

Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies

Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris Cuomo

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Abstract: Indigenous ethics and feminist care ethics offer a range of related ideas and tools for environmental ethics. These ethics delve into deep connections and moral commitments between nonhumans and humans to guide ethical forms of environmental decision making and environmental science. Indigenous and feminist movements such as the Mother Earth Water Walk and the Green Belt Movement are ongoing examples of the effectiveness of on-the-ground environmental care ethics. Indigenous ethics highlight attentive caring for the intertwined needs of humans and nonhumans within interdependent communities. Feminist environmental care ethics emphasize the importance of empowering communities to care for themselves and the social and ecological communities in which their lives and interests are interwoven. The gendered, feminist, historical, and anticolonial dimensions of care ethics, indigenous ethics, and other related approaches provide rich ground for rethinking and reclaiming the nature and depth of diverse relationships as the fabric of social and ecological being.

Keywords: caring, indigenous, responsibility, interdependence, women, knowledge, remediation

Over 40 years ago a phenomenal grassroots environmental movement was organized in the Himalayas of Uttarakhand, India, when women and men of the Chipko Andolan movement surrounded and hugged trees to protect local forests from state-approved logging companies. The Chipko movement enacted ethics of caring for trees,

forests, women, and communities as valuable interdependent beings, and it initiated a national movement that embraced and publicized the potent symbol of tree-hugging as an expression of resistance to environmental exploitation (Shiva, 1988; Gottlieb, 1996). More recently, in the spring of 2003, a group of Anishinaabe grandmothers and other community members gathered and began walking around the Great Lakes in response to pollution and water misuse. Their Mother Earth Water Walk seeks to raise consciousness of water's sacredness, our interdependence with water, and the reciprocal responsibilities that connect humans, water, and other beings. Now an annual movement throughout the North American continent, the Water Walk includes women and men of different heritages and nations (McGregor, 2012). Spanning several decades and a great many miles, Chipko Andolan and the Mother Earth Water Walk are connected as environmental politics grounded in ethics of caring and responsive caretaking, mindful of human and nonhuman concerns at multiple scales and aiming to protect and to shift consciousness.

“Care ethics” refers to approaches to moral life and community that are grounded in virtues, practices, and knowledges associated with appropriate caring and caretaking of self and others. In contrast to ethical theories that assume the paradigm of moral reasoning to be an isolated agent making impersonal, abstract calculations—a dominant view in western philosophy—ethics of care highlight the affective dimensions of morality, the inevitability of dependence and interdependence, the importance of caretaking and healthy attachments in the basic fabric of human well-being, and the relational and contextual nature of any ethical question or problem (Gilligan, 1982). Ethics of care understand moral agents as deeply and inextricably embedded in networks

of ethically significant connections and conceive of caring as exercising responsibilities and virtues that maintain and positively influence relationships and general flourishing within those overlapping networks. As philosopher Virginia Held has written, a fundamental premise of care ethics is that “morality should address issues of caring and empathy and relationships between people rather than only or primarily the rational decisions of solitary moral agents” (1995: 1). Proponents of care ethics describe realms of caring such as good parenting, friendship, and community membership as relationships that foster human development, social cooperation, and the basic foundation of all morality and ethics. They therefore reject the idea that caring and caretaking are trivial or irrelevant in “public” spheres. Care ethicists highlight the extent to which certain people are commonly directed to spheres and norms of feminine caretaking and compulsory service for others, and they argue that women may therefore have significant epistemic insight concerning philosophical and practical understandings of care ethics. However, most identify caring as an orientation accessible to all and eschew the notion that caring and caretaking ought to be “women’s work.”

As the Chipko and Water Walk movements illustrate, care ethics can be compelling foundations for environmental ethics, and the general relevance of care ethics for environmentalism is considerable. Ethical paradigms centered around caring are able to acknowledge the significance of caring for all kinds of others, as well as the complex value of ecological interdependencies and the limitations of worldviews that deny reliance on nature. Perspectives informed by care ethics are able to raise crucial questions about the specific relationships involved in any particular environmental issue and highlight opportunities for developing appropriately caring actions and policies.

