How Should Supporters of the Deep Ecology Movement
Behave in Order to Affect Society and Culture

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C.A. Bowers has written a helpful and provocative article which touches upon this question. 1 Summing up, he states that:

> An awareness of culture in terms of a semiotic perspective may help us affect changes at a pre-reflective level of awareness and meaning that is beyond the reach of the printed word. Thus, the real challenge is to broaden the approach to ecosophy in a way that takes into account the primacy of culture – in all its dimensions. (Bowers)

What some of us write who are not only supporters, but also theorists of the movement, seem to rely abnormally on "the reach of the printed word". One legitimately asks whether we do anything else than writing and giving speeches. And if we do other things, why don't we say so?

Gandhi was both a supporter and a theorist of a gigantic movement. It is always instructive to see what kind of practice he was engaged in. Always a campaign included a constructive program. The supporters declared themselves eager to help and cooperate in the daily work of opponents as well as supporters. "Trust begotten in the pursuit of continuous constructive work becomes a tremendous asset at the critical moment." (Young India, 9.1.1930). It is decisive that the opponents trust you. Talk is of course not enough, and who reads what you write?

In a modest way, a constructive program was carried out in a conflict in Arctic Norway. We obstructed the preliminary work for building a dam. Some local people in favor of the dam were furious. When they approached our camp, the rule was to invite them to coffee. That is a culturally based sign of peace and goodwill and it is difficult to reject an obviously seriously meant invitation. The people were given plenty of time to vent their anger. Before leaving, supporters of the direct action asked sincerely whether they could be of any help. Many of the angry people were family farmers and the supporters asked whether there were fences to be repaired etc. Through the constructive program it was easy to make people listen to our views how they could get a necessary amount of electricity without the dam.

In short: the supporters tried to understand adequately the general cultural determinants of the opponents and act in a decent way as judged from their cultural point of view. Unfortunately there was a relatively clear line of division: the angry locals had in general less formal education than the locals who were

against the dam. In such a case it is of course a plus to mobilize supporters who talk and act in a way that is completely familiar to the formally less educated, the family farmers and labor people. Talking in local schools it was difficult to make the people in favor of the dam speak up: to speak in favor of the dam was taken to be a sign of lack of education. What always helps, is to do something together, practical and constructive.

Theorists are often badly equipped to do constructive work, but fortunately that constitutes only a very tiny minority of the supporters of the deep ecology movement.

Supporters in industrial countries who focus on the population problems have naturally more than enough to do in their own countries, but if they venture to accomplish some-thing (locally), say, in Kenya, the acculturation process is formidable. Women who try to increase female influence in matters of procreation, must live in the village as much as practically possible in harmony with its cultural traditions. They must serve the community in a convincing way and get trusted. It is a form of constructive program in the sense of Gandhi. Obviously people from the West cannot, and should not, have any decisive influence in the population conflicts. And if the culture is a so-called traditional one, the way to proceed demands considerable work before anything can be done directly in the area of population policies, in cooperation with locals who share our views.

In Uruguay, social ecologists who also are supporters of the deep ecology movement, work among the 'poor' whose old traditions contain many ecologically sound ways of production and consumption, trying to revive and strengthen them and warding off the unecological ways introduced by Westerners and the power elite of their own country. Here also the cultural aspect is of paramount importance. Supporters from the West are nevertheless capable of cooperation with a minority in the traditional society and widen that minority. Not much of the supporters' time is spent on writing and theorizing.

Supporters work on personal, social and political levels. On the personal level I assume that people have a significant range of freedom of decision, a considerable range of choices. They may have within a certain framework the opportunity to work out their own guidelines of conduct in life. The way I talk about ecosophies, it justifiably evokes concern that I overestimate the freedom to choose basic guidelines in life, and also overestimate the importance of personal ("individual") choices in a society where a large degree of conformity and consensus reduces or seems to reduce devastating con-flicts. My answer: people tend to underestimate their own potentials. They need to hear more about alternative ways of behavior and thinking.

The technique of working out premise/conclusion surveys of (parts of) ecosophies is a very special and "Western" technique. For people with certain kinds of background, it is not only a convenient but potentially wholesome activity when trying 'to live according to one's teaching'. It helps development in the di-

rection of 'living according to reason' as viewed by philosophers and others who have a Spinozist bent. That is, judging decisions to be irrational or a-rational, which are not consistent with one's ultimate premises - one's basic beliefs and attitudes. It is a common feature in life that changes of basic beliefs and attitudes occur with difficulty, and the efforts to articulate verbally what happens are important for some persons. But for most supporters of the deep ecology movement, it would presumably not be helpful at all to work in the way I do with myself. Working in community and society my special terminology and my diagrams may rarely be useful.

