of the basis of the cultural elaboration of women's oppression *in the west*, of the particular form that it takes in the western context, and that is still of considerable explanatory value. Once cultural universalism is rejected, we can draw on these features to explain much that is especially western in our ways of relating to each other and to nature. That is how I have tried to use them here.

The concepts of humanity and nature have been used in a similarly universalised fashion in the critique of anthropocentrism. Critics have rightly complained that the use of the blanket category 'human' obscures highly relevant cultural and other differences between human groups, and differences in responsibility for and benefits from the exploitation of nature (Bookchin 1988; 1989).² The Penan who defend the forest at the risk of their lives are not to be held responsible, as 'humans', for its destruction in the way that the agents of westernised development are. A universalised concept of 'humanity' can be used also to deflect political

critique and to obscure the fact that the forces directing the destruction of nature and the wealth produced from it are owned and controlled overwhelmingly by an unaccountable, mainly white, mainly male elite. This criticism applies to those ways of developing the critique which hold that it is simply humanity as a species which is the problem and which use the blanket concept 'human' to cover over vitally important social, political and genderbased analyses of the problem. These problematic formulations of the critique of anthropocentrism tend to assume some sort of underlying species selfishness, perhaps as part of 'human nature', and to focus on a general reduction in human numbers as the solution.

But this approach should not be confused with the critique of the way human identity has been treated in particular influential cultures such as western culture. According to the way of understanding the critique developed here, it is the development in certain cultures, especially and originally western culture, of a particular concept and practice of human identity and relationship to nature which is the problem, not the state of being human as such. The difference might be compared to the difference between ways of understanding patriarchal domination which see males (biology) as the problem, and accounts of the problem in terms of particular understandings and practices of masculine identity in particular social and cultural contexts (gender). There has been much confusion on this point, which has led to charges that critiques which question human domination are 'anti-human', treat being human as a disease; and so on (Bookchin 1988). The critique of human domination must be part of the familiar and healthy practice of self-critical reflection, not an acultural and ahistorical expression of self-hatred and collective human-species guilt.

Similarly, although the critique must involve some recognition of the human species as a whole as more limited in its claims on the earth and in its relation to other species, this does not translate into any simple claim about the need for blanket reductions in human numbers, or into the view that different human groupings have equal responsibility for and benefit equally from the destruction of nature. The human colonisation of the earth is human-centred in the competitive, chauvinistic sense that it benefits certain humans in the short term (although not in evolutionary terms) at the expense of other species. But it is not human-centred in any good sense, since not all humans share in or benefit from this process or from its ideology of rational imperialism. Indeed as in the case of other empires, many humans—including women as well as those identified as less fully human—are the victims of its rational hierarchy, just as many humans are the victims rather than the beneficiaries of the assault on nature.

Thus understood, the critique of human domination is in no way incompatible with older critiques which reject human hierarchy. In fact it complements and makes more complete our understanding of this hierarchy. But just as the exploitation of women cannot be justified by more equal parcelling out of the spoils between males in the way the prefeminist critiques invoking equality and fraternity assumed, so the destruction of nature cannot be justified by a more equal distribution of the results among human groups, as the pre-ecological critiques often suggested. Human domination of nature wears a garment cut from the same cloth as intra-human domination, but one which, like each of the others, has a specific form and shape of its own. Human relations to nature are not only ethical, but also political.

ECOLOGICAL FEMINISM AND GREEN THEORY

What might loosely be called 'green theory' includes several subcritiques and positions whose relationship has recently been the subject of vigorous and often bitter debate, and which have some common ground but apparently a number of major divergences.³ The debate seems to have revealed that the green movement still lacks a coherent liberatory theory, and raises the question of whether it is and must remain no more than a political alliance of convenience between different interest groups affected differently by the assault on nature.

Yet such a perspective connecting human and non-human forms of domination does seem both possible and essential to do justice to the concerns which the movement has articulated in the last two decades. Key aspects of environmental critiques are centred on the way that control over and exploitation of nature contributes to, or is even more strongly linked to, control over and exploitation of human beings. As numerous studies have shown, high technology agriculture and forestry in the third world which are ecologically insensitive *also* strengthen the control of elites and social inequality, increasing, for example, men's control over the economy at the expense of women, and they do these things not just as a matter of accident. People suffer because the environment is damaged, and also from the process which damages it, because the process has disregard for needs other than those of an elite built into it. We die of the product (the destruction of nature) and also of the process (technological brutality alias technological rationality serving the end of commodification). As the free water we drink from common streams, and the free air we breathe in common, become increasingly unfit to sustain life, the biospheric means for a healthy life will increasingly be privatised and become the privilege of those who can afford to pay for them. The losers will be (and in many places already

are) those, human and non-human, without market power, and environmental issues and issues of justice must increasingly converge.

It seems that unless we are to treat these two sorts of domination as in only temporary and accidental alliance (which would abandon the most important insights of the green movement), an adequate green philosophy will have to cater for *both* sorts of concerns, those concerned with human social systems and those concerned with nature, and give an important place to their connection and accommodation. What is at stake in the internal debate on this issue of political ecology (which has involved social ecology, deep ecology and ecofeminism) is also the question of liberatory coherence and of the relationship between the radical movements and critiques of oppression each of these internal green positions is aligned with. The quest for coherence is not the demand that each form of oppression submerges its hard-won identity in a single, amorphous, oceanic movement. Rather it asks that each form of oppression develop sensitivity to other forms, both at the level of practice and that of theory.⁴

THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Social ecology, which draws on radical tradition for an analysis of ecological problems in terms of human social hierarchy and market society, seems initially to be a promising place to look for a coherent liberatory perspective. But social ecology, as articulated in the recent work of its best-known exponent, Murray Bookchin, tries to resolve the problem of the relationship between these forms of exploitation in the familiar but deeply problematic way of creating a hierarchy of oppressions. Bookchin's work has developed, often in a powerful way, the critique of the role of intra-human hierarchy and centralisation in ecological destruction, and has emphasised the need to maintain a critique of fundamental social structures. But his recent work has been unable and unwilling to accommodate a thoroughgoing critique of human domination of nature or to acknowledge a notion of human difference not linked to hierarchy. Recent (and theoretically superficial) attempts at public reconciliation have not been able to bury the theoretical divergences (Chase 1991). Bookchin's recent work leaves little room for doubt that his theory is for the most part hostile to the new rival critique of anthropocentrism, and eager to subsume it under some form of human domination. The domination of nature, he assures us, came after the domination of human by human and is entirely secondary to it. Thus he asserts an historical reduction thesis:

All our notions of dominating nature stem from the very real domination of human by human.... As a historical statement [this]

declares in no uncertain terms that the domination of human by human *preceded* the notion of dominating nature.

