

Gender, Sovereignty, and Environmental Ethics*

by

Juliann Emmons Allison
Department of Political Science, University of California
900 University Avenue, Riverside, CA 92521-1008
(951) 827-4582 (phone), (951) 827-3933 (fax)
juliann@ucr.edu

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ABSTRACT

This essay bridges international relations research on global environmental politics and feminist moral theory to provide an understanding of sovereignty that recognizes the importance of human consciousness and agency in creating the social and political institutions that would govern a sustainable world community. It begins with an overview of how political theorists and international relations scholars have conceptualized sovereignty. This discussion illuminates the promise of popular sovereignty, and the corresponding need for an environmental ethic to meet the global challenge of ecological scarcity. It is followed by an introduction to feminist scholarship on the ethics of care that suggests an argument for the international relevance of contextually specific dispositions and caring practices intended to heal and sustain our world. Next, I argue that care exists in practice and may be promoted effectively as a kind of popular sovereignty insofar as it advances the collective expression of individual choices made within an ethical framework befitting the establishment of locally, regionally, and globally sustainable ecosystems and livable societies.

Gender, Sovereignty, and Environmental Ethics

Every man is, naturally, sovereign of his own energies and can use them as suits him, but the law of the society of which he is a member forbids him certain uses of them and enjoins him certain other uses.

Bertrand De Jouvenal

Technological change and the consequent “shrinking” of world has made it difficult, if not impossible, for sovereign states individually and the international system as a whole to “...insure basic values, such as peace, security, welfare, and *conservation*” (Jackson 1999, 427). With respect to the natural environment, in particular, the problem is that states continue to claim sovereignty over the resources and activities within their own territorial boundaries; yet they are “under mounting pressure to manage their resources according to internationally agreed upon norms” (Litfin 1998, 1). As such, contemporary international environmental politics challenge international relations scholars and practitioners alike to confront issues and respond to questions that have long been within

the purview of environmental ethics, and resonant among feminist theorists and activists. Environmental ethicists ask questions, such as: What kind of world do we desire? What ought to be the relationship among humans and between human beings and nature? How should our political and social institutions be designed and constituted to yield the earth that we want to live on now and one day leave to our children? Such normative inquiry is likewise characteristic of feminist concerns with understanding the ways in which gender structures constrain the lives of women, and often also men, and prescribing the means by which hierarchical political and social institutions might be changed (Robinson 1999; Tickner 2001).

This essay constructs necessary theoretical and practical connections between international relations research on global environmental politics and feminist moral theory to develop an understanding of sovereignty that recognizes the importance of human consciousness and agency in creating the social and political institutions that would govern a sustainable world community. I begin with an overview of how political theorists and international relations scholars have conceptualized sovereignty intended to illuminate the promise of popular sovereignty, and the corresponding need for an environmental ethic to meet the global challenge of ecological scarcity. I follow this call for an effective international environmental ethic with a discussion of feminist scholarship on care and ecofeminism that establishes the international relevance of contextually specific dispositions and caring practices intended to heal and sustain our world. Next, I argue that care already exists in practice and may be promoted as a kind of popular sovereignty insofar as it advances the collective expression of individual choices made within an ethical framework befitting the establishment of locally, regionally, and globally sustainable ecosystems and livable societies.

SOVEREIGNTY, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, AND ETHICS

Scholarly research on sovereignty is divided between those who concern themselves with questions of territorial or Westphalian sovereignty, and those who emphasize the increasing importance of the popular sovereignty that requires democratic forms of national governance (Onuf 1991; Jackson 1999; James 1999; Krasner 1999). Territorial sovereignty is both the most general and the best documented of the two types of sovereignty and implies that a national government is supreme within its jurisdiction, and free of foreign and international authorities. It is just this kind of *external* sovereignty that is arguably threatened by today's interdependent economies and ecologies (Cusimano 2006).

For some scholars, such threats are practically inconsequential. Stephen Krasner (1999 2091), for instance, concludes his evaluation of the contemporary sovereignty by acknowledging the continuing importance of power and interests over norms. Peter Haas and Jan Sundgren (1993) suggest, more specifically, that international environmental institutions have facilitated the “greening” of state practices rather than the transformation of state sovereignty. Other scholars allow that although states are still the primary actors in international environmental politics, the increasing activism of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and environmental movements and the emergent global civil society has effectively extended authority to govern the natural environment beyond the state (Lipschutz and Mayer 1996; Wapner 1996). Yet John Ruggie contends:

The global ecological implosion inherently invites epochal thinking, yet analytically informed empirical studies of “ozone diplomacy” or attempts to save the Mediterranean invariably focus on negotiation processes and the dynamics of regime construction, as opposed to exploring the

possibility of fundamental institutional discontinuity in the system of states (1993, 143).

His position resounds the more general argument that we are unlikely to solve the social, economic, and political challenges associated with ecological scarcity within the confines of the state system because ultimately these obstacles are not territorially bounded.

The predominance of territory-based conceptualizations of sovereignty in the international relations literature notwithstanding, *internal* sovereignty has become increasingly relevant to international environmental politics. This popular variant of sovereignty privileges the authority of a population to act on its own behalf (Barkin and Cronin 1994). As such, it associates a state's or territory's authority to act with the political will or consent of the population residing within its boundaries—that is, it is “the people” who are “the final source of state legitimacy” (Mayall 1995, 484) This simple, widely accepted relationship between the sovereignty of a people and the territory within which they live may be considered problematic, though. According to James Mayall, contemporary international politics contests the contingent origins of national boundaries, and:

belies the fact that in those cases where boundaries do change, the new map quickly becomes as sacred and consequently as un-negotiable, as the old. When we contemplate the levels of destruction and human suffering that have frequently resulted from the defense of these boundaries, it might be prudent for statesmen, scholars and lawyers to adopt a more open-minded approach to territoriality than they have customarily done (1995, 487).

Janice Thomson is likewise cognizant of the violence that often results from popular claims to legitimate control of designated territory; however, she faults state exercise of sovereignty in multilateral, international institutions far from societal control, rather than the state itself as the rightful agent of the people (1995, 230).

Such concerns about state legitimacy are among those broached by the coterie of scholars who have begun to think specifically about the relationships between sovereignty and ecological interdependence (Haas and Sundgren 1993; Barkin and Cronin 1994; Conca 1994; Conca 1994; Wapner 1996; Schrijver 1997; Lipschutz 1998; Litfin 1998). One particularly influential collection views sovereignty as a socially constructed institution with multiple meanings *and* practices varying over time and space (Litfin 1998, 4). From this vantage point, changes in how we perceive sovereignty do not move predictably in any one direction, and hence are not evolutionary. Rather, we experience sovereignty as a consequence of the norms chosen to govern international relations (Bartelson 1995).

Thus:

when international norms legitimize state rather than national sovereignty, the international community and its institutions will tend to defend the rights of established states...[W]hen the norms of the international order favor national over state sovereignty, the international community will be more sympathetic to pleas for national self-determination (Barkin and Cronin 1994, 108)

This approach recognizes that states most often have the authority, legitimacy, resources, and control required to enforce international environmental agreements, and consequently, provides some support for territorial sovereignty as a source of environmental protection (Litfin 1998). Paul Wapner (1998), for example, chronicles the

tempering of the Harmon Doctrine of 1895—an early international environmental document that favored territorial sovereignty over protecting the natural environment—to reflect the international principle of good neighborliness. This widely accepted principle upholds states’ sovereign control of natural resources within their territorial boundaries, yet charges states to use these resources only in ways that do not harm other states or their inhabitants.¹

Wapner (1998) argues that good neighborliness and other international environmental institutions remain insufficient to instill global responsibility for protecting and preserving the natural environment. He, therefore, suggests that we also consider: incorporating appropriate non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the reporting, monitoring, and compliance associated with contemporary international governance; on-site inspections; and international labeling standards to spotlight states’ environmental reputations and raise the environmental awareness of individuals everywhere. Wapner’s (1998, 2000) emphasis on the prospects for non-governmental environmental activity reflects the remarkable growth in transnational environmentalism and related forms of citizen activism in recent decades, which challenges “international relations scholars to consider the implications of democratic participation for sovereignty” (Litfin 1998, 15).

Ken Conca (1994) is among those who have responded to such calls for a popular foundation for international environmental action. He argues that:

What is needed is a new governmentality—one that recognizes that any society must interact with its environment in order to provide for its members and that society must be thought beyond sovereign territorial boundaries...beyond species boundaries...means taking into serious consideration the ambiguity, contingency, and diversity of life (1994, 130).

Thom Kuehls (1996) goes even further to suggest that in addition to finding some way to “think about politics in [a] nonsovereign space,” what we need is “an ethic to accompany this thought” (Kuehls 1996, 17).

Environmental Ethics

He is far from alone. There is a growing literature on ethics that is relevant for thinking about the politics of transboundary and global environmental problems. Much of this work is distinguished by a common effort to incorporate the moral treatment of the natural environment and non-human species into traditional ethical frameworks—e.g., utilitarianism or Kantian reasoning—which premise moral action on the definition of universally applicable rules.² Legal scholar Christopher Stone (1993), for instance, initiates a particularly significant discussion of justice and the relationship between human welfare and environmental sustainability with the following two questions: 1) “If the nations of the world are to cooperate in the reduction of globe-hazarding substances or the protection of species, how are the burdens of those actions to be apportioned?” 2) “What are the obligations that humankind, as a whole, owes to the rest of the natural world?”³ In response, Stone first discusses how John Rawls’ difference principle (1971) which challenges us to maximize the welfare of the least well off, might be used to understand and direct international environmental negotiations.⁴ He argues that while a modified version of the difference principle—specifically, one that includes rights, or entitlements, to some environmentally unjust, yet inordinately difficult to change, practices—has potential (Stone 1993, 261). Stone then urges us to extend our consideration of the rights we as humans claim to health and welfare, which depend on a viable natural environment, to nonhuman species.

The values associated with the decade-old Global Integrity Project represent an alternative rights-based environmental ethic, one which premises environmental protection on the intrinsic identity between humans and nature (Miller and E. Rees 2000). In a manner reminiscent of Bill McKibben (1989), integrity is associated with “wild, untrammled nature and the self-creative capacities of life to organize, regenerate, reproduce, sustain, adapt, develop, and evolve itself” (Miller and E. Rees 2000, 11) and engenders an ethic that values nature and natural systems, and heavily weights intergenerational equity. According to Alan Holland, this moral position conditions the integrity of the natural environment on our conception of a worthwhile human life. Holland encourages normative debate to determine the worth of life from a position that acknowledges “the presence of the nonhuman as constitutive of a superior ideal of the human good” (2000, 57). He argues that extant moral claims about the value of nature independent of the relationship between humankind and natural environment risk being sacrificed in favor of short-term attempts to alleviate human suffering by weakening (domestic and/or international) environmental laws.

While admittedly persuasive, even progressive rights-based approaches like Stone’s and Holland’s fail to appreciate the everyday, and often very individualized, contexts in which moral dilemmas concerning the natural environment arise and decisions are made. Ethical frameworks such as these do recognize the individual sources of international environmental problems, but they cannot provide much guidance with respect to engendering more environmentally conscious behavior within the world’s many and diverse societies (Pearce 1993; Downie 1995; Dobson 1998; Crittenden 2001).

Consider, for example, the case of global warming. A potent source of the United States’ record emissions of global warming gases is the cumulative decisions by millions of Southern Californians to commute long distances to work. Solving the global climate

change crisis must, therefore, address the ideological, socio-economic, and cultural influences—i.e., Western individualism, the accessibility of mass transit, and the desirability of housing near work, in this case—on individuals’ decisions to own cars and drive them to work. Regulatory policies and market incentives designed to encourage Californians to purchase less polluting vehicles and to drive them less frequently represent a political response to this need for contextual understanding. The effectiveness of such measures is limited, though, by the moral attitudes of the individuals affected by them. Every driver in California is subject to auto emissions standards and technological regulations intended, in part, to reduce global warming, but no one is required to leave the car at home in favor of mass transit, which is typically less convenient and often more expensive than driving.⁵ Yet some people do. Recent work by Lívia Markóczy and Karen Randazzo (2002) on individuals’ motivations for cooperating to solve social dilemmas, which would include the problem of global warming, suggests that those who value a stable climate and understand their role in preserving it would be the people most likely to park their cars for the common good.

The importance of valuing the natural environment and understanding the ecological connections between the behavior of individual human beings and nature to environmental protection and preservation cannot be understated. Recently Kay Milton has asked pointedly “Why do some people care more about the future of the natural world than others do? Why do some people actively protect nature while others, by indifference or intent, are prepared to see it destroyed?” (2002, 1). While most anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, and other social scientists rely on various, rational social and cultural contexts and conditioning to explain individuals’ environmental activism (Wapner 1994; Deudney 1998; Wapner 1998; Wilmer; Wapner 2002), Milton (2002) argues that people care about the environment because they are emotionally connected to it, as well as to other humans. That is, our actions—and

environmental activism, in particular—are ruled both by “what we feel” and by “what we know and think about the world” (Milton 2002, 4). Hence, learning about the natural environment and the threats that humans and other species pose to it, and making the sacrifices that may be necessary to solve environmental problems, requires each one of us to bridge our thinking and feeling natures.

FEMINIST ETHICS AND ECOFEMINISM

In contrast to traditional ethical approaches, which premise ecologically moral action on rational conceptualizations of the connections between humans, in general, and their natural environment, some so-called radical or alternative ethical approaches more easily support Milton’s (2002) appreciation for individuals’ emotional relationships to their ecological and social environments. Aldo Leopold’s (1970) land ethic, for instance, is a matter of both cognizance of, and identity with, nature and nonhuman species as members of a common community. Karen Warren’s (2000) recent work similarly presents a care-sensitive ecofeminist ethic, which posits that emotions, particularly those associated with our capacity to care, are central to moral reasoning (Damasio, 1994). Unlike Leopold, Warren, and other like-minded environmental ethicists, proponents of the feminist ethics of care generally do not address problems of environmental protection; yet their work does prepare a way into thinking about emotions, relationships, and caring behavior as foundations for moral environmental action, activism, and ecologically sustainable change.

Significant within the context of this essay, the care ethic is situated within a broader, feminist critique of sovereignty (Marchand and Runyan 2000). Feminists regard the distinction between men and women to be the central defining characteristic of social and political life, and feminist theorists are among those who extend consideration of popular

sovereignty, which is generally associated with the public life, into the private sphere of home and family. By questioning outright the absolute authority, or sovereignty, of the man or father as a family's head of household, this tack recognizes the often overlooked roles of women in (international) politics and political economy (Enloe1990; Peterson; Whitworth1992; Brace 1997; Huntley 1997; Enloe 2000; Youngs2004; Youngs2000). In a manner consistent with Gillian Youngs' critique of patriarchal structures in international relations, it upends the predominant "elevation of the public over the private as a determinant of international reality" (2000, 45). The resulting shift in emphasis opens up an ideational space in which conventional accords, contracts, memoranda, treaties, and other articles of international environmental relationships may be influenced by practices of care (Jones 1993).

To start, the socio-cultural and political practices of *caring about*, *taking care of*, and *giving and receiving care* (Tronto 1993) devolve from and sustain emotions—e.g., empathy and compassion—and psychological states—of high regard, in particular—for others. Roger King (1996) argues that these emotional and psychological conditions are essential to the successful preservation and protection of the natural environment. According to Joan Tronto, the ethic that accompanies these various practices of care:

begins from a different understanding of human nature and human interaction. Rather than seeing people as rational actors pursuing their own goals and maximizing their interests, we must instead see people as constantly enmeshed in relationships of care (1995, 2).

The care ethic ties moral goodness to meeting demands for care as they arise, and more pointedly, providing for the care of members of given society (Tronto 1993, 126). It is distinctive both perceptually and actively. The care ethic requires the cultivation of a

particular habit of mind (Tronto 1993, 127); that is, the care-giver must recognize a need for care when it exists, and understand that the receiver or object of care will respond positively to adequate and appropriate care. The care ethic also requires the generation of the mental and material resources necessary to provide care as well as the diverse acts of caring themselves(Tronto 1993).

As an emotional, moral voice, care originated in Carol Gilligan's (1982) claim that women tend to express an ethics that emphasizes relationships and responsibilities, as opposed to rules and rights. According to Gilligan (1982), the widely accepted process by which an individual supposedly develops a method of moral reasoning governed by "self-legislated and self-imposed universal principles such as those of justice, reciprocity and respect" (Tronto 1993, 82) is gendered. Gilligan argues that the way in which women make moral choices differs from this rational and progressive process because they see themselves less as autonomous individuals than as interdependent human beings.⁶ Gilligan accounts for this difference by reference to Nancy Chodorow's (1978) object-relational argument that a young girl's natural connection to her mother is the source of the relatedness that would prepare her for the traditional work of caring for a home and family; a young boy's need to separate from his mother and identify instead with his father is likewise the source of his inability to relate deeply to others and corresponding readiness for work in the public sphere. Gilligan (1982) concludes that women's moral reasoning understandably raises issues of care and responsibility.⁷

Care as a foundation for moral choice is notably rooted in women's actual life experiences as sources of knowledge. The ethic associated with the diverse practices of care is, therefore, understandably distinguished from more traditional moral perspectives and epistemologies premised purely on reason (Robb 1994; Clinchy 1996). This generalization is perhaps nowhere more true than in the case of motherhood (Ruddick

1995). Motherhood remains a distinguishing relationship for the care ethic, broadly understood. The actual physical experience of pregnancy, birth and motherhood often reshape a woman's moral identity. Susan Dwyer, for instance, explains that pregnancy does not just happen to women—"from the moment a women learns she is pregnant...[her] responsibilities are mediated by this unique bodily perspective" (Dwyer 1998, 35). The portent of such a fundamental change in moral consciousness for the earth's ecology lies in questions of how we might instill the virtues associated with mothering, "the caring, nurturing, feeling, intuiting, empathizing, and relating" (Forcey 1991, 352) to those who do not share this experience, and direct them towards adults as well as children the world over, non-human species, and even inanimate aspects of the natural environment.

Despite the practical import of care, and the obvious connections between care and environmental protection and preservation, there are three widely acknowledged critiques of the care ethic to consider. The central problem with the care ethic is its inherent essentialism. Essentialism, in reference to a specifically feminine or women's standpoint, is problematic, in part, because no one woman's standpoint can possibly be the basis for emancipating all women, not to mention all people. Variations on this critique have increasingly been leveled by feminist women of color and Third World feminists, who often do not share the experiences and interests of more mainstream feminist theorists and activists (Davenport 1981; Yamada 1981; Narayan 2000; Anzaldúa and Keating 2002).

