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THE MEANINGS OF "DEEP ECOLOGY"

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I

Environmental philosophy, or ecophilosophy, is a new, exciting, and vitally needed development within philosophy that constitutes a radical challenge to the anthropocentrism (i.e., human-centeredness) that has informed mainstream Western philosophy since the time of the classical Greeks. Just how recent the development of ecophilosophy is can be gauged from the following: ecophilosophical work that dates from the early 1970s is considered to be "early" work in this area; the U.S. based journal *Environmental Ethics*, the central academic journal in the area of ecophilosophy, dates only from 1979; and the Canadian based journal *The Trumpeter*, the next most significant journal in this area, dates only from late 1983.

In one "early" (1972-73) ecophilosophical development, the distinguished Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess marked the distinction between "shallow" and "deep" approaches to ecology and environmentalism. Although Naess continued to develop his ideas on deep ecology during the 1970s, his distinction was hardly mentioned in the literature until it was vigorously taken up in the late 1970s by Bill Devall, a sociologist at Humboldt State University, California, and George Sessions, a philosopher at Sierra College, California. Devall's and Sessions' work effectively lifted Naess's distinction out of relative obscurity and put it on the ecophilosophical map in the period 1979-80. Further work by Naess, Devall, and Sessions meant that by February 1983 the well-known Australian philosopher John Passmore could justifiably write: "It is now customary to divide the family of 'ecophilosophers' - that limited class of philosophers who take environmental problems seriously - into two genera, the 'shallow' and the 'deep.'" 1

Debates over the deep ecology approach to ecophilosophy are now at the center of contemporary ecophilosophical discussion, as can be seen by looking at any recent issue of *Environmental Ethics* or *The Trumpeter*. The term "deep

ecology" and the ideas associated with that term are also increasingly being taken up by scientific ecologists (e.g., see the introduction to Paul Ehrlich's *The Machinery of Nature*), by those concerned with broad cultural analyses (e.g., see the concluding chapter in Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point*), and by those working within or writing about the environmental movement (e.g., deep ecology is referred to in virtually every recent book on ecophilosophy or Green politics and articles on deep ecology appear regularly in environmentalist magazines; articles discussing deep ecology have also appeared in such popular, often glossy, newsstand publications as *Arete*, *Mother Earth News*, *Mother Jones*, *New Age Journal*, *Omni*, *Rolling Stone*, *Simply Living*, *The Nation*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Whole Earth Review*, and *Yoga Journal*).

What, then, is deep ecology? I argue in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: The Context, Influence, Meanings, and Distinctiveness of the Deep Ecology Approach to Ecophilosophy* that Naess's conception of deep ecology subsumes three related but analytically distinct meanings or fundamental ideas. 2 I refer to these meanings as Naess's "popular," "formal," and "philosophical" senses of deep ecology.

Naess's popular sense of deep ecology — what most people understand by this term — refers to the general idea of a nonanthropocentric or, more positively, an ecocentric approach to ecology/living-in-the-world. Whereas an anthropocentric orientation considers the nonhuman world as so many "resources" to be used as humans see fit, an ecocentric orientation attempts, within obvious kinds of practical limits, to allow all entities (including humans) the freedom to unfold in their own ways unhindered by the various forms of human domination. 3

It is important to note here that an anthropocentric orientation does not necessarily mean the same thing as an environmentally destructive orientation. This is because we exhibit an anthropocentric orientation not only when we see the nonhuman world as there simply to be farmed, dammed, mined, pulped, slaughtered, and so on, but also whenever we argue that the nonhuman world should be conserved or preserved because of its use value to humans (e.g., its scientific, recreational, or aesthetic value) rather than for its own sake or for its use value to nonhuman beings. Indeed, it cannot be emphasized enough that the vast majority of environmental discussion is couched within these anthropocentric terms of reference whether one is referring to public meetings, newspapers, popular magazines, reports by international conservation organizations, reports by government instrumentalities, or even reports by environmental groups. Thus, even many of those who deal most directly with environmental issues continue to perpetuate, however unwittingly, the arrogant assumption that we humans are central to the cosmic drama; that, essentially, the world is made for us.

