

Storytelling Morality: Ecofeminism, Agrarianism, and Pigs in the Field

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I. THE ETHICS OF EATING

The practical task of environmental ethics exists most simply to help us navigate, articulate, and enact appropriate relationships with the natural world. Often arguments focus on the valuation of and our potential responsibilities to endangered species, biodiversity, the protection of special landscapes, or the anthropogenic drivers of environmental degradation. These are worthy and meaningful conversations. But this focus can overlook our responsibilities to – and that arise within – one of our most extensive and impactful land systems, the agricultural landscape. The task of understanding our relationships with and obligations to the natural world through the labor and practice of food production is central to our development as moral beings and environmental citizens. How we eat, as well as why we eat particular foods in particular ways, is a simple and frequent opportunity for all citizens to engage in environmental decision-making. It is in these landscapes, as well, that we can learn and grow the virtues that are important to our lives as actors in multiple and diverse communities, both on and off the farm. This is rich terrain for ethicists to probe into our attempts to articulate and enact appropriate relationships with the natural world, and both ecofeminism and agrarianism – in their overlap and distance – can offer ideas about how best to express our environmental and citizenship ethics through the everyday act of growing, eating, and engaging with food. One simple way for these two ethical approaches overlap is in their embrace of story as a holder of meaning and ethical wisdom. Thus it is with this story that we will begin.

II. AGRICULTURAL STORIES

As a methodology, we are particularly drawn to the “work” that stories do in our culture. On the symbolic level, stories and accounts of material practices are offered as a way forward, to create models of virtue to enliven and empower the moral imagination of farmers, students, scholars and eaters alike. As cultural studies and discourse analysis demonstrate, food and agricultural narratives are multiple, contradictory, changing and differentially available (Richardson, 1997). More specifically, Raymond Anthony (2009) reminds us that a narrative approach when applied to animal agriculture helps to build a more inclusive moral community, drawing upon the foundational stories of agrarianism (Thompson 2001) as a vehicle for normative action, providing a

palpable demonstration of “good ethos”. However, Anthony cautions that the major agricultural storyline today is a “tragedy” made up of incompatible camps and irreconcilable images. He proposes we instead author a new story for agriculture, one that offers a narrative of reconciliation and revitalization.

Feminist methodologists also suggest we move beyond resistance narratives that react to dominant discourses by continuing to re-inscribe the worn out binaries of win/lose, have/have-not, humane/inhumane. In thinking about what comes after the “posts” (poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and so on), Patti Lather (2001) instead advocates for a more “tentative voice” and a “less certain” social science that stands open to the inconclusiveness and complexities of the realities we experience in the field. Laurel Richardson (1997) concludes that the kinds of stories we must write are linked to the kinds of “communion we can create, not to the hegemonies we can resist” (79). So in the spirit of revitalization, community, and care, we offer two stories of our material practices with raising pigs on an educational organic farm. These stories, our contribution to the chorus of other stories, illuminate what we see as important ethical, social, and environmental context for our new agricultural narrative.

III. ETHICS IN ACTION: PIGS ON THE SMALL-SCALE ORGANIC FARM

Our first story begins with two farmers: Laurie, a feminist environmental educator and social scientist, who is a founding faculty mentor of the Student Organic Farm at the boundaries of our campus, and Dale, the Minnesota farm-boy turned animal scientist with a focus on swine management and nutrition, and whose career has focused on intensive pork production. Four years prior, Laurie heard a colleague tell a story about a sow’s 500-pound nest and learned that the 3 foot by 8 foot concrete and metal enclosures – gestation crates – that modern sows are forced to live in preclude this natural nest building behavior. Her moral imagination was stirred enough to set aside her preconceived notions of animal science and reach across disciplinary boundaries to email Dale, whom she had never met, to seek collaboration to bring pigs to the farm. As contextual background: our academic environment is one where disciplinary silos often still exist, where agricultural education and research is dominated by corporate monoculture interests, and where pushback against the prevailing system is often viewed as a threat to one’s validity and voice within the discipline. Interdisciplinary projects such as the one Laurie was proposing, especially projects that lack scientific experimental design, are difficult to fund and typically dismissed. Thus it is in this context where Laurie, a post-modern ethnographer, formed a deep and meaningful bond with Dale, an animal scientist trained and tenured in the positivist paradigm, around the care of pigs, animal agriculture, and the farm as a dynamic natural and social system. And it is through this relationship – as well as hard work, logistical and regulatory challenges, and moments of beauty

and joy – that a series of interspecies, interdisciplinary, and academic-industry relationships – what we consider a moral community of care – grew and flourished.

IV. LAURIE'S STORY

I do not believe that it is morally necessary for everyone who eats meat to personally kill animals. I do believe that for people who eat meat there is great value in coming to know and care for animals, so that the act of eating is not completely divorced from the lives and deaths of the fellow creatures on whom we depend.