Essentialism is troubling, furthermore, because arguments validating and elevating women's stereotypical roles as mothers and care-takers may not adequately distinguish between characteristics and behaviors that are physiologically and psychologically feminine and those which are socially constructed. Indeed it is increasingly clear that the

experience of establishing and maintaining caring relationships is not necessarily constrained by gender, race, or class (Manning 1992; Tronto 1993; Buege 1994; DeWaal 1996; Allport 1997; Hrdy 1999; Turner 2000). Young people, grandparents, society's economically disadvantaged and disenfranchised members, and others in positions of submission and servility are especially likely to reason in terms of their personal experiences and relationships. Many others—including parents, in particular—frequently also provide feminine, in reference to particular, non-utilitarian, justifications for their moral choices (Manning 1992; Tronto 1993).

Critics fear that the conflation of traditional female physiology and psychology in negative, feminine stereotypes has historically prevented women from fully exercising their political rights (Okin 1989). Their concern is buttressed by current research in evolutionary biology, psychology, and sociology indicating that whether or not women are genetically predisposed to nurture and care is, at best, a hotly contested question (Angier 1999; Hrdy 1999; Allen 2001).

Perhaps; yet a more productive approach to this essentialist criticism would be to consider the care ethic as an inroad to serious consideration of the tremendous possibilities for human growth and change associated with eliciting a more caring response from all people. Indeed, as Milton's (2002) analysis of emotions and environmental activism indicates, and feminist theorists increasingly recognize (Friedman 1993; Robinson 1999), this potential "extends beyond the personal to the political, and, ultimately, to the global context of social life" (Robinson 1999, 23).

Another problem associated with the care ethic regards the dichotomization of care and justice as contradictory ethical approaches. Hence, care is associated with an appreciation for the emotional interdependence and contextually specific thinking endemic to

interpersonal relationships, while justice is defined in terms of independence and generalizable principles and rules—hallmarks of the morally significant person. Despite this philosophic tendency, much recent scholarship recognizes that moral theory, inclusive of the care ethic, must attend to questions of justice (Okin 1989; Okin 1990; Friedman 1993; Robinson 1999).

The final problem questions the appropriateness of extending the care ethic beyond the private sphere of, home, family and friendly relationships, where the practices of care are more broadly considered essential to the development of the qualities necessary for justice in the public spheres of community, nation, and world. Because the care ethic is defined in terms of specific, personal relationships, applying it to international, or inter-temporal, relationships (Noddings 1991; Jaggar 1995) would seem difficult. Yet Virginia Held (1993) and Robinson (1999) argue that caring for others need not be limited to one's family members or proximate others. According to Robinson:

To say that we will care for a stranger at our door but not for starving children in Africa is to ignore the ways in which the modern world is intertwined and the ways in which hundreds of prior public and private decisions affect where we find ourselves and which strangers show up at our doors (Robinson 1999, 31).

Ecofeminism and an International Politics of Care

Ecofeminist thought provides an interesting and significant line of support for Robinson's (1999) call to extend the concept and practices of care beyond family, friends, and immediate community. Its many and diverse arguments notwithstanding, ecofeminism generally refers to the branch of feminist theory and activism that regards both women

and the natural environment as victims of patriarchy. According to Warren, the point of ecofeminist ethics, in particular, is "to develop theories and practices concerning humans and the natural environment that are not male-biased and that provide a guide to action in the prefeminist present" (2000, 37).

One such ecofeminist approach is pointedly essentialist. In the context of this moral position, women's lived experiences endow them not only with a special capacity to care, but also with a natural inclination to care about the environment. It draws on women's biological and spiritual relationship to the earth and suggests that women's sensitivity to changes in the natural environment and care taking is a source of empowerment and activism (Longenecker 1997; Davion and Wolf 2000). Marlene Longenecker argues in this vein that:

in transcultural, global patriarchal practices, "women" and "nature" share a subordinate and instrumental relationship to men; both are subject to patterns, attitudes, and institutions of male domination and control; but, given women's affiliation with nature, women have a unique responsibility to the health and survival of nature itself, to the care of the planet (1997, 1).

Longenecker's position belies harsh realities. According to Joni Seager:

Because women, worldwide, still have primary responsibility for feeding, housing and childcare, they are often the first to notice when the water smells peculiar, when the laundry gets dingier with each wash, when children develop mysterious ailments (1996, 280)

It also invites criticism that this sort of essentialism is dangerous not only to women, as explained above, but also nature (Biehl 1991; Stabile 1994; Longenecker 1997).

