Direct Action and the Heroic Ideal

An Ecofeminist Critique

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I am seated at a plenary session at a national animal rights conference animal rights activist and self-described "eco-warrior" is speaking to a his voice bellowing with anger. He declares that violence is a norma response to the desecration of sacred places or art. Why, then, is it not reaction to rainforest destruction? If activists truly valued these "cathe he continues, they would not simply picket, lobby, or dance around it they would rise up and rip those loggers limb from limb. The audience with enthusiasm, and gives him a standing ovation when he is done.

A few years later, I'm seated at an animal rights conference, listenir direct action. The facilitator introduces himself by giving his personal was imprisoned for several years for overturning a car during an anim He initiates the discussion by asking, How many people think that justified? People begin to raise their hands until it seems that all a mine. He has not specified what *type* of action he would like us to contact that information, I cannot respond.

Direct action as a means of opposing injustice is a time-honored tradit embraced by many members of the animal rights and environmental Direct action activists have made significant contributions. In additious of countless animals and curtailing environmental devastation, to key issues in the forefront of discussions about animal liberation and ethics. Many nature advocates now recognize that it is not enough inherently corrupt system; we must challenge the entire notion of nonhing property. Direct action activists have also advanced the discussion of terrorism. Is it terrorism when someone rescues an animal who is be pain and suffering and ultimately death? When someone throws a brick a fur store? Or is terrorism, rather, the state of siege that is inflicted upon

animals everyday throughout the world? These types of discussions ha animal liberation movement in significant ways.

Some forms of direct action can be valuable tools for social change. I videotapes from the Head Injury Clinic at the Neurological Institute for example, documented extreme cruelty to primates and was instrur the laboratory.² But when direct action is endorsed uncritically in any embraced as a universal norm, it can do more harm than good. Th distinction between liberating an animal from a laboratory, in which exists, and burning down a building where someone could be injured. When most animal rights advocates think of direct actions, they conju dramatic night-time raids, property destruction, and acts involving gre Freeing animals, bombing buildings, destroying research, seizing evi abuse, and targeting the homes of individuals involved in animal explc to mind as examples. The uncritical endorsement of heroic³ acts by sc mal and environmental advocates, however, may inadvertently repl worldview that the protesters seek to supplant. Moreover, the focus c also tends to eclipse the more frequent everyday acts of courage that fe social change. In this paper, I examine both the ethos that underli action, and the importance of ordinary acts of courage that can br change.

It is understandable that people would resort to extreme actions in pervasive suffering of animals that persists and even grows, decampaigns against it. We live in a patriarchal and capitalist society animal abuse as the norm. Billions of animals suffer and die every profit, pleasure, and use. Nonhuman animals emerge into this w prodded, choked, caged, pierced, bludgeoned, raped, gassed, brander assaulted. Their flesh and body products appear in our cosmetics, c food. The mentality that underlies these forms of abuse conceives o "other," as mere objects with no independent identity, existing only to of others.

The worldview that underlies animal abuse in Western culture derive mentality to the one which underlies the abuse of women. Women, animals, are viewed as Beasts or Bodies. The Beast is a symbol for a not human, and thus evil, irrational, and wild. Civilization is achieve or killing the Beast.⁴ On an inward level, this involves obliterating al own animality.5 Outwardly, the triumph over the Beast has been ena conquest of wilderness, with its concomitant claim to the lives of mil driven from their homes.

The triumph over the demonic beast has been a recurring theme through mythologies. Typically, the slain Beast is a former divinity f matriarchal world. The serpents, dragons, and horned gods, who w worshipped as divine, are transformed

in patriarchal mythology into devils and monsters that must be slain. T Gaia's python; Perseus kills the three-headed Medusa (the triple g described as having snakes writhing from her head; Hercules defeats the headed Hydra; and the pharaohs of later Egypt slay the dragon A Middle Ages, there were countless renditions of St. George's prowed ragon to rescue the damsel in distress.

Today, the heroic battle against the Beast is reenacted as ritual masculine ventures as sport-hunting, bullfights, and rodeos. A similar seen in the ritual degradation of women in pornography and rape animals are tied and bound in rodeos, women are tied and bound magazines, or depicted in acts of submission.

The second image underlying the abuse of women and nonhuman anir heroic, but is equally violent in its own way. It is the representation nonhuman animals as mindless matter, objects that exist to serve the n rational "Man." In this conception, animals are depicted as having d natures, rather than as wild or evil creatures that must be conquered an are not so much irrational as nonrational beings. Along with women, as mere "matter" (a word that, significantly, derives from the san "mother"). In this conception, the bodies of women and animals are reproductive capacity and their flesh. Their bodies are also said to excof men.