Environmental ethics nearly always stress the need for increased or improved caring in the form of moral regard for nonhuman others and ecological systems, and the lack of such regard is commonly cited as a fundamental cause of environmental damage and destruction. Care ethics question canonical conceptions of nature as passive or inert and express anticolonial ethics and epistemologies based on the wisdom of relation-centered traditions and practices.

In spite of the lurking influence of actual care in the world, in the canon of environmental philosophy ethical caring is rarely taken seriously as a framework for guiding decision making, and perhaps this is linked to colonialism, sexism, and racism. Emotional caring, including care for future generations, is noted as motivating environmental action, but there remains an overriding tendency for theorists and policy advocates to consider caring as a pre-cognitive rather than informed and knowledge-producing response. Liberal philosophers focus on ideals such as stewardship, biotic citizen, rights-holder, and manager, and frame moral issues in abstract, economic, and legalistic terms (Kheel, 2008; Whyte, 2014). Ironically, environmental thinkers such as Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, and Arne Naess, who did call for more effective caring for nature, seem to neglect or underestimate the importance of caring for other human beings as a way of caring for nature (Plumwood, 1993).

Environmental ethics that incorporate paradigms of caring conceive of environmental harms and the exploitation of nonhuman animals as failures to extend caring to worthy others and see those failures in relation to similar failures to care for other people. As decision-making guides, ethics of care attend to the affiliations and relationships that frame a particular moral problem and recommend actions and policies

with potential to heal or create worthy affiliations and relationships. They may also call for resisting or severing relationships that are harmful or oppressive (Deloria 1972/2003; Friedman, 1987; Hoagland, 1988; Card, 1990). Care ethics inform a distinct set of priorities and methods for environmental decision making that give voice to a range of perspectives. Here we discuss influential indigenous and feminist discourses in which care figures centrally in environmental ethics and provides guidance for ethical decision making about action and policy.

1. Care Ethics in Indigenous Environmental Movements

Indigenous peoples are among the leading environmentalists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and exemplars of ethical perspectives highlighting attentive caring for the intertwined needs of human and nonhuman communities. As a collective term, “indigenous peoples” refers to communities who governed themselves before a period of invasion or colonization; today they total about 370 million persons, with a presence on every continent, and continue to exercise self-determination in the context of being dominated by the colonial power of nation states such as the U.S. or New Zealand. Concepts of care are often integral aspects of the communications and practices of indigenous environmental movements, although they may not use English language terms for caring, and when they do their meaning can differ from traditions of care ethics articulated by people of other cultures and heritages. We offer the view that important philosophical and practical themes related to care ethics are influential in many indigenous environmental discourses, and these provide important paradigms for caring as part of environmental ethics. Specifically, indigenous conceptions of care (1)

emphasize the importance of awareness of one's place in a web of different connections spanning many different parties, including humans, non-human beings and entities (e.g., wild rice, bodies of water), and collectives (e.g., forests, seasonal cycles); (2) understand moral connections as involving relationships of interdependence that motivate reciprocal responsibilities; (3) valorize certain skills and virtues, such as the wisdom of grandparents and elders, attentiveness to the environment, and indigenous stewardship practices; (4) seek to restore people and communities who are wounded from injustices by rebuilding relationships that can generate responsibilities pertinent to current environmental challenges such as biodiversity conservation and climate change; (5) conceive of political autonomy as involving the protection of the right to serve as responsible stewards of lands, the environmental quality of which is vital for sustenance. Indigenous environmentalists have expressed these themes in their writings and practices in response to a number of environmental problems that occur at the intersection of industrialization and colonization. Across the globe indigenous peoples have frequently been displaced by the creation of national parks and the establishment of conservation areas, endure harms associated with their reproductive capabilities that are linked to living nearby polluting industries, and are among the first societies who face permanent relocation due to climate change that has been triggered by the emissions of greenhouse gases from corporate activities and high levels of consumption (Grinde and Johansen, 1995; LaDuke, 1999; Shearer, 2011; Weaver, 1996; Igoe, 2004; Hoover et al., 2012; Krakoff and Rosser, 2012; Abate and Kronk, 2013). The lands and waters that indigenous peoples depend on have been degraded by extraction industries, from mineral mines to forestry to tar sands extraction, and by chemical and manufacturing industries, such as