– Brian Donahue, Reclaiming the Commons (51-2)

This dreaded day arrived so soon; I had been anticipating the arrival of pigs at the farm for several years and now here we were, already saying goodbye. This 'harvest' as Dale called it, was met in my mind with completely different thoughts and emotions from other harvests at the farm. This harvest involved killing 12 sentient beings, 12 animals I loved. After five months of growth, joy, and hard work it was time to send our "boys" to market, to bring the cycle of this project full circle; these were livestock, meat animals, not pets. I had limited experience with butchering chickens, but this harvest elicited a more complicated tangle of emotions and thoughts; pigs are vastly more intelligent animals and I had developed an intimate bond with them. I knew their individual personalities; probably most troubling, they knew me – this was a reciprocal relationship. After several difficult goodbyes in my life – namely the deaths of both my parents – this snorting, romping, caught-in-the-prime-of-their-life goodbye set my moral compass spinning and this was exactly what I wanted, but it also hurt like hell. I once read that the Greeks used to say we suffer our way to wisdom; by purposefully drawing close to the death associated with meat eating I was seeking to morally 'account' for this relationship in my life. We were sending these beautiful animals to their death, and they were not sick, suffering, or dying. They were happy healthy growing animals. This is a planned death for human consumption, for *my* consumption. Unlike the other deaths in my life, where I was merely a *bystander*, here we were in control of the where, the when, and the how, and this simultaneously felt good and right and awful. Good and right because we have proxied away our food relationships and responsibilities to mega-corporations and I am ready to reclaim my place in this web that nourishes me. Good and right because our students were seeking to participate in this learning process, asking to witness the slaughter and saving their hard earned dollars to buy the meat we raised. Awful because I was killing my animal friends and this felt like too much power for one person to hold; thankfully I didn't – these were shared decisions.

Dale and I met at the farm the day before loading to take the final weights of the pigs. It was a beautiful fall evening, warm and peaceful. A hint of fall color animated the woodlot. I love the farm Goralnik, Thorp, Rozeboom, Thompson

this time of day, as the sun is beginning to drop behind the trees, the heat of the day giving way to cooling shadows of oaks and maples. The pigs, revived by the dropping temperature, would come out to play, chase, and root. A profound peace envelopes the farm in the evening: the work of the day is over, the students and staff have gone home, the farm rhythms slow. This was always my special time to be with the pigs, to drop the weight of the day at their feet, turn off my mind and turn on my senses to be fully present in *their* world. Driving up the dirt road leading to the pigs' field I noticed David,¹ a male graduate student, had already arrived and was saying his goodbyes to the pigs. Sitting on the ground among the pigs under the trees – their favorite spot to congregate – I could see he was crying. Here was a male student making himself vulnerable in front of a male faculty member (Dale had also arrived). David is also a vegetarian. He came tonight not only to say goodbye, but to assist in the weighing of these animals for market, soon to become food he would never eat. He could have said his goodbyes and left but this noble gesture was his way of affirming our work from across a chasm that normally divides.

We carted out the large digital scales and I got my bag of marshmallows (the pigs' favorite treat) to begin the task of weighing the boys. Fighting back tears, I sprinkled marshmallows on the scales and called the pigs over. Robin, a female farm student with strong emotional bonds to the pigs, arrived to also say goodbye and offer her assistance. We paused for a brief hug and cry. We marked the pigs that were at market weight (250 lbs. or greater) with an orange chalk stripe for easy identification during loading the next morning. This was the mark of death. My head was a swirl of relief and pride that our pigs reached market weight in this alternative system (the skeptics said it would take too long), and also a fear of betrayal, for I was breaking the love and trust of my pigs.

The next morning we would load the pigs for transport to a small local processor that Dale had known for years. He told us about Jackson's Meats and his friend Randy, the butcher, and he described to us a friendship that mattered. This was not simply a business transaction. For the last two months Dale had been on the phone regularly with Randy discussing all the complexities associated with meat processing: USDA inspection, proper packaging and labeling according to state food code, approved storage conditions and transport, price negotiations, butchering and curing preferences. This was not some nameless, faceless processing facility, not just another link in the supply chain. We were continually assured that our pigs were in good hands; our circle of care was growing. Very soon after pigs arrived at the farm our students had started asking questions about the slaughter, and early on Josh, one of the student workers, asked if he could witness it. Dale honored this request with great care and thought; he would talk to Randy. One by one, more students decided they wanted to follow our pigs to harvest, to witness the killing, to make

¹ Some names have been changed.

themselves vulnerable, draw close, and understand farm life in a new way. At first I doubted my ability to witness the kill, but within our farm community I was carried forward to the final step in the process of growing good meat.

We met at the farm at 6am to load the pigs. The confinement facility staff arrived with a trailer hitched to a truck and backed up to the field to load the pigs. The trailer is about a foot off the ground, and while the pigs are capable of making this step up, this is not a situation they understand. Perhaps they smelled the other pigs who had ridden in the trailer before, or perhaps they were afraid of the large step, or maybe they even sensed they were leaving their farm life. Whatever the reason, they resisted. The confinement staffer grew frustrated as we tried to load the pigs. He barked commands at pigs and people. He shoved the pigs with large herding boards, but the pigs only slipped around and over the boards, never onto the trailer. He tried to use strength and assertiveness. The pigs resisted more. His frustration escalated and became palpable. Out of the corner of my eye I saw two female farm students standing at the end of the field clutching each other in grief. Crying and spent, my marshmallows and I climbed past the escaping pigs and the confinement staffer and into the trailer. I knelt, held out my hands to the pigs, called some by name, and begged them to please come on up. They knew my voice, my smell. They trusted me. When I climbed into the trailer, the pigs climbed in, too.

Maybe 5 months of intense love has the ability to erase 30 minutes of death, but thankfully the moment of death for my pigs is now fuzzy, as if viewed from the wrong end of a telescope. This must be some kind of protective mechanism to keep us from going insane with grief, our psyche removing the memories that are just too painful to humanly bear. We cannot carry around open wounds for long without becoming hard-hearted or brutal. Rick Bass (2000) asks us to ponder this: "What rhythms make most sense in these troubled times? What is most irreducible?" (73). Somehow this attention to every last detail of death – the washing of bodies, the letting of blood, the examination of their most precious corpses, their open animal hearts – pulled me back into the flow of life that sustains us and has sustained communities for millennia.

What I do remember? I remember Sarah's grandfather miraculously appearing at the exact moment that she fainted next to the kill floor. What kind of cosmic connection was at work at that moment to protect this young woman? I have to believe there is a gossamer thread that connects. I remember Randy's bright yellow plastic apron with his name written across the top and that gave me comfort. I remember crying into Josh's shoulder so furiously that I was left gasping for air. I remember oh so faintly the fear on the faces of my pigs at the final moments of their life. But I also remember I was not alone. I can still see Lissy and Jeremy, Sarah and Drew, Sam and Erin, Peter and Dan all holding hands, suffering our way to wisdom.

V. CARING RELATIONSHIPS AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Many social movements aiming to reform contemporary agriculture miss the mark precisely because they fail to challenge the underlying metaphysical and metaethical commitments of the industrial age. The assumptions that ethics is primarily about making “good choices,” and that for individuals (as distinct from organizations) choices are made by “subjects,” or by Descartes’ thinking things, constrain our thinking and our discourse. Both these assumptions are shared by ethical philosophies that differ from one another dramatically in most other respects. Thus, viewpoints that argue against industrial animal production by positing that animals are moral subjects whose suffering or rights deserve moral consideration simply extend the deontological (duty-focused) and teleological (consequentialist) approaches that have dominated philosophy departments in the twentieth century and ethical dialogue for centuries. However, one significant challenge to mainstream metaethics, came from outside philosophy altogether in the work of Carol Gilligan².

Gilligan is a psychologist who studies moral development. Working with Lawrence Kohlberg, she launched a major challenge to Kohlberg’s linear theory of moral development when she noticed that the girls they studied did not track through Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development in the same way that boys did. Many female subjects had difficulty applying principles to resolve moral conflicts in a manner that led to a clear decision to act one way or another, and these results led Gilligan to speculate not that females were less adept at moral reasoning than males, but that that making clear action decisions was less central to women’s moral development than maintaining a network of caring relationships. Gilligan’s speculations have been developed by a number of feminist theorists, including Nel Noddings,³ into an alternative approach to ethics that, similar to virtue theorists, challenges the presumption that ethics is primarily concerned with generating principled and consistent approaches to decision making, especially in circumstances of moral conflict.

In this conception of morality, which is woven through contemporary ecofeminism, ethics is not a straight line problem-solving exercise of good and bad, right and wrong. The ways we develop morality are rooted in our own dispositions, backgrounds, and meaning-making. Thus a notion of ethics that prioritizes only rationality over emotion, or consequences over relationships, is limiting and perhaps misguided. Gilligan’s work demonstrated that there are more journeys to morality

² See: Gilligan, Carol. (1982). *In a different voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

³ See: Noddings, Nel. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Noddings, Nel. (2002). *Educating moral people*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University; Noddings, Nel. (2006). *Philosophy of education*, 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

than just one. And here, too, in an approach to ethics inclusive of emotion and embodiment, as well as rationality, and an ethics that embraces not just principles but narrative as a holder of moral wisdom, is a place for the stories of ecofeminism and agrarianism to overlap. It is in the telling of these two stories – Laurie’s and Dale’s – that we juxtapose the different ways these two pig-lovers, scholars, educators, and moral agents have arrived at their current work on behalf of sustainable animal agricultural systems; despite moving down very different paths, motivated by different goals, relationships, curiosities, and understandings of the world in which they live. And through their stories we aim to give context in which to engage the theoretical dialogue of agricultural and environmental ethics rooted in the land to better understand what appropriate relationships with nonhuman others and natural systems might look like in practice.