Moreover, insofar as an ecofeminist ethic is concerned with nature primarily as a means of support for humans, it is subject to criticism as unduly monist (Buege 1994).

Rather than claiming and elevating women's essential nature, conceptualist approaches to care as the basis for environmental ethics question the theoretical opposition that patriarchal culture sets up between men and culture, on the one hand, and women and nature, on the other. It is precisely these dualisms that arguably drive the parallel oppression of women and the natural environment (King 1996, .83). According to Greta Gaard:

the way in which women and nature have been devalued in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture and the mind (1993, 4).⁸

For the most radical ecofeminists, nothing short of conceptual revolution to eliminate entirely the male gender bias inherent in this facile relationship between women/emotion/nature and men/reason/culture will do (Buege 1994; Warren 2000). Warren (2000) situates her own care-sensitive ethic just short of this extreme. She argues that care-sensitive ethics is not an ethics of care--i.e., it is not definitively separate from traditional, especially, rights-based, ethics--but rather "locate[s] the moral significance of care" in an ethic that requires: a basic ability to care; an appreciation for the particular contexts in which ethical principles apply; and the actual practice(s) of caring (2000, 108).

Warren's (2000) narrative of her first rock-climbing experience sensitizes the reader to the value of so contextualizing moral reasoning about the environment, and the manner in which care for nature or wildness can emerge out of one's experience in relationship with the natural environment. The following oft-quoted excerpt refers to Warren's second day of climbing:

I rappelled down about 200 feet from the top of the Palisades at Lake Superior to just a few feet above the water level. I could see no one--not my belayer, not the other climbers, no one. I unhooked slowly from the rappel rope and took a deep cleansing breath. I looked all around me—really looked—and listened. I heard a cacophony of voices—birds, trickles of water on the rock before me, waves lapping against the rocks below. I closed my eyes and began to feel the rock with my hands—the cracks and crannies, the raised lichen and mosses, the almost imperceptible nubs that might provide a resting place for my fingers and toes when I began to climb...I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what it offered me—a chance to know myself and the rock differently, to appreciate the unforeseen miracles like the tiny flowers growing in the even tinier cracks in the rock's surface, and to come to know a sense of *being in relationship* with the natural environment...I realized then that I had come to *care about* this cliff (2000, 102-103).

This narrative describes Warren's deepening relationship with her nonhuman environment and motivation to care about the cliff and the rocks as "earth others," as opposed to "sources of enjoyment or...benefit to humans" (2000, 121). In contrast to

Warren's first day of climbing, which she approached as a conqueror, it is a story of transformation and growth that reveals what matters in ethical decision-making.

Although this alternative, conceptual route toward care as the basis for environmental ethics does surmount the problems associated with ecofeminist essentialism, critics question its reliance on experience. Because experience is, by definition, selective, it arguably represents cultural and personal interpretations that necessarily presuppose some reconstruction of the lived experience that is not intrinsic to the experience itself. Though it is difficult to conclude on the basis of experiences like Warren's how care benefits the natural environment, recall that Milton (2002) suggests such experience is the basis for the individual, emotional relationships to the earth that environmental action requires.

The moral principle and practices of care are most often invoked in reference to specific, personal relationships and experiences; however, feminist and other theorists and international political practitioners alike increasingly recognize international applications for care (Noddings 1991; Jaggar 1995; Robinson 1999; Allison 2001; Milton 2002). More specifically, contemporary international environmental relations are characterized by ecological and political interdependencies that render the natural environment a wildly interconnected "Web of Life" (Fritjof 1996). It is thus increasingly less reasonable to speak of responding to air or water pollution, deforestation, toxic contamination of the land, and other forms of environmental degradation as if they are problems solvable by a single—local, state, regional, or even global—governance structure. Consider the case of photochemical smog, for example, which was long considered to be a local problem. The efforts of California and other states to regulate nitrogen and ground-level ozone actually contributed to stratospheric ozone levels; controlling the depletion of this chemical ultimately required international action

(Tonnessen 2000). Situations like this one are now common, and demand the incorporation ecological responsibility and care into the discourse and practice of environmental politics at all levels of government (Wapner 1998; Warren 2000).

That is, heads of state, international negotiators, and others empowered to make or affect decisions that will impact any aspect of the natural environment, and those whose lives depend on it, have a moral responsibility to consider carefully “where, why, and how the structures of existing social and personal relations” have created conditions of environmental degradation and social injustice (Robinson 1999, 46) Robinson (1999) would regard such an injunction as relational. It calls leaders to focus on the personal, social, and institutional relationships within which “we notice and draw distinctions” (Robinson 1999, 112)—here, distinctions relevant to the locus of a given environmental problem, its proximate causes, and the range of scientific and political solutions to it. Attention to the network of relationships that create the context in which transboundary and global environmental issues arise and are resolved has the capacity to transform the underlying values and day-to-day practices of international politics concerning the environment and other critical issues in the world today--such as, human rights and humanitarian intervention, and economic development (Robinson 1999). On the basis of these insights, we might expect the institution of regulatory norms and initiatives at multiple levels of governance, all intended to foster care for peoples, non-human species, and nature itself.