At times, women and nonhuman animals have also been idealiz innocent, providing a nurturing influence that functions to moderate a Once again, their value lies only in their utility to others. They are con in distress, helpless victims who must be rescued from the evil conception, protection becomes the mirror image of predation. The that fuels the masculine conquest of the Beast is transformed into the protection. Again, women and nonhuman animals are seen as devoic identity, passive objects which reinforce the autonomous masculine sel Patriarchal society presents us with intolerable choices. Everyday the more that we could be doing to alleviate the pervasive suffering that we do nothing, we often feel complicit in this suffering. Engaging i direct action can help assuage our feelings of helplessness, providing u empowerment. Heroic forms of direct action in particular may see search for empowerment, but they can also reflect an assertion of control.

Significantly, a number of individuals who engage in direct action vie "eco-warriors" and relish their warrior role. Dave Foreman, one of Earth First! openly declares that "Earth First! is a warrior society." 9 logo of a raised fist, accompanied

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by the words "In Defense of Mother Earth," aptly exemplifies the war "rescue the helpless female-in this case Mother Earth." ¹⁰ Paul Watson Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, similarly exemplifies the warrior inspiration from two ancient Asian military strategists, and litters I military metaphors: "war," "battle," "enemy," "weapons," and "defeat.' the Sea Shepherd, he rams fishing boats and fires shotguns in his batt rine animals. He praises newsworthy actions that "hint of roman claiming that "there is nothing wrong with being a terrorist as long Militarism is more than a metaphor for Watson, who states that "Right early stages of World War III. We are the navy to Earth First!'s arm save the planet. This kind of action will be getting stronger... Eventual open war." ¹³

Martyrdom is a trait often praised by eco-warriors. In Watson's we warrior, like all warriors, must be prepared for death." ¹⁴ Always redanger for a noble cause, the eco-warrior often denounces other form cowardice. Behind these tirades lurks the specter of the sissy, with devalued female world. Watson scorns Greenpeace, the organization found, as "the Avon Ladies of the environmental movement." ¹⁵

Animal liberation philosophers also typically employ the model of the citing the "force of reason" in their "defense" of "animal rights." ¹⁶ Reathe weapon of choice for compelling adherence to universal norms, su and "rights." Proponents of direct action, by contrast, purport to me power of words, preferring physical force to achieve the goal of anima as feminists have pointed out, both the logical power of "reason" a power of force often fail to change people's hearts. What is needed, in development of compassion for the nonhuman world, and an undersuch care is so singularly absent in our current culture.

A nineteenth-century organization of English children's kindness clul Mercy, a wing of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Ar understood the importance of reaching people's hearts, rather than o The Bands of Mercy provided the inspiration for the modern day org same name, which later developed into the ALF Founded in the 18 slavery activist, Catherine Smithies, as a branch of the RSPCA, the clu members to sign a sworn statement promising that they would be "kin living creatures, and try to protect them from cruel usage." ¹⁷ Mer required to get thirty people to sign the oath in order to form a "bar were modeled after the widespread and internationally popular children to take vows of abstinence from alcohol. ¹⁸

The kindness clubs and temperance organizations that sprang up in the nineteenth-century were part of a larger mov~ment, predominantly led be sought to stem men's violence. These movements reflected the post-Darwini "animal nature," and the concomitant hope that women's benevolent influen a civilizing force. Promoting kindness and compassion, mostly in young both a central purpose of many nineteenth-century women's organizations.

The twentieth-century organization, the Band of Mercy, which emerged in retained vestiges of its nineteenth-century namesake, the Bands of Mercy model of "active compassion." ¹⁹ Founded in 1972 by members of th Association (HSA), the organization initially condoned property destruction used to stop animal abuse. ²⁰ When Band members engaged in raids to dam in the hunt, they claimed that they "would always leave a message to the I the motives of their actions and the logic of animal liberation, while stat nothing personal against anyone individual." ²¹

Over the next four years, the Band of Mercy extended its activities to a animal rescues. In 1976, the members decided to change the organization that it no longer seemed appropriate. The name of the new organiza Liberation Front, appears to have been designed to inspire fear, rather that Noel Molland explains, the group wanted a new name that "would haunt the A name whose very mention could symbolize a whole ideology of movement." ²² The organization, however, still retained its commitment towards humans, and destruction only of property used for animal abuse.

