

Ecosophy, Population, and Sustainable Development

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Introduction

The title of this paper is not self-explanatory. I shall briefly indicate what I am driving at.

(1) Ecology, as a science of inter-relations of all beings, has since the 1960s gained dramatically in significance for practically every question humans raise about their future. The bulk of scientific data is overwhelming. But the increase of problems of practical importance shows a steeper curve of increase than that of ecological knowledge. Result: increase of bewildering uncertainty. We recognize that a main problem in the 1990s will be the wise use of data and the mobilization of political and individual will to support wisdom of interaction with all beings. In a word, we shall need constraint and ecosophy as much as we need ecology. By an ecosophy I mean a total view inspired in part by fundamental ecological insights in our bewildering situation.

(2) Today a total view must include tentative answers to the question of whether the ultimate goals of humanity are best served by a population of the size projected for the next century, or perhaps by a fraction of that size. If the latter is accepted, the question must be faced whether it is practically hopeless today to prepare for a politically, but not geologically, long range change in the preferred direction. But ecosophy must also answer whether the non-human world with its wealth and diversity of life forms, the habitats of animals, plants, and

other life forms, would profit from a smaller (and better behaved) human population. Here the answer is yes.

(3) The slogan now adopted worldwide, “sustainable development” might be interpreted differently, but the interpretation accepted here is such that ecologically long range sustainable development is implied. Again, to arrive at policies satisfying this norm, a total view is relevant. What does it imply for the rich nations? For the poor? It is here argued that the implications are vast and cover every aspect of a society and the life style of its members. The conclusion rests in part on descriptions of what is going on in the oceans, on land, and in the atmosphere.

Total Views and their Articulation as Systems

Humans are sometimes called bundles of contradictions. And, certainly, we often surrender to impulses that seem to be inconsistent with our value priorities or assumptions about social or other realities. Nevertheless, as persons, we at least implicitly presume that we have certain consistent value-priorities. Most of these form conclusions from premises which are in part factual hypotheses or assumptions.

The phrase “priorities of value” might mislead because it does not point to the vast number of hypotheses that a person presupposes, when announcing the value priorities.

The term “philosophy” might mislead because it points mainly to the fundamental and near fundamental norms and hypotheses. But in an ecosophy the decisions in particular situations are decisive.

The term “total view” has, to some extent, the same weakness as philosophy. But I hope it suggests both fundamentality and practice, whereas philosophy often only suggests the first.

What practical importance does the total-view concept have in environmental conflicts?

My experience is that conflicts between experts are coloured by the throwing to and fro of information against one another. They who combine factual arguments with value priority arguments and fundamental principles are likely to win, at least in the long run. Those who are not experts should, as integrated persons, argue from fundamental principles and support those decision-makers who combine this in their utterances as experts. Ecosophia is an aspect of

general wisdom (*sophia*), and wisdom must show up in wise actions, the implementation of wise decisions. Knowledge is not enough for any wise decision; it is not only a knowledgeable decision. Decisions, if they are to be wise, must take everything relevant into account and this includes not only facts but basic rules or norms. Because knowledge of what will be the immediate, not to mention remote, consequences of an action is limited, a decision will in general be made on the basis of uncertain premises of very different kinds. Therefore, in principle, the premises of any decision whatsoever are all embracing. In this sense, any decision by a mature person implies the pretension of a total view as its foundation. Let us take the question of wolf/human relationships as an example.

In wolf/human philosophy I neglect astronomy and astrology, implicitly asserting that they are irrelevant. If a strong believer in astrology objects, I will admit my only very limited knowledge of it, but repeat my verdict, this time explicitly: Astrology is irrelevant. One of my indefinite number of implicit premises is made explicit! We cannot neglect politics, and politics is, from a cognitive (knowledge and acquaintance-related) point of view, based on political philosophy.