VI. DALE’S STORY

I grew-up on what was in the 60’s and 70’s a typical west-central Minnesota farm. My parents grew the farm 160 to 300 acres and raised corn, soybeans, alfalfa, spring wheat, oats and animals. I remember each year having about 90 finished beef, 20 sows and 200 market hogs farrow-to-finish, 500 laying hens, 2 horses, a dozen beef cow-calf pairs, geese, ducks, broilers, a dog or two, and lots of cats. There were 10 kids in my family, and several of us participated in 4-H. I exhibited beef, dairy, and swine at the county fair, the state fair, the state Market Livestock show, and the AK-SAR-BEN livestock show and rodeo in Omaha. In 1974, I exhibited the grand champion market barrow in the state of Minnesota. My parents were generous and allowed me to start and maintain a crossbred cow-calf herd to raise show beef animals. Each year it was nine months of waiting for calves, who came via artificial insemination and some of the best, new, and exotic breeds and sires available. My parents also let us raise hogs for exhibition, and every year it was a long winter waiting for sows, who had been mated in October, to gestate. In February I would often sleep in the hog barn, watching, waiting, and assisting sows as they gave birth to the pigs that would be my 4-H projects. There was something to enjoy year-round with raising and showing animals. Yearly the scenario repeated itself, giving me a biorhythm that I still sense even now.

Chores with the animals were never drudgery for me. I enjoyed them because I enjoyed watching, caring for, and just being around the animals. During my school years, my Dad and I had an agreement where he would do the morning chores and I would do the afternoon chores. I looked forward to coming home after school and being responsible for the animals. Sometimes it would be after 6 PM in the winter dark, because of basketball or other school activities. As a really young kid, the first chore I recall being solely responsible for was caring for the laying hens. I fed, watered, took out the dead birds (fed them to the hogs) and collected eggs. The 500 hens would lay the eggs in nest boxes, three high and five across. After collecting the eggs, I would pack them into boxes for

delivery to what I called the “egg place” in Kerkhoven. I was the fifth kid in my family, and we kids often did chores together, adding to the fun and giving us a time to learn how to resolve conflicts. And yes, there was a lot of manure to clean.

I remember most of my animals I had growing up. I remember Ruby, red-tan-spotted gilt, who was not a show winner, but did go on to farrow 19 piglets in her first litter. There was Judas, a heavily-muscled Limousin steer who was crowned county fair champion. The year before Judas, I owned a steer of similar breeding; he never won a show, but he went on to hang the 8th place carcass (out of 1000) in Omaha. I credit my parents, our county agent, and others for teaching me how to take care of animals and giving me an appreciation and interest in the carcass merit of the animals I raised and showed. I had an emotional attachment to each animal, but not always of the same intensity. Each had a slightly different character or personality. I recall the very wild, untamable steer, the stubborn steer that would not lead, and the pig that hated being in the show-ring and just wanted to go back to his pen. Animals have different dispositions, a result of genetics and experiences, much like humans. But I grew up pretty much thinking of pigs as pork, cattle as beef, dairy cows as milk, cream, and butter producers, and chickens as egg layers.

Another of the earliest “jobs” I remember as a kid was cleaning gizzards during the butchering of broilers for the family freezer. My mom showed us how to cut the muscular organ open with a sharp knife, how to remove the gravel and fibrous food, and then the tough, leather-like internal lining. I remember my mom’s hands. For a woman not even five feet tall, Mom had strong hands. No nail polish or fancy nails, just short sturdy fingers. The broilers were raised during the spring and summer, so we butchered in the backyard, not far from the house. Mom dressed the carcasses, sometimes a dozen or more a day. In my youth I saw hundreds of broilers running around or in concrete tile segments, geese and ducks hung on clotheslines, with their heads cut off. I am sure my ways of relating to food animals is to a large degree the result of being around animals at an early age *with* my parents and siblings, not just in their presence but doing and conversing and experiencing all together. In addition to the broilers, every winter we butchered one or two hogs and a steer or a cow from my uncle. In some cases it was a heifer or cow that broke a leg. I learned there was nothing wrong with them as meat, even if they were injured, and they would make excellent hamburger, roasts and steaks. No need to waste. We butchered right on the farm, in the basement of our house and on our kitchen table.

