

Ecological Feminism and Global Mysticism: Rekindling the Inspiration of Hildegard of Bingen

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Abstract

This work aims to propose that ecological feminism (ecofeminism) can be a viable step towards attaining a new mode of consciousness that can accordingly promote global mysticism, in the hope of ensuring the integral good of planet Earth, and thus, of the survival of humanity as a whole. Briefly, ecofeminism is a meditation on the possibility of approaching the question of creation integrity through the intuitive framework of feminist thought. This paper specifically evokes the mystical insight of the proto-ecofeminism of Hildegard of Bingen. The goal of global mysticism upon which to hinge humanity's hope in achieving a planetary well-being is a spiritual task addressed to all human beings of goodwill. This consists in constantly learning to discern that which truly ultimately matters to humanity in today's changing global realities. Looking forward, by global mysticism issues and misuses of the Earth's resources can be put in perspective for properly communicative action. The Earth is humanity's one and only, final dwelling-place and sustaining source of being.

Keywords: Hildegard of Bingen, feminism, ecological feminism, global mysticism, mysticism

Introduction

The search for the Other is philosophy's quintessential task. This means that the human being's quest for self-realization is only possible within the fold of dynamic relations with others. To wit, whether one goes to affirm or negate the Other, the truth remains that one necessarily exists in relation with something other than oneself. Relationality, then, becomes a social task, insofar as the demand is to mutually nourish the inevitability of being with and being for one another. The self in relation to itself, others, and with the world is an ontological given that nonetheless requires reflexive cognition for self-transformation. The ontology of relations is the well

from which springs all existence. In the vastness of the universe, everything is interconnected, every element inevitably affects all the rest – if we are courageous enough to accept it. This implies the ever-growing interest in the discovery of a new perspective that can give birth to and sustains all interpretive efforts of being.

Philosophy as love of wisdom puts into question any posturing of absolute knowledge, since philosophy thrives in the human being's desire for attaining meaning in the context of change, in the realm of the different, in the encounter with the new, and in relation with the Other. Philosophy's search for its Other is never a negation of its end as humanity's symbol of hope for living wisely. On the contrary, philosophy essentially consists in humanity's desire to attain self-realization through the inexorable relation with the Other. Doing philosophy therefore includes the perfection not only of the cognitive and reflective aspects of being human, but also of the intuitive and contemplative dimensions integrally constitutive of its nature. In short, philosophizing is more than thinking but feeling as well, since both modes of being are distinctly expressive of being human. Blaise Pascal is remembered here for the dictum of intuition: "*The heart has its reasons which reason doesn't understand.*" Inspired then by Pascal's insight, we can pursue the case of the imperative of keeping in touch with ourselves specifically as regards keeping a close watch over the reality of earthly existence. Knowing out of the depths of one's being reveals, on the one hand, the limitations of relying on one's innate intellectual faculties, and on the other hand, the possibilities of achieving a new sense of being from humbly opening one's world to the non-rational. Martin Heidegger is clear on this matter in that he argues for the mind's turning to meditative thinking in order to overcome the dangers of technological consciousness of control and manipulation. To quote him from his *Discourse on Thinking*: "I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, *openness to the mystery.*"¹ The mystery is in no way an abdication of reason, for the latter is what is uniquely human. Nonetheless, by the human being's openness to what is beyond her rational reach she begins to see that all her being is embraced by something far greater than what she can muster as seen in her power over the observable facts in this world. When one is honest about it, the power of reason opens up possibilities beyond its cognitive limits. As it were, reason is a passageway towards another realm whereby reason finally fulfills its earnest longing for being.

More importantly, that which we call the mystery is what primordially grounds all thinking through which one's being unfolds. This further tells us that what we have always believed that we know can

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969), 55.

be radically different when probed beyond the standards of orthodox thinking. There remains much to see and experience outside the limits of one's empirical world. However, in practice, this points to the challenge of rethinking one's mode of relating to the same world of facts. This means not abandoning this world, but transforming it by way of developing an affirmative mode of consciousness.