Although the various kinds of arguments against anthropocentrism could be elaborated at length (these include arguments that are based on theoretical, practical, logical, moral, and experiential grounds - see Chapter 1 of *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*), the main point to be noted in this context is that

this ecocentric sense of deep ecology does not serve to distinguish that subset of ecophilosophers who are referred to as "deep ecologists" from other ecophilosophers. This is because the vast majority of these other ecophilosophers are also concerned with the development of a point of view that is (at least to a reasonable degree) nonanthropocentric. There is, in other words, nothing distinctive about the popular, ecocentric sense of deep ecology.

Naess's formal sense of deep ecology is predicated upon the idea of asking progressively deeper questions (Why A?, Because B; Why B?, Because C; and so on) about the ecological relationships of which we are a part. Naess holds that this deep questioning process ultimately reveals bedrock or "end of the line" assumptions, which he refers to as "fundamentals," and that deep ecological views are derived from such fundamentals (e.g., "Obey God!" or "Further the ends of evolution!") whereas shallow ecological views are not. This is a purely formal characterization of deep ecology because it says nothing about the content of the answers to the progressively deeper questions that one asks. It should also be noted that Naess makes it clear that this formal sense of deep ecology constitutes the reason for his use of the adjective "deep" in the term "deep ecology" (i.e., for Naess, the term "deep ecology" is effectively an abbreviation for "a deep questioning approach to ecology/living-in- the- world.")

To discuss Naess's purely formal characterization of deep ecology in detail would entail an excursion into Naess's philosophy of language and communication and into his important ideas regarding "normative systems" that space does not allow for here. Suffice it to say, however, that I argue at some length in Chapter 5 of *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* that it is just as easy to derive anthropocentric views from fundamentals (such as the "Obey God!" and "Further the ends of evolution!" examples I gave above) as it is to derive ecocentric views, and, further, that it is at least as plausible to believe that anthropocentrists do in fact derive their views from fundamentals as it is to believe that ecocentrists derive their views in this way. I therefore conclude that, insofar as we hold deep ecology to be concerned with an ecocentric approach to ecology/living- in- the- world, Naess's formal, asking-deeper-questions/derivation- from- fundamentals sense of deep ecology is not a tenable sense of deep ecology. It fails to distinguish ecocentric views (or those who hold these views) from anthropocentric views (or those who hold these views).

Naess's philosophical sense of deep ecology refers to a concept of Self- realization (spelt with a capital "s") that is inspired primarily by Spinoza and Gandhi. By Self-realization Naess means to refer to the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible (in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes). Self- realization thus differs from self-realization (spelt with a lower case "s") in that the former refers to the realization of a wide, expansive, or field-like sense of self, whereas the latter refers to the realization of a narrow, atomistic, or particle- like sense of self. The former leads to compassion, the latter to egoism.

I refer to this Self-realization sense of deep ecology as Naess's philosophical sense of deep ecology because Self-realization is the fundamental from which Naess's own approach to ecophilosophy proceeds, and because Naess claims (extremely usefully, I believe) that any view that proceeds from fundamentals is perforce a philosophical view. This latter point can be expressed another way by saying that asking progressively deeper questions — asking strings of "why" and/or "how" questions — eventually takes one beyond the realm of the everyday, the technical, and the scientific and into the realm of philosophy.

Naess's philosophical sense of deep ecology is both tenable and distinctive. By "tenable" I mean that this sense of deep ecology is, at a minimum, neither demonstrably false (like Naess's formal sense of deep ecology) nor logically inconsistent. Indeed, expressed more positively, I, like many others, actually think that this sense of deep ecology offers the most interesting and appropriate way of approaching the question of how we should live in the world. And by "distinctive" I mean that this sense of deep ecology constitutes a distinctive approach to ecophilosophy and that it is a commitment to this approach that distinguishes "deep ecologists" from other ecophilosophers. This can briefly be explained as follows. The majority of other ecophilosophers are primarily concerned with developing arguments to establish the fact that nonhuman entities — or certain kinds of nonhuman entities — are intrinsically valuable (i.e., valuable in and of themselves, independently of their use value to humans). Indeