

of an ethical outlook' [2]. I am not sure that, in the hardly unploughed field of modern, neo-Aristotelian ethics, this is quite enough.

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Plumwood, Val, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 304, £60 (cloth), £16.99 (paper).

In this, her most recent book, Val Plumwood sets aside some of the conventional terminology and associated puzzles that frequently arise in environmental ethics debates. To some extent she sidelines the classical environmental ethics project of distinguishing between anthropocentric and biocentric moral attitudes towards nature. Plumwood suggests that prudential maintenance of the non-human world overlaps and merges with selfless care for the non-human world, and does not dwell on how these moral motivations can or should be differentiated. In the feminist tradition, she is wary of this kind of dualistic logic—the practice whereby concepts are paired and narrowly defined in opposition to one another. Indeed, this is Plumwood's critical focus in her assessment of both the causes of, and responses to, the 'ecological crisis of reason'. Her analysis is both extensive and insightful; it moves beyond stifling meta-ethical debates about the sources of value in nature, and considers what characterizes ethical attitudes, and how such attitudes should direct all spheres of human activity, from political processes to scientific investigation. While at times she employs opaque language, and in some cases participates in the very dualisms that she attacks, I think Plumwood successfully demonstrates her claim that environmental philosophy can learn much from aspects of feminist and other anti-oppression political/philosophical approaches.

Plumwood initially attacks the conceptual separation and privileging of reason over nature. This is a point that unites many environmental philosophers. The idea that rationality or consciousness elevates humans above the rest of the natural world, such that we have the capacity to dictate natural order according to our own terms, is widely criticized as being delusory. Ecological scientists warn that nature is not merely formless material awaiting human manipulation; it consists, rather, of biological networks having particular structures that enable diverse forms of life. Plumwood uses more emotive (but not unreasonable) language in her portrayal of ecosystems—she describes them as accommodating multiple, interdependent sources of agency and teleological activity. Consistent with this emphasis on nature's purpose, she later (in Chapter 8) asserts that we should understand human rationality not as a radically separate phenomenon, but as existing within a rich spectrum of differing types of agency or 'mindfulness'. This depiction provides compelling reason to employ the language of relationships to refer to the interactions between humans and non-humans. It gives Plumwood the basis for elaborating an environmental 'ethics of care'. Such a moral framework makes the overlap between prudential and ethical treatment of non-humans straightforward—both attitudes amount to establishing respectful, supportive relationships with those whom we interact with and depend upon.

In keeping with an ethics of care, Plumwood does not formalize respectful relationships with non-humans into a system of 'rights' that encompasses all of

nature. (I would argue that those who have attempted this project have failed.) She focuses instead (in Chapters 1 and 2) on how our political and scientific institutions are modelled according to a rationale that retards positive relationships amongst humans, and between humans and non-humans. To this end Plumwood draws on feminist criticism of the reason/emotion and public/private dualisms that pervade Western culture. In distinguishing between the private, domestic sphere of caring and emotional attachment, and the public sphere of self-interested rationality, Plumwood claims that modern society subordinates ethics, and allows our cultural practices and relationships to be dominated by self-interest. Her project is not to extend the disinterested rights-oriented approach, but rather to assert the need for an ethics of care as central to all our activities and interactions, whether within the private, public, or broader ecosystem sphere. According to this understanding of ethics, fair and reasonable economic transactions would necessarily involve sensitivity and active responsibility towards all stakeholders. Plumwood extends her criticism to modern scientific culture, which she claims reinforces the prevailing ‘ethics-free’ market economy. In presenting the generation of knowledge as rational and objective only insofar as it detaches itself from power agendas and end-use, she argues that science allows its work to lend authority to, and be subsumed by, self-interested market ideals.