The challenge of seeking the other of the orthodox model of discursive thought—that of the intuitive kind—is philosophy's fundamental, self-critical function. In other words, if philosophy is honest about its roots in a life of wisdom, then it must remain infinitely open to what comes about in its search for a wiser lifestyle. Wisdom entails facing up to new realities with the intention of learning from these vicissitudes. This challenge includes the knowledge of the only environment in which humanity finds its existence. Perhaps, a shift of focus from the usual paradigm of subduing the environment into that of caring for it can infuse into our consciousness a renewed sense of being human. Otherwise, we remain guilty of perpetuating the kind of philosophy that is insensitive to the integrity of the environment. In his timely article "Are Philosophers Responsible for Global Warming?" Nicholas Maxwell challenges us to rethink the way we relate with the environment, lest we accelerate the pace of global climatic aberrations. To reflect on Maxwell's eloquence, thus:

Given the urgency of our situation – the unprecedented perils associated with the new, immense powers bequeathed to (some of) us by science – we philosophers ought to do everything we can in our professional capacities to get the message across: there is a very serious *philosophical* disaster at the root of many of our current human disasters – at the root of our current incapacity to respond adequately to our current global problems. We need to bring about a revolution in the aims and methods – the *philosophy* – of the academic enterprise so that it takes up its proper task of helping humanity learn how to create a better world – or at least avoid some of the worst possible futures.²

Well argued, to say the least, to remind us that philosophy needs to be transformed from being an academic enterprise into becoming a potent force of ecological well-being.

Nicholas A. Robinson, who is a law professor and a founder of the Center for Environmental Legal Studies, poses the following challenge to the care of nature as an integral component in framing international environmental law:

²Nicholas Maxwell, "Are Philosophers Responsible for Global Warming?"

Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas 65, January/February 2008, 13.

What must be done to stimulate nations and peoples to see themselves as stewards of Earth? Evidentially, something more is needed than an action plan and a declaration of principles in order to move the bodies politic of the world.³

What this tells us is that no brilliant lawmaking can substitute for an authentically felt thinking concerning the environment. While laws protect the interest of human beings, they have to be equally just to the demands of environmental wholeness. That is, we look forward to developing an ecologically sensitive way of thinking that recognizes the enduring truth of the Earth as our basic home. The Earth is the primeval source out of which everything that humanly exists arises. In truth, we human beings, with all our vaunted natural and cultural endowments, will cease to exist if set apart from the good of the Earth. This is far from harping on what is obvious; on the contrary, enunciating what is otherwise acknowledged as a cliché concerning the place of human beings in nature might just drive home a point for serious reflection. We belong to nature, it does not belong to us! Here, the meaning of ecology becomes more pressing in order to arrive at a caring interpretation. Interdependence, interrelatedness, creation integrity, web of existence, and the like are just some of the basic descriptions given to ecology.

Understood as the equilibrium of existing relations involving human beings and their surrounding, ecology further demands a careful and respectful approach to its question of significance. Thus, a new way of thinking resulting in a new mode of being is called for in these trying times of ecological precariousness. And a feminine mode of being characterized by intuition, compassion, and cultivation might be the order of the day. Quite affirmatively, feminism as an ecological paradigm can be richly explored as an area whereby we can hope to creatively attend to the present environmental world crisis. As an alternative paradigm of philosophy to the overly rationalistic orthodox ones, feminism is admittedly intuitive, as already suggested, for it involves an immediate grasp of the cordially mystical behind the positivistically analytical.

This paper presents the view that a mystical approach to the question of ecology offers a compelling alternative to the existing instrumental mode of knowing and relating to the environment. Specifically, this essay argues that the proposed mystical element of today's feminism can learn much from, and may even be traced to, the proto-feminism of the 12th century

³Nicholas Robinson, "The Draft Covenant on Environment and Development: A Sustainable Model for International Lawmaking," in *Human Rights Environmental Law and the Earth Charter*, ed. Helen Marie Casey and Amy Morgante (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 32.