automaking and petrochemical processing. In many communities, harms associated with global environmental issues such as climate change are often compounded by other factors. For example, interest in resource extraction and the warming circumpolar region has increased the risk to indigenous people, and especially to women, of being exploited by the harmful economies that accompany intensive extraction industries (Sweet, 2014). Examples such as these are connected to large literatures that cover multiple ways in which environmental degradation associated with colonial economies disrupt relationships that are integral to indigenous livelihoods, such as indigenous gender systems (e.g., Calhoun et al., 2007) and indigenous community planning methodologies (e.g., Walker et al., 2013).

Beyond expressing or arguing for ethical commitments by writing philosophy articles, in recent decades indigenous thinkers worldwide have composed a great many political declarations and statements summarizing the viewpoints and positions of their communities regarding various environmental matters. Indigenous peoples' environmental movements almost always express normative philosophies of how humans should relate to other humans and non-humans. For example, the Kari-Oca 2 declaration, produced by a gathering of some 500 indigenous persons at the RIO + 20 Earth Summit, states that environmental policy must respect

the inseparable relationship between humans and the Earth, inherent to Indigenous Peoples . . . for the sake of our future generations and all of humanity... Our lands and territories are at the core of our existence – we are the land and the land is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories and they are inextricably linked to our survival and to the

preservation and further development of our knowledge systems and cultures, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem management... Caring and sharing, among other values, are crucial in bringing about a more just, equitable and sustainable world (Indigenous Peoples of Mother Earth assembled at the site of Kari-Oca, 2012).

There is much to say about Kari-Oca 2, but a key theme is the importance of an awareness of the intimacy and multidimensionality of the connections linking humans, non-human beings and entities, and collectives. In particular, the relationships involve close and interdependent ties. They have intrinsic value as sources of identity, community, and spirituality but also instrumental value as sources of sustenance and usable knowledge that furnish guidance on caring for biodiversity and ecosystems. The relationships are morally weighty because they motivate responsibilities involving reciprocity, harmony, solidarity, and collectivity. The term “caring” is used to suggest a value foundational for justice and sustainability.

As enactments of complex commitments to care, indigenous environmental movements have made great strides in protecting indigenous lifeways against the parties who are responsible for the environmental problems they face, including international bodies, nation-states, subnational governments, corporations, and nongovernmental organizations. Though the struggle to reestablish indigenous peoples’ rights to steward their territories continues, the positive developments stemming from indigenous environmental movements are many, and they are powerful reminders of the possibilities of applying environmental care ethics in practical political realms. For example, various indigenous parties worked to ensure that the United Nations (UN) Declaration of the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007, included articles that support the environmental protection many indigenous peoples rely on for continuing their lifeways (see Articles 20 through 32; Joffe, Hartley, and Preston, 2010). Indigenous peoples have also won numerous court victories against subnational governments and corporations, from the Saramaka decision by the Inter-American Court to the Boldt Decision in North America, gaining important legal protections and strengthening their capacities for preserving and enacting traditional but dynamic models of environmental stewardship (Otis, 2012; Brown, 1994).

Indigenous environmental movements have also enacted civil disobedience and mass mobilizations in defense of their autonomy as peoples and the links between their autonomy and their deep connections with other beings. The Idle No More movement in Canada focuses on concerns about the settler government's lack of respect for indigenous environmental values and systems of stewardship that predate colonialism, and it has expressed discontent through media activism, teach-ins, and flash mob round dances (Idle No More, 2014). Indigenous environmentalists have also shaped national policies in countries that dominate indigenous communities, such as in the United States, where indigenous communities have fought hard to use treaties and federal policies to bolster political sovereignty in ways that also serve subsistence cultures and environmental protection (Wilkinson, 2005).