(Bookchin 1989:44)

It is prior in other senses too according to Bookchin. Although his account stresses human liberation, he does not see it as inseparable from the liberation of nature, but rather claims that it is strategically prior to (1989:60–1), and must come *before*, the liberation of nature, which is described as a ‘social symptom rather than a social cause’ (1989:25). Bookchin can be read as suggesting that we must first create a society in which all forms of human hierarchy are eliminated before we can hope to achieve a truly rational, ecological society (1989:44). Although social ecology stresses its radical political orientation, Bookchin’s version of it seems to see politics as confined to intra-human relationships, and his textual practice appears insensitive to the colonising politics of western human/nature relations. Thus in *Remaking Society* Bookchin rarely mentions non-human nature without attaching the word ‘mere’ to it. (Thus deep ecologists want to ‘equate the human with mere animality’, to ‘dissolve humanity into a mere species within a biospheric democracy’ and reduce humanity ‘to merely one life form among many’ [1989:42].) The more egalitarian approach advocated by some forms of deep ecology is roundly condemned as debasing to humans and involving a denial of their special qualities of rationality.

For Bookchin, the ecological crisis demands the defence of the supremacy of reason and the western tradition against their critics, including recent environmental, feminist and postmodernist critics who have argued that western cultural ideals of reason have defined themselves in opposition to the feminine and to the sphere of nature and subsistence (Midgley 1980; Harding and Hintikka 1983; Lloyd 1985; Fox Keller 1985; Harding 1986). Bookchin’s ecological rationalism retains a humanist-enlightenment emphasis on reason as oppositional to spirituality, and maintains the traditional role of reason as the basis of human difference and identity and the chief justification of human superiority over nature. Many ecological critics of anthropocentrism (for example, Dodson Gray [1979:19]) have argued that the dominant tendency in western culture has been to construe difference in terms of hierarchy, and that a less colonising approach to nature does not involve denying human reason or human difference but rather ceasing to treat reason as the basis of superiority and domination. Bookchin, however, presents the denial of human hierarchy over nature as the denial of human distinctness, and the rejection of colonising forms of reason as the rejection of all rationality.

Social ecologists, including Bookchin, are not, I believe, wrong in their conviction that western radical traditions can offer valuable

insights into our ecological plight. But the best radical traditions of the west, at least in their self-critical phases, must surely find problematic the colonising politics of a philosophy which places western culture at the apex of evolution. Bookchin's neo-Hegelian ecological rationalism fails to come to terms with the re-evaluation of any of the complex of western-centred rationalist concepts which inferiorise the sphere of nature and non-western culture—rationality, progress, 'primitivism', development and civilisation. It fails to confront the chief myth of progress and the other ideologies which surround colonialism, namely the confrontation with an inferior past, an inferior non-western other and the associated notion of indigenous cultures as 'backward', earlier stages of our own exemplary civilisation. The retention of an oppositional concept of reason and the continued fear and denial of its exclusions are represented in the constant dark references his work makes to 'atavism' and 'primitivism'.

Similarly, the concept of salvation in an ecological society where humans represent second nature (defined by Bookchin as 'first nature rendered self-reflexive, a thinking nature that knows itself and can guide its own evolution' [1990:182]) is used to lend support to traditional and hierarchical models of humans as rational 'stewards' managing nature for its own best interests. The concept of humans as 'nature rendered self-conscious' leaves no space for any independence, difference and self-directedness on the part of first nature, making it impossible to represent conflicts of interest between rational 'second nature' and non-rational 'first' nature.⁵ Bookchin's version of social ecology, then, focuses on some of the forms of hierarchy within human society, but inherits many problematic aspects of the humanist, Enlightenment, Hegelian and Marxist traditions (Plumwood 1981). It defends assumptions associated with the human colonisation of nature and retains forms of intra-human hierarchy which draw on this. Although social ecology presents itself as offering a way of reconciling the various critiques of domination, Bookchin's version at least falls well short of that objective.⁶

PROBLEMS IN DEEP ECOLOGY

The critique of anthropocentrism or human domination of nature is a new and in my view inestimably important contribution to our understanding of western society, its history, its current problems and its structures of domination. However, as it is currently represented by some of the leading exponents of deep ecology, this critique is hardly less problematic than Bookchin's account of social ecology and is similarly intent on a strategy of subsuming or dismissing other green positions.⁷ Leading deep ecologist Warwick Fox makes repeated counter-claims to

‘most fundamental’ status for his own critique of the domination of nature, arguing that it accounts for forms of human domination also. At the same time (and inconsistently) Fox treats critiques of other forms of domination as irrelevant to environmental concern, claiming, for example, that feminism has nothing to add to the conception of environmental ethics (Fox 1989:14). Hierarchy within human society is declared to be irrelevant to explanations of the destruction of nature.⁸

If social ecology fails to reconcile the critiques because it cannot understand that human relations to non-humans are as political as human relations to other humans, deep ecology as articulated here also suppresses the potential for an adequate *political* understanding of its theme of human/nature domination, although it achieves this suppression of the political by a different route. Thus dominant forms of deep ecology choose for their core concept of analysis the notion of *identification*, understood as an individual psychic act rather than a political practice, yielding a theory which emphasises personal transformation and ignores social structure. The dominant account is both individualist (failing to provide a framework for change which can look beyond the individual) and psychologistic (neglecting factors beyond psychology).

A similarly apolitical understanding is given to its core concept of ecological selfhood; here the account, while drawing extensive connections with various eastern religious positions, seems to go out of its way to ignore the substantial links which could fruitfully be made with feminist accounts of the self and with feminist theory (Warren 1990; Cheney 1987; 1989). The result, as I argue in chapters 6 and 7, is a psychology of *incorporation*, not a psychology of *mutuality*. Fox suggests that selfishness in the form of excessive personal attachment, which he conflates with psychological egoism, is the fundamental cause of ‘possessiveness, greed, exploitation, war and ecological destruction’ (Fox 1990:262). An analysis which exhorts us to consider nature by transcending the egoism of personal attachment matches in its depth of political insight the sort of social analysis which exhorts us to resolve problems of social inequality through acts of individual unselfishness. Such an analysis also uncritically assumes an account of personal attachment as antithetical to moral life which has increasingly and deservedly come under attack recently, especially from feminists (chapter 7). This form of deep ecology makes a good religious or spiritual garnish for a main political recipe which eschews radical critique and treats green politics in terms of a warmed-over ‘green’ liberalism. Deep ecology, like social ecology, fails in its current form to present a coherent liberatory perspective (Elkins 1989).⁹

Given these points it seems that both deep ecology and social ecology, as they are currently articulated, are unsuitable for providing the basis

for an adequate green theory. Social ecology stresses environmental problems as social problems, arising from the domination of human by human, but has little sensitivity to the domination of non-human nature, while deep ecology has chosen a theoretical base which allows its connection with various religious and personal change traditions but blocks its connection to the critiques of human oppression. It seems then that an ecologically orientated feminism is the most promising current candidate for providing a theoretical base adequate to encompass and integrate the liberatory concerns of the green movement. The domination of women is of course central to the feminist understanding of domination, but is also a well-theorised model which can illuminate many other kinds of domination, since the oppressed are often both feminised and naturalised. The ecological feminism of writers such as Rosemary Radford Ruether has always stressed the links between the domination of women, of other human groups and of nature.¹⁰ 'An ecological ethic', she writes, 'must always be an ethic of ecojustice that recognises the interconnection of social domination and the domination of nature' (1989:149). Ecological feminism provides an excellent framework for the exploration of such interconnections. I attempt here to provide some of the philosophical basis for such an account.