Standard cost/benefit analysis cannot do the whole job. Factual analysis cannot do the whole job. Factual analysis presupposes norms in order to arrive at proposals for decision. Benefit for which ethically acceptable goals? For which long range global goals? Adequate wolf policies require consideration of ultimate or fundamental norms and their application to local and global strategies of action. The question is: Cost/benefit in relation to which immense sets of partly incompatible and even incompatible systems of norms and hypotheses? A fragment of an answer relative to wolves in an area where they interact with sheep and sheep-owner in a particular country, Norway, will be given later in this article.

It is clearly the responsibility of the highly educated (in the limited sense of university education) to articulate norms and hypotheses beyond standard cost/benefit analysis. But, unfortunately, experts and researchers with such education have a tendency to avoid norms and values at a fundamental level. One of their ways of justifying this is to proclaim that technology and science are based only on facts and hypotheses, not norms, not on sentences with unavoidable, irreducible exclamation marks. This claim of objectivity is an illusion well worth inspecting in some detail.

Given that chains of derivation cannot be infinite, they must start with definite statements. One can justify A with B and B with C, but at a definite time, in a definite situation, one has to stop somewhere, taking certain norms as ultimate or fundamental. In methodology there are rules of procedure, in logic there are rules of inference. They can be derived from fundamental rules. A rule as a kind of norm is properly expressed with an exclamation mark, not a full stop. That a rule, if followed, has certain consequences may be expressed by a sentence ending with a full stop, but a sentence saying that the rule or the consequence is good should properly end with an exclamation mark. Most rules assumed to be fundamental seem to be absolutely obvious, but sometimes derived rules seem more intuitively obvious, for instance in arithmetic. In normative systems, the fundamental norms which constitute kinds of rules normally appear to be obviously valid to those accepting the system. One may say that they tend to be accepted through intuition, like the basic rules of logical inference. In the philosophy of mathematics and metamathematics, controversies exist about competing systems (constructivist, logicist, formalist, intuitionist, etc.) in which intuitive acceptance plays an inescapable role.

The importance of the above stems from the widespread, unsupportable view that if one is a scientist one starts and ends with factual statements, sentences ending with full stops. But one never gets going without methodological and logical rules, and some of them cannot be validated within one's system. *Unvalidated rules are necessary to validate a claim that such and such is a fact.* To show that a fundamental rule (R_1) is useful, successful, or valid, one must include these properties in the conclusion one infers from premises, say observation sentences. But how, from those premises, does one reach a conclusion? Only by rule. So one either uses R_1 , going in circles, or use a new fundamental rule, R_2 , whereby the same trouble as to how to prove that rule is encountered.

The appreciation of the necessity of taking some rules as fundamental in scientific work makes it easier to accept that we have to do the same in handling normative systems. Here the most important rules are of an ethical character. However, that should not make one call them “subjective” or mere “expressions of feeling.” There is less agreement, it seems, and certainly less clear disagreement on fundamental ethical views than on methodology and logic. The statistics of agreement or disagreement do not, however, make them subjective or objective in any strict sense.

For simplicity of discussion we need some kind of model to facilitate the complex pattern of argument. We propose an ecosophic model in the form of a normative system. A normative system is not a psychological system showing how we actually think and how people or institutions actually arrive at decisions. It is not a causal or genetic system. It shows logical priority: a premise is logically prior to a conclusion. In it, fundamental value priorities form ultimate premises. The term is used for a set of norms and hypotheses arranged to show what is derived from what, rarely by strict logical inference, but derived in a loose way from premises.

In a normative system three levels may be distinguished. One contains ultimate or fundamental norms derived from the first level sentences, plus further hypotheses. A third level contains sentences expressing concrete decisions in specific situations. The situations are described by factual assertions, or hypotheses.

A model of such a system is not constructed once and for all, but articulated as we continue to debate the merits and demerits of alternative decisions, using what we already have articulated and adding what is needed to reach new decisions.

In the illustrations the use of exclamation marks and full stops needs elucidation.