Tools used when thinking and arguing for and against a decision in a particular situation may seem rational, intuitive, individualistic or collectivistic. It depends on one's 'meta-thinking', thinking about thinking and arguing. With my background, the use of premise/conclusion models does not preclude high estimation of ways of life and of deciding matters in traditional societies. Nor does it preclude trying to find out what can be learned from such societies.

Cultural traditions are not monolithic or like crystals, either continuing essentially unchanged, or destroyed and crushed. "The are two points that must be balanced", says Hilary Putnam, "both points that have been made by philosophers of many different kinds: (1) talk of what is "right" and "wrong" in any area only makes sense against the background of an inherited tradition; but (2) traditions themselves can be criticized." 2

The criticism does not need to be determined by influence from a different tradition. That is, a member of a definite tradition may experience things which makes the member severely critical of an important detail in his own cultural tradition without in that case being influenced by a 'foreign' tradition or culture. According to at least one tradition, extraordinary fatness is taken to be proof of extraordinary health and an adequate defence against illnesses which kill others. From this it seems to have been inferred that such people are immune to AIDS. A member of the tradition may find it difficult to understand the death of a very fat person reported to have died of AIDS: perhaps the doctor is wrong or the traditional belief is wrong. Even if somebody is a full member of the tradition, the second option is realistic.

There is an open question: how should we interpret "sense" in the above quotation from Putnam? If a member of tradition A says to member of a tradition B that something the B-member does is "wrong", B may not understand the word "wrong" ? When we talk, what we say is only "understandable against the background of an "inherited" linguistic "back-ground". But I may say to a member of a very different tradition from mine that what that member does is wrong. Perhaps I may be criticized for this by some cultural anthropologists, but the member may perfectly well understand what I mean, and answer that perhaps I am right, perhaps not. Two requirements for this to happen are (1) that I have learned the verbal language or body language, of the other tradition, and that there is a distinction right/wrong in their tradition which roughly cor-

responds to that of mine. As far as I can judge from my own experience, there exist such correspondences across many cultures. For instance it is understood when we criticize a certain kind of cruelty (according to our own tradition) the members of another tradition condone because is part of an old ritual.

From the above I conclude that there may be senses of "sense" which makes what Putnam says under (1) adequate, but there is at least a sense of "sense" in which talk about what is right and wrong (but not necessarily about "right" and "wrong", using those terms) make sense – in spite of deep cultural differences. We are not imprisoned in traditions! Under- estimation of cultural traditions as a determining factor of a person's thinking and acting should be fought, but this fight is itself based on an assumption of the inadequacy of complete 'cultural determinism': the view that what we think and do is entirely determined by traditions.

According to Putnam what he calls a "cultural relativist" can say "Well then, truth - the only notion of truth I under-stand - is defined by the norms of my culture". 3 Such a point of view leads to inconsistency or worse. Two main points in discussing the concept of different ecosophies are (1) the vast importance of cultural determinants of the thinking and acting of an ecosopher, and (2) the importance of the wide range of potential personal creativity. The creativity may have had bad conditions in the formative years of a person, but the rule is that even in such a case the person in a sense recreates a cultural tradition when 'internalizing' most of its norms. Anyhow, serious research with the goal to describe a culture as a whole will end with descriptions which depend on a more or less arbitrary framework, and mostly end with an acknowledgement of vast simplification. This may give the reader the false impression that a culture 'has' a strict coherence of definite sets of norms. It is understandable that the people doing research within what is often called cultural anthropology don't like to use the term "culture". What is a culture?

What is above said regarding theories about traditions and cultures applies to theories about interpretation (in a wide sense) within the hermeneutic trend in philosophy. An expression like 'the social construction of reality' is useful as a slogan, but a society, even less than a culture, has a system of 'norms and hypotheses' rigid enough to determine a definite view of reality.

The statement that "you are not expected to agree...but to learn the means for developing your own systems or guides, say, Ecosphies X, Y, or Z" reflects the liberal assumption that decisions should be based on the free choice and rational judgment of the individual. Locating the ultimate authority for this decision within the individual would be totally inconceivable in cultures based on pre-modern cosmologies." (Bowers). This is a statement about my statement which I find interesting, but somewhat misleading. My experience in traditional societies has led me to believe that the range of personalities and range of choices of lifestyles may be quite considerable there. Some of the differences seem small for us, but they are considerable within their culture and consequences are as