Chapter 1

Feminism and ecofeminism

In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than a whole, in Reason. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes. Consequently the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue and humanity that distinguish the individual and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow.

(Mary Wollstonecraft)

That women's inclusion in the sphere of nature has been a major tool in their oppression emerges clearly from a glance at traditional sources: 'Woman is a violent and uncontrolled animal' (Cato 1989:193); 'A woman is but an animal and an animal not of the highest order' (Burke 1989:187); 'I cannot conceive of you to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey' (Swift 1989:191); 'Howe'er man rules in science and in art/The sphere of women's glories is the heart' (Moore 1989:166); 'Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilisation has become more and more men's business' (Freud 1989:80); 'Women are certainly capable of learning, but they are not made for the higher forms of science, such as philosophy and certain types of creative activity; these require a universal ingredient' (Hegel 1989:62); 'A necessary object, woman, who is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink' (Aquinas 1989:183). Feminine 'closeness to nature' has hardly been a compliment.

There are, however, many traps for feminists in extracting themselves from this problematic. Both rationality and nature have a confusing array of meanings; in most of these meanings reason contrasts systematically with nature in one of its many senses. Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature

includes everything that reason excludes. It is important to note this point because some ecofeminists have endorsed the association between women and nature without critically examining how the association is produced by exclusion. On the other hand, some equality feminists, equally uncritically, have endorsed women's ascent from the sphere of nature into that of culture or reason without remarking the problematic, oppositional nature of a concept of reason defined by such exclusions. In this chapter, I will point to a route of escape from the problematic that the traditional association between women and nature creates for feminists, to a position which neither accepts women's exclusion from reason nor accepts the construction of nature as inferior.¹

THE WOMAN-NATURE CONNECTION—OUTDATED AND OPPRESSIVE?

The dominant and ancient traditions connecting men with culture and women with nature are also overlain by some more recent and conflicting ones in which unchangeable 'male' essence ('virility') is connected to a nature no longer viewed as reproductive and providing but as 'wild', violent, competitive and sexual (as in the ideas of Victorianism, Darwinism and recent sociobiology), and 'the female' is viewed in contrasting terms as insipid, domestic, asexual and civilising.² As Lloyd (1984) has noted too, the attitude to both women and nature resulting from the traditional identification has not always been a simple one. Also, as Merchant (1981) notes, it has not always been purely negative. The connection has sometimes been used to provide a *limited* affirmation of both women and nature, as, for instance, in the romantic tradition (Ruether 1975:193).³ But both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power.

It is not surprising that many feminists regard with some suspicion the view expressed by a growing number of women who describe themselves as 'ecofeminists': that there may be something to be said *in favour* of women's connectedness with nature. The very idea of a feminine connection with nature seems to many to be regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life. It is both tempting and common therefore for feminists to view the traditional connection between women and nature as no more than an instrument of

oppression, a relic of patriarchy which should simply be allowed to wither away now that its roots in an oppressive tradition are exposed (Echols 1989:288).⁴

But there are reasons why this widespread, 'common-sense' approach to the issue is unsatisfactory, why the question of a womannature connection cannot just be set aside, but must remain a central issue for feminism. The connection still constitutes the dynamic behind much of the treatment of both women and nature in contemporary society. As I will show, it is perilous for feminism to ignore the issue because it has an important bearing on the model of humanity into which women will be fitted and within which they will claim equality. And as I argue in this chapter, how it is that women and nature have been thrown into an alliance remains to be analysed. This analysis forms the basis for a critical ecological feminism in which women consciously position themselves *with* nature.

The inferiorisation of human qualities and aspects of life associated with necessity, nature and women—of nature-as-body, of nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as-primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine—continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of human life. The connection between women and nature and their mutual inferiorisation is by no means a thing of the past, and continues to drive, for example, the denial of women's activity and indeed of the whole sphere of reproduction.⁵ One of the most common forms of denial of women and nature is what I will term backgrounding, their treatment as providing the background to a dominant, foreground sphere of recognised achievement or causation. This backgrounding of women and nature is deeply embedded in the rationality of the economic system and in the structures of contemporary society (Ekins 1986; Waring 1988).⁶ What is involved in the backgrounding of nature is the denial of dependence on biospheric processes, and a view of humans as apart, outside of nature, which is treated as a limitless provider without needs of its own. Dominant western culture has systematically inferiorised, backgrounded and denied dependency on the whole sphere of reproduction and subsistence.⁷ This denial of dependency is a major factor in the perpetuation of the non-sustainable modes of using nature which loom as such a threat to the future of western society.

The backgrounding and instrumentalisation of nature and that of women run closely parallel. For women, their backgrounded and instrumental status as nature does not usually need to be explicit, for it structures their major roles in both public and private spheres. Women are systematically backgrounded and instrumentalised as housewives, as nurses and secretaries (Pringle 1988),⁸ as colleagues and workmates.

Their labour in traditional roles is also systematically omitted from account in the economic system (Waring 1988) and omitted from consideration when the story of what is important in human history and culture is told. Traditionally, women are ‘the environment’—they provide the environment and conditions against which male ‘achievement’ takes place, but what they do is not itself accounted as achievement (Irigaray 1985a; Le Doeuff 1977). Women are vulnerable to backgrounding even when they step outside their traditional roles, as the history of areas such as DNA research makes plain (Watson 1969), but are most strongly backgrounded in their traditional roles and especially in their roles as mothers.

Diverse strands of feminist theory converge on the invisibility of the mother. The immensely important physical, personal and social skills the mother teaches the child are merely the background to *real* learning, which is defined as part of the male sphere of reason and knowledge (Benjamin 1988; Jaggar 1983:314). The mother herself is background and is defined in relation to her child or its father (Irigaray 1982), just as nature is defined in relation to the human as ‘the environment’. And just as human identity in the west is defined in opposition to and through the denial of nature, so the mother’s product—paradigmatically the male child—defines his masculine identity in opposition to the mother’s being, and especially her nurturance, expelling it from his own makeup and substituting domination and the reduction of others to instrumental status (Chodorow 1979; Irigaray 1982; Kristeva 1987; Brennan 1993). He resists the recognition of dependence, but continues to conceptually order his world in terms of a male (and truly human) sphere of free activity taking place against a female (and natural) background of necessity.

HUMANITY AND EXCLUSION

The view that the connection of women with nature should simply be set aside as a relic of the past assumes that the task for both women and men is now that of becoming simply, unproblematically and fully *human*. But this takes as unproblematic what is not unproblematic, the concept of the human itself, which has in turn been constructed in the framework of exclusion, denial and denigration of the feminine sphere, the natural sphere and the sphere associated with subsistence. The question of what is human is itself now problematised, and one of the areas in which it is most problematic is in the relation of humans to nature, especially to the non-human world.

The framework of assumptions in which the human/nature contrast has been formed in the west is one not only of *feminine* connectedness

with and passivity towards nature, but also and complementarily one of exclusion and domination of the sphere of nature by a white, largely male elite, which I shall call the master model. But the assumptions in the master model are not seen as such, because this model is taken for granted as simply a *human* model, while the feminine is seen as a deviation from it. Hence to simply repudiate the old tradition of feminine connection with nature, and to put nothing in its place, usually amounts to the implicit endorsing of an alternative master model of the human, and of human relations to nature, and to female absorption into this model. It does not yield, as it might seem to do at first, a *gender-neutral* position; unless the question of relation to nature is explicitly put up for consideration and renegotiation, it is already settled—and settled in an unsatisfactory way—by the dominant western model of humanity into which women will be fitted. This is a model of domination and transcendence of nature, in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature, necessity and the feminine. The critique of the domination of nature developed by environmental thinkers in the last twenty years has shown, I think, that there are excellent reasons to be critical of this model of human/nature relations. Unless there is some critical re-evaluation of this master model in the area of relations to nature, the old female/nature connection will be replaced by the dominant model of human distance from and transcendence and control of nature. Critical examination of the question then has to have an important place on the feminist agenda if this highly problematic model of the human and of human relations to nature is not to triumph by default. If the model of what it is to be human involves the exclusion of the feminine, then only a shallow feminism could rest content with affirming the ‘full humanity’ of women without challenging this model.

There is another reason then why the issue of nature cannot now be set aside as irrelevant to feminism. As Karen Warren (1987) has observed, many forms of feminism need to put their *own* house in order on this issue.⁹ Feminists have rightly insisted that women cannot be handed the main burden of ecological morality, especially in the form of holding the private sphere and the household responsible for the bulk of the needed changes (Ruether 1975:200–1; Instone 1991). The attempt to lodge responsibility mainly with women as household managers and consumers should be rejected because it continues to conceive the household as women’s burden, because it misconceives the power of the private household to halt environmental degradation, and because it appeals to women’s traditional self-abnegation, asking them to carry the world’s ills in recognition of motherly duty. Nevertheless, women cannot base their own freedom on endorsing the continued lowly status of the sphere of nature with which they have been identified and from which they have lately risen. Moves upwards in human

groups are often accompanied by the vociferous insistence that those new recruits to the privileged class are utterly dissociated from the despised group from which they have emerged—hence the phenomenon of lower middle-class respectability, the officer risen from the ranks, and the recently assimilated colonised (Memmi 1965:16). Arguments for women’s freedom cannot convincingly be based on a similar putdown of the non-human world.

But much of the traditional argument has been so based. For Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, what is valuable in the human character ideal to which women must aspire and be admitted is defined in *contrast* to the inferior sphere of brute creation. In her argument that women do have the capacity to join men in ‘superiority to the brute creation’, the inferiority of the natural order is simply taken for granted.¹⁰

THE MASCULINITY OF THE DOMINANT MODEL

Several critiques have converged to necessitate reconsideration of the model of feminine connectedness with nature and masculine distance from and domination of it and to problematise the concept of the human. They are:

- 1 the critique of masculinity and the valuing of traits traditionally associated with it (Chodorow 1979; Easthope 1986).
- 2 the critique of rationality. Relevant here is not only the masculine and instrumental character of rationality (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979; Marcuse 1968), but also the overvaluation of reason and its use as a tool for the exclusion and oppression of the contrasting classes of the non-human (since rationality is often taken as the distinguishing mark of the human [Ruether 1975; Midgley 1980; Le Doeuff 1977]), of women (because of its association with maleness [Lloyd 1984]), and, as well, of those inferiorised through class and race (since greater rationality is also taken to distinguish the civilised from the primitive and the higher from the lower classes [Kant 1981:9]). The overvaluation of rationality and its oppositional conception are deeply entrenched in western culture and its intellectual traditions. This overvaluation does not always take the extreme form of some of the classical philosophers (for example, the Platonic view that the unexamined life was worthless), but appears in many more subtle modern forms, such as the limitation of moral consideration to rational moral agents.
- 3 the critique of the human domination of nature, human chauvinism, speciesism, or anthropocentrism (Naess 1973; Plumwood 1975); of the treatment of nature in purely instrumental terms (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979) and the low valuation placed on it in relation to

the human and cultural spheres. Included in this is a critique of the model of the ideal human character and of human virtue, which points out that the western human ideal is one which maximises difference and distance from the animal, the primitive and the natural; the traits thought distinctively human, and valued as a result, are not only those associated with certain kinds of masculinity but also those unshared with animals (Rodman 1980; Midgley 1980). Usually these are taken to be mental characteristics. An associated move is the identification of the human with the higher, mental capabilities and of the animal or natural with the lower bodily ones, and the identification of the authentic or fully human sphere with the mental sphere. This mental sphere is not associated with maleness as such but rather with the elite masculinism of the masters (male and female) who leave to slaves and women the business of providing for the necessities of life, who regard this sphere of necessity as lower and who conceive virtue in terms of distance from it.

The critiques converge for several reasons. A major one is that the characteristics traditionally associated with dominant masculinism are also those used to define what is distinctively human: for example, rationality (and selected mental characteristics and skills); transcendence and intervention in and domination and control of nature, as opposed to passive immersion in it (consider the characterisation of 'savages' as lower orders of humanity on this account); productive labour, sociability and culture. Some traditional feminist arguments also provide striking examples of this convergence of concepts of the human and the masculine. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* appeals strongly to the notion of an ungendered human character as an ideal for both sexes ('the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being' [1982:5]), but in her account this human character is implicitly masculine. The human character ideal she espouses diverges sharply from the feminine character ideal, which she rejects, 'despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners'. Instead she urges that women become 'more masculine and respectable'. The complementary feminine character ideal is rejected—both sexes should participate in a common human character ideal (1982:23) which despite some minor modifications (men are to become more modest and chaste and in that respect to take on feminine characteristics) coincides in its specifications with certain masculine ideals. A single supposedly 'unsexed' character ideal is substituted for the old two-sexed one, where the old feminine ideal was perceived as subsidiary and sexed.

The key concepts of rationality (or mentality) and nature then create crucial links between the human and the masculine, so that to problematise masculinity and rationality is at the same time to problematise the human and, with it, the relation of the human to the contrasted non-human sphere. As we shall see, however, these concepts also form links to other areas of exclusion, for it is not just any kind of masculinity which is usually involved here, but a particular kind which is formed in the context of class and race as well as gender domination (which I have called the master model). The western rationalist ideals of the human embody norms not only of gender exclusion but of race, class and species exclusion. The view that women's humanity is unproblematic mistakenly takes the concept of the human to be unproblematic and fails to observe these biases and exclusions. This connection is then another reason why the issue of the traditional connection of women and nature cannot simply be ignored, why the problems raised must be considered by feminists.