By 1984, many direct action proponents had come to endorse violence as for achieving success. The underlying rationale was that, given the resistatorms of social change and the worsening conditions of animals, the ends. Patriarchal society, however, employs a similar logic in support of anime experimenters cite the worthy benefits that will ensue when they "sacrific altar of science; nonhuman animals are merely tools in their single-minded or products. "Home demos," which target the homes of individuals engaged show a similar singularity of focus: there is little concern that innocent children, may be traumatized by their actions. 23 Yet every action occurs we context and generates multiple reactions.

Feminist philosophers have underscored the need for contextual thinking as care.²⁴ In contrast to modem ethical theorists who base their arguments on a and universal rules, feminists point to the importance of understanding t which ethical decisions are made.²⁵ The two approaches find a parallel in t Allopathic medicine views the body as a battlefield in

which the invading enemy-disease-needs to be countered with an arse including radiation, surgery, and drugs. The physicians are the heroes ailing body, overcoming the enemy combatants. Holistic healing, by c understand the causes of disease, fortifying health so the body can re repel unwelcome intruders. Holistic healing focuses on preventing ill simply suppressing symptoms and declaring the battle "won." ²⁶ In holistic ethics seek to understand the underlying roots of moral proble to removing them, and preventing their reoccurrence.

Direct action proponents might do well to consider trading in their mi for the model of holistic health. Rather than viewing individual act interventions designed to force enemy combatants into submission, the as educational opportunities. The open rescues that liberate animal their liberation, exemplify the kind of direct action that helps individu also promoting empathy and an understanding of the larger col oppression. Karen Davis illustrates this point in her description of liberation of several hens by the Australian Action Animal Rescut

We see the hens' suffering faces up close. We watch and hear a hen scream as the molasses-like manure in which she is trapped in the pits beneath the cage tures not only the terrible suffering of the hens being rescued, but the gentlene the rescue team (as expressed, for example, by their hands), who, as an integra eotaped operations, contact the police, get arrested, and explain their mission of putting battery-hen farming visibly on trial before the public and in the cour At times, open rescuers do not reveal the particular operation t preferring to put pressure on the industry as a whole. These open rescu the heroic mind-set of the masked warriors who focus on property d defeat of a single animal operation, neglecting to lay the base understanding that can prevent future abuse of nonhuman animals.

While the feminist ethic of care eschews abstract principles and u favor of a contextual approach to ethical conduct, it can draw c evaluating particular situations and actions. Kim Stall wood propose criteria for assessing direct actions, based on the "core values of co nonviolence or ahimsa, and 'interbeing." . his words, he endorses direc

- is motivated by a sense of compassion for all beings (human and non
- tells the truth about animal cruelty and all resulting harms it causes to environment:
- is accomplished with adherence to nonviolent principles to all beings nonhuman alike) and property;

• is undertaken only after all consequences of the direct action and people and animals are carefully considered by the protagonists, wl honestly and openly accept the consequences.²⁸

Just as holistic health seeks to determine the causes of disease with a health and preventing its recurrence, so too holistic ethics strive to det of moral problems, and the way to prevent them. Exploring the 1 masculine self-identity and violence toward nature may help to shed needed to transform our society's relation to the natural world.

It is well known that a large majority of members of the animal liber are women.²⁹ It is also no secret that women are disproportionately re more mundane work entailed in running an organization. A similar bi found in shelter and other rescue work, with far more women than men day-to-day care for nonhuman animals. Feminist activist pattrice jone despite men's greater visibility in direct actions, the gender represe probably comparable to that of the rest of the movement.³⁰ Altho surrounding direct actions makes it difficult to determine gender ratio, believe that more men than women are drawn to the heroic model of a concedes that "the combination of macho posturing by ALF unstructured nature of the ALF cell system, and the essential lawlessr makes it possible for "disaffected and potentially violent young men .. as an excuse to vent anger in inappropriate ways." She contends, he liability can be remedied by media coverage which puts a "feminine f Although changing the "face of the ALF" may help to discourage activism, foregrounding education and "active compassion" would, per ALF in more fundamental ways.

Examples of direct actions which combine active compassion and e found around the globe, including the Chipko tree-hugging movemer Butterfly Hill's year-long tree sitting campaign in the US, and the Gre missile protest in England. In the Chipko movement in the early villagers embraced trees in order to prevent environmentally devastati Although the movement was originally organized and controlled torganizers were catapulted into the spotlight when they spontaneou persuade loggers to leave the forest.³²

In a similar spirit, beginning in 1997, Julia Butterfly Hill, camped out the top of a California Coast Redwood tree in protest of the logging pra Lumber Company.³³ Both forms of action illustrate the figurative and of what the protesters hoped to protect in contrast to angry confraperceived enemy, which often alienate the public.³⁴

The Women's Peace Camp in Greenham Common illustrates a similar form of activism.³⁵ In this instance, women embraced not what they we but the missiles they opposed. The Women's

Greenham Peace Camp began in England as a protest against the Cruise Missiles at the Greenham Common. Throughout its nineteen ye organizers engaged in multiple forms of imaginative, mostly nonviole actions. In 1982, for example, 30,000 women joined hands around "Embrace the Base" event. In other actions, women tied yarn around the war machinery, confusing the police officers who didn't know l unknitting a web of women.

