Feminism and Ecology: On the Domination of Nature

PATRICIA JAGENTOWICZ MILLS

This paper examines the attempt to bring together feminist and ecological concerns in the work of Isaac Balbus and Ynestra King, two thinkers who place the problem of the domination of nature at the center of contemporary liberation struggles. Through a consideration of the abortion issue (which foregrounds the relation between nature and history, and the problem of their "reconciliation") I argue against what I call their abstract pro-nature stance.

INTRODUCTION

The most insightful political interventions of the 1960s were directed to the problems and possibilities of a post-industrial society. The social critiques done by the first generation of the Frankfurt School (Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno) and the social ecology movement (developed primarily by Murray Bookchin) are two influential strains of radical social thought that contributed to and maintain the innovative politics of the sixties. In both these intellectual perspectives the major conflict is seen as that between industrial society and nature, rather than between classes within industrial society, with the focus on "domination" rather than "exploitation." These critiques, based on the domination of nature, go beyond the mere condemnation of the ecological crisis to reveal a connection between the domination of nonhuman nature, social domination, and psychological domination. They argue that as nature comes to be viewed as nothing more than the material for human domination, we develop an anthropocentric view in which we see ourselves as "the measure of all things." In this way we lose an awareness of the dialectical relation between nature and history, as we lose an awareness of ourselves as part of nature.[1] Nature becomes an external Other, merely the "stuff of domination," and we become blind to our true goals, those that will lead to self-realization and liberation. Both perspectives then point

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to that which is left out or denied by the domination of nature, as Otherness is extended to particular social groups. In this sense, the problem of the domination of nature is seen as theoretically central to women's liberation, Afro-American and Third World liberation, sexual liberation, native struggles, and the peace and ecology movements: all these movements are centrally formed by the repressive power of industrial society on what is perceived and formed by it as the external Other.

The New Left neo-Hegelianism of Isaac Balbus and the ecofeminism of Ynestra King each seek to use the concept of the domination of nature as a theoretical point of unification to clarify and unite contemporary political struggles. For both thinkers a form of Hegelian reconciliation is central to the realization of freedom insofar as this reconciliation is said to overcome the dualisms of mind and matter, nature and history, subject and object, self and Other.

In this paper I challenge the adequacy of their projects through a focus on what I term their "abstract pro-nature" stance. This stance entails a highly selective approach both to theory, by assuming that one can simply extract parts from several theoretical traditions and fuse them into a new whole, and to contemporary politics, by sidestepping the feminist issue of reproductive freedom as it relates to the issue of abortion. I will argue that the abstract pro-nature stance of Balbus and King develops a political program that views "Nature" as benign, cooperative, and sharing with humans a form of consciousness or subjectivity that is to be emulated; it leaves out of consideration its opposite or contradictory moment—the moment of nature "red in tooth and claw." I conclude that their abstract pro-nature stance ignores important elements of women's liberation by depoliticizing feminism, making it merely a handmaid of the ecology movement.[2]

Central to my argument is a consideration of the distortion and misappropriation by both Balbus and King of the work of Horkheimer and Adorno on the domination of nature. It is with the tradition of critical theory developed by Horkheimer and Adorno that the domination of nature emerges as *the* fundamental problem for a critique of society. With their work, Marx's critique of capitalist exploitation is renewed and extended in a critique of the domination of nature that attempts to uncover the psychic and social basis of the solidification of repressive society. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, do not romanticize nature or leave out of consideration the regressive moment of nature, "the revolt of nature" that characterized German fascism.

Hegel Reconsidered: Balbus and the Frankfurt School

In *Marxism and Domination: A Neo-Hegelian, Feminist, Psychoanalytic Theory of Sexual, Political, and Technological Liberation*, Isaac Balbus asserts that his project is to find a unifying principle for all the liberation movements in contemporary society. This principle is identified in terms of the domination

of nature, which grounds the process of objectification in society. The domination of nature is shown to entail social and psychic consequences that result in ecological crises, patriarchal domination, and repressive political forms in both capitalist and socialist societies. Instrumental reason (what Balbus calls the "instrumental mode of symbolization") is revealed as the specific form of reason through which nature is mastered. As a rationality of *means*, instrumental reason eliminates the question of *ends*, and in doing so it distorts not only the ends but also the means or techniques it uses by exalting them to ends. The unconscious roots of this instrumental logic or mode of symbolization are said to develop within a specific form of childcare in which women are the primary nurturers of infants (Balbus 1982, 269-302).[3]

In his effort to theorize and generate new possibilites of critical consciousness Balbus points to the necessity for a transformation in childrearing practices. Since the mode of childrearing is seen to determine significantly our unconscious life, and thereby to establish the limits of our ability to transform society as adults, a nondominating stance toward nature and others is to be achieved through shared heterosexual parenting. Leaning heavily on the work of Dorothy Dinnerstein, Balbus claims that fathers as well as mothers must be involved in the care of infants if we are to eliminate the development of an unconscious process that entails the domination of the Other as woman, nature, or political adversary. Once both men and women share the responsibility for childcare, the mother will no longer be seen as all-powerful, and with the dissolution of the first powerful (M)Other the logic of domination will disappear (303-52).