The concept of the human is itself very heavily normative. The notion of being fully or properly human is made to carry enormous positive weight, usually with little examination of the assumptions behind this, or the inferiorisation of the class of non-humans this involves. Thus, for example, behind the view that there is something insulting or degrading about linking women and nature stands an unstated set of assumptions about the inferior status of the non-human world. In modern discourses of liberation, things are deplored or praised in terms of conformity to a concept of 'full humanity'. But the dignity of humanity, like that of masculinity, is maintained by contrast with an excluded inferiorised class.¹¹

Once these assumptions are made explicit, the connection between the stance adopted on the issue of the woman/nature connection and the different options for feminism becomes clearer. In terms of this framework the main traditional position—the point of departure for feminism—can be seen as one in which the ideals of human character are not, as they often pretend to be, gender-neutral, but instead converge with those of mastery, while the ideals of womanhood diverge. Thus, as Simone de Beauvoir (1965) has so powerfully stated, the tragedy of being a woman consisted not only in having one's life and choices impoverished and limited, but also in the fact that to be a good woman was to be a second-rate human being. To the extent that these 'neutral' human character ideals were subscribed to and absorbed and the traditional feminine role also accepted, women must forever be forced to see themselves as inferiors and to be so seen. Because women were excluded from the activities and characteristics which were highly valorised and seen as *distinctively human*, they were forced to be satisfied with being mere spectators of what the *distinctively human*

business of life was all about, the real business of the struggle with nature.

Simone de Beauvoir's solution to this tragic dilemma is also stated with great force and clarity—change was to come about by women fitting themselves and being *allowed* to fit themselves into the dominant model of the human, and women were thus to become *fully human*. The model itself—and the model of freedom via the domination of nature it is based on—is never brought into question, and indeed women's eagerness to participate in it confirms and supports the superiority of the model.

THE FEMINISM OF UNCRITICAL EQUALITY

From the perspective of the second wave of feminism, the earlier, first wave form of feminism which made itself felt in the 1960s and 1970s attempted to fit women uncritically into a masculine pattern of life and a masculine model of humanity and culture which was presented as gender-neutral. This first wave position is most closely associated in current terms with liberal feminism, although, as many feminists have pointed out (O'Brien 1981; Young 1985; Benhabib and Cornell 1987; Nicholson 1987; Nye 1988; MacKinnon 1989), the attempt to fit women to a masculine ideal of selfhood goes beyond liberal feminism and is also found in those forms of socialist or humanist-Marxist feminism which are uncritical of the model of the human as a producer or worker. It is also found in some forms of social ecology (Biehl 1991).¹² The second wave thesis requires qualification, I have suggested, since it is the dominator identity of the master rather than a masculine identity as such which has formed the ideals of western culture and humanity as oppositional to nature and necessity. But with appropriate qualifications the basic point still stands. The position rejected as 'masculinising' is one which sees the task for women as one of laying claim to full humanity, in terms of women adapting themselves to the ideals of culture and the corresponding social institutions of the public sphere. The position can be summed up as one which demands participation by women in exclusionary ideals of humanity and culture. The associated activist strategy can be seen as one of uncritical equality, demanding equal admittance for women to a sphere marked out for elite males and to dominant institutions which are themselves viewed critically only to the extent that they exclude women (and elite women especially).

Central to these ideals of humanity to which women must seek admittance on the uncritical equality strategy is the domination of nature. Women, in this strategy, are to join elite men in participation in

areas which especially exhibit human freedom, such as science and technology, from which they have been especially strongly excluded. These areas are strongly marked for elite men because their style heavily involves the highly valorised traits of objectivity, abstractness, rationality and suppression of emotionality; and also because of their function, which exhibits most strongly the virtues of transcendence of, control of and struggle with nature. In the equal admission strategy, women enter science, but science itself and its orientation to the domination of nature (and domination of excluded groups) remain unchanged.

The uncritical equality strategy associated with liberal feminism has been rejected to varying degrees by several recent forms of feminism. It has been widely seen as a very incomplete escape from the more subtle forms of male cultural domination, and as lacking a basis for adequate critique of the masculinity of the dominant western culture. Perhaps the major criticism levelled at it is that it has failed to observe the implicit masculinity of the rational subject of liberal theory and public discourse, as well as the implicit masculinity of the parties in the myth of the founding contract (Jaggar 1983; Harding 1984; Lloyd 1984; Irigaray 1985b; Tapper 1986; Fox Keller 1985; Gilligan 1987; Benhabib 1987; Young 1987; Nye 1988; Pateman 1988; MacKinnon 1989). A critical ecofeminist account can broaden and extend this objection in a number of directions. First, the approach of liberal feminism fails to notice not only the implicit masculinity of the conception of the individual subject in the public sphere (and indeed the subject of post-enlightenment rational discourse generally), but also its other exclusionary biases, and fails to challenge the resulting bias of the dominant model of the *human* and of human culture as oppositional to nature. Thus uncritical equality endorses a model which is doubly phallogentric, for it is implicitly masculine not only in its account of the individual in society, but in its assumption that what constitutes and is valuable in human identity and culture is in opposition to nature. Second, the liberal approach fails to notice that such a rationalist model of the human as exclusive of nature is one which writes in assumptions not only of gender supremacy, but also of class, race and species supremacy.

The implicit masculinity and the other biases of these models also mean that the hope of equality for women within them will be largely illusory, except for a privileged few. The master model of both the human and the individual citizen and of corresponding social institutions has been arrived at by exclusion and devaluation of women, women's life-patterns and feminine characteristics, as well as by exclusion of those others and areas of life which have been construed as nature. Because this model has been defined by *exclusion*, it is loaded against

women in a variety of more and less subtle ways/Most women will not benefit from formal admission to it and will not attain real equality within it. As Genevieve Lloyd notes, 'Women cannot easily be accommodated into a cultural ideal that has defined itself in opposition to the feminine' (1984:104). Absorption into the master model of humanity, culture and social life is not likely to be successful then for most women, who will remain down at the bottom of the social and cultural hierarchy.¹³ For women, more than altruism is involved in challenging such models.

But even if the absorption of women into the master model of human culture were to be widely successful, ecological feminists would argue, it would be objectionable, because it amounts to having women join elite men in belonging to a privileged class, in turn defined by excluding the inferior class of the non-human and those counted as less human. That is to say, it is a strategy of making some women equal in a now *wider* dominating class, without questioning the structure of or the necessity for domination. The criticism here is that the conceptual apparatus relating superior to inferior orders remains intact and unquestioned; what is achieved is a broadening of the dominating class, without the basis of domination itself being challenged. And the attempt to simply enlarge the privileged class by extending it to, and including, certain women not only ignores a crucial *moral* dimension of the problem; it ignores the way in which different kinds of domination act as models, support and reinforcement, for one another, and the way in which the same conceptual structure of domination reappears in very different inferiorised groups: as we have seen, it marks women, nature, 'primitive' people, slaves, animals, manual labourers, 'savages', people of colour—all supposedly 'closer to the animals'.

When the problem of the women-nature connection is simply set aside, then, it is implicitly assumed that the solution is for women to fit into a model of human relations to nature which does not require change or challenge. Thus a critical and thoroughgoing contemporary feminism is and must be engaged in a lot more than merely challenging and revising explicit ideals of feminine character and behaviour. It is and must be engaged in revising and challenging as well the ideals of both *masculine* and of *human* character. It must take up the challenge to western culture, issued by the early feminists, to conceive women as being as equally and fully human as men. But it can only do this properly if it problematises the dominant conception of the human, and of human culture, as well as that of the rational individual. The challenge then to dominant conceptions of the human involves but is more than a challenge to male domination. It involves also, as we shall see, the challenge to other forms of domination.