For some people, slaughter may be a sad time. For me, sad is not the right word to describe my feelings, though I haven’t yet found the right word to capture how I feel. When I go to the freezer and pull out a package of meat, I feel appreciative and grateful. I have a great deal of disdain for gluttony and waste. I also realize that relating to animals has benefited me beyond just being food.

I am grateful that animals have helped me learn about myself and about life. Raising animals has taught me a lot about patience. Seeing a cow lumbering about reminds me to slow down. They don't have to be first to arrive anywhere or win some competition. Being around animals helps calm me. It just does.

Though I grew-up raising animals in a more extensive, old-fashioned way – in small barns, feedlots, and pastures – most of the past 25 years of my life has focused on intensive or confinement swine production farms. I appreciated the many positive attributes of these systems and as a scientist I find the work of making them better and more sustainable a good challenge. But growing consumer interest in having more choice about where their food comes from has me working with pigs and people outside of the barn once again. About 7 years ago a colleague in entomology asked me to meet with an orchard owner about a potential research project. I was hesitant at first, because I was aware of the drawbacks of exposing pigs to outdoor environmental factors, including slower growth and parasite infestation. But because I was increasingly curious about the various food choices people were making, I got involved. The project goal was to use pigs to graze organic apple orchards to control a plum curculio (an insect that damages maturing fruit) infestation. The pigs would consume the apple pulp, historically a waste product, and it worked. From this project, my attitudes about extensive pork production and consumer choices have changed. I came to accept slower growth of pigs on the land. I also learned that farmers can demand a higher price for pork when consumers perceive greater value, which derives from how the animals are raised. And I'm still learning.

Three years ago I was contacted by Laurie about bringing pigs to the farm. Again, I was hesitant. There was no fencing and no one out there had much experience raising pigs. Who would do the work? Could it be profitable? But I agreed to see what we could learn. In that first year we raised 5 hogs for 40 days pre-harvest to see if they would graze fields after the vegetables had been harvested. We pre-sold the pork to the Kellogg Center, the hotel and conference center on campus, for a price that blew my mind. Soon after they added it to their menu, though, we realized we had not had the pork USDA process-inspected at the proper levels and they could no longer sell it. This waste was heartbreaking. There were a lot of steps in supply chain we didn't anticipate when we drove those pigs out into the fields that first year.

In 2010 we raised 12 pigs for 4-5 months and we worked hard to address all of the slaughter and processing issues. This time we were successful. One of the highlights of 2010 was the harvest experience for the students. I agreed to lead the tour because I wanted students to have a quality learning experience. Sure I was nervous, knowing that many had never observed a slaughter before. I did not want anyone to be scared or shaken by the experience. I'd seen other students

view euthanasia and butchering for the first time, but this harvest was going to be different, as I had watched these students become attached to these pigs all summer.

The enjoyment and richness of my animal experiences as a young person are major reasons why I am in an animal science department teaching students and extending knowledge to farmers now. I always knew I would pursue a career studying and working with animals. I relate to animals with care and respect. I also respect those who complete the process of harvesting food from animals. This is how I grew to know Randy, my friend who slaughtered our pigs from the farm. Our relationship started when he contacted his state representative, who then called my department chair and me into his downtown office to discuss what the university could do for Randy's business. Managing byproduct was expensive and he was looking for an alternative to rendering. That was over 10 years ago. Working with him led to an increased respect and trust between us. Initially, I thought Randy's shop was too dark: the walls are clay block, the equipment cold steel. I worried the room would look gloomy to students who were curious but apprehensive about seeing the death of pigs they had cared for. I thought they might equate dark with less safe or dirty. But I knew Randy had a gentle spirit and had a respect for all individuals. He was a County Fair Board member and I had seen and greeted him at the fair. I knew he communicated with people gracefully in that challenging role. I asked Randy because I trusted him to understand my request to help teach students who have no previous butchering experience, and that he trusted his employees to understand, too. Together, we were willing to engage the USDA vet inspector, risking his disapproval of a dozen extra people in the abattoir during slaughter. But most of my fears were never realized, and the harvest experience highlighted one of the most worthwhile – and perhaps for me, unexpected – elements of this work, sharing the experiential learning process of and with the students. There was great support among the group during the slaughter process. Students demonstrated curiosity and sincere interest in the procedures on the floor and in the anatomical features of the animals they had cared for and loved. The ride back to campus from the butcher plant was relaxed and full of stories.