While the project of Balbus's book may be crucial for those interested in radical social change, the theoretical analysis developed by him for this political task is extremely problematic. We are led through an intellectual maze that begins with the work of Hegel and Marx, proceeds through Balbus's conception of Western or neo-Marxism, Marxist feminism, Freudianism, neo-Freudianism, feminist Freudianism, and a sociohistoric account of childrearing patterns. The theoretical pastiche Balbus creates as he journeys through this maze moves from logic to genetic theory, in an effort to discredit Marx's focus on the mode of production (which accepts the logic of the domination of nature) and thereby to discredit the working class as the revolutionary agent of social change. Balbus argues that repressive technology, the state, and patriarchy are relatively autonomous forms of domination that should not be seen as automatically determined by the mode of production. He claims that the childrearing practices by which ecologists, peace activists, and feminists have been raised have led them to create movements structured around the principles of participatory democracy, and these movements have thereby superseded the working class as the revolutionary subject of history (389-90).[4]

It is true, as Balbus shows, that the Hegelian problem of the relation between identity and difference is at the heart of the modern project to create a free and equal society. That is, within all liberation struggles of the 1990s there is

now a search for a form of intersubjective recognition (a relation between self and Other) that allows for concrete differences but does not on that account render the relation unequal by dominating the Other. However, it is *not* true that we can, as Balbus suggests, simply extract parts out of Hegel's system in order to eliminate some while we "apply" others. In fact, the abstraction of parts from the whole is precisely what Balbus faults neo-Marxists and Marxist feminists for doing with Marx's theory (4-6). The problem with Balbus's approach to Hegel emerges most clearly in his failure to address the problem of the domination of nature *within* Hegel's theory.

Balbus's claim that we can keep Hegel's notion of Absolute Knowledge as a final moment of reconciliation but eliminate the teleological movement of *Geist* or World Spirit on which it depends is extremely questionable (284-91). For Hegel, Spirit or *Geist* (self-thinking thought or the self-knowledge of the universe) moves dialectically through progressive stages in such a way that Spirit externalizes or alienates itself, overcomes this alienation or externalization, returns to itself, and is, finally, complete self-knowledge. Each of the initial stages of the dialectical process is "abstract" or "partial" because it leaves out its essential opposite. In each stage a contradictory "moment" or negation emerges through Spirit's self-alienation or externalization; a profound struggle between the two moments then takes place, from which emerges a third moment of reconciliation that simultaneously maintains, negates, and transcends the earlier moments. This is the negation of the negation that becomes a "positive" moment. Hegel uses a single term to describe this complex process: the original "moments" are *aufgehoben* (Hegel 1979, 1-57).

Through Hegelian dialectical logic, thought is said to think the relation between two concepts in such a way that both concepts are maintained—one is not dissolved into the other—while at the same time a true unity or reconciliation is achieved in the third moment. Thus, dialectical logic is said to reveal the movement of life as a process that overcomes the conceptual dualism or mutual exclusivity of the concepts of the understanding (*Verstand*). At the stage of reason or *Vernunft*, a higher unity of concepts emerges, fusing concepts without canceling out their differences: reason can apprehend the concepts in an identity-in-difference. Hegelian logic, therefore, claims to overcome the dualisms of subject and object, mind and matter, nature and history, self and Other.

Hegel assumes a necessary connection between his system of philosophy, its dialectical movement, and the historical evolution of humanity. Consciousness or Spirit does not transcend historical experience. Rather, rationality is nourished by history such that there are correlations between stages of the dialectic of consciousness and historical transformation. For Hegel the goal of philosophy is to present systematically the structure and teleological movement of Spirit, which culminates in the universe's knowledge of itself. Nature is conceived as Spirit's opposite, but it is an opposite that is the necessary

precondition for the realization of the dialectical movement of Spirit's self-development. However, as the philosophical thought of Hegel attempts to recognize and conquer the actual world, nature gradually passes over into Spirit as its higher truth.

Rather than offering a *new* relation to nature as Balbus claims, Adorno has shown that Hegelian identity theory—the theory that latent in contradictions is an ultimate unity or identity-in-difference of subject and object, mind and matter, universal and particular, history and nature—has always meant domination: of the subject over the object, mind over matter, universal over particular, history over nature. Adorno, therefore, rejects Hegelian identity theory and attempts to provide a dialectical theory that remains a "negative dialectic" such that there is no third or final "positive" moment of identity as domination; it is a theory of nonidentity in which the "reconciliation" of difference is not one of domination but freedom (Adorno 1973, 146-74).