The sentence "Less taxes!" may function to express an announcement that less taxes are desirable, or that there should be less taxes, or that it is ethically or morally mandatory or obligatory that there should be less taxes. All of these modal variables are included in my use of the exclamation mark, or with the term from modal logic, the !-operator. There is also a more fundamental use covered. For example, if God said, "Let there be something!" when so far there was nothing, there was no receiver of the message. A norm is meaningful, just as are hypotheses, independent of a specification of receivers of the message. Furthermore, a norm has, just like hypotheses, a partial testability. There is methodology how to judge the validity of norms. In short, one should not overrate the cognitive dissimilarity between norms and hypotheses.¹

Let us imagine there is a systematization of a total view called *Ecosophy T*. (Actually there are only tiny fragments worked out). One of its norms has been thus formulated: "Ecological policies should not imperil the continuation of evolution, including speciation on Earth!" A hypothesis concerning the same topic says that the peril is yearly

increasing. Against such an hypothesis some people have recently claimed that continued speciation is increasingly secured by several, mutually isolated Nature reserves or, essentially, through an archipelago of reserves. They then argue that "speciation will occur in such a system because of the isolation between the reserves." A prominent researcher in this field, Michael Soule, has this to say:

The flaw in this reasoning is that reserves are much smaller than real big islands, and that it is likely that a species will go extinct in most of the reserves long before the evolution of significant differences. Extinction appears to be very common in small reserves or on small islands. Of course, if the reserves are managed intensively, it is possible to rescue such species before they go extinct, but the very tools that we use for rescuing species, namely introducing individuals from one population into another (artificial gene flow, transfers), will prevent speciation from occurring. Ironically, the medicine that prevents extinction also prevents speciation.²

The expansion of human habitats has not always reduced richness and diversity of life. When, after the ice age, humans went up the Norwegian coast, they eventually burnt some forests completely. A new kind of landscape developed. It is amusing to note that today there is an increasing opinion which favours protection some of these treeless areas as part of Nature conservation. Incidentally, the effort to build up forest along the coast does not result in a rich ecosystem because of standardization. Only a few profitable kinds of wood are planted. So a future destruction of this man-made wood would be an advantage, perhaps.

I mention this in order to emphasize the complexity of the processes since the last Ice Age, and to counteract the opinion that very radical views on environmental questions need be hostile to humans.

An example of how seemingly narrow policy questions involve immense or indefinitely wide areas of norms and hypotheses can easily be given. Consider the policies (in Norway) concerning the protection of wolves in areas with scattered, small sheep owners.

Some relevant norms to this context are:

A1– Severe suffering endured by a living being X is of no less negative value than severe suffering endured by a living being Y, whatever the species or population of X and Y!

The term “living being” is ambiguous. It includes the human species, but, until further notice, we are to think here mostly of non-humans. The norm A1 is highly relevant in discussions regarding the severe pain or panic of sheep and other domestic animals which are attacked but not killed by wolves.

A second example of a norm in Ecosophy T:

A2– Humans have an obligation not to place their domestic animals in a situation where there is a significant risk of severe suffering!

A more precise formulation will take into account the difference between a sheep owner in a very rich community and one in a region of general human hunger and deprivation. Obviously there cannot in such cases exist any severe obligation of the kind intended in Norm A2.

Who is responsible for the suffering of sheep in a mixed community including wolves? Laws against killing wolves may be thought to make the lawmaker to some extent responsible, therefore obliging him to help protect the sheep by, for instance, financing shepherds.

Scarcely covered by the norm A1 is the general decrease of life quality of a group or herd of sheep that has suffered after a wolf attack. This decrease is, in part, reflected in a decrease of the economic value of the affected sheep on the market. But that is another matter. As for definitions of “life quality,” we limit ourselves to referring to recent literature on the subject.³

It is argued by people who support conservation of wildlife that, given that there are more than two million sheep in Norway but only a handful of wolves, the violent death or suffering of a sheep should not be taken as seriously as that of a wolf. A very doubtful norm. We would rather accept the following:

A3– The negative value of the severe suffering of an animal belonging to a large population has no less negative value than that of an animal of a small population.

This norm seems to go against the grain. It is human to treat animals more coldly, when there are masses of them. In years when lemmings are abundant, people hiking with their dogs are likely to let them “have fun” with lemmings, than in years when lemmings are interesting as a rarity. We also reject the view that the sheep is a less developed, dumb

animal compared to the superbly intelligent and beautiful wolf, and that it therefore deserves less consideration. Beauty or intelligence is completely irrelevant in application of the norm.

There are considerable differences in identification among people. Some tend, we are glad to say, to identify positively with the underdog or ugly duckling; others identify with the winner, the clever, the intelligent, the beautiful. This influences our attitudes toward spectacular predators. (Human predators identify with other predators?) Some, not all, take into account the suffering itself as our responsibility.

A4– If a traditional sheep area, by decree from central authorities, is to be considered an area where wolves are protected, it is up to the central authorities to arrange for fair and swift compensation for losses, and/or financial support for hiring shepherds!

The last norm is, of course, highly controversial. It is, however, in accordance with main trends in green politics and with principles of an welfare society of the Scandinavian non-socialist, social democratic type. Norway has ratified the great Bern treaty of protection of wild animals, including wolves, but the rules are usually evaded by clauses concerning “special circumstances.”

In short, wolf protection policies involve every question related to interaction between humans and animals; furthermore, they involve every major question of general ethics, politics, cultural anthropology, and, of course, economics. Questions of war, peace, and independence are involved because there may be a choice to be made considering the possibility that Norway may be occupied in the future, like it was during the Second World War. Cultural resistance towards the occupier is highly dependent upon self-reliance, and local self-reliance is easier with a lot of sheep than with a lot of wolves.

Long Range Population Reduction

Two issues are of special relevance here: (1) The reduction of wilderness, or more generally, free Nature, through wanton destruction with no long range considerations; (2) The reduction of wilderness through seemingly inescapable expansion of human habitats through mere multiplication of the number of humans.

In what follows, it is the latter process I shall consider. The basic population question for a philosophy of life may be thus formulated:

What is the relation between the magnitude of the human population and the outlook for maximum satisfaction of human basic needs and aspirations? Are 10 billion, 1 billion, or 100 million seemingly good numbers?

There are other ways of forming the question. Population considerations center around (1) bulk, (2) distribution, and (3) per capita interference with Nature. Ecosophy demands that the present state of affairs be studied in relation to these dimensions, and the present state be confronted with the basic norms and hypotheses of a total view.

As to basic goals in individual human life, there are three different families of ideas. We may name them using the terms pleasure, happiness, and perfection.⁴ Our problem may then be formulated as follows: What bulk, distribution, and interference is required for maximum attainment of the supreme human goals of pleasure, happiness, or perfection?

As to collective basic goals, I postulate richness and deep diversity of cultures. There should be space for independent developments in various non-predictable directions.

I am going to conclude from a considerable amount of hypotheses and norms, and the maximum satisfaction of values is more likely with a smaller bulk of the human population than at present, as well as a different distribution, and also a considerably smaller amount of interference per capita than in contemporary industrial countries. That is, reduction of human population is required for the sake of human, abstracting from considerations of other living beings.

This last conclusion is important mainly because many people think that population reduction is only meaningful if done for the sake of non-humans, or because of a lamentable necessity due to the limitation of the planet.

I take for granted that we all agree that an increase of the bulk of the population, a wider, indiscriminate distribution, and a necessary increase of interference per capita in poor countries, will further reduce the already rapidly dwindling areas of free Nature. It is a welcome and important result of our reflection, that maximum satisfaction of human needs and aspirations does not require billions of individuals. The welcomeness and importance should be duly experienced, before

proceeding to the complicated long range problems of how to promote stabilization and reduction of the human population.

If your personal motivation for preaching population reduction is mainly concern for non-human life forms, for continued evolution, and for the planet, is it not dishonest to concentrate on reduction for the sake of humans themselves?

It is not dishonest to use even 90 per cent of argumentation in favour of humans, provided one honestly believes in what one says. Working through argumentation for a great, long range goal, those arguments which carry most weight must be used for what they are worth.

Is procreation to be considered a human right? It should, I think, but then the term must be understood to imply only one child. Perhaps one might insist that the set of human rights is not eternal, but changes, and that as long as there is a deep discrepancy between (1) the procreation habits and many human rights; for example, to nourishment, home, space and (2) between the procreation habits and the limits to growth, there cannot be a human right to procreation. If this position is taken, it seems that we would have to announce that procreation is a privilege, like driving a car. You may drive a car, but only if you fulfill certain requirements of age, skill, etc. This is, I think, to go too far. But in practice, in determining social obligations, such as paying taxes, procreation will be treated as a privilege. The welfare state gets the difficult problem of seeing to it that the opportunity of procreation, like that of education, does not depend heavily on the level of income.

How many women in the Third World want no more children than the ones they already have? The World Fertility Survey reported that in 1980 about half of all women interviewed said they wanted no more. Nevertheless, men may insist that they should have more, or they simply make the women pregnant as part of their life style and sign of virility. Anyhow, even if men do not demand more children, absence of contraceptives may cause millions of children to appear.⁵

The efforts of population planning may be seen from two angles: (1) The kinds of efforts involved, and (2) the magnitude of each. If we use the yardstick of war-time efforts, the magnitude expected is that adequate to solve the problem.

Let us consider efforts to support family planning in poor countries as an example. From recent Chinese data we may accept that at least 100 full-time personnel per million inhabitants are required for organizing

the communication and education program concerning family planning.⁶ There are very few organizations operating outside of China in poor countries. At least 100,000 more workers are needed. This is not a very big number considering the immense task, and it is a task for rich countries to help establish such a personnel force. As many as possible of the organizers should have some training in argumentation from the basis of total views. In that way, the fundamental goals of human existence would more clearly partake in fixing the concrete goals of the family plans. Conclusion: Magnitude of problem gigantic, the ways of implementation highly problematic, involving grave ethical and other norms. (But this is, of course, no excuse for passivity.)

Sincere respect for a culture deeply different from one's own does not imply active support for those traits which, from the point of view of one's own culture, contradict central norms or hypotheses. More difficult is the problem of how to behave in relation to those in opposition to their own culture, who embrace a norm we find central, but which is considered invalid in the foreign culture. Can we permit ourselves actively to support the opposition? What are the consequences of the support, is it perhaps counter-productive?

For example, it can be argued that the rate of population growth of the Masai is obviously not sustainable. We think we see undesirable consequences for their children. They will face significantly worse living conditions and be incapable of continuing their nomadic traditions: it will be of no avail to change pastures because all the other pastures are already occupied and overgrazed. There will be no space for more nomads. It is on this basis, as an effort to support their culture, that it is permissible to support the Masai with whom we already agree, and to help this minority to increase their influence in ways that are acceptable from their ethical and political points of view.

Population stabilization and eventual reduction is a necessary condition for the richness and diversity of human cultures. This seems obvious enough when considering the pressures to expand or to protect existing borders against aggressive neighbours. Many cultures are today invaded because of lack of available soil for the young generations. Other cultural problems are also aggravated through the lack of population stability.

The above exemplifies derivations of norms and hypotheses from at least one ecosophy, ecosophy T. Other ecosophies may have other norms or other hypotheses and view the population problems in a different light.

Experts' Unavoidable Support of Ecologically Nonsensical Decisions

Politicians and big firms in the rich countries need to underpin some of their decisions through reference to hired experts. Their function is not to air their innermost beliefs, but to answer definite, limited questions. Unavoidably, they will often, not always, directly or indirectly support political, especially governmental, decisions that are contrary to what they firmly believe are meaningful in the broadest and deepest context, that is, are nonsensical from an ecosophical view.

If a complete argumentation pattern dealing with ecosophical issues lacks reference to ultimate goals and premises, it deserves the appellation non-deep, or, admitting the normative basis of the judgment, shallow. The distinction between a deep and a shallow ecology movement does not apply to individual arguments, or obviously not to people.

People who have political power often complain that their range of politically realistic decisions is considerably overrated. It is not realized how much pressure, in how many directions, is severely limiting the range. Experts or others who are asked to furnish facts and give advice to these so-called powerful people are usually thought of as people telling exactly what they think would be the best decision (in the long run). This is a dangerous illusion. It is a dangerous illusion because it fosters a negative attitude towards experts which prevents people from contacting them privately. We can learn a lot from them “under four eyes.”

Suppose decisions A, B, and C are politically realistic. An expert is asked to give advice and explains that B is best. But from the point of view of global, long range sustainable development, A, B and C are more or less nonsensical. But better decisions D, E, or F are not relevant. An adviser dwelling on those will scarcely be asked in the future.

I am not here claiming that policy makers and their advisers are making nonsensical decisions daily, but I regret that they cannot, at least once a year, admit through the mass media that current decisions are nonsensical from a long-range, global, or fundamental point of view.

Given the power distribution within a policy making group, the question facing the individual participant is how to choose between a set of decisions of unequal degree of nonsense. The rationality of the choice is therefore a rather special one. It is rational in relation to a special, intricate power structure.

An example: The conservative government of a small but very rich industrial country published in 1982 a program of economic policies for the next 20 years, that is from 1982 to 2005, taking into account the somewhat dark outlook for the rest of the 1980s. The government announced the necessity of reducing public expenditures; but what about private consumption? Essentially only three choices seemed to be at hand: to decree to say nothing about private consumption, or say unreservedly that it could increase, or to say some cautious words about increase. The only ecologically responsible decision was to announce a decrease in private consumption, but that was impossible for a conservative government at the time. The decision chosen was to say that the rate of increase of private consumption should be dampened. This is like a leader of an expedition who sees that they must not go further towards the north, but must turn south, saying that they should go less fast towards the north.

The main ecosophical norm implied is that of universalizability: You should not recommend a level of consumption that you cannot seriously desire others could have. Evidently, others, including people in non-industrial countries, cannot reach the level of consumption, including the level of sheer waste, of the small rich country, without catastrophic consequences for all. Consider, for example, the use of paper. There would be no trees left, and substitutes, for instance grass, would require unwise energy consumption.

The most powerful way to politically realistic and ecosophically responsible decisions in the rich countries is to activate the grassroots, the ecologically enlightened section of the general public. Politicians with green inclinations deplore reluctance to instruct and influence the people they meet in daily life. Ecological activism is not primarily participation in collective direct actions (demonstrations, etc.) but persistent work for the dissemination of ideas and the exemplification of ways of living.

Many politicians are today aware of substantial increases in ecological awareness and are able to stick their necks further out and courageously propose policies they did not dare propose until now. They are then in a better position to ask experts to work out alternatives which make

sense. But the scale of the problems is unprecedented, and the absence of well established pressure groups in the service of the Earth will continue to severely limit the scope of politically realistic projects.

The Brundtland Report and Sustainable Development

The recommendations of the Brundtland Report are agreed upon by a number of politicians with different opinions and already for that reason vague and ambiguous, admitting many mutually incompatible interpretations. This sounds like a drawback, but if we conceive the Report as one expressing an extremely complicated process in the human world, it is a valuable feature which makes it possible for different countries to implement somewhat different policies referring to the same source of inspiration and thus strengthening the feeling of action in support of a “common future.”

