

A Joint Struggle Against Oppression: Liberation and the Environment



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Abstract

The aim of this project is to explore the concepts of oppression and the environment, in doing so I aim to prove that the manipulation and exploitation of the environment and oppressed people are constitutive of one another. My central claim being that the subordination of oppressed people and the environment are facilitated by the same mechanisms, namely dualistic logic and the episteme and social structures that come about as a result of corresponding hierarchical value systems. In evaluating the relationship between oppression and environmental degradation I provide methods of resistance and liberation that exist outside of the dualistic logic of oppression. In changing our environmental ethics to utilize principles of care and respect we can find, develop and establish new resistant ways of being and relating to one another. Changing our relations to one another and the environment necessitates the destruction of all forms of oppression all at once, thus beginning the process of liberation and revolution. These ideas can thus take us out of the oppressive episteme we find ourselves in allowing us to create new and imaginative futures.

Conclusions

- Both the environment and marginalized groups are subordinated through dualistic logic enforced by material conditions like violence, infrastructure, property, economic structures and more
- The environment when identified as a collection of social groups

Research Questions

1. What is oppression?
2. What is the relationship between oppression and the environment?
3. If we are to argue that environmental degradation and oppression are co-constitutive of one another, how must our approach to environmental philosophy need to change?
4. Can an ecofeminist ethic lend itself to revolution, or is it restricted to reform?

Existing Scholarship

Key Terms + Theories

- Episteme—the paradigms that exist within a given society that make up meaning and all implicit background assumptions as a prevailing knowledge structure
- Dualism – “the construction of a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness” which reify some “essential” elements of a person that are then used to justify their lumping together into a social group
- Social group - a “collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life”
- Logic of Purity – logic that focuses on separation and categorization for the purpose of exploitation and fragmentation to maintain subordination and domination through legibility
- Ecofeminism – a philosophical tradition that argues the climate crisis is entangled with the oppression of women and other oppressed people

Conditions for oppression

Oppression names a harm that comes out of institutional practice(s) to mold, reduce, and immobilize a selected group that satisfies the following four conditions:

- The harm conditions: there is a harm that comes out of an institutional practice
- The social group condition: the harm is perpetrated through a social institution or practice on a subordinated social group whose identity does not exist apart from the oppressive harm in (1)
 - The harm must be a group harm; harming both the individual as a result of their status as a member of the subordinated social group as well as harming the group overall
- The privilege condition: There is another dominant social group that benefits from the institutional practice in (1)
- The coercion condition: There is unjustified coercion or force that brings about the harm.

Implications

- If it is the case that oppression and environmental degradation are co-constitutive, environmental decision-making as it is currently conducted will need to undergo a shift in its fundamental ideologies
- It then follows that environmental ethics must take a feminist approach to decision making and maintain liberation as its core value, likewise philosophies of oppression will need to prioritize ecosystem health in order to achieve liberation