German mystic, theologian, writer, composer, and radical abbess Hildegard of Bingen. This is to suggest, at least, that much of the present discourse about creation spirituality, ecological integrity, and the like already had earlier manifestations in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen. That makes then Hildegard's work a challenging and an exciting recourse for contemporary ecological discussions. Strangely enough, much of the ignored elements in history are those that ultimately affect the life of society.

Hildegard was a counselor to Popes and was in correspondence with holy fathers like Bernard of Clairvaux and with religious and political leaders of her time. It is clear that her mystical views of the universe made significant impact upon her times. To quote Renate Craine from her study of Hildegard entitled *Prophet of the Cosmic Christ*:

Hildegard poses a challenge for each and every one of us today. Having lost the sense that the earth is part of an organically ordered cosmos, we have much to learn from the wisdom expressed in her visionary theology, which makes ecology a spiritual task and spirituality a powerful agent of social reform. . . . Hildegard's challenge to us is a call to become humble enough to understand our place in the universe and then to realize it in relationship. Embracing the ecological and therapeutic task of coming back into relationship with all there is will make us aware of both the dignity and the poverty of our being, as individuals and as communities: the dignity and glory of being human and the poverty of our failures.⁴

Today, Hildegard of Bingen's call for an integrative understanding of being human within the vast realm of creation is an important bit of ecological wisdom. For Hildegard, the Earth is our mother from which all existence springs and which nourishes all. This is a dynamic metaphor rendering a pluralist interpretation of the whole of creation. Pluralist, insofar as it generously accounts for the myriad seeds of creation that give rise to the birth of humanity. Curiously, this reminds us of the claim that the first philosophers are primarily cosmologists who have concerned themselves with the basic stuff of the world. Hildegard's importance in the history of thought certainly comes from her explicit acknowledgment that the human person is a composite of the rich elements of the world. "*Bios*" gains significance only from the "*cosmos*." Put another way, the text of life achieves meaning in relation to the context of the universe. As the creation spirituality writer Matthew Fox puts it, in emphasizing the importance of

⁴Renate Craine, *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 68 and 72.

the work of Hildegard: "Her ideas about the universe as well as her method of thinking and sharing these ideas are cosmologically oriented."⁵ Thus, arguably, today there is still much work to be done to introduce to a wider philosophical readership the achievement of Hildegard of Bingen as an ecological resource for affirmative reflection and positive action, especially in the present age of dramatic climate changes.

Intuitions of Ecological Feminism

Feminism as the call of the Other from what is otherwise a male-dominated theoretical paradigm constitutes a radical shift from the way thought is understood and presented. Essentially, a feminist paradigm argues that long-standing masculine ideas and concepts are theoretically corrigible.

Crossing familiar traditions of thought, ecological feminism argues for a unified link between theory and practice. The feminist call for political and social equality between men and women must be coupled with a practical response to the urgent call of the environment to respect its creational integrity. From an ecologically feminist point of view, justice must be expanded to include not only the interpersonal realm but also the non-personal level of earthly existence. Justice understood as giving everyone her due must be extended to the whole of nature as well. Justice, according to Hildegard of Bingen, sustains all things in a cosmic balance, upon which all creation stands. In relation to the question of the whole of creation as a manifestation of God, "justice is the foundation" that sustains the cosmic constitutive complex relations, writes Hildegard of Bingen.⁶

From ancient wisdom, we learn that the secret to humanity's harmonious existence is to observe the balance of the cosmic elements of water, fire, earth, and air. This elemental constitution of the universe when unjustly disturbed by human intervention causes a breach in cosmic harmony. Worse, due to the human being's stubbornness of heart, any protracted series of unnecessary interventions in the workings of nature can spell humanity's annihilation. In her writings on the creation of the world, Hildegard of Bingen brings to the fore the following telling account of the original blessing of cosmic harmony:

All the elements are present in human beings and each human being is able to function through the elements, which are fire, air, water, and earth. These four basic

⁵ Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 110.

⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Mark Atherton (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 156.

substances are interwoven and connected to such an extent that none of them can be separated from the others; and they are so closely interconnected that they are known as the firmament.⁷

Martin Heidegger, steeped in the German tradition of mysticism, has a version of the same. He calls it the fourfold and it consists of the original unity between earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. Mystical in inspiration, Heidegger's philosophy of the fourfold symbolizes the integral dimension of human existence anchored in the primordality of Being. In his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger makes the following important ecological meditation, emphasizing the truth that being human is essentially dwelling and letting-dwell:

The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.⁸

To adopt the allegorical language of Hildegard of Bingen, there is an abortion in the cosmic womb the moment human beings contravene in the realization of bringing forth the pulsating life-force. And so, there is a need to rethink and, perhaps, to rewrite the dominating worldview of the creation story in the Scriptures.

Ecological feminism brings us home to the truth of who we really are, reminding us that the Earth is our home, "*oikos*." In this home we experience the living source of our being in freedom and in truth. The Earth is our existential home; it is where we realize the meaning of our being in all its relations. Ecology when appreciated from a feminist perspective can be a beautiful source of seeing everything as a living testimony to the life-giving *telos* of all creation. Is this account exclusively partial to a woman's reality? I feel that posing such query will not get us anywhere away from the binary standard of male-female opposition. The more appropriate question to render thoughtful reflection for purposes of living up to the challenge of living philosophically, that is, wisely, is whether or not everyone is willing to finally consciously awaken in her the compassionate mode of being as symbolized by the feminine.

Carol Gilligan's pioneering work *In a Different Voice* will always be a provocative call for the man to be really patient in his effort to understand the woman in her alterity. According to Gilligan, man has a

⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 348.

different self-concept from that of the woman, which he must understand. Surely, respecting gender dynamics is a welcome approach towards peaceful coexistence. This means understanding the woman's psyche more dynamically and respectfully. I don't think this is another typical "womanish-ness," if I may be permitted to employ a term. But the ontology of relations points to the fact that reality is both male and female. "*Male and female S/He created them,*" to paraphrase a familiar passage from the Genesis account. This bespeaks the complementariness of gender differences in the whole panorama of creation, which can serve as an enduring model for keeping and caring for human relationships. Gilligan explains that human relationships must be motivated by an ethics of care, around which we can evaluate the manner of relationships that someone accords another. She describes the evolution of what she calls an ethics of care, as follows:

Thus a progressively more adequate understanding of the psychology of human relationships – an increasing differentiation of self and other and a growing comprehension of the dynamics of social interaction – informs the development of an ethic of care. This ethic, which reflects a cumulative knowledge of human relationships, evolves around a central insight, that self and other are interdependent.⁹

The promotion of an ethics of care aims to cultivate a new way of understanding human relationships, on the basis of a lucid grasp of gender differences. In consequence, we can extend the same ethics of care to what rightfully deserves our passion: the environment. The environment alerts us to our ecological task of caring for the Earth's depleting resources and of putting a stop to the abuses committed against it. Ecology as a philosophical issue is undoubtedly a unique discourse with wide-ranging implications in the life of individuals, since at stake is the existence of the society as a whole. Given the challenge of a heightened sense of ecological responsibility, one needs to develop an ethical intuition for the good of the environment and beyond normal moral standards. Without going into the detail any further than necessary, this is close to the Kierkegaardian *leap of faith*. One way to accomplish this task before us is to invite everyone to a disciplined development of global mysticism.