2. Knowledge, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Moral Repair

Themes of indigenous knowledge, responsibility, reciprocity, and moral repair are salient in indigenous environmental movements and political discourses. In 2012, the First

Stewards Symposium: Coastal Peoples Address Climate Change convened indigenous peoples from North America and the Pacific and produced a resolution stating that “First Stewards” have “awareness of the interconnectedness of the clouds, forest, valleys, land, streams, fishponds, sea, lakes, canyons and other elements of the natural and spiritual world, and . . . expertise and methodologies to assure responsible stewardship of them . . .” (McCarty et al., 2012). Here stewardship does not express human exceptionalism or control over nature, as it typically does in other environmental discourses. Instead, it refers to acknowledgment of one’s place in a web of interdependent relationships that create moral responsibilities, and it recognizes that there are methods and forms of expertise involved in carrying out such responsibilities. The environmental ethics suggested by the First Steward’s resolution involve responsibilities that flow from close and interdependent relationships. Indigenous peoples’ understanding of interdependence forms the basis for justifying and motivating ethical responsibilities in human and ecological communities.

Declarations also emphasize the importance of awareness of connections across humans, non-human beings and entities, and collectives. The Anchorage Declaration, written in 2009 by indigenous representatives from the Arctic, North America, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Caribbean, and Russia, claims to “reaffirm the unbreakable and sacred connection between land, air, water, oceans, forests, sea ice, plants, animals and our human communities as the material and spiritual basis for our existence” (The Anchorage Declaration, 2009). Many declarations do choose to invoke the term “care” for describing the moral significance of interdependence. The Water Declaration of the Anishinaabek, Mushkegowuk, and Onkwehonwe (peoples), convened

by the Chiefs of Ontario, claims the three cultures have “their own inherent responsibilities and intimate relationships to the waters” and “have the responsibility to care for the land and the waters by our Creator.” It claims that these peoples “have a direct relationship with all waters—fresh and salt that must be taken care of to ensure that the waters provide for humans on a daily basis . . . [they] have ceremonies from birth to death that relate to the care of the waters . . . and our own ways to teach our children about their relationships to waters.” In fact, treaties were intended “to make certain that decision making processes related to use and care of the water . . .” (Chiefs of Ontario, 2008). Relations with a settler nation such as Canada through treaties were from an indigenous perspective intended to protect caretaking. The Indigenous Peoples Kyoto Water Declaration, written in 2003 by indigenous participants in the World Water Forum, states that water is “sacred and sustains all life” and that indigenous “traditional knowledge, laws and ways of life teach us to be responsible in caring for this sacred gift that connects all life” (Third World Water Forum, 2003). The Declaration identifies indigenous peoples as “caretakers of Mother Earth.” The Tlatokan Atlahuak Declaration, from the Indigenous Peoples Parallel Forum of the Fourth World Water Forum in 2006, claims that “We have been placed upon this earth, each in our own traditional sacred land and territory to care for all of creation and water . . . our traditional knowledge, laws and forms of life teach us to be responsible and caring for this sacred gift that connects all life” (Third World Water Forum, 2006).

In the philosophical views expressed in these declarations, responsibilities are not conceived as only the province of human beings, and water is not considered inert. In fact, several emphasize the responsibilities of water to humans and others. Anishinaabe

scholar and activist Deb McGregor, who has worked closely with Mother Earth Water Walkers of the Great Lakes basin, describes the responsibilities that are derived from such a relationship as follows:

We must look at the life that water supports (plants/medicines, animals, people, birds, etc.) and the life that supports water (e.g., the earth, the rain, the fish).

Water has a role and a responsibility to fulfill, just as people do. We do not have the right to interfere with water's duties to the rest of Creation. Indigenous knowledge tells us that water is the blood of Mother Earth and that water itself is considered a living entity with just as much right to live as we have. (2009, 37–38)

McGregor's words support an approach to ethics involving relationships with diverse beings and entities. The responsibilities that maintain and strengthen those relationships are between and among active agents, and they are reciprocal, not one-directional. Here "inextricably close" and "interdependent" relationships justify and motivate responsibilities among various entities and collectives. As responsible agents, a range of human and nonhuman entities, understood as relatives of one another, have caretaking roles within their communities and networks.