In all of these examples, protesters garnered widespread sympathy through creative actions that embodied their hopes and their drea engaging in violent confrontations. Heroic direct actions, with their style, by contrast, tend to eclipse the everyday acts of courage that we behalf of nonhuman animals. Some of these more prosaic actions prese us on a daily basis and are often lost or overlooked. My niece recent these opportunities. Sarah, raised as an orthodox Jew, was a natural-bo activist from a very young age. A vegetarian from birth, she grew t with a combination of horror and disgust. She teased her meat-emimicking the animal they were consuming-flapping her arms when the and swishing them like a fish when they consumed a fish. She embarra in public by hiding under the table whenever meat was served.

She was not deterred by authority figures from voicing her strong vi On one occasion, when dining at a Rabbi's house, she challenged condoning meat eating. "Meat eating is murder!" she instructed 1 responded by explaining that that is not possible, since it would ma murderers. "Well, you are!" she responded, much to her mother's emba As she grew up, her demonstrative acts of protest began to wane, but I doubt that her zeal for the animal cause had abated. It therefore came a learned that she was engaged to be married and planned to serve meat her wedding day. Giving in to the pressure to conform, Sarah had opportunity to engage in a direct action. Had she chosen to serve veg could have expressed her care and compassion for nonhuman animal influenced a large number of people. While serving vegetarian food at not jump to mind as an example of direct action, this type of challens of convention exemplifies the everyday acts of resistance that form th transformation.

Direct action on behalf of nonhuman animals can further be enriched discussion of the heroic ideal. Is courage only an act of physical t always entail danger? Can courage, for some, be found in defying convention? How might "direct action" be redefined so that it incorp acts of courage? A feminist ethic of care and "compassionate activism important contribution to answering these questions and to the deve forms of

direct action that can help create a world of peace and nonviolence for all liv

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Notes

- 1. The tenn "direct action" generally refers to both legal and illegal actions of an immediate nation pressure toward social change. On one end of the spectrum, some conceive of direct action as transmals, arson, and other acts
- of eco-sabotage. On the other end are organizations, such as Friends of Animals, which conside direct action. My intention in this article is to challenge the preeminence of the heroic ideal in d action, and to explore its masculinist underpinnings.
- 2. The tapes that were stolen were the actual footage taken by the experimenters themselves. Dick Pothier, "Animal-Rights Group Says it Vandalized Penn Laboratory:' *Philadelphia Inqui*
- 3. Heroism in the Western world is traditionally associated with the notion of courage, sacrifice of conceptions of direct actions within the animal rights and environmental movements. The cla commonly a male warrior who vanquishes foes and sunnounts obstacles in an attempt to overce "hero" derives from ancient Greek "hieros" and originally referred to the notion of a demi-god. and immortalization through legend, is closely aligned with the classic notions of heroism.
- 4. I am indebted to Mary Midgley for my understanding and use of the tenn Beast. Midgley, Ma *The Roots of Human Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- S. For an in-depth analysis of how masculine self-identity and Western civilization are founded transcend animal and female nature, see Brown, Wendy. *Manhood and Politics:* A *Feminist 1 Theory*. Totawa, N.J.: Rowman and Litttlefied, 1988, and French, Marilyn. *Beyo/ld Power: O. Morals*. New York:

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- 6. Portions of my discussion of the heroic Beast are drawn from Marti Kheel, "From Heroic to l Ecofeminist Challenge." In *Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Te Press, 1993.
- 7. Monica Sjoo and Barbara Moor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion c* Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 250-51.
- 8. On the common worldview underlying predation and protection, See Hoagland, Sarah. *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value.* Palo Alto, California: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1989. Robbins, "The Environmental Guerillas: *Boston Globe Magazine, 27* March 1988. Cited in S *Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Global Environmental Crisis* (New York: Rou 10. Joni Seager, 227.