For Adorno "the matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel . . . expressed his disinterest. They are the nonconceptual, the individual, the particular . . . what Hegel called 'lazy Existenz' " (1973, 8; amended translation). While Adorno argues that identity philosophy is animated by a hostility to the Other, which results in the domination of all that is *deemed* Other, and necessarily excludes certain forms of experience, some feminists have argued that woman as Other has been "feared, idealized, and negated": she has been defined as different from man, and as the ontological principle of difference itself, to be dominated and excluded (Butler 1985). Thus, a theory of nonidentity becomes a prerequisite for a theory of women's liberation. Adorno argues for such a theory in *Negative Dialectics*, claiming that the nonidentity of nature and history, subject and object, particular and universal, does not mean an absolute dualism but a dialectic whose "reconciliation" avoids the annihilation of the Other: "The reconciled condition would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien [the Other]. Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own" (Adorno 1973, 191).

Balbus argues that the elimination of the domination of nature is to be achieved by a transformation of consciousness, the creation of a "postobjectifying mode of symbolization," that transcends objectification. With this change in consciousness, nature will no longer be the dominated object, the "alien, recalcitrant other," but will be understood as "an end in itself" (Balbus 1982, 285). For Balbus this occurs by moving beyond the anthropomorphic stance in which humans see themselves as "the measure of all things" to "the more modest, ecologically sound assumption that nature cannot be outwitted and that, in fact, 'Nature knows best' "(365). The result is that "human interaction with nature once again becomes a meaningful experience" (285). Balbus's position *may* be useful for the ecology, peace, and anti-nuclear move-

ments, but it creates profound problems for many feminists because "Nature" in its "wisdom" creates not only ecological balance but unwanted pregnancies. That is, without a more careful analysis of the dialectical relation between nature and history, the "natural" event of pregnancy emerges as an end in itself rather than as part of the human historical enterprise. And this creates the possibility for interpreting abortion as a form of the domination of nature.

The "meaningful experience" of the interaction between humans and nature in Balbus's work amounts to an elevation of nature "itself" and a vagueness about how the "natural" world is to be transformed through historical intervention. Balbus's abstract pro-nature stance leaves the politics of abortion in limbo at best and, at worst, undermines those feminist arguments about the necessity for reproductive freedom based on the transformation of nature for human ends.[5] This stance is also the basis for the conflict between native groups, who live by hunting wolves, seals, or bears, and urban-based groups, who oppose all killing of animals. And of course, "Nature" creates famine, flood, and disease as well as ecological balance.

Within much feminist theory and within Balbus's analysis, there has been a shift away from the politics of abortion (non-motherhood) to a concern with reclaiming motherhood. But the liberatory roots of the attempt to reclaim and reconstruct motherhood *began* with women who found themselves suffering from the alienation of enforced motherhood—women who found themselves pregnant when they did not want to be and were forced either to have an unwanted child or to risk death with an illegal abortion. The politics of reproduction cannot forget its origins: it cannot be reduced to a call for a reconciliation with nature achieved through a form of shared heterosexual parenting that does not confront the issue of abortion. Pregnancy, understood as part of the historical enterprise, challenges any facile formulation of a "reconciliation" of nature with history. Feminists must remain committed first and foremost to a woman's right to choose *not* to reproduce, the right to *not* mother, because the compulsory motherhood that results from seeing pregnancy as merely "natural" maintains the domination of women within a patriarchal society. In addition, feminists must affirm the right to choose the form of birth (midwife/hospital) and to choose between heterosexual shared parenting and woman-only motherhood.[6]

Balbus admits that feminism is the weak link in his argument for the unification of the feminist, ecology, and participatory democracy movements. However, he believes that this is because the prolonged pre-Oedipal identification between sons and mothers creates a radical male psyche able to support ecology and participatory democracy while still retaining an unconscious need to dominate women (393). Against this claim, I believe that the political insufficiencies of his work are rooted in the theoretical eclecticism of an abstract pro-nature stance that entails a dismissive rather than a critical approach to the work of Horkheimer and Adorno on the domination of nature.

Whereas Balbus states that the work of Horkheimer and Adorno amounts to nothing more than a footnote to Hegel (283), I would argue that the problem of the domination of nature is most powerfully articulated by these two members of the Frankfurt School.[7] Unlike their colleague Marcuse, who remains committed to identity theory as a form of Hegelian reconciliation with nature, Horkheimer and Adorno challenge this position as they analyze the destructive tendencies of "the revolt of nature" and oppose any romantic idealization of nature.[8]

There are, however, several important theoretical positions that Horkheimer and Adorno share with Balbus: they reject labor as the necessary source of liberation; they are concerned with overcoming the domination of nature by reconstituting subjectivity and eliminating the psychic oppression that maintains self-domination (what Kate Millet calls "interior colonization" or the internalization of the characteristics of oppression); and they hold to a theory of the relative autonomy of the psyche, the family, and cultural and political spheres. But while Balbus, like Marcuse, wants to reclaim Hegel, the formulations of Horkheimer and Adorno show the necessity for departing from the Hegelian system. They offer a sustained critique of the notion of reconciliation in Hegel's philosophy, which, they argue, creates a closed and uncritical system that maintains the domination of all that is deemed Other.