Indigenous environmental movements express their environmental ethics to help people of other heritages and nations understand how to be critical about their ethical assumptions. . . Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel argues that an array of civil and political rights discourses are inadequate for indigenous peoples because they ignore "the cultural responsibilities and relationships that indigenous peoples have with their families and the natural world (homelands, plant life, animal life, etc.) that are critical for their

well-being and the well-being of future generations . . .” (Cornassel, 2008, 107)The Kari-Oca 2 declaration calls on “civil society” to respect indigenous “values of reciprocity, harmony with nature, solidarity, and collectivity,” including “caring and sharing.” The declaration also claims that the idea of saving “nature by commodifying its life giving and life sustaining capacities [is] a continuation of the colonialism that Indigenous Peoples and our Mother Earth have faced and resisted for 520 years . . .” (2012). These examples express criticisms of impersonal utilitarian and rights-based ethical orientations toward the environment. Instead, characteristics of an ethics of care such as relationships, interdependency, and responsibilities are emphasized. In this vein, McGregor describes an Aboriginal perspective on environmental justice as involving more than distributive justice and critiques of power:

Environmental justice is most certainly about power relationships among people and between people and various institutions of colonization... It is about justice for all beings of Creation, not only because threats to their existence threaten ours but because from an Aboriginal perspective justice among beings of creation is life-affirming... An Anishinaabe understanding of environmental justice considers relationships not only among people but also among all our relations (including all living things and our ancestors). (McGregor, 2012: 27–28)

In the writings discussed here, we see “care” as referring to recognizing and learning from one’s place in a web of diverse relationships and being drawn by the responsibilities that are embedded in such relationships. Indigenous movements emphasize the importance of specific relationships involving reciprocal, though not necessarily equal, responsibilities among participants who understand one another as relatives. Accepting

responsibilities is constitutive of realizing healthy ecosystems that already include human communities. Indigenous environmental movements also suggest to others the importance of seeing all people as in relationships with other humans and many other respected beings and entities. Finally, repair of harms is conceived as a matter of rebuilding relationships that can generate new responsibilities in contemporary times. Indigenous environmental movements therefore represent important places for conversations about the significance of caring in environmental ethics.

The moral theories explicit in indigenous environmental movements offer more than criteria of moral rightness; they also furnish guidance for decision making on action and policy in relation to environmental issues. They contend that intimate relationships of interdependence yield complex forms of moral and scientific knowledge. In addition, a large literature shows how through intimate relationships indigenous peoples express crucial ecological knowledge that is important for informing conservation strategies and climate change adaptation. Indigenous ecological knowledges have been compared to adaptive management (Berkes, Colding, and Folke, 2000) and resilience theory (Trosper, 2002) and have been valorized in theories of common pool resource management (Cox, Arnold, and Tomas, 2010). Indigenous ecological knowledges are often seen as containing insights that differ from or complement insights stemming from environmental and climate sciences (Kimmerer, 2002; Whyte, 2013). The Mandaluyong Declaration states that indigenous “mutual labor exchange systems” and “forest management practices” are effective in part because they are guided by a spirituality that connects “humans and nature, the seen and the unseen, the past, present and future, and the living and nonliving” (Mandaluyong Declaration, 2011). One implication of this

literature is that any efforts to address environmental issues must consider the ecological knowledge, advice, and leadership of indigenous peoples. Numerous international and national policy documents and academic literatures attest to the importance of indigenous knowledges for ethical and policy decision making on environmental issues (Nakashima et al., 2012; Berkes, 1999; Williams and Hardison, 2013; Mauro and Hardison, 2000). Indigenous scholar Roland Trosper discusses how important guidance on ethical behavior and policy toward the environment flow out of indigenous webs of relationships, interdependency, and responsibility. In the potlatch system of some Pacific Northwest Tribes, “high grading is not allowed, consumption has an upper bound, and there is always concern that ecosystem health should be maintained” (Trosper, 1995). Trosper argues that principles like these allow a society to buffer, self-organize, and learn in response to environmental issues (Trosper, 2009). A study by Nick Reo and Whyte describes the case of one Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) community in which governance of subsistence hunting practices was structured by a web of interconnected responsibilities to deer, forests, and fellow community members (Reo and Whyte, 2012). Elsewhere Reo and Jason Karl discuss how this responsibility- and morality-based governance structure is a viable form of regulation according to some criteria in comparison to the governance structure for hunting endorsed by the state of Wisconsin, which emphasizes different sources of motivation and values (Reo and Karl, 2010).