On March 1, 2011 we moved two sows from the Swine Farm to the farm for our first organic on-farm births. We had been prepared for months and the sows successfully transitioned from environmentally-controlled housing to the field. Their arrival coincided with a new cohort of farm students, as well as a new pig leadership team Laurie and I had been mentoring for several weeks already, so they were welcomed by an eager labor force who attended to the daily chores. In late April, 18 live piglets were farrowed by two sows. We are on our way, learning how expensive organic feed is, how much work it is to farrow and keep piglets alive in the first 4 days of life, and how rewarding it is to share the responsibilities of animal care with students. It is a valuable learning experience for the students to manage every aspect of the pigs' lives.

Laurie recently shared a story with me about a conversation she overheard between two of our students. After a particularly challenging farrowing with one of the sows, who demonstrated an extremely low pain tolerance, and then 4-5 nights of around-the-clock surveillance of the sow and her litter, the students discussed the use of farrowing stalls. Also called farrowing crates, this technology is common in confinement systems, but is often viewed by advocates of sustainable systems as problematic because it significantly limits the sow's movement. After caring for this sow and litter during birthing, the students, who were previously apprehensive about the use of farrowing stalls, discussed the potential value of the technology for both farmers and pigs. They suggested the farm might consider using a farrowing stall next year. Multiple days of staying up with the pigs to prevent piglet crushing were exhausting for pigs and farmers alike. The challenge and the labor costs of our system convinced them that there may not be one right way to farrow sows, that farm practices might be context dependent. There is value in this dialogue between systems – no one system is wholly good or bad or right or wrong – and experience in place had helped the students engage this dialogue sincerely. Sometimes I explain to others who are not familiar with raising pigs why technologies like stalls are used in modern production, but I am not sure if they really grasp the reasoning behind this decision. Here I didn't have to do much explaining. The experience in the field was the teacher.

In six years, my attitude toward extensive production has changed significantly. I am much more open-minded when it comes to food choices, to farming choices which provide a living, and to production practices I haven't even thought about yet. The systems we have today are not final. The challenge is proving technologies and considering tradeoffs in their use. There is a growing population and a need to feed people. I want to be a part of the transition to better solutions. The neat part is when you go out there and see the nipple water hanging there in the field, an intensive technology we're now applying to extensive pork production. The systems are learning from each other, using the new to re-vision the old. In many ways, what we are learning is not all that novel. It's what farmers experienced years ago, raising pigs in fields with minimal low cost inputs. We are relearning and history is informing the present in new and valuable ways.

VII. ECOFEMINISM AND ANIMALS

Laurie's and Dale's stories offer us entrance into the intentions, moral commitments, and choiceful actions of two actors in our food system who are interested in the lives of other beings, the health of the land, the economic and social dynamics within the system, and sustainability. Through reading their stories—and telling our own—we can begin to make sense of the contemporary agricultural narrative that ties us to the land through the meals we share. Their stories can also help us understand what a meaningful environmental and animal ethic that is linked directly to the

labor and care of the land looks like in practice, and this practical ethic can provide context for the application of more theoretical agricultural and environmental ethics. Story and narrative offer ways for us to reclaim our own voices in discussions of morality and ethics, a wrestling away of power from the purely rational and academic approach offered by traditional ethics and a re-assertion of the value of multiple kinds of learning, relating, and responding to our world. Through narrative we understand our obligations to each other and the natural world, communicate our ideas about the world, and posit the value of relationships—practical and moral—in that world. Karen Warren (1990) explains:

[N]arrative gives voice to a felt sensitivity often lacking in traditional analytical ethical discourse, viz., a sensitivity to conceiving of oneself as fundamentally ‘in relationship with’ others, including the nonhuman environment. It is a modality which *takes relationships themselves seriously*. It thereby stands in contrast to a strictly reductionist modality that takes relationships seriously only or primarily because of the nature of the relators or parties to those relationships...[F]irst-person narrative gives expression to a variety of ethical attitudes and behaviors often overlooked or underplayed in mainstream ethics” (135).

Narrative is central to feminist discourse and ecofeminism, a philosophy and activism that bridges the issues of feminism and environmentalism with the understanding that all oppression – including, but not limited to, the feminine by masculine culture, or the natural world by human action – is linked by a shared logic. Accepting there are historical, theoretical, and practical relationships between gender discrimination and environmental degradation, ecofeminists resist cultural dualisms that perpetuate systems of domination (male/female, human/nature, rationality/emotion), which have traditionally allowed both the domination of the natural world by humans and the degradation of women by men. In response to what many feminists considered to be an androcentric focus in environmental ethics scholarship, as well as a shift from animal welfare – which focuses on the wellbeing of individual nonhuman individual beings – to ecocentric arguments on behalf of natural systems – whose wellbeing often depends on the sacrifice of individuals for the good of the whole (e.g., culling a herd for the good of the population), ecofeminism seeks to articulate and enable agents to enact loving rather than hierarchical relationships with each other and the natural world.

The ethic of care, a relational and contextual ethic that has emerged from ecofeminism – as well as from the moral development work of Carol Gilligan (1982) – offers a way to understand and address these appropriate moral relationships. While ecofeminism has splintered and lost cohesive momentum since its development in the 1970s, its central concerns, including how we might configure acceptable relationships with particular individual others while still meeting our

obligations to wider natural systems and abstract communities, still guide environmental ethical discourse. Current ecofeminist scholarship (Adams 1990, 1994; Donovan 1990; Curtin 1991; Gruen 1993; Donovan & Adams 2007; Kheel 2008), much of which focuses on agricultural and eating relationships, emphasizes the importance of this task. At core these arguments assert that the best way to honor our obligations to individual nonhuman others is to cease from killing them and causing them unnecessary pain. This includes the pain of death. Thus, one must become a vegetarian (or vegan), especially in the face of the unsettling cultural practice of intensive or factory farming and its associated environmental impacts.

But this stance against eating animals overlooks the role that animals play in farming systems as laborers, sustenance, beings in relationship, and catalysts for moral development and relationship networks to emerge. Recent ecofeminist scholarship does not explore what right relationships with agricultural animals might look like – except within the context of the animal sanctuary, which ‘rescues’ agricultural animals from their role on the farm – and instead advocates for the abstention of direct and concrete relationships with these nonhuman others to prevent the problematic termination of these relationships (that is, the death of the animal), or to eliminate pain and injustice (enacted by humans against animals or enacted by capitalist production systems in a culture of inequality) associated with this death. This position – somewhat removed from the original intended contextual focus of ecofeminism – also ignores the embodied component of ethical development (Hamington, 2004; McCuen and Shah, 2007) prominent in feminist ethics, which promotes a concept of ethics separate from the hyper-rationality of traditional, western philosophical approaches (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; Warren 1990; Plumwood 1991). Additionally, this position misses an important opportunity to describe and promote particular relationships we already have with the land so we can address and change the structures and systems we are uncomfortable with, namely agricultural landscapes and production animals. Indeed, uncritically promoting a vegan diet may instead condone farm and agricultural practices we are uncomfortable with because of their impacts on environmental systems, or it may overlook important opportunities to advocate for and enact moral caring relationships with the natural world and with each other in virtuous human communities.

VIII. AGRARIANISM AND THE WHOLE FARM APPROACH

Other environmental ethical approaches, though, including agrarianism, offer us a lens to understand these relationships with nonhuman others and thus provide a framework through which to apply ecofeminist and care-based ethics in new ways. The idea that agriculture has a symbolic, cultural, and moral function can be thought of as the agrarian vision. It holds that agriculture is unique among trades in its capacity to co-produce a wide variety of social goods while

also supplying food and fiber needs. Thomas Jefferson (1984), for example, claimed that “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens” (818). Quite realistically, Jefferson recognized that traders and manufacturers can relocate their portable assets if the situation became unfavorable in the new nation. . Farmers, however, cannot. They are invested in the context of their land, in the relationships of place, and in the health of the systems that sustained them.

As a philosophy, agrarianism argues that we should look to this citizenship example rooted in our agricultural history to understand how farming, land, and food relationships can instill and develop environmental virtues such as stewardship and sustainability. The practice of eating in season, knowing one’s farmer, and getting out to the farm once in a while counters Leopold’s (1949) concerns that “There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery and the other that heat comes from the furnace”(6). We all need a practical and material demonstration of our dependence and direct impact on the land. We need to be reminded of how tenuous, experimental, and adaptive good farming has to be.

There are also more particular virtues that develop in the context of the farm – caring for beings and system health in relationship, working collaboratively through challenge, literally weathering uncertainty and unpredictable circumstances – that can inform an environmental ethic both for people directly involved in agricultural landscapes and those who are connected by way of their food. One way farms do this is by enabling caring relationships with nonhuman others. The physical work involved with animal care requires a certain investment in their good. Relationships can develop in this context. This element of agrarianism resonates with ecofeminism in both the scholarship and practice of the ethic of care. Additionally, other relationships – with people, systems, off-farm industry – develop in the labor of animal care through which we can learn community values, participatory virtues (Ferkany & Whyte 2011), and other citizenship skills that are important for creating the world we want to live in.

Key components of an agrarian livestock ethic would hold that animal farming should produce habits of character that not only result in ethically defensible forms of animal husbandry, but that go further in creating both practical and symbolic context for the furtherance of virtues that have broader resonance in moral life. From a practical standpoint, animal husbandry should involve the animal caregiver in practices that both reinforce habits of good character and also create opportunities for learning, growth and deepening of a person’s general understanding of moral responsibility and their network of care. On the symbolic level, stories and accounts of these

practices should create models of virtue that can enliven and empower the moral imagination of people who do not actually engage in animal husbandry.