Within their critique of the domination of nature Horkeimer and Adorno distinguish the rational mastery of nature from its irrational forms, and they contend that a new and qualitatively different relation between humanity and nature is possible. However, they also retain a tension between the liberatory and repressive aspects of nature. That is, while these theorists search for a new relation to nature in terms of the historical possibilities of nature, they also analyze the regressive moments of nature that led to the rise of fascism. For Horkheimer and Adorno, German fascism, with its cry for a return to "blood and soil," was a form of nature's revenge on history: the "revolt of nature" against domination was transformed under fascism into an expression of the return of repressed nature in distorted and savage form (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, 185-86). They root emancipatory promise in the necessity to *remember* nature, not in nature "itself": "By virtue of this remembrance of nature in the subject, in whose fulfillment the unacknowledged truth of all culture lies hidden, enlightenment is universally opposed to domination" (1972, 40). Memory breaks the vicious circle of dominated consciousness and opens the vision of a free future. For Horkheimer and Adorno it is the memory of distortion and suffering resulting from the domination of nature that motivates critique.[9] The domination of nature distorts repressed instincts, and the fragments of this distorted nature, though they may give rise to the vision of utopia, cannot erase the suffering of historical and psychological experience.

Adorno declares: "The suppression of nature for human ends is a mere natural relationship, which is why the supremacy of nature-controlling reason and its principle is a delusion. . . . The subject's desperate self-exaltation is its

reaction to the experience of its impotence, which prevents self-reflection" (1973, 179-80). The domination of nature is a consequence *of* nature insofar as it is the result of the lack of self-reflection. Given this analysis, Horkheimer declares that "the sole way of assisting nature is to unshackle its seeming opposite, independent thought" (1974, 127). From this perspective Balbus represents an abstract pro-nature position, a position that advocates a naive reconciliation of humanity with nature that does not take into account the danger, distortion, and compulsion of "nature itself."

The work of Murray Bookchin, which has been influenced by the Frankfurt School, understands the complexity of the relation between freedom and barbarism within nature. In *The Ecology of Freedom* Bookchin notes that "an ecological ethics is not patterned on a naive vision of the natural world—either as it exists today or as it might exist in a 'pacified' social future. The wolf has no business lying down with a lamb" (1982, 277). However, Bookchin has a deep disagreement with the Frankfurt School. Whereas Horkheimer and Adorno maintain a conceptual distinction between human self-consciousness and nature, Bookchin regards nature as already imbued with consciousness as subjectivity: "From the biochemical responses of a plant to its environment to the most willful actions of a scientist in the laboratory, a common bond of primal subjectivity inheres in the very organization of 'matter' itself. In this sense, the human mind has never been alone, even in the most inorganic of surroundings" (1982, 276). This avers that plants share with humans some form of consciousness although what that consciousness is, is not clear. Here the philosophical dispute between the Frankfurt School and Bookchin touches on the most fundamental issue raised by critiques of the domination of nature: the question of the relation between human self-consciousness and nature. The political philosophy of the Frankfurt School derives the distinction between human self-consciousness and nature from German idealism (Hegel) through Marxism. While Marcuse differs from Horkheimer and Adorno in terms of his commitment to some form of Hegelian reconciliation, all three argue from a dialectical formulation that entails a rejection of what they see as the one-sided or partial position of anarchism. Even if one grants a form of "natural consciousness" to the animal and nonhuman world, that does not clarify the difference between "natural consciousness" and human *self*-consciousness, nor does it reveal how "nature" is to be understood as an "end in itself." Bookchin's work, rooted in an anarchist perspective, argues for the necessity to step outside the tradition of Hegelian Marxism to focus on a new understanding of nature as "subjective" "in-itself."[10]

Ynestra King's Ecofeminism: Critical Theory Denied

Clearly, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Bookchin's work on nature reveal a fundamental incompatibility, yet in her early work, Ynestra

King attempts to use both sources as if they were not only compatible but profoundly so. King's "analysis," like that of Balbus, is an eclectic pastiche that does not confront the contradictions that emerge in the attempt to combine disparate theoretical perspectives. Like Balbus, King attempts to link the ecology and feminist movements through a consideration of the problem of the domination of nature, and, like Balbus, she maintains an abstract pro-nature stance that calls for a reconciliation with nature that does not deal with the issue of abortion. But whereas Balbus explicitly attempts to rehabilitate Hegel, King takes a rhetorical stance that calls for, but refuses, the difficult conceptual analysis of a philosophy of nature required by her position. And while Balbus takes over 300 pages to make his argument, King does it in a few short articles, so that her theoretical insufficiencies are more excusable if not less problematic.