3. Feminist Care Ethics and Environmental Ethics

In feminist philosophy the deep significance of caring and caretaking for human ethics is also emphasized, understood as fundamentally gendered in oppressive contexts

and therefore calling for critical engagement and rearticulation. Feminist care ethics articulated in theorizing include moral orientations that (1) understand individuals, including human selves and other beings, as essentially embedded and interdependent, rather than isolated and atomistic, even if they also exercise some degree of autonomy; (2) take mutually beneficial caring relationships to be foundational and paradigmatic for ethics; (3) highlight the common association of care work with females and subjugated peoples; (4) emphasize the virtues, skills, and knowledges required for beneficial caring relationships to flourish; (5) are attentive to the contexts of moral questions and problems; and (6) recommend appropriate caring and caretaking as remedies for addressing histories of harm and injustice and necessary counterpoints to the overemphasis in some cultures on impersonal, abstract ethical judgments. Segun Ogungbemi has identified a care ethic toward the natural environment in African traditions, and Buddhism's foundational commitment to compassion for all sentient beings places interspecies caring at the center of morality (1997). Philosophical discussions of care ethics have highlighted critical concerns about appropriate caring, including the limits of caring as a response to violence, historical connections between colonialism and oppressive discourses of caring, the pitfalls of caring within unequal relationships, and the challenges of translating caring into formal systems of decision making (Code, 1991; Bell, 1993; Tronto, 1993; Narayan, 1995; Halwani, 2003; Slote, 2007). Feminist research on care ethics articulates the significance of distinct moral perspectives associated with caring work and female socialization, while analyzing how gendered moral paradigms create and maintain hierarchies and oppressive relations.

In academic theory, a movement to claim care ethics as a distinct ethical approach was sparked by philosopher Sara Ruddick's articulation of "maternal thinking" as an effective and pervasive form of moral reasoning focused on attentive caring for dependent others and by the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan, whose research questioned the view that approaches to ethical problem solving associated with masculinity and impersonal objectivity are paradigmatic or superior (Ruddick, 1980; 1989; Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan's findings indicated that even among culturally similar (white, American, middle class) subjects, two moral "voices" or paradigms of moral reasoning are evident: one focused on impersonal justice and rule-following, the other focused on appropriate caretaking and meeting responsibilities within specific relationships. Early studies indicated that these different approaches to ethics are linked to gender roles within patriarchy, although later research questioned a strong identification of ethical perspectives with gender (Gilligan 1988).

The identification of fully developed care perspectives highlights a foundational dimension of ethical life that has been ignored or regarded as an object of disdain in western philosophy. But the moral and material strength of practical care ethics show that forms of moral reasoning associated with subservient social roles are not inherently immature or irrational, but instead demonstrate significant moral wisdom. Importantly, the critical lens that feminist philosophers have brought to the idea of care ethics calls for investigating the extent to which "feminine virtues" may express a slave morality of false ethical norms that uphold oppressive divisions and hierarchies through severe judgment (Card, 1990; Hoagland, 1991; Cuomo, 1992; Willett, 1995). Low-paid or unwaged caring labor is often assigned to and associated with females and subjugated peoples, whose

social identities may be defined by self-sacrifice and service for others and whose options may be severely limited in relation to those associations. For example, overemphasizing caring virtues and self-sacrifice in girls and discouraging them in boys propagates sexist divisions, violence against women and girls, and patriarchal oppression in private and public spheres. As philosopher Michele Moody-Adams has written, within sexist societies moral capacities identified with hegemonic femininity may “best suit women for domestic pursuits,” and “the vision or morality that Gilligan believes to be dominant in women’s thinking is bound up with rather limiting stereotypes” (1991: 201). In addition, some paradigms of caretaking that claim to be moral are actually paternalistic, hierarchical, and belittling (Narayan, 1995).