Robinson’s (1999) application of the care ethic to issues of economic development is instructive. She argues that:

Moral and political action aimed at reducing poverty...[requires] a restructuring of political action in such a way that enduring relationships

can flourish and agents can focus their moral attention, and, ultimately, act with virtues of care—attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility... Thus instead of seeking to find wealthy and powerful parent-figures to provide material support and “care about” impoverished children, attention must be paid to the ways in which parents themselves may be empowered to care adequately for their own children (Robinson 1999, 154)

According to Robinson (1999), grass-roots efforts to eradicate poverty that focus on women, such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, illustrate the significance of care for making progress in important areas of economic development. The Grameen bank provides credit to women and others who are poor and without the assets needed to receive credit elsewhere. The formation of groups to make decisions about lending and establish social and professional reputations has been an integral part of the bank (Robinson 1999). Likewise, group formation has been significant for SEWA, which has provided a means of labor organization for women workers, most of whom work from home or in multiple, changing locations (Ackerley 2000). In these and other similar cases, the personal relationships nurtured within the group provide a basis for establishing the self-esteem and individual initiative necessary for its members to succeed economically (Ackerley 1999; Robinson 1999; Ackerley 2000).

The importance of grass-roots organizations to the economic development of women in developing nations is noteworthy because women have also been associated with, and successful in, grass-roots and other facets of the environmental movement in the United States and elsewhere (Di Chiro 1997; Longenecker 1997). According to Seager, “women comprise 60-80 percent of the paid members in mainstream environmental groups, and a

much larger percentage than that in grassroots and animal rights organizations” (1996, 271). These women are often motivated by threats to their children, families, and communities rooted in their immediate natural environment. Such was true for Lois Gibbs, one of the original protesters at Love Canal and founder of the Citizens’ Clearing House for Hazardous Waste in the United States. In reference to her transformation from homemaker to environmental activist and organizer, she once commented that:

This movement, in hundreds of local and regional organizations, is typically led by women, working-class people, and people of color.

Many, particularly the women, have never been involved in any political issue before and have been galvanized primarily by their concern for their children’s safety.⁹

Petra Kelly (1995), a founder of the West German Green party and representative of that party in the Bundestag from March 1983 to December 1990, extended her commitment to (peace and) environmental protection to include the world. Francine D’Amico and Peter Beckman explain that “her program of ecofeminism saw an interconnection between respect for all people and respect for all nations, and between human rights, women’s rights, and environmental activism” (1995, 169).

To the extent that their experience with environmental degradation arouses a practice of care for the natural environment and those it supports, women and other environmental activists represent a potent bottom-up challenge to *international* environmental politics (Di Chiro 1997; Wapner 2006). Collectively, they are constitutive of global civil society, which consists of critical social movements, including: the women's movements, environmental movements, antinuclear movements, consumers' movements, and movements struggling for human rights (Turner 1998). The significance of this

phenomenon is that such movements seek to bring about specific changes in policy and corporate practices, and to publicize problems that are not amenable to change. Scott Turner argues that they are "oriented more toward general transformation of public consciousness, which in turn affects the parameters of legitimacy within which traditional institutions must operate" (1998, 30). Our human capacity to care about one another and the environment is key to this kind of political transformation. In the practice of caring for the natural environment lies the basis for sustainable life choices—choices in which “we open ourselves to provocations of irony and humor, the experience of wilderness, and the echoes of the best traces of our indwelling terrestrial histories” (Stone 1993, 280).

CARE AND SOVEREIGNTY, REVISITED

The care ethic extended to include elements of the natural environment presuppose that our relationships to other humans and to the earth are key to understanding who we are, both as individuals and as peoples (Krishnamurti 1992; Buege 1994). Moreover, according to Kathleen Jones:

it involves relinquishing the primacy of the needs of the self, making concrete connections with others and questioning assumptions about authority and autonomy. The idea of caring...undermines the notion of the self as a container with a fixed boundary. It makes the idea of invasion and violation much more problematic. It questions whether we should always see relationships with others as potentially threatening to our sense of self (1993, 150).