RADICAL FEMINISM AND THE MASCULINITY OF CULTURE

What has been variously called cultural feminism or radical feminism has been a major rival to and critic of the feminism of uncritical equality.¹⁴ If liberal feminism rejects the ideals of feminine character, radical feminism (as well as certain forms of socialist feminism) rejects masculine ideals. This rejection gives rise to several themes in ecological feminism. Ideals thought of as masculine are similarly rejected by some ecofeminists and by some feminist theorists of non-violence (Ruddick 1989; McAllister 1982; Harris and King 1989), who link masculine identity and its character ideal (and biological maleness in the case of Gearhart 1982 and Collard 1988) to aggression against fellow humans, especially women, as well as against nature. They reject the absorption of women into this male mould, which is perceived as yielding a culture not of life but of misogyny and death (Daly 1978:62). The principle behind this critique is important and illuminating, even if it is sometimes presented in an oversimplified form: it is not only women who have been damaged and oppressed by assimilation to the sphere of nature, but also western culture itself which has been deformed by its masculinisation and denial of the sphere associated with women. According to this cultural critique, the dominant forms of western culture have been constructed in part at least through control, exclusion and devaluation of the feminine and hence of the natural. Because western culture has conceived the central features of humanity in terms of the dominator identity of the master, and has empowered qualities and areas of life classed as masculine over those classed as feminine, it has evolved as hierarchical, aggressive and destructive of nature and of life, including human life (Ruether 1975; McAllister 1982; Caldecott and Leland 1983; Miller 1986:88; Eisler 1988). For women, the real task of liberation is not equal participation or absorption in such a male dominant culture, but rather subversion, resistance and replacement.

While such a critique of male-dominant culture is powerful, it can be interpreted in different ways and accordingly gives rise to different forms of ecological feminism and radical feminism. On the basis of assimilation to certain characteristics of radical feminism, ecological feminism is both critiqued and stereotyped. Radical feminist cultural critiques have suffered from various problems: they often assume women's oppression to be the foundational form of oppression from which all others are derived; the denial of the feminine is conceived as the origin point of the distortion of culture. It has been tempting too for some radical feminist opponents of the dominant culture to try to resolve the problem of the inferiorisation of what that culture has denied and subordinated by the reversal strategy: giving a positive value to what was previously despised and excluded—the feminine and the natural. But very different

interpretations of reversal strategies are open to us. One of the major forms of it, the feminism of uncritical reversal, is just as problematic as the feminism of uncritical equality, I shall argue, and perpetuates women's oppression in a new and subtle form. The uncritical reversal position expresses both a strong tendency within, a potential danger for, and a stereotype of ecological feminism. Some critics of ecofeminism do battle with this stereotype rather than with the substantive concerns and the work (which they do not reference) of ecofeminists (Prentice 1988; Echols 1989:288; Biehl 1991). On the other hand, while some ecofeminist writers do fall into this stereotype, and while there is an essentially correct insight in the idea of affirming a difference that has been denied and inferiorised, a great deal depends on how the revaluation is carried out and on what is affirmed, as I argue in subsequent chapters.

The simple reversal model, which affirms women as 'nurturant' and celebrates their life-giving powers in a way which confirms their immersion in nature, conceives the alternatives for remaking culture in terms of rival masculinising and feminising strategies. If the masculinising strategy of feminism rejected the feminine character ideal and affirmed a masculine one for both sexes, such a feminising strategy would reject the masculine character ideal and affirm a rival feminine one for both sexes. Several slogans sum up this feminising strategy: 'The future is female', 'Adam was a rough draft, Eve is a fair copy'. But although this is an obvious way to try to find a basis for an ecological feminist argument, it is not, as I will suggest, either the only way or the best way.

THE FEMINISM OF UNCRITICAL REVERSAL

The concept of dualism is central to an understanding of what is problematic in the attempt to reverse the value both of the feminine and of nature. The dualism of western culture has come under sustained criticism from many directions in contemporary feminist and critical thought, from poststructuralist and postmodernist feminism to ecofeminism. Dualism is the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive. Thus as Alison Jaggar writes:

Male-dominant culture, as all feminists have observed, defines masculinity and femininity as contrasting forms. In contemporary society, men are defined as active, women as passive; men are intellectual, women are intuitive; men are inexpressive, women

emotional; men are strong, women weak; men are dominant, women submissive, etc.; ad nauseam.... To the extent that women and men conform to gendered definitions of their humanity, they are bound to be alienated from themselves. The concepts of femininity and masculinity force both men and women to overdevelop certain of their capacities at the expense of others. For instance men become excessively competitive and detached from others; women become excessively nurturant and altruistic.

(Jaggar 1983:316)

Dualism, as a way of construing difference in terms of the logic of hierarchy (Derrida 1981), has been discussed by many feminist and ecological feminist thinkers (Griffin 1978; Jaggar 1983; Plumwood 1986; Warren 1987; King 1989). Only liberal feminism, which accepts the dominant culture, has not had much use for the concept. In dualism, the more highly valued side (males, humans) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being from the 'lower', inferiorised side (women, nature) and each is treated as lacking in qualities which make possible overlap, kinship, or continuity. The nature of each is constructed in polarised ways by the exclusion of qualities shared with the other; the dominant side is taken as primary, the subordinated side is defined in relation to it. Thus woman is constructed as the other, as the exception, the aberration or the subsumed, and man treated as the primary model. The effect of dualism is, in Rosemary Radford Ruether's words, to 'naturalise domination', to make it part of the very natures or identities of both the dominant and subordinated items and thus to appear to be inevitable, 'natural' (Ruether 1975:189).

As I show in chapter 2, dualism is a process in which power forms identity, one which distorts both sides of what it splits apart, the master *and* the slave, the coloniser *and* the colonised, the sadist *and* the masochist, the egoist *and* the self-abnegating altruist, the masculine *and* the feminine, human *and* nature. But if this is so, clearly we cannot resolve the problem by a simple strategy of reversal, affirming the slave's character or culture, for this character as it stands is not an independently constituted nature, but equally represents a distortion. It is a reflection in the dualistic mirror of the master's character and culture. Thus, for example, to the extent that women's 'closeness to nature' is mainly a product of their powerlessness in and exclusion from culture, and from access to technological means of separating from and mastering nature, affirmation of these qualities, which are the products of powerlessness, will not provide a genuine liberatory alternative. Rather, it reactively preserves and maintains the original dualism in the character of what is now affirmed.

In chapter 2 I develop a more thorough theoretical account of dualism and its politics, and show how to affirm the underside of a dualistic contrast (for example, how to affirm nature in contrast to reason) without employing a reversal of values strategy. Here I want to show how the concept of dualism can illuminate the problem of distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable reversal positions, and the clearer formulation of positions in feminism and ecofeminism.