In one of the first ecofeminist articles, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," King focuses on a critique of dualistic philosophies that have denigrated nature and women; at the same time, however, she wants not only to affirm but to strengthen the connection between nature and women, and infers that women speak *for* nature (1983, 17 and 19). She claims that although the association of woman with nature as Other has in the past been one of domination, it can now be consciously embraced by women in the present to overcome dualisms, the domination of nature, and the domination of women. King argues that the association of woman with nature gives women "a particular stake in ending the domination of nature" that has poisoned the earth, created ecological chaos, and put us at the edge of nuclear annihilation (1983, 16). King's ecofeminism not only retains but accentuates the personification of nature as female, which becomes the plea to "save our mother-earth." From this perspective, women are not only responsible for their own liberation but become uniquely responsible for all life. And here, of course, is where the ecofeminist position becomes treacherous for a feminist politics of reproductive freedom. If women are "responsible" for life and an abstract pro-nature stance is advocated which claims that "Nature itself knows best" or that "Nature must become an end in itself," then the issue of a woman's right to abortion on demand is at risk. While it may be that some ecofeminists have resolved this tension for themselves, it is remarkable that in this groundbreaking article King is silent on the issue of the feminist concern to control one's own body.

Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of woman's association with nature as Other in *The Second Sex* is reclaimed by King, who then resists the logic of de Beauvoir's argument. De Beauvoir argues that man sees woman as that which calls him back to his natural state and makes him remember his own mortality. Woman's reproductive power, her ability to create new life, is said to be rooted in the immanence of nature, which pulls man back to his body, back to the fragility of the human condition in which each new beginning, each new birth,

necessarily ends in death. This is the source of the womb/tomb association. Since man wants to forget his mortality, to transcend the flesh, he learns to objectify and dominate nature and to dominate woman as the representative of nature.

While de Beauvoir is noted by King for revealing the problem of the association of woman with nature as Other, she is promptly chastised for maintaining a dualism that urges women to get *beyond* this association rather than to embrace it. It is true that de Beauvoir accepts a dualistic ontology and valorizes (male) transcendence, but it is important to remember that for de Beauvoir women are no more or less connected to nature than are men. When asked whether she thought women had a special mission in terms of pacifism and the peace movement, de Beauvoir replied that such a claim was "absurd!—because women should desire peace as human beings, not as women! That whole line is completely irrational. . . . And if [women are] being encouraged to be pacifists in the name of motherhood, that's just a ruse by men who are trying to lead women back to the womb. Besides, it's quite obvious that once they're in power, women are exactly like men."[11]

For King, pacifism, defined as "the organic praxis of nonoppositional opposition" (1989, 132), is central to ecofeminism. This pacifism seems to emerge from woman's association with nature, originating in her unique capacity to bear and rear children. Thus in King's early article, "masculinity," revealed in the aggressive domination of women by men, is seen as the source of all exploitation and domination. What is implied in this position is that women are "better" than men, can achieve solidarity in diversity more easily than men, and, through an alternative, morally superior life-style to man's, can act to purify the politics of the ecology movement that has not dealt with male domination.[12]

In her most recent work, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism," King argues against the position she seemed to fall into earlier as she attempts to distance herself from the ecofeminism of Mary Daly and Susan Griffin. Here, Daly is shown to advocate a simple reversion of old dualisms, rather than providing a way beyond them, in her reification of the female over the male (King 1989, 124). Griffin's work, which King locates "somewhere between theory and poetry," is said to overemphasize what women share as victims of patriarchal oppression and lends itself to romanticizing the connection between women and nature, claiming that women retain a "natural" moral goodness due to their separation from the depravity of male culture and history (1989, 124-25). By focusing on what is common to women both theorists, according to King, underestimate the problem of differences among women, problems of race, class, ethnicity, and religion.

While I agree with King's assessment of Daly and Griffin, I find that her "arguments" remain rhetorical and polemical, so that this later work is no more sophisticated in its analysis and no closer to the "precise political philosophy

and program" that she calls for than is her earlier piece. King's programmatic plundering of theories (the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Bookchin's anarchism, socialist feminism, radical cultural feminism), which is meant to bolster the political project of ecofeminism, remains rooted in an abstract pro-nature stance that continues to *call* for theory but rarely provides it. She tells us over and over again that we must have a "truly dialectical theory" and a "reconciliation with nature" in order to "get beyond dualism," but she refuses the difficult conceptual work that might get us there. King's concern is first and foremost one of political practice—theory is the handmaid of practice for her, as feminism is the handmaid of the ecology movement.

