

Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens (eds)
Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism
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Ecofeminist philosophy has had inconsistent reception in its history, enjoying seasons of prominence and seasons of relative obscurity, along with intense periods of harsh criticism of perceived inescapable problems linked to essentialism, utopianism, colonialism and structuralist thinking. Yet in recent years – especially as the ecological conditions of the world dramatically worsen – ecofeminist scholarship has garnered revitalised attention. This collection of an editor's introduction and 11 new essays is evidence of that revitalised attention and is responsive to it.

The book explores contemporary manifestations of ecofeminism, making a strong case for the relevance of this field in times characterised by uncertainty and ecological disaster. The book begins with a bold assertion: 'We need them now more than ever' (p. 1). The essays that follow assert and support this claim. The essays are diverse and wide-ranging and, therefore, I will not treat each individually in this review. Instead, I will primarily attend to the book as a whole and the contributions it makes to ecofeminist literature and to environmental philosophy and environmental studies more broadly.

The volume draws upon the wisdom of prominent and influential ecofeminist thinkers like Karen Warren and Val Plumwood, but, situating itself as a collection of contemporary approaches to ecofeminism, it makes critical moves to recast this wisdom in response to the exacerbated social, political and ecological crises of our time. The essays in the collection invite 'a deployment of radical ideas, strategies, and politics which re-connect the human and more-than-human world' (p. 5). With contributions from philosophers, economists, biologists, sociologists, feminist theorists, management and organisational studies scholars, queer theorists and activists, among others, the very composition of the book exemplifies the sort of intersectional work for which much of the book's content advocates. This volume brings together voices from scattered geopolitical locations and divergent academic disciplines in an effort to begin to think about the ways that ecofeminist theories, practices, and methodologies may help us tackle complex, tangled systems of domination and neoliberal power.

The first section of the book explores ecofeminism and theory. Five essays comprise this section, with a strong opening chapter by Niamh Moore titled 'Eco/feminist genealogies: renewing promises and new possibilities'. Moore traces the rich history of ecofeminism and the injurious impact of the sorts of critiques mentioned in the opening of this review, with particular attention to the challenges of essentialism. Carefully attentive to these criticisms, Moore argues against the binary of essentialism/anti-essentialism, naming this binary a failure as a corrective to problems in eco/feminism. The genealogical tracing opens up space for readers to envision 'possible futures for eco/feminism' (p. 21). Moore finds rich possibility in the emergence of new materialism, which she argues 'serves as a potent reminder that while nature and essentialism are often aggregated in feminist theory, this is not always the case, a point easy to forget from an eco/feminist perspective' (p. 34). We should shift our focus now toward biology and matter. A materialist account can help theorists 'avoid the critique of essentialism [and] even anti-essentialism' (p. 33) in order to move the conversation forward. Like many of the other essays in this section, Moore's is an excellent mixture of theory and grounded application, drawing here on the

Chipko Movement to raise questions about the future of ecofeminism. Moore traverses similar genealogical ground in her 2015 book, *The Changing Nature of Eco/Feminism: Telling Stories from Clayoquot Sound*, highlighting in that instance eco/feminist futures through specific Canadian ecological struggles. Other essays include engagements with theoretical debates about the relationship of humans to non-human animals, engagements with political economy, the climate crisis, and social contract theory, and a novel account of ‘covenantal ethics’, which argues that our responsibilities to nature come from an understanding that life is a gift too great for us to ever repay. I was drawn in particular to Mary Phillips’ essay. Phillips, co-editor of this volume, offers a beautiful essay on embodiment and nature awareness using resources from French feminist philosophy. Awareness of the body and awareness of nature can be understood to be subversive acts which may undermine patriarchal structures and the logics of domination. Moore calls for us to imagine possible futures for eco/feminism, and perhaps Phillips’ articulation of poetry as activist practice is one way to enliven imagination: ‘Writing the body to re-imagine and re-engage with nature such that it is valued for itself offers a “practice of hope”’ (p. 72).

The second section of the book explores ecofeminism in practice and, in my estimation, is the part of the book which is the most pronounced contribution to existing literature in this genre. The six essays in this section may initially seem incongruent, covering regionally specific issues such as food security in the Global South, the treatment of bush wives in South Africa, the postcolonial gaze of tourism in South Africa, and practices of nature management in German forests, as well as engaging climate change science-fiction and examining ‘tempered radicalism’ as spiritual practice in business. Yet this focus on specific practices in wildly different contexts unifies the essays in meaningful ways, highlighting the relevance and vibrance of ecofeminism today and crossing transnational and disciplinary boundaries in ways that reaffirm the editors’ claim that ‘we need them now more than ever’. The ‘we’, in this case, is not limited to narrow, homogenous, Western theorising, but is global, active, and engaged.

Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism is an excellent volume, complementing other recent work in ecofeminisms, such as Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen’s 2014 *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* and Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva’s 2014 *Ecofeminism: Critique, Influence, Change*, yet being distinctive in its emphases and diversity of approaches. Certainly, academic libraries will want to add this volume to their collections, perhaps alongside others in the Routledge Explorations in Environmental Studies series, the series under which this volume is published. But this book should not be restricted to library stacks and databases. Scholars and activists concerned with intersectional and interdisciplinary practices, methodologies and theories about the complicated relationships between humans and the more-than-human world will find this collection to be a valuable investment. It will also be an excellent component of advanced undergraduate or graduate-level courses in topics ranging from ecofeminism and transnational feminist theory to environmental philosophy and global development.

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References

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