What is at issue here is not the distinctions between women/men, and human/nature, but their dualistic construction. The concept of the human has a masculine bias (among others) because the male/female and human/nature dualisms are closely intertwined, so much so that neither can be fully understood in isolation from the other. The dualistic distortion of culture and the historical inferiority of women and nature in the west have been based, as we have seen, on a network of assumptions involving a range of closely related dualistic contrasts, especially the dualism of reason and nature, or (in a virtually equivalent formulation), of humanity and culture on the one side and nature on the other. It is necessary to set these assumptions out clearly to dispel the fog of charges that essentialism, biologism and reverse sexism are inherent in ecofeminism (Echols 1983; Prentice 1988:9; Biehl 1991), and to chart clearly a path which avoids these pitfalls. Setting these assumptions out more fully makes it clearer what the problematic form of the reversal argument is. There are three parts to each set of assumptions which are important for our discussion:

- (A) 1 the identification of the female with the sphere of physicality and nature (women=nature assumption)
- 2 the assumed inferiority of the sphere of women and of nature (inferiority of nature assumption)
- 3 the conception of both women and nature in terms of a set of dualistic contrasts opposing the sphere of nature to that of reason or the human (dualistic assumption)

- (B) 1 the corresponding identification of the male with the sphere of reason, of true humanity and culture (men=reason assumption)
- 2 the assumption of the superiority of the sphere of reason, humanity and culture to that of nature (superiority of reason assumption)
- 3 the conception of the human or cultural sphere in terms of a set of dualistic assumptions opposing it to nature (dualistic assumption).

The fact that there are three parts to each corresponding set of gender assumptions helps to explain why a thoroughgoing development of feminism leads in the direction of a critical, anti-dualist ecological feminism. For the

feminism of uncritical equality can be seen as rejecting only the first item in these two sets of assumptions, namely (A)1 (the women=nature assumption), but as accepting the further assumptions of each set, (A)2 and (A)3, and (B)1 and (B)2, which inferiorise nature and define it dualistically. Thus liberal feminism rejects the idea of a special feminine (connection to) nature, the traditional feminine model for women, and the exclusion of women from true humanity. Its problem, I have suggested, is that it merely aims to disengage women from the sphere of nature. It does so without questioning either the assumption that the natural sphere itself is inferior, or the dualistic assumptions which yield the masculine model of the human itself, namely (A)2 and (A)3.

The form in which the reversal argument is problematic for radical feminism and ecofeminism is one which does just the opposite of this. The problematic form rejects the premises which assert the traditional inferiority of the feminine and of nature, (A)2 and (B)2. Thus it reverses the low or negative value traditionally assigned to the feminine and to nature, but without disturbing the further assumptions, (A)3 and (B)3, which define this sphere as the contrast term of the masculine model of culture and reason. Here, I shall argue, it is not the assumptions (A)1 and (B)1 which are the problem (although much depends on the form in which these are asserted) so much as the dualistic assumptions (A)3 and (B)3.

PREMISE (A)1: THE IDENTITY OF WOMEN AND NATURE

While an ecological feminist argument cannot be based satisfactorily on accepting premises (A)3 and (B)3, there are a number of different ways ecological feminism can go with respect to premise (A)1, which asserts the identity of women and nature. I want to suggest that (A)1 needs to be refined, and whether or not it is acceptable depends on modifications. Premises (A)1 and (B)1 raise a number of difficult issues, which I shall treat first.

First, we might note that (A)1 and (B)1 yield an important part of the master model of human identity: women's alignment with nature has been matched by the development of an elite masculine identity centring around distance from the feminine, from nature as necessity, from such 'natural' areas in human life as reproduction, and around control, domination and inferiorisation of the natural sphere. Such distance has been obtained by the location of value in the area of human character and culture; this expresses masculine ideals as human ideals, and distinguishes humans from the non-human world. This model then yields the dualistic conception of human identity and culture which a critical ecological feminist position should challenge.

Thus as they stand, these two premises would usually be understood as asserting the identity of women with nature conceived as distinct from and exclusive of culture. Conversely, they assert the identity of men with culture as exclusive of and distinct from nature. (That is, (A)1 would read 'Women are, and men are not, part of nature', and (B)2 would read 'Men are, and women are not, part of culture'.) But once we have begun to question human/nature dualism these assumptions are no longer acceptable. As I argue in chapter 2, human identity has, as part of its dualistic construction, been conceived of in terms which are exclusive of and in opposition to nature. A major point of the critical ecological feminist position I shall develop is to argue that we should reject the master model¹⁵ and conceive human identity in less dualistic and oppositional ways; such a critical ecofeminism would conclude that both women and men are part of both nature and culture. This form of ecological feminism, in reconceiving human identity, is not placing women, or in fact men either, back in undifferentiated nature.¹⁶ For critical ecological feminism, premises (A)1 and (B)1 would be acceptable only in a highly qualified form.

Second, premises (A)1 and (B)1 raise the issue of how women's association with nature reflects women's difference, of whether such a difference exists and how it is based. As we have seen, a common misconception is that the critique of the masculinity of dominant culture requires us to affirm women's difference in the form of a special, biologically based feminine connection to nature, now worn as a badge of pride rather than as one of shame, as in the reversal argument (Prentice 1988:9). But the argument that women have a different relation to nature need not rest on either reversal or 'essentialism', the appeal to a quality of empathy or mysterious power shared by all women and inherent in women's biology.¹⁷ Such differences may instead be seen as due to women's different social and historical position.

Ecological feminists can also be discriminating about the characteristics and aspects of culture they choose to affirm; they need not be confined, as I argue in later chapters, to a choice between Biehl's alternatives of 'demolishing' the complete inheritance of women's past identity or 'enthusiastically embracing it' in its entirety (Biehl 1991:12). To the extent that women's lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositional to nature than those of men, and have involved different and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism.

Ecofeminist critics, as well as some theorists,¹⁸ often write as if ecological feminism is a unitary position. Both critics and sympathisers

need to acknowledge ecological feminism as diverse and as containing, in varying degrees of development, different and sometimes conflicting positions and political commitments. But there is some ground common to all positions which can be called ecological feminist, namely the rejection of (A)2 and (B)2, which state the inferiority of women and nature. The rejection of these assumptions also provides part of the basic common ground between ecological feminism and those other positions in environmental thought which reject the inferiority of nature, although usually without giving attention to its connection with the inferiorising of women.¹⁹ A more complete and critical ecological feminism, I have argued, goes further still, beyond both the feminism of equality and the feminism of reversal to query *both* sets of assumptions, (A)2 and (A)3, and (B)2 and (B)3, and to call the dualistic construction of both gender identity and human identity into question in a thoroughgoing way.

ECOLOGICAL FEMINISM AS AN INTEGRATIVE PROJECT

Women have faced an unacceptable choice within patriarchy with respect to their ancient identity as nature. They either accept it (naturalism) or reject it (and endorse the dominant mastery model). Attention to the dualistic problematic shows a way of resolving this dilemma. Women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of human culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature. The dualised conception of nature as inert, passive and mechanistic would also be challenged as part of this development.

Thus the anti-dualist approach reveals a third way which does not force women into the choice of uncritical participation in a masculinebiased and dualised construction of culture or into accepting an old and oppressive identity as 'earth mothers': outside of culture, opposed to culture, not fully human. In this alternative, women are not seen as purely part of nature any more than men are; both men and women are part of both nature and culture (Warren 1987; Ynestra King 1989).²⁰ Both men and women can stand with nature (Ynestra King 1989) and work for breaking down the dualistic construction of culture, but in doing so they will come from different historical places and have different things to contribute to this process. Because of their placement in the sphere of nature and exclusion from an oppositional culture, what women have to contribute to this process may be especially significant. Their life-choices and historical positioning often compel a deeper

discomfort with dualistic structures and foster a deeper questioning of a dualised culture.