While an ethics of care essentially concerns local, particular relationships, and resists definition in terms of an abstract formula, Plumwood shows that its recommendations are far-reaching when extended to the public sphere. As discussed, she critiques the market economy, as well as the institution of science. Plumwood considers ethical responsibility to be a community issue, by virtue of the fact that social conditions fundamentally impact upon the ability of individuals to engage with others in a positive manner. In Chapter 4, she broadly envisages communities in which power differentials (economic or otherwise) are minimal, such that all participants are able to participate in decision-making and cultural initiatives—she refers to such a political structure as a ‘deep democracy’. Within Plumwood’s deep democracy, human participants have the additional responsibility of representing the needs of non-humans with whom they interact. This kind of ethical community would strive to make diverse, collaborative relationships characteristic of all aspects of living.

While Plumwood’s caring democracy may begin to sound like an unreachable utopia, in Chapters 3 and 4, she argues that creating such a society is not simply an ethical issue but is also a matter of prudence. Assuming that the promotion of human flourishing is a shared and overriding goal, Plumwood is correct to point out that there is nothing rational about an ‘economic rationality’ that compromises long-term health and survival for short-term gains. She advocates alternative, more sensible concepts of ‘ecological rationality’, one possible definition being ‘the capacity to correct tendencies to damage or reduce life-support systems’ [68]. While this principle expresses prudence, Plumwood argues that it further supports her vision of a caring democracy. She provides a convincing account of why a community structure involving all affected participants in decision processes is necessary for monitoring and maintaining ecosystems that support human life. It certainly seems plausible that the ability of those with market power to redistribute harmful ecological effects to the silenced poor contributes to current denial that our well-being depends on the health of broader ecosystems. Plumwood experiments with the idea of a green

dictatorship to further illustrate her point that democracy is essential for ecosystem resilience and diversity.

In elaborating her ecologically sensitive democracy, Plumwood is aware of the problems associated with drawing a contrast between respect for non-humans versus treating non-humans as resources. In fact, Chapter 7 criticizes what can be labelled the use/respect dualism that is apparent in many environmental ethics theories. Plumwood argues that this distinction results in our ethical discourse problematizing, or even disregarding, the many life forms that we use in the interests of human survival and flourishing. I consider this to be an important point, so I was disappointed to find that Plumwood herself occasionally participates in this use/respect dualism. A notable example is her opinion regarding biotechnology; Plumwood does not engage in a critical analysis of the technology to determine its potential benefits and/or harms, or how it compares with other agricultural/medicinal practices. She asserts that the technology is wrong because it is a ‘tightening of control over nature’ [238], but this does not seem consistent with her argument that we may both use *and* respect other life forms. Perhaps Plumwood’s opinion is that although use and respect are not polar opposites, some forms of use are incompatible with respect. I think it detracts from the consistency of her ideas, however, that she neither makes this point clearly, nor demonstrates why it specifically applies to some technologies rather than others.

For the most part, Plumwood is non-specific in her portrayal of caring attitudes and relationships. This seems appropriate, since her ethics of care does not revolve around obedience to steadfast rules. Given this lack of finer detail, however, I would argue that Plumwood should be more cautious with her sweeping criticisms. Her remarks about biotechnology are one example. Another aspect of the work that I found unsatisfying was her poorly explained attacks on the uses of abstract, mathematical techniques in scientific method and decision-making. In her critique of dominant understandings of science and ethics, Plumwood (particularly in Chapter 7) seems to reject quantitative approaches wholesale, which is hardly a plausible position. A more constructive approach might be to give better context to these methods. For example, within a decision process that respects all affected community members, determining a suitable collective strategy can remain a complex task, and it is plausible to think that expected utility or other types of abstract calculations would be useful tools in such situations.

Although she embellishes her analysis with some unconvincing generalizations, Plumwood presents a largely consistent and engaging ethical account. She dismantles many of the dualisms that commonly trouble environmental ethicists—distinctions such as prudence versus ethics (to describe moral motivation), or use versus respect (to prescribe treatment of non-humans). Plumwood focuses rather on how acknowledging ourselves to be members of interdependent ecological communities exposes the overlaps between these moral characterizations. She advocates an ‘ethics of care’, which is not only appealing for its personal, emotion-based qualities, but also for its political relevance; with this interpretation of ethics, Plumwood provides an ‘ecologically rational’ integration of the domestic, public, and wider ecosystem spheres of human activity and moral sensibility.

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