drastic as joining a 'far out subculture' in a rich industrial society. It is not my
experience that ,for instance, 'poor', illiterate, family farmers in the mountains
of Hindu-kush (Pakistan) make less "decisions...based on the free choice and
rational judgment of the individual". As Muslims of sorts they may be said
to locate "the ultimate authority" for a decision, not within their own person.
They would refer to their own community and to Allah. I am speaking about
the 70 porters we hired to help our expedition to carry provisions in very rugged
mountainous terrains, including glaciers. Our interaction with our porters was
intimate, dramatic, and offered excellent opportunity to study differences of
personal character. The differences were deep! One of them was a thief, let me
here call him Abdul. Sometimes when we could not find something, for instance
a tool, one of our porters would say, "Abdul may have stolen it." Usually it
was found. I liked Abdul and he probably understood that, and when we were
crossing a valley he stole some apples for me. The glint in his eyes seemed to be
saying, "of course I am going to steal as much as I can from you, but I like you."
I do not pretend to know much about his total view, but I do think that he, in
his way, was able to articulate some of it. As a 'deviant', as a person refusing
to follow a lot of the norms – and hypotheses – of his community, he probably
engaged in some wonderful verbal articulation expressing general guidelines in
life.

In short, I do think that my talk about total views is roughly applicable to
persons in traditional societies. They have, in part, 'their own way' of life. And
the expression 'their own' does not imply opposition to any main tradition in
their community. Bowers quotes me as follows: "saying 'your own' does not
imply that the ecosophy is in any way an original creation by yourself. It is
enough that it is a kind of total view which you feel at home with, 'where you
philosophically belong'. Along with one's own life, it is always changing." If you
feel very much at home with the traditions of your community, your way may be
completely within the limits of the traditionally tolerated range of differences.
Because a traditional society is always changing, there is intense discussions
centering on particular traditions. The range changes, gets wider and narrower.

I am not sure I know what Bowers means by "liberal assumption", and "con-
tinuing commitment to the basic tenets of liberalism." It is difficult for me to
think within the terminology of "ideological liberalism" and "ideological con-
servationism!". But when I read that Gary Snyder's bioregionalism appears
"to be based on essential values and assumptions that can only be described
as ideologically conservative", I tend to like to be classed that way myself. It
is, on the other hand, inevitable to be classed as "individualistic", the way I
often focus on personal choice. It is a focus that is very different from that of
colleagues in sociology and political science. "You overrate the capacity and
opportunity of people to choose!" This may be the case, but I believe sincerely
in the vast strength and importance of historical, social and political determi-
nants of personal decisions. From a statistic comparing the number of times I
use the terms 'choice' and 'personal' with the number of times a sociologist uses

the term 'society', not much can be inferred about our total views.

Point 6 of the 8 points of deep ecology as I see it, is thought to express what most supporters of the deep ecology movement agree about on a fairly abstract level, and it suggests that the work to be done is largely social and political. There is little basis for an assumption that supporters of the deep ecology movement are politically passive, or that supporters in industrial societies do not look for things we may learn from non-industrial societies.

Bowers points to important sources of contemporary in-sight - sociology of knowledge, cultural anthropology and a certain trend in semiotics. He summarizes the key assertions of a part of sociology of knowledge in a way that makes them roughly acceptable if I am permitted to insert some words of caution:

> (1) The person's taken for granted sense of "reality" is /largely/ socially constituted; (2) what is /conceived as/ "real" is /largely/ dependent upon multiple pathways and patterns of communication; (3) the cognitive schemas acquired through communication with significant others become internalized as the individual's /early/ inter-subjective self; and (4) the socially shared typifications, assumptions, and categories that provide the schemas necessary for thought and communication are also part of the self-identity process.

The insertion "early" is meant to emphasize the mature person's own creative thinking and feeling when participating in the formation of his social and ecological self. The in-sertion "conceived as" is important, because certain philosophers, especially within the hermeneutic movement, write and talk as if they meant that what is real is determined by humans. The various formulations of laws of gravity are all humans creations, but not what they are intended to refer to, however inadequately. (Just as the impact of logical positi-vism in its time elicited strange views, the enthusiasm for existentialism, the late Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophy, each had its climatical overstatements. Now it is time for hermeneutics and postmodernism, it seems.)

It may be held that Warwick Fox and I do too little to address the cultural aspects of the ecological crisis, but we are very clear about the many-sided efforts needed. With this admission of fallilibility, I shall end my notes on the article by Bowers. Ecological awareness and cultural awareness should develop together, and also be articulated together.

Notes

1. "Some Questions about the Theoretical Foundation of Warwick Fox's Transpersonal Ecology and Arne Naess' Ecosophy T", this issue of The Trumpeter.

2. See Hilary Putnam's article in After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman & Thomas McCarthy, (Ed.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987.

3. Idem, p. 232.