Writing from a perspective influenced by the Frankfurt school, Patricia Jagentowicz Mills has argued that those ecological feminists who reject the negative value that western culture has attributed to the sphere of nature (which I have argued above is the core assumption of all ecological feminisms) have adopted an 'abstract pro-nature stance'. This is 'theoretically unsound and paves the way for the erosion of women's reproductive freedom' (Mills 1991), by obliging them to oppose abortion rights. Her own proposed solution to the problem would modify the 'abstract pro-nature stance' to take account of the regressive moment of nature, the moment of nature 'red in tooth and claw', which it is essential for women to rise above. A rejection of the negative value traditionally accorded nature, she suggests, would make this impossible.

There are a number of grounds on which to reject Mills's argument. To reject the western construction of nature as an inferior sphere of exclusion is not by any means to adopt an 'abstract pro-nature stance' in the sense of agreeing to abandon oneself to necessity, to accept anything which may happen without resistance, nor to agree to any moral precepts such as 'Nature knows best', whatever they may mean. We do not have to accept a choice between treating 'nature' as our slave or treating it as our master. We do not have to assume that nature is a sphere of harmony and peace, with which we as humans will never be in conflict. A rejection of the western treatment of nature implies a careful, critical and political look at the category of nature. In short, what is involved is not, as assumed in Mills's argument, a simple reversal of the value of nature which embraces the category without further deconstruction.

This approach has major implications for the assignment of women's reproductive activity to the sphere of nature, which has formed much of the traditional basis for their inferiorisation. But this placement of reproduction within a framework of nature/culture dualism is precisely what is now thrown open to question. Much feminist discussion has shown how problematic this dualising framework has been for women (Le Doeuff 1977; McMillan 1982; MacKenzie 1986). A rejection of nature/culture dualism can actually provide a much better framework for thinking about women's reproductive issues than the dualising framework which creates an opposition between the body and free subjectivity.

In terms of the assumptions of nature/culture dualism, women's 'uncontrollable' bodies make them part of the sphere of nature. Such an assumption of women's 'closeness to nature', where nature is taken as the realm of necessity over that of freedom, is of course extremely problematic for feminists. A contemporary example of the attempt to use

the dualistic conception of reproduction to control women is the position (let us call it 'papal ecofeminism') which aims to upgrade traditional women's sphere as nature while denying their freedom to choose, control and structure it, thus denying the basis of their claim as culture. It seeks to imprison women in nature by denying access to available cultural means to mediate nature, and to affirm passivity for women and not for men. In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir presented a powerful analysis of the effect on women of the conception and treatment of their reproductivity as dualised nature. Because reproduction is construed not as a creative act, indeed not the act of an agent at all, it becomes something which is undergone not undertaken, at worst tortured and passive, at best a field for acceptance and resignation. When women's agency and choice are denied, the female body itself comes to be seen as oppressive, the instrument of an invading nature hostile to human subjecthood and alien to true humanity, a nature which can only be subdued or transcended.²¹

The attempt to view women and reproduction in terms of nature/culture dualism is distorting whichever of the alternatives, nature or culture, is chosen. The construction of reproduction as the field of nature makes it the work of instinct, lacking skill, care and value. It is an unsharable and insupportable 'natural' burden which can be allowed to dominate and distort women's lives and destroy their capacity for choice and participation in a wider sphere of life. But if the escape route is meant to be the entry to culture by the rational mastery of the body as nature, then the results are also problematic. If in the rationalistic paradigm (for example, in Hegel), the male body is made rational by being made the instrument of a rationality which transforms nature, the female body is made part of culture by being subject to the control of others taken to represent rationality: medical and other experts, abortion tribunals and the like. As dualised nature, conceived as inert, passive, non-subjects, women have offered a fertile field for such control and manipulation by a rationality which structures women's experience of reproduction in two Cartesian halves: the suffering body deprived of agency, and the mastering, external rational agent.

But reproduction only becomes intelligible as a *project for women* if it is seen in non-dualistic ways, if the body and agency are not split. If it is seen as pure nature it is not a project for the woman, only a process, although it is a project for others, those who actively 'deliver her'. If it is seen as pure culture, it is a project, but one with the wrong features. In the case of its construal as pure culture, the 'project', conceived in instrumental terms as the production of a child, is perhaps best transferred to a surrogate, whether human or mechanical, and directed in the most efficient way to that end, by scientific personnel. It is only

when women are conceived as free agents and choosers with respect to their bodies and as full agents in their reproductive activity that this split is avoided. It is only in such freedom that women's reproductive life is not distorted.

Accordingly, a critical ecological feminism can reject both the distorted choices generated by nature/culture dualism; it can reject the model of women and women's reproductivity as undifferentiated nature, but it is also critical of the attempt to fit them into a model of oppositional and masculinised culture. The woman-directed movement towards redefining reproduction as powerful, creative and involving skill, care and knowledge with the reproductive woman as subject, should also be understood as the movement to transcending nature/culture dualism. The critical ecological feminism which results from this approach would contain no assumptions which were not acceptable from a feminist standpoint, and would represent a fuller development of feminist thought in taking better account of the category of nature: the key to so much of women's past and present oppression. As a political movement it would represent women's willingness to move to a further stage in their relations with nature, beyond that of powerless inclusion in nature, beyond that of reaction against their old exclusion from culture, and towards an active, deliberate and reflective positioning of themselves *with* nature against a destructive and dualising form of culture.

The programme of a critical ecological feminism orientated to the critique of dualism is a highly integrative one (Plumwood 1986:137; Warren 1987:17; 1990:132), and gives it a claim to be a third wave or stage of feminism moving beyond the conventional divisions in feminist theory. It is not a *tsunami*, a freak tidal wave which has appeared out of nowhere sweeping all before it. Rather, it is prefigured in and builds on work not only in ecofeminism but in radical feminism, cultural feminism and socialist feminism over the last decade and a half. At the same time, this critical ecological feminism conflicts with various other feminisms, by making an account of the connection to nature central in its understanding of feminism (Warren 1990). It rejects especially those aspects or approaches to women's liberation which endorse or fail to challenge the dualistic definition of women and nature and/or the inferior status of nature.

But, as I indicated, critical ecological feminism would also draw strength and integrate key insights from other forms of feminism, and hence have a basis for partial agreement with each. From early and liberal feminism it would take the original impulse to integrate women fully into human culture. Like cultural feminism, it believes this integration is only possible within a culture and concept of the human which is profoundly different from the one we have, one which abandons

the dualisms which have shaped western culture. But it does not see this in terms of a gynocentric model of the human, or a 'women's culture' grown from women's essential nature. From black, anti-colonialist and socialist feminism, I will argue in the next and subsequent chapters, a critical ecofeminism can draw an understanding of many of the processes and structures of power and domination which are embedded in dualisms. Such an anti-dualist ecological feminism must also be understood then as an integrative project with respect to other liberation struggles, for the dualisms which have characterised western culture, and which are linked philosophically to rationalism, also correspond in important ways to its main forms of repression, alienation and domination, as I argue next.