Intimations of Global Mysticism

The care of the Earth is everyone's responsibility. It is a responsibility that touches the core of every human being's existence. Furthermore, it is

⁹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 74.

a spiritual task in that it concerns humanity's sense of gratitude towards the Cosmic Matrix from which everything comes to be. Accordingly, a heightened sense of being a part of the whole universe is needed for every decisive action vis-a-vis the environment. By a heightened sense of being is meant the human being's capacity to discern the divine plan of creation in every concrete relation with nature. Mysticism is not against reason; it is its very condition of actualization. Since all thinking lies in a particularly situated process of being human, and every human being finds her place in nature which is a revelation of an infinitely grand design of creation, it can be argued that all powers that the human being enjoys wielding for or against another is derived from this infinite source of creation. In a word, no human power stands over and above the cosmic force that brings to existence everything that is human. "Justice strives towards the good works of men and women," intuitively Hildegard of Bingen, "so that they too may touch the heavenly joys and as it were come to their good beginning."¹⁰ For which reason, before the infinite force the human being cannot help standing in awe. This is the realm of the mystical. The paradox here is surely that the realm of the logical finds its fulfillment in the mystical. Justice is the mystical component of creation whereby everything else moves towards its fulfillment beyond the limits of the law. As Hildegard interprets it: "Justice accompanies humanities on two paths, that is to say, the path of the Old Law and the path of Incarnation of the Son of God."¹¹ Accordingly, the deeper paradox here lies in the impossibility of explaining the mystical through the analytical. Nonetheless, it is not a hopeless case, for the mystical has its own language that requires a transformation of the analytical paradigm. Following Hildegard of Bingen's cosmic Christ paradigm, the way out of the theoretical impasse is to see the world incarnationally, that is, through an integrative truth between the relations of theories, practices, and modes of being.

It is clear that for Ludwig Wittgenstein, the religious sensibility concedes to the analytical, in general; but he still at the same time opens himself to the higher realm of the mystical. Notably, Wittgenstein's series of propositions in his *Tractatus* admits of the first six propositions and their elaborate sub-expositions as logical ways of dealing with the analytical, that is, with the observable. However, he caps them all with the profession of the last and seventh proposition that suggests mystical silence as that which actually explains away—fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how one looks at it—all sophisticated analyses. This is to bring to heart what essentially matters. As Wittgenstein enigmatically states the seventh proposition in his *Tractatus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."¹²

¹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, 157.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 108.

The experience of the mystical is the encounter with the frontiers of rational understanding, and hopefully, when properly discerned, at the same time breaks new ground for cordial understanding as the adequately meaningful mode of coming to terms with a higher level of intelligibility.

The mystical realm appeals to the symbolic language of the heart. "Listening with the ears of the heart," as the Rule of St. Benedict exhorts us, is precisely this turning towards the mystical experience. Clearly, the mystical has its own "logic." However, it is something that transcends the ordinary way of reasoning, for it is more integrative rather than discriminative in its movement towards the fullness of all knowledge. Mystical knowledge, following its etymological significance, is a kind of knowing that lies outside the senses. But the truth of the matter is that the human being radically stands in relation to two fundamental conscious spheres of existence: the logical and the mystical. As history shows, much of human knowing is bound up with the logical order. And understandably so, for it is in the logical realm that the human being can exercise control and mastery of what her rational reach can lend her, through the analytical mediation of concepts and theories. That is why the peace that human beings aspire for eludes them precisely because of their failure to build on the mystical order. The mystical order is the sphere of the transcendental, the realm of contemplative existence. The mystical side of existence brings everything in the cosmos into integral connection, in existential relation, and in structural harmony. The setting apart of cosmic elements that analysis breeds, for purposes of complete comprehension, actually needs to be brought to perfection through the mystical communion of the same cosmic elements. Otherwise, human beings will never attain the sense of equilibrium to which they were destined from the beginning of their being. "Each human being contains," intimates Hildegard of Bingen "heaven and earth and all of creation and yet remains one whole figure, and within every human being all things lie concealed."¹³

Mystical consciousness is not a contradiction in terms, at least, not necessarily. By mystical consciousness is meant the human being's awareness of the divine presence amidst the hustle and bustle of living in an increasingly expanding global society. To be mystical in this global age demands realigning one's priorities with that of the Divine order. Craine points out:

Hildegard never ceases to remind us that we have tremendous power. Although each human being is seemingly small and insignificant within the structure of our historical reality, each one can become very capable. If

¹³Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, 95.

each of us opens the depth of our heart to the Mystery of God in the concrete events of life, and then—in freedom—decides for the good.¹⁴

This is undeniably a tall order, but it is something that women and men of good will have to do if they want to keep this planet intact. How this is possible beyond theoretical suggestion is definitely outside the scope of educational institutions and instructional programs. The nearest we can get may be to have a constant awareness of the challenge the moment: how do we relate the moment to the whole in our search for meaningful existence? “A basic teaching of all in the creation mystical tradition is this:” declares Matthew Fox in his above-mentioned work, “*everyone is a mystic*.”¹⁵ This implies being able to put everything in perspective to yield a lasting value even in a fleeting moment. For instance, my discussing the topic of this paper with an audience in mind brings about in me a new world of meanings, since I have to be sensitive to where my readers are coming from. In the process, I have to let go of my initial proddings for which I have written this paper, in order to assume a hermeneutical stance with my audience. Frankly speaking, writing a paper is expressing a certain advocacy. This clearly shows in the way answers to the audience’s questions are negotiated. It happens that one who writes about another author, for example, assumes, perhaps, unwittingly, the persona of the said author. This occurs when a writer appropriates to herself the thought of her subject of study. Why does this happen? The answer perhaps lies in the experience of precisely owning to oneself something that one has encountered as the truth. This may not pass as a manifest instance of a mystical experience. But the point of the example is to illustrate that mystical experience engages the human being and her earthly bearings. “Grace builds on nature,” so it is said. Human existence is a graced existence in that it is infinitely open to the inspiration of the Divine in which it finds its true resting place of being.

The Divine has gifted humanity, despite all its infirmities, with the prophetic and holistic lives of the mystics. These mystics have more than once shown the way to salvation. This way to salvation is deeply incarnated in everyone, since the way is no other than the fullness of one’s humanity or humanization. Cosmic redemption means that the Divine is in our humanity and that our humanity is shared by the Divine. As Hildegard of Bingen straightforwardly puts it: “For when God created the world, he had already determined by his ancient counsel that he would become a man.”¹⁶

The Hildegards of Bingen, Meister Eckharts, Johns of the Cross, Therasas of Avila, and many more in the mystical tradition have

¹⁴ Craine, *Hildegard*, 75.

¹⁵ Fox, *Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 48.

¹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, 95.

courageously proclaimed their visions of redemption, though always with a price, namely, the human being's painful struggle of surrendering her sinful pride to the Divine. This resolute act of self-surrender finally disarms the human being of her powers of comprehension, seduction, and manipulation through which she has sadly deceived herself. However, by emptying herself of her own self she begins to open her whole being to the mystical that simply takes over her like divine madness. In today's world, which is addicted to the survival of the fittest, we still can actually learn from the mystics of old who continue to speak to us about the truths that they have found in themselves. Certainly, there is only one truth. This is the truth that the way of God, which involves reverence for His creation, is the way of cosmic harmony. To quote Hildegard of Bingen: "Those who run on the path of truth—they will reach the springing fountain of glory, from which they will gain the precious riches of earth and heaven!"¹⁷

Conclusion

This paper has argued that there is a need to redirect our attention to the manner we think of and relate with the environment. This demands a fundamental shift from an instrumental (read *conquest*) cosmological perspective to a mystical (read *surrender*) imperative of nature. We can find in Hildegard of Bingen plenty of ecological suggestions that deserve critical reflection today. These are suggestions that are deeply spiritual in the sense of gaining new grounds in entering into the fold of mystical truth that is embedded in nature. Moreover, these are fundamental ideas that present a larger vision of truth that transcends anthropological standards. For the humanity of the human person pales in comparison with the reality of the universe that is her primordial home. Hence, the truth of the cosmos permeates the rest of human reality. That is, ecological truth presupposes cosmic reality and implies human solidarity. Hildegard of Bingen's wisdom has certainly found creative expressions and received educative reappropriations in the works of later thinkers whose thought opens up to the necessity of teaching serious reflection on the meaning of the Earth as the source of being human.