However, although relegation and socialization into the realm of caretaking labor can be a fundamental feature of oppression, caring and nurturing cannot be dismissed as only or inevitably exploitative. Rather, they are indispensable and valuable, and the virtues of caring can be understood and revised in more egalitarian ways that value caretakers and recipients of care. Caretaking positions such as “parent,” “mammy,” “nurse,” “guide,” “tree-hugger,” and the like have developed and realized specific forms of ethical wisdom, virtue, and problem-solving, sometimes in resistance to hegemonic norms about what it means to be good or to do the right thing, as when the female subjects of Gilligan’s early studies shared that they would bend or disregard inadequate or unjust rules and laws to benefit an innocent loved one in need. Discussions of care ethics have been influential in caring professions such as nursing, teaching, social work, and public health. The framework of care ethics that has evolved in the literature articulates modes of ethical life founded on mutually beneficial caring relationships that

do not exploit caregivers, that enable and encourage responsible and healthy caring and caregiving, that highly value the input and autonomy of the cared-for, and that are promising as correctives to moral, political, and philosophical systems that neglect the significance of context, caring, and dependence in moral life (Tronto, 1987; Kittay, 2001; Held, 2007).

Feminist care-based environmental ethics are prominent in movements to acknowledge the value of animal others. Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen provide an ecofeminist analysis of the connections among the exploitation of women of color employed as chicken factory workers, the slaughter of chickens for food, and the cultural construction of chickens as a life form subjected to gross mistreatment but deserving of far more caring and justice (Gaard and Gruen, 1993). Animal rights activists and theorists have embraced the discourse of feminist ethics, promoting caring and empathy for all animals, and linking the mistreatment of nonhuman animals to other forms of social injustice (Adams and Donovan, 1996; Gaarder, 2011). But feminist environmental ethics of care are not limited to caring for sentient beings. The tree-hugging Chipko movement in India illustrated how environmental protection can be enlivened by women's local knowledge about communal well-being and the intermingled interests of human and nonhuman life. Public performances of care ethics helped revolutionize understandings of conservation and women's unique stakes in environmental protection, especially where basic rights and needs are threatened by destructive projects that generate profits for outsiders (Bahuguna, 1984).

There has been a great deal of analysis of ethics as requiring both caring and justice which allows for understanding morality as pluralistic and contextual, involving

many levels of agency and concern (i.e., personal, household, cultural, institutional, legalistic). For example, feminist discussions of the gendered dimension of climate change focus on the importance of caring-- empowering communities to care for themselves and the social and ecological communities in which their lives and interests are interwoven-- as well as the importance of laws and policies to reduce pollution. As a moral and practical problem, climate change evokes a range of dilemmas involving caring and caretaking, as well as demands related to justice, fairness, inclusive methods, and empowering policies—matters of legalistic morality and institutional justice (Aguilar, 2009; Tschakert and Machado, 2012; Cuomo and Tuana, 2014).

Empirically and on the ground, efforts toward moral repair regarding environmental harms benefit from the integration of care ethics into institutions and collective decision making. It is noteworthy that serious attention to these issues seems to be articulated by agencies as mainstream as the US Environmental Protection Agency, which purports to address the unjust distribution of environmental harms through “community-based programs that help build capacity to address critical issues affecting overburdened populations” (USEPA, 2011: 5). Utilizing a framework of environmental justice, this language extends ethics of care in the direction required by justice, toward the "overburdened." But when disastrous pollution and the like are inflicted on already-targeted communities, such reparative support is clearly only the beginning of what truly respectful ethical caring demands.

4. Conclusion

Feminist and indigenous conceptions of care ethics offer a range of ideas and tools for environmental ethics, especially ones that are helpful for unearthing deep connections and moral commitment and for guiding environmental decision making. Beyond the examples discussed here, care often figures behind the scenes in policies and practices that aim to promote both human and environmental well-being. More work is needed, however, to draw attention to the important contributions made by ethics of caring in spheres of politics and policy. Movements such as the Mother Earth Water Walk and the Green Belt Movement are ongoing examples of the effectiveness of on-the-ground environmental care ethics (Maathai, 2011). The gendered, feminist, historical, and decolonial dimensions of care ethics and related approaches to environmental ethics provide rich ground for rethinking and reclaiming the nature and depth of diverse relationships as the very fabric of social and ecological being.

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