Whatever the plausible interpretation chosen, it may be safely said that a country according to the Report is not developing sustainably if it is not developing ecologically in a sustainable way. From the point of view of ecosophy this is of prime importance. The people accepting the Report may be said to announce a norm “Ecosophically sustainable development!” The interpretation here chosen is to view the sentence as synonymous to “Global, long-range, ecologically sustainable development!” The actual situation today as described (hypothesized) in publications such as *The State of the World 1988* is such that a very elementary implication of the negative norm gains supreme importance: "Elimination of long range ecologically unsustainable developments!" Perhaps this norm is more adequate than the positive because of an idea until recently associated with the term “development”: The idea that every patch of the surface of the Earth should somehow serve narrow human purposes.

In order to simplify discussion, the task to be done may be illustrated by a quasi-quantitative illustration. If P_u symbolizes unecological (not long range sustainable) features of a way of production, C_u symbolizes the same relative to consumption, and N the number of people involved,

$$(P_u + C_u) \times N$$

may symbolize what must be reduced drastically according to the elimination norm. Using current prediction of population and poverty development, the situation will be coloured by a very big factor $P_u + C_u$ in the rich countries and a factor N increasing rapidly. There is not

much gained by trying to compare the adverse effects of P_u , C_u , and increases in N . In the Old World (Europe and part of Asia) increasing N through the centuries has changed and impoverished landscapes drastically through human habitation. What now goes on in Brazil and other parts of the New World resembles in essential ways what happened long ago in the Old. This has certain implication for the proper attitude to be shown, which will be noted in a later section.

The term “global sustainability” should be discussed. The interpretation used here is such that it implies the absence of human interference in the ecosystems of the globe which are unnecessary for the realization of the ultimate goals of humankind. Wasteful interference is basically interference unrelated and unnecessary for the realization of such goals. Waste in this sense is immense, relying on hypotheses of the kind published in *The State of the World 1988* and on current ideas of what the ultimate goals are.

Using a less technical terminology, the norm to abstain from excessive interference may be interpreted as a norm not to decrease the richness and diversity of life on Earth, using the term “life” in a broad sense. It implies respect for the habitats of animals and plants, not only a norm to abstain from total species extinction. The satisfying of vital needs of humans obviously implies the destruction of some habitats of many other living beings, but what now happens is wanton destruction on a vast scale clearly unrelated to ultimate goals.

The prospect of a turn of the tide, turning increasing unsustainability into a development of decreasing unsustainability gains in likelihood when life and landscapes are in a holistic way conceived to have value in themselves, not *only* as resources for the satisfaction of some narrowly defined human needs. Such an ecosystem oriented conception is found in every culture, but has had little influence in recent centuries compared to the results of efforts to exploit, dominate, and sometimes gain power through mere numbers.

Western Self-criticism and Activism

Plato complained: "Compared to how the forests were previously, what is now left is like the skeleton left of a sick man." Since his time the substitution of tree-plantations for forests has proceeded relentlessly. Europe has practically nothing left of primordial forests and very little left of forests with a high level of diversity of life forms. The

simplification of ecosystems through big buildings, roads, and other manifestations of industrialization proceeds on a scale fully comparable to the increase of desertification.

What reason have nature loving Westerners to expect from the poor countries with rapidly increasing population that they should behave any better? When the world's richest nation is still degrading its national forests, how can one expect poor nations to save rain forests? The effort on the part of the rich nations to stop the total destruction of such forests in the poor countries cannot succeed, if at all, without clear admittance that the policies of the rich countries have resulted in the degradation of life conditions on the planet as a whole and through disturbance of habitats and otherwise, on an enormous scale in their own territories. The plans of the rich countries to start "developing" the Antarctic continent show that they are yet far from conscious of their mindless behaviour.

Inspection of the present planned reduction of pollution by the rich countries reveals that they are unlikely to turn the tide before the middle of the next century. Referring to the symbol $(P_u + C_u) \times N$, this means that $P_u + C_u$ is not meant to decline in the foreseeable future. Perhaps plans will be much more radical in the '90s, but that possibility cannot be counted on.