In her search for the dialectical praxis that is to point the way to freedom, King refers to the important political work done by the women's health movement in the West to rescue childbirth from "medical experts," thereby reclaiming women's power over our bodies and our lives. But even as she reclaims a focus on women's procreational power she again fails to delineate a politics of abortion, offering no principle for grounding the feminist struggle for reproductive freedom.[13] She also cites "the hugging movement" initiated by women in India who wrap themselves around trees to prevent the destruction of their forests. These two movements represent the "nonoppositional opposition" that is the foundation of King's ecofeminist politics.

When King does turn to theory, she offers a critique of what she sees as the three dominant forms of feminism (liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism) in terms of the problem of the domination of nature. What she then puts forward as a "solution" is an ecofeminism that is said to be a dialectical "synthesis" of radical cultural feminism and socialist feminism.[14] According to King this synthesis offers a "standpoint theory"[15] that both recognizes biological difference while it recognizes women as unique historical agents who do the mediating work ("mothering, cooking, healing, farming, foraging") that bridges the relation between nature and culture (1989, 130).

While critical of radical cultural feminism for its biological determinism, King argues that it has at least recognized the importance of "natural" sexual difference for the social world (1989, 129). And although King is critical of socialist feminism for its Marxist inclination to maintain the domination of nature and the social construction of reality (to the detriment of the qualitative, imaginative, and spiritual aspects of human life), she sees it as offering a resistance to the erasure of the subject by postmodernism. Beginning from the gynocentrism of radical cultural feminism we are to move to a "greener" and more "spiritual" socialist feminism that recants the domination of nature. According to King, "Separately [socialist feminism and radical cultural feminism] perpetuate the dualism of 'mind' and 'nature.' Together they make possible a new ecological relationship between nature and culture, in which mind and nature, heart and reason, join forces to transform the internal and external systems of domination that threaten the existence of life on earth" (1989, 132).

Just how is this dialectical "synthesis" of socialist feminism and radical cultural feminism to take place? Is this merely another form of neo-Hegelianism that is being called for? It seems so, insofar as King calls for a dialectical reconciliation of opposites in a final moment of identity-in-difference. If King's ecofeminism is just another form of neo-Hegelianism, then the fact that Hegel's philosophy remains committed to the domination of nature and all that is deemed Other prevents the realization of her project. If this is not a form of neo-Hegelianism, then how are we to understand King's project in which we are to take only what King deems "good" from each form of feminism while leaving aside what is "bad?" Without a more profound analysis of the contradictions that emerge out of the confrontation between these two forms of feminism, the call for their synthesis remains conceptually incoherent. It returns us to the problem of extracting parts from the whole, which was shown to be treacherous in my earlier critique of Balbus.

If the domination of nature is central to Marxism, in that Marx views freedom as the movement out of "natural" necessity *through* the domination of nature, what is left of socialism without it? Adorno has argued that Marx's advocacy of the domination of nature is in contradiction to the principle of nonidentity that is fundamental to dialectical materialism (Adorno 1973, 244), but King offers no such theoretical argument. Instead, King's position recalls earlier feminist analyses that saw an androgynous "synthesis" as the solution to the division between men and women: that is, King's synthesis and the androgynous synthesis both assume that they are referring to "the kinds of opposites which, when combined, will yield a proper balance of moderation" resulting in the "good" of each being combined (Morgan 1982, 256). This assumption has been shown to be untenable in the androgyny debates and, by extension, can be seen to undermine King's position.

King calls for "a new dialectical way of thinking about our relationship to nature to realize the full meaning and potential of feminism, a social ecological feminism." For her "the domination of nature originates in society and therefore must be resolved in society" (1989, 131). Moreover,

> both feminism and ecology embody the revolt of nature against human domination. They demand that we rethink the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature, including our natural, embodied selves. In ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of the interrelated domination of nature—psyche, and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature—and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminist theory. (1989, 132)

Given these statements, and the fact that King has cited Horkheimer and Adorno in her first essay (1983, 16-18), one might reasonably expect her to

turn explicitly to the work of Horkheimer and Adorno. Curiously, King *denies* the work of the Frankfurt School even as she appropriates its conceptual framework. She writes: "All hitherto existing philosophies of liberation, with the possible exception of some forms of social anarchism, accept the anthropomorphic notion that humanity should dominate nature and that the increasing domination of nonhuman nature is a precondition for true human freedom" (1989, 117). Now this last statement is patently false. The critical theory of the Frankfurt School provides a sustained, dialectical critique of the domination of nature, which, I would argue, makes it the most advanced philosophy of liberation of our time.

Instead of developing a feminist critical theory based on the concept of the domination of nature in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, King simultaneously denies and misuses their work. When she claims, for example, that "both feminism and ecology embody the revolt of nature against human domination," she "borrows" Horkheimer's analysis but wrongly suggests that the revolt of nature is necessarily progressive. For example, in the *Eclipse of Reason* Horkheimer argues that the domination of nature calls forth psychic and social revolt, but, as he sees it, there is nothing *necessarily* progressive in this revolt which can be manipulated by existing institutional powers to justify and maintain their domination.[16] In *Minima Moralia* Adorno explicitly links this understanding of the revolt of nature to feminist issues. Woman's domination, according to Adorno, creates feminine characteristics that lead to an abnegative reconciliaton with nature, a reconciliation that does not challenge domination but reinforces it.[17] The assumption of the necessary progressiveness of the revolt of nature, rather than a careful consideration of this concept, is part of King's abstract pro-nature stance that refuses to acknowledge, much less analyze, the way in which an image of nature as "all good" can become part of the process of domination.

Conclusion

What emerges out of Balbus's neo-Hegelian thought and King's ecofeminism is what I have called an abstract pro-nature stance. Correctly perceiving that the domination of nature is the underlying issue for the liberation movements of the 1990s, this position suggests the elevation of nature "itself" as the creator of values but does not offer a "concrete" or comprehensive understanding of the problem of the domination of nature in that it ignores the regressive moment of nature that Horkheimer and Adorno focus on in their analysis. While the abstract pro-nature position points to the difficult task of developing a coherent philosophy of nature it simultaneously avoids this task by embracing neo-Hegelianism. Balbus's position is rooted in an explicit neo-Hegelianism, while King's seems rooted in an implicit one. Both theorists call for a reconciliation with nature, but both adopt a facile notion of the reconciliation of

difference that does not address the problem of the domination of nature *within* Hegel's philosophy. And neither one considers the question of an abnegative or regressive reconciliation with nature that Horkheimer and Adorno discuss.

Both Balbus and King assume that an eclectic pastiche of theories can "somehow" provide us with a model of liberation that will realize a harmonious reconciliation with nature. In both cases feminism serves merely to purify the ecological movement (by removing male domination from its ranks) while the focus on nature in the ecology movement depoliticizes feminism. The purification of political life and the reconciliation with nature are achieved, for Balbus, through the transformation of parenting meant to defuse the power of the first (M)Other and through a coalition of various liberation movements. King, on the other hand, claims that a "progressive" reconciliation with nature will be achieved when women consciously embrace nature and the natural world in the development of their politics. The reconciliation with nature entails everything from a rethinking of motherhood to the hugging of trees, but omits consideration of the issue of abortion. Thus, where Balbus's New Left neo-Hegelianism and King's ecofeminism may be rhetorically significant in terms of the political project of the ecology movement, their abstract pro-nature stance is theoretically unsound and paves the way for the erosion of women's reproductive freedom.

We must move beyond an abstract pro-nature stance as we move beyond the theoretical dependence on Hegel's concept of reconciliation. Rhetoric and neo-Hegelianism must give way to a sustained feminist critical theory that begins from the work of Horkheimer and Adorno on the domination of nature. Such a feminist critical theory would not judge theory solely in terms of its direct application in practice nor use feminism as a mere handmaid of the ecology movement.[18]

NOTES

1. The concept of the dialectical relation between nature and history is sometimes discussed by the authors under consideration as the dialectical relation between nature and culture. Since both concepts are meant to describe the same concern, I have used "nature and history" throughout my discussion to maintain consistency.

2. The concerns of ecofeminism are valid and are not sufficiently addressed in any other form of feminism. Thus, my argument here is not meant to belittle the project set out by Balbus and King but rather to point out the enormity of the theoretical task it presents and the immaturity of the solutions they offer. What emerges from Balbus's eclecticism and King's rhetorical stance is what Adorno calls the Janus-faced argument of contradiction, which presents oppositions and assumes the possibility of a reconciliation but does not analyze contradictions to the point of their own reversal.

3. According to Balbus the domination of nature is a "collective neurosis" originating in the process of our separation from the mother within "mother-monopolized"

childcare, which leaves us unable to accept our own death. Thus, the problem of death (Norman O. Brown) rather than objectification (Marx) or sex (Freud) is the focus of his work.

4. Balbus runs into some difficulty here since this theory cannot explain the activism of Native Americans, the Young Lords, Black Panthers, or anyone else who has not been reared according to white-Western child-centered models. In fact, this model doesn't quite explain white middle-class feminist activism to Balbus's own satisfaction (Balbus 1982, 394-95).

5. To say that nature must become "an end in itself" hardly articulates a principle that can ground a feminist politics of abortion on demand. This position, in which the interpretation of the "end" or *telos* of nature is left in limbo, lends aid and comfort to those within the peace, ecology, and antinuclear movements in the United States who don "the seamless garment" of an abstract pro-life politics that entails an antiabortion stand. For a discussion of the conflict between an abstract pro-nature or abstract pro-life politics and a feminist perspective see Hentoff (1985), Willis (1985) and Pollitt (1985). The same debate appeared in the pages of *The Nonviolent Activist*, a publication put out by the War Resisters League. (See the May-June 1985 and July-August 1985 issues.) According to a report in *off our backs* (August-September 1985, 7), an antiabortion group called Feminists for Life was spawned by this debate.