IX. ECOFEMINISM AND AGRARIANISM: A CONVERSATION

Community is another virtue that can be supported through particular approaches to agriculture. In rural towns of times past it came naturally, as relative isolation and the need for solidarity created interdependencies that forced people together. However, there was a dark side to this style of community: for close-knit rural communities, while remarkable for their foundations in relationships, reciprocity, attentiveness to natural cycles, and inclusion of the natural world in the practical community of place, could also breed uniformity and intolerance. This outcome of an agrarian approach needs some work and this is a place for ecofeminism, with its focus on diversity, justice, and equity, to play a role, while agrarianism tempers some of the ecological disconnect of ecofeminism's overly narrow focus on individual nonhuman others. Thompson (1998) writes: "The 'interpersonal networks' side of feminism rehabilitates some of the key moral apparatus of agrarian philosophy. Agrarians would agree with network-feminists in emphasizing the importance of maintaining the integrity of one's community, one's care-circle against the priority that Enlightenment moralists have accorded to notions of duty and efficiency" (175). But he also worries about ecofeminism's distance from the actual landscape, for while ecofeminist scholars muse about farmlands and obligations, infrequently do ecofeminist scholars actually engage in farm labor. Therefore their arguments on behalf of what they consider to be appropriate behaviors miss some important intricacies of the practice (see Haraway 2008 for alternative ecofeminist ideas about animals). He continues: "I would like to see the feminist rehabilitation go farther, and in particular embrace the agrarian emphasis on productive work....Perhaps the critique of domination can weigh in effectively in moderating the tendency toward nativism and in-group elitism" (175).

Some critiques of ecofeminism also worry about insularity, though. If we prioritize our closest, concrete relationships because it is in these relationships we best understand reciprocity, right action, and the needs of the cared-for, we will always forsake our obligations to distant beings or systems because we cannot fully understand the needs of those relationships in ways that encourage moral care (Card 1990, Baier 1995). But other ecofeminist scholarship responds directly to this critique and offers ways to conceptualize our distant or abstract relationships by applying in them what we know and feel in concrete, near relationships. Through this approach to ecofeminist or care-based theories of justice (Held 2006, Slote 2007, Engster 2009) – sometimes called a politicized ethic of care (Curtin 1991, Plumwood 1991) – we understand how particular farm, food, and landscape relationships can inform our citizenship virtues more broadly.

This is a place where agrarianism can engage a fruitful dialogue with our nuanced, systems-oriented ethic of care, which finds great moral value in the relationships that develop out of the shared labor of care for agricultural animals raised as a meaningful component of the farm system. Our project with field-raised pigs offers an example of the kinds of stories we can tell to demonstrate the moral community of care that captures the ethical dimensions of the human-human, human-animal, human-natural system, animal-land relationships that have developed on a small-scale organic farm. In the telling of our stories we are responding to Anthony's (2009) concern that the main storyline found in agriculture today is that of a "tragedy" made up of incompatible camps and irreconcilable images. We answer his call for a new story for agriculture. It is a work in progress, always under "erasure" (Lather, 1993), yet extended as a new storyline for others to borrow, connect to, grab hold of or dismiss. Here is the ecofeminist on the land that has been missing from the discourse. Here is the agrarian who purposefully moved beyond his insular scientific community to seek new the perspectives. Here they work together. Fully recognizing that "ethics explodes anew in every circumstance" (St. Pierre 1997), we offer our story of reconciliation, our agricultural narrative revitalization.

Valuing the pigs as integral to our farm system requires we both appreciate their role as tillers of the soil and contributors of organic fertilizer, while at the same time also mitigating the impacts of wallowing on soil compaction and preventing parasite issues with an effective rotation system. We work in community across disciplines and across farm boundaries with farmers, processors, consumers, and educators. We appreciate and reciprocate the pigs' touch, and at the end of the season, we sit with their death, even consume their meat. Our duties are to their lives, to the health of the system, to the laborers in the fields, and to the eaters who purchase our products – we are morally responsible to the whole system, and this responsibility permeates the very fabric of farm culture. And at the center of our work, research, and community are our relationships with the pigs themselves. While we root our work in feminist care-based scholarship, we step to the margins of this work when we embrace the death of our animals – beings we play with, care for, and love – as a necessary and important part of our system. Without their death, we cannot sustain our system. Agrarianism understands this ethical decision, because it embraces the systems perspective at the very core of farm cycles. This is a place for us as care scholars to learn from agrarianism as a model for relationships in and with the land. It is in this vein that we stayed with our pigs through their death, accompanying them as a community of students, educators, farmers, researchers, care-givers, and friends onto the slaughter floor. And it is for this reason we tell our story.

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