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WGS 374

24 February 2020

Greed and Ignorance Breed Environmental Disaster

To discover and appreciate nature's inherent capabilities of restoring and repairing itself without humankind's chemical intrusion on such natural processes is comparable to unravelling an Eighth Wonder of the Ancient World. However, humanity has unfortunately fallen trap to our own self-inflicted scientific conceit with a sudden surge in pesticide production and use. After reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, I discovered that as a result of prioritizing individualistic financial monetary acquisition, mankind's unjustified ignorance and entitlement towards nature's biologically embedded defense mechanisms has inevitably led us to falsely conclude that we would ever successfully create chemicals superior to such natural phenomenons.

Perhaps unravelling my takeaway first requires a deeper insight into the natural phenomenon of nature repairing itself that Carson provides a plethora of scientific evidence to describe and support. It is true that there are indeed a wide variety of self-repairing methods encoded into nature's ecological mechanisms that regulate the quality and quantity of plants and insects alike, methods that I did not know about until reading *Silent Spring*. One such mechanism Carson cites is the importation of thirteen parasites and predators of the gypsy moth initiated to control its populations as a form of a natural quarantine, achieving "outstanding restriction of distribution and damage" (Carson 157). Such a success story not only simply illustrates the basic fact that natural solutions are available, but also proves that natural solutions are available and

are effective. If this method proved to be successful with the moth, then the same method can be applied to other insects that pose a threat to certain plants, such as the Japanese Beetle, where the populations "have been kept at relatively low levels" due to natural controls set up (88). The fact that a natural solution such as this is so readily available ironically aggravated me as I knew that we were not taking full advantage of its abundant availability and effectiveness, that instead we were completely disregarding it in favor of a far more harmful chemically engineered solution. Another successful natural mechanism as opposed to pesticide use was planting marigolds among roses as per advice from Scientists of the Dutch Plant Protection Service, in which the marigold's excretion had the capability to kill soil nematodes. Carson reports "The results were striking. With the aid of the marigolds the roses flourished; in the control beds they were sickly and drooping. Marigolds are now used in many places for combating nematodes" (78). I had never even known, let alone considered the benefits, of planting another plant in order to kill off insects. I was fascinated by the ways in which we are often outsmarted by nature right before our very eyes. These only further support the finding that nature comes with an abundance of inherent biological mechanisms designed to keep various populations of various species in check without the need of harmful man made chemicals. After reading about such phenomenons, I couldn't help but wonder, why let such an eco-friendly and far less costly and damaging method go so widely unknown and therefore unused?

I then found it necessary to analyze the negative ways in which the chemical industry in addition to a wide variety of other research institutions had failed to invest time, money, and research into the study and use of nature's natural defense mechanisms. My goal was to discover the "why" of such a lack of competence from the chemical industries for falling behind on

utilizing such an effective pest control method. Carson's brief mentions of monetary gain and capitalistic motivations for conducting or not conducting certain research projects proves to be a primary source of this problematic practice. This viewpoint is supported when Carson states, "Biological-control studies, on the other hand, are never so endowed— for the simple reason that they do not promise anyone the fortunes that are to be made in the chemical industry" (259). To do or not to do certain studies when something as critical as our environment is involved for "fortune" purposes leads to nothing but catastrophic environmental and biological damage on all living things, from humans, to plants, to animals, and to insects. It was sad for me to realize and acknowledge the lack of rationality industry professionals had once monetary incentives were involved. Even when removing the factor of money, a similar concept still stands in which "[the chemical industry's] professional prestige, sometimes their very jobs depend on the perpetuation of chemical methods (259). It is dangerous to let the future of something as essential yet fragile as our environment rely on the extremely flawed greediness of mankind in his selfish search for wealth and prestige (which is presumably measured by wealth).

I began to reflect on the toxic ways in which our need for financial superiority has taken precedence over the wellbeing of our own environment. Upon reading Ariel Salleh's *Ecofeminism as Politics*, I then made a fascinating connection between this thirst for wealth to the influence that a predominantly white male culture has in perpetuating such toxic ideas of maximizing monetary gains. She describes the principle foundation of ecofeminism as combatting the "eurocentric capitalist patriarchal exploitation of natural resources" (Salleh 39). This description is the exact driving force behind the complete disregard of biological solutions and the total appeal of mass produced chemicals. It displays an array of entitlement to dominate

over nature and women, and anything deemed "less than" a man in an effort to be the most commercially successful as possible. To do anything but would be counteracting what Salleh brilliantly calls the "masculine ego" (42). Tying this to the issue of using harmful pesticides as opposed to utilizing nature's biological mechanisms, it became clear to me that the decision to choose one method over another because it accumulates greater commercial success and prestige very largely relied on the fact that such chemical industries and research institutions were run by straight white males who fed off of such shallow and problematic measures of success. It was at this point that I finally saw the ways in which gender and environment influence each other, helping me view the harmful use of pesticides as an intersectional issue. The culture of masculinity and capitalism plays substantial roles in the development of nature's pesticide crisis.

This all culminates to the lack of education, research, and awareness of such biological methods of pest control, and this inevitably is accompanied with the over-reliance on pesticides that in the long-run do more harm than good. Carson provides additional insight to this argument by highlighting the use of pesticides in an overwhelmingly negative light, constructing it as what seems to be only the direct product of desperation and ignorance. She states, "The resort to weapons such as insecticides to control it is a proof of insufficient knowledge and of an incapacity so to guide the processes of nature that brute force becomes unnecessary" (275). At this point it was clear to me that we humans have full accountability for the damage done unto nature as it was our own lack of education and lack of willingness to receive that education caused by selfish greed for maximizing capital profit that led us to the unnecessary overproduction of several hundred harmful pesticide and insecticides. As a matter of fact, an alarming statistic Carson presents further supports this notion of industry professionals failing to

fully invest in the beneficial process of biological controls. In 1960, "only 2 per cent of all the economic entomologists in the country were then working in the field of biological controls. A substantial number of the remaining 98 per cent were engaged in research on chemical insecticides" (258). This number was shocking to me as it put into a quantifiable perspective of how little hope we have for the widespread awareness of biological solutions. It is the pinnacle representation of a capitalistic society designed to cater to upper class white males. We are the reason for our own ignorance towards biological solutions, and our ignorance has correlated to the massive harm we've done to nature.

Under the influence of Carson's evidence, the effectiveness and benefits of the biological solutions founded upon nature's mysterious yet fascinating ways of repairing itself far outweighs the harmful and long-term ineffective man made chemicals humankind has unfortunately introduced into the natural world. This is an important topic worthy of attention and discussion as the environmental implications associated with the continuation of harmful chemicals threatens essentially all forms of life on Earth, while also ultimately making the matters worse. As a society, it is essential we finally recognize that our creations may not always lead to the best outcomes and put our greedy financial motivations aside for the better of our planet.

Works Cited

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Penguin Books, in Association with Hamish Hamilton, 2015.

Salleh, Ariel. "Ecofeminist Actons." *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern*. Zed Books, 1997, pp. 39-42.