- 11. Paul Watson. Earthforce!: An Earth Warriors Guide to Strategy. Los Angeles, Californi Chaco Press, 1993.
- 12. Paul Watson, Presentation at the Animal Rights 2002 National Conference, sponsored Reform Movement, McLean, Virginia, June 28-July 3, 2002.
- 13. Quoted in Best, Steven. "It's War! The Escalating Battle Between Activists and the Co Complex." In *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters: Reflections on the Liberation of Animals*, ed. 5 Anthony J. Nocella, II. New York: Lantern Books, 2004.
- 14.Paul Watson, 51.
- 15. Scarce, Rik. Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movemwt (Chicag 1990), 102.
- 16. See Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of 1983, and Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*, 2nd Edition. New York Review of Books, 199 the emphasis on reason in animal ethics, see the essays in *Beyond Animal Rights*, edited by Adams. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- 17. Our Dumb Allimals Volume 20 No.3 (1987).
- 18. The twentieth-century Band of Mercy maintained that some militant members of its ni predecessor also sabotaged rifles, but conceded that no evidence exists to substantiate this to have drawn inspiration from a play performed by the earlier organization, in which a m gun of a hunter, which subsequently burst in his face. See Molland, Noel, "Thirty Years o *Compromise* 18 (Summer, 2002).
- 19.Ibid.
- 20. For an overview of the history of direct action, see Stallwood, Kim. "A Personal Over Action in the United Kingdom and the United States." In *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters*.
- 21. Noel Molland, "Thirty Years of Direct Action."
- 22 Ibid
- 23. Carol Adams gave a first-hand report, describing how traumatic it was for her childrer home picketed by anti-abortion activists. Panel presentation at The Animal Rights 2003 N sponsored by the Farm Animal Reform Movement, Los Angeles, 2-5 August 2003.
- 24. On the subject of a feminist ethic of care, see Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psy Womens Development.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993; Larrat *An Ethic of Care: Feminist Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* New York: Routledge, 1993; Col Susan Coultrap McQuin, eds. *Explorations in Feminist Ethics: Theory and Practice.* Bloomi University Press, 1992. For a discussion of an ethic of care in relation to nonhuman anima Donovan, Josephine and Carol J. Adams, eds. *Beyond Animal Rights.*
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- 28. Kim Stallwood. "A Personal Overview of Direct Action in the United Kingdom and the Terrorists or Freedom Fighters.
- 29. Researchers estimate that women constitute over seventy-five percent of the animal ac See Galvin, Shelley L. and Harold A. Herzog, Jr., "Attitudes and Dispositional Optimism Demonstrators," *Society and Animals* 6: 1 (1988), and Plous, Scott, "Signs of Change With Movement: Results From FollowUp Survey of Activists," *Journal of Comparative Psychol* 54.

- 30. jones, pattrice. "Mothers with Monkeywrenches: Feminist Imperatives and the ALF.' Freedom Fighters.
- 31. Men's disproportionate representation in risk-taking activities, especially those that ir threats to life, health, and the environment, is well documented in a number of studies. So Boholm, Asa, "Comparative Studies of Risk Perception: A Review of 20 years of researc *Research* I (1998): 135-63. For an in-depth analysis of the allure of adventure for men, see *Adventurous Male: Chapters in the History of the White Male Mind.* University Park, Pennsy State University Press, 1993.
- 32. Women's role in the Chikpo movement came to the fore in 1974, when the male org of Reni were lured away to clear the way for the loggers. In addition to convincing the leave the forest, the women also destroyed and guarded
- a bridge, preventing them from returning. For a detailed history of the Chipko movement Ramachandra. *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change & Peasant Resistance in the Himalay* University Press, UC Press, 2000. For an analysis of the gender dynamics of the moveme "Standing Up for Trees: Women's Role in the Chipko Movement," *Unasylva* 36.4 (1984).
- 33. For a chronicle of her tree sitting campaign, see Butterfly Hill, Julia. *The Legacy of Tree, a Woman, and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods.* San Francisco:

Harper Collins, 2000.

- 34. The above tree-hugging/sitting actions contrast with the tree spiking campaign of the movement. According to this tactic, spikes are placed in trees in order to deter logging. V huggers/sitters pose only a risk to themselves, tree spiking endangers others. Moreover, t timber workers, rather than to the corporate decision-makers. Although Earth First!ers de at least one timber worker was badly injured by a tree spiking incident. Tree spiking was the Northern California and Southern Oregon chapters of Earth First! EF! activist, Judi B are serious about putting Earth first, we need to choose tactics because they work, not be macho or romantic." (Bari, Judi, "The Secret History of Tree Spiking," Earth First! Journ (1994): 264-328.
- 35. For a detailed history of the Greenham Women's Peace Camp, see Roseneil, Sasha. Disanning Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Actiorl at Greenham. Buckingham: Open Un