As a consequence, global responsibility suggests that the official policy of the rich nations should not only be to support stabilization of their own populations, but to decrease them. Any effort to stimulate birth-rate is an insult towards the poor countries. The small N of the rich countries may mislead. If we consider item for item what an average member of a rich country does during a day, and consider the way the things are produced which he or she makes use of, the ecological negative results are 10, 50 or 100 times more serious compared with the negative results of what a poor global citizen does. That means that a 5-million population rich country counts as one of 50, 250, or even 500-million in a poor country.

Western self-criticism has an instrumental value: it makes Western activism ethically acceptable. Humility is one thing, activeness another. Self-criticism in conflicts in the face of the opponent is part of Spinoza's *generositas*, but he announces *generositas et fortitudo*, generosity and fortitude, unwavering dedication in the pursuit of the highest goals.

Privileged people in the rich countries have the opportunity to contemplate the Earth as a whole, to assist minorities in the poor countries who see the long range effects of present policies, to criticize the indifference of the rich and powerful in those areas, and vigorously but non-violently to support the opposition. What is now being done to rain forests in Brazil is essentially a new wave of invasion and suppression which started in the 15th Century with the European invasion of the Americas. Western self-criticism should include what people of European descent do in this century.

Fundamental ethical norms in rich countries make denial of the following norm difficult: "Don't lead a sort of life you count as desirable which you cannot seriously wish that others would lead!" The philosophically wasteful way of the average person in rich countries is known to be ecologically catastrophic if generalized. The presumption that a set of technical revolutions could soon change this conclusion is irresponsible. Ethically, the way to go is to accept a change of production, consumption, and population so as to make material life in the rich countries, as far as it is worthwhile to attain, generalizable. Waste in a philosophical sense includes production that rather hinders than makes easier the realization of ultimate goals in life. Waste is an important part of the average life in a rich country, but rarely acknowledged as such. It is part of what is considered the high standard of living (as opposed to the quality of life). Therefore it is prudent to consider how a decrease of the material standard of living could become politically acceptable in the rich countries. This could result in a rough equality of material standard of living in poor and rich countries. A very unlikely development, but important as a guiding star. We would then avoid two blind alleys: the attempt of the poor to resemble the rich, and the attempt of the rich to continue an unsustainable development.

From the point of view of at least one ecosophy (Ecosophy T) the decrease of the material standard of the rich countries need not in the long run, result in decrease of quality of life. In the long run an increase might be expected.

Life quality research has now come of age as a respected area of social research. Using a rather rough general formula, we may say that whereas standard of living research measures what you have, that is, which means you have at your disposal for feeling good, life quality describes to what extent people feel good: how they feel about the world themselves, their family life, their jobs, whether they feel lonely, feel respected, have economic worries, and so on. Obviously it takes

time to describe, and even to measure, material standard of living. The potential social and political importance of life quality thinking and research stems from the change of perspective, from concentration on means to concentration on ends. The turning of the tide towards increasing sustainability requires such a change.

The quest for long range ecological sustainability turns upside down the application of the distinction between “developed” and “undeveloped” countries. Whereas from 1945 to 1985 development was conceived as change of ways of production and consumption in exactly the direction of the rich countries, development as a plus word now implies change in the direction of sustainability. When the rich countries have turned the tide and are changing in the direction of sustainability, they deserve the name of developing countries. We are now looking forward to a state of the world where every country, however unlike in culture, is a developing country.

Endnotes

¹The semantics of versions of a normative system is based upon elementary concepts introduced in Naess, *Communication and Argument*, Oslo University Press and Allen & Unwin 1966. Now *SWAN* volume 7. For methodology see Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

²Quotation from a letter written October 12, 1984.

³A preliminary survey of life quality research is easily obtained by looking through recent volumes of the periodical *Social Indicators Research* which contains many reports of value. For methodology, see *Quality of Life Research*, INAS, Oslo 1986.

⁴A short commentary on pleasure, happiness, and perfection is found on p. 80 in Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*.

⁵Lester Brown, et al., *The State of the World 1985*, New York: Norton, 1985, p.215.

⁶See, e.g., IPPF Fact Sheet, September 1984.