Talk about global ethics, environmental ethics, green peace, and ecological justice reveals today's urgent challenges that confront human beings with the issue of the environment. But it seems solutions to these problems are elusive, notwithstanding the presence of brilliant minds that have shaped the history of thought. Or, do we care to look at the other direction of tradition to find out if there is a sign of hope to break this intellectual impasse that everyday allows nature to die at the hands of human beings whom it serves with its limited resources? That which

¹⁷Ibid., 135.

comprehensively surrounds us, namely the environment, is at the same time, that in which we transformatively dwell, namely ecology. Here then lies the relationship between environment and ecology. The promise of ecofeminism derived from Hildegard of Bingen's mystical cosmology as a significant mode of thinking that is inextricably linked to the mystical opening includes not only interpersonal, social, and political relations, but environmental concerns as well, is something that is worthy of every serious philosophical discussion. "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts," muses the American philosopher and naturalist Henry David Thoreau, "but it is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically."¹⁸ To reiterate, the problem of the environment is truly a practical concern, with which philosophy as a revered way of life must inescapably address, sooner or later.

Feminism as a collective key concept is the freedom from the standards of the masculine. It challenges every other theory to complete itself by realizing itself in the practice. In this way, philosophy is forced to be relevant to the concrete lives of human beings. Feminism seeks the Other of philosophy by locating those ideas relegated, for political convenience, to the margins. Its philosophy of Otherness has opened up new horizons of doing theoretical work that has real impact on the world. This entails the recognition of what is otherwise treated less real from the perspective of male dominance in society. Feminism is a politics of recognition. It is a politics that demands justice for the victims of a hegemony that levels off views that differ from the norm. In other words, feminism moves to help others achieve their rightful place in society. This includes giving environment its rightful place in the consciousness of human beings. This is the promise of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism is this thoroughly conscientious and religious mode of being human on Earth, which recognizes that the preservation of the latter is humanity's basic ecological responsibility. Hildegard of Bingen in another lucid manifestation of her mystical cosmology, expounds upon this:

Who thus trusts God will also honor the existing world, the course of the sun and moon, the winds and air, the earth and water, everything that God created for the glory of human beings and for their protection. Human beings have no other ground to stand on. If they abandon this world, it will result in destruction by demons and dismissal from the protection of the angels.¹⁹

¹⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003), 17.

¹⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Welt und Mensch*, quoted by Craine in *Hildegard*, 74.

Ecofeminism certainly opens up new possibilities for the emergence of the kind of mystical thinking that is needed in today's world. Mystical thinking integrates the wholeness of nature into the conscious freedom of human beings, and involves surrendering humanity's proclivity for control to a Transcendent reality. This new global consciousness involves shifting paradigms in the understanding of the rational subject: it must be seen as existing with intentional relations to others and to the world. Karl Jaspers captures this basic openness to the new thinking, which can describe ecofeminism as well, in the following insightful claim:

The new thinking can say no more to those who want nothing but plans and instructions, but it will aid people perplexed by the ultimate aimlessness of all planned aims. For they have experienced the intellect's inability to guide the life of existence and resolution. Unless they drowned their puzzled thoughts in the din of distracted and trivial activities, they will be saved by the thought processes of the new way – which are true only when the thinker changes.²⁰

In the name of justice, ecofeminism must consciously redeem that which is lost because of technological thinking, i.e., the integrity of the process of human existence. Justice demands that the way to relate with nature is through harmony, not mastery.

"May you never tire on the path of justice,"²¹ Hildegard of Bingen exhorts all of us today in these trying times of ecological neglect.

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²⁰ Karl Jaspers, *The Future of Mankind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 217.

²¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, 32.

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