The implication of this philosophical, and metaphysical, interpretation of care as an ethical basis for international environmental politics is that care may be hazardous to

standard conceptualizations and practices of sovereignty. Certainly, the care ethic is contrary to territorial and other kinds of sovereignty defined in terms of “unitary” and associated with some special “ability to command obedience” (Jones 1993, 38). Sovereignty, in this sense, not only sanctifies boundaries and legitimates power and coercion, but also restricts and moulds the imagination in ways that can be antithetical to environmental protection and preservation. For example, the United States’ decision to abandon global warming talks arguably forced nearly all of the world’s nations to salvage the Kyoto pact by drafting an agreement unlikely to have any significant impact on the emissions of the greenhouse gases” (Victor 2001; DeSombre 2004; Gardiner 2004). The possibility that global warming might be slowed outside of the predominant, Kyoto process of high-level negotiations among sovereign states was not seriously considered.

The limited success of the Kyoto process and many other international efforts to redress environmental degradation is due to the failure of these activities to engage the emotional as well as the intellectual foundations for ecological holism. We have largely accepted the scientifically sound conceptualization of the earth as a single, integral bioregion. Yet many of us still do not grasp the related metanarrative of psychic return to a primal world, which is connected by a shared story of equity among individuals and peoples, and “between humankind and the earth as a common treasury” (Jones 1993, 139).¹⁰ Thus our collective capacity as nations to care adequately about and for the natural environment rests primarily on the mix of international treaty regimes and less formal norms that simultaneously reflect and guide domestic regulatory systems designed to constrain our customarily anti-environmental, human nature. The continuing accuracy of this generalization is subject to the growing influence of environmental and related social movements and organizations that are basic to the emergent global civil society. Hence alternative forms of environmental governance may prove to better represent the environmental prerogatives of affected individuals and communities than some states do,

and more effectively respond to international environmental issues than most states can (Rosenau 1993; Hempel 1996; Lipschutz and Mayer 1996; Wapner 1996; Paterson 1999). To their advantage, these groups recognize that "if people do not care about nature, do not see, feel, or understand it," then we face the "task of educating the moral imagination to perceive and interpret nature in such a way that nature is consciously a presence in human life, rather than the absence it has become (Buege 1994, 92)

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¹ Wapner explains that, "in 1895, U.S. Attorney General Judson Harmon articulated sovereignty's initial environmental meaning when he dismissed Mexican complaints that U.S. use of the Rio Grande adversely affected Mexico. According to Harmon, the United States had the legal right to use waters within its territory as it saw fit, independent of external effects" (Wapner 1998, 277) The precedent-setting Trail Smelter case in which Canada was obliged to compensate Americans living down-wind of has since become the standard reference point for resolving international environmental conflicts (Allison 2002).

² Stone (1993) draws on Kant (1964), Rawls (1971), and Smart and Williams (1973) to provide an accessible application of these rights-based frameworks to international environmental matters. In contrast to this "moral monism," he argues that his own "moral pluralism" invites us to conceive moral activities as partitioned into several distinct frameworks, each governed by distinct principles and logical texture" (1988). likewise draws on Bentham (1948) to ground his utilitarian argument for animal welfare, which questions practices of factory farming both in the United States and elsewhere.

³ Stone distinguishes between these questions by reference to the following example: the first question asks: If whales are to be protected, have whaling nations any claims for compensation

from nations rich in cattle and grain?" The second asks, "Has humankind any duty to whales to begin with?" (1993, 244).

⁴ More specifically, Rawls (1971) constructs an index of primary goods and then argues that individual negotiators in the original position, in which it is not known who or how wealthy each of them will turn out to be in the actual society that exists among them, would choose to maximize the basket of these primary goods to be held by the least well off among them. See Harsanyi (1995) for an important counter-argument.

⁵ AB 1493 directs the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to develop a plan for reducing the emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to global warming by January 2005, which will be put into effect for the 2009 model year. Signed into California state law in July 2002, AB 1493 has been heralded as the first U.S. law intended to reduce greenhouse gases.

⁶ Gilligan (1982) challenged psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's six-stage process of moral development, which describes how a child moves from a primitive moral orientation defined by obedience/punishment to a sophisticated, universal ethical orientation.

⁷ Although the empirical veracity of Gilligan's work has been roundly criticized, her own and others' interpretations of her claims regarding the merits of subjective ethical reasoning and bases of knowledge have revolutionized the discipline of moral theory and the practice of routine social science inquiry.

⁸ Note that according to Huey-li Li, historical evidence is insufficient to determine whether women are oppressed because of their identification with nature, or "nature is exploited because of its identification with women" (1993, 275).

⁹ Cited in Dobson (1998, 21).

¹⁰ Tarsas defines the primal mind to be "experienced as completely continuous between inner and outer," in contrast to the modern mind, which "experiences the world in such a way as to draw a radical boundary between the human self as subject and the world as object" (1998, 4)