6. The reclaiming of motherhood is a contentious issue among feminists. Balbus, following Dinnerstein and Chodorow, sees only negative features in human development due to the absence of the father from early childcare. This analysis, however, is quite different from those that see "female-mothering" as the basis for the transformation of society. Feminists like Adrienne Rich, Sara Ruddick, Joanne Ryan, and Caroline Whitbeck find positive features in "mother-raised" children and want to use these features to ground a model of the nondominating relation of self and Other. (See especially Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*.) Even those who agree with Dinnerstein, Chodorow, and Balbus that shared heterosexual parenting is a feminist goal recognize that there are potential dangers. For example, men are not nurturers by training and so may not be able to give the infant the nurturance it requires; men are the source of most familial incest; and men may attempt to divest women of their children in situations in which women have little else.

The emphasis on reclaiming motherhood in feminist theory in the United States often obscures the fact that there are still many unwilling mothers bearing unwanted children and women dying from illegal abortions all over the world.

7. My argument with Balbus first appeared in a review essay of his book entitled "Man-Made Motherhood and Other Sleights of Hand" (*Phenomenology and Pedagogy* 3, no. 3, 1985). The critique offered here is a synopsis of that article.

8. This is not to suggest that the philosophical positions of Horkheimer and Adorno are identical. Despite their collaboration on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they develop different perspectives over time so that liberatory potential is found finally in religion for Horkheimer and in "genuine" philosophy and "autonomous" art for Adorno.

9. Adorno writes: "The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth" (Adorno 1973, 17-18); and Horkheimer declares that nature is "a text to be interpreted by philosophy, that if rightly read will unfold a tale of infinite suffering" (Horkheimer, 1974, 126). While Horkheimer and Adorno focus on the memory of suffering, Marcuse focuses on the memory of happiness as redemptive, particularly in *Eros and Civilization*.

10. In a speculative vein, it seems to me that Bookchin's conception of nature maintains a deep affinity with the origins of American nature philosophy as found in Emerson and Thoreau.

11. Interview with Simone de Beauvoir in *Ms.* (August 1983), as cited by Terry Mehlman, Debbie Swanner, and Midge Quandt, "Obliteration as a Feminist Issue," in *Feminism Lives!* (March 1984). This article is a radical feminist critique of ecofeminism that details the development and consequences of an abstract pro-nature position on the project of women's liberation.

12. While King claims that men raised in our woman-hating culture learn to dominate women for psychological reasons, she never addresses the implications for *women* raised in such a culture. Do we have no psychological problems in terms of our self-identity and our attempts at female solidarity that emerge from this woman-hating culture? I would argue that we do have such problems and that the path to liberation through female solidarity requires an awareness of these difficulties rather than a denial of them.

13. In her reply to Kirkpatrick Sale's assessment of ecofeminism in *The Nation* (December 12, 1987), King implies that she is "pro-choice" (730). My argument here is to be understood not in terms of what she claims about her personal politics but in terms of the analysis she gives, which, in its abstract pro-nature stance, offers no principle for a pro-abortion position.

14. King distinguishes radical rationalist feminists (those who repudiate the connection between women and nature) from radical cultural feminists (those who emphasize this connection and emphasize female difference). For a more historical and comprehensive account of the development of radical feminism from its roots in the New Left to its degeneration into cultural feminism, see Ellen Willis (1984) and Alice Echols (1989).

15. Standpoint theory attempts to articulate an epistemology beginning from the social location of patriarchal domination which allows women to make particular knowledge claims that are not reducible to biological determinism. See Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Alison M. Jaggar (1983, 369-71 and 377-89).

16. In the *Eclipse of Reason* Horkheimer argues that repressed desires generate a resentment, against civilization and against the self, that intensifies the more society dominates nature. Due to the inherent distortion of the instincts by repression (as described by Freud), the revolt of nature against civilization is complicit with, and tends to extend, those very aspects of civilization that maintain domination.

17. Adorno writes: "The feminine character, and the ideal of femininity on which it is modelled, are products of masculine society. The image of undistorted nature arises only in distortion, as its opposite. Where it claims to be humane, masculine society imperiously breeds in woman its own corrective, and shows itself through this limitation implacably the master. The feminine character is a negative imprint of domination. But therefore equally bad. . . . Glorification of the feminine character implies the humiliation of all who bear it" (1974, 95-96).

18. Elsewhere (Mills, 1987) I attempt to develop a feminist critical theory beginning from an analysis of the work of Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno on the relationship between the domination of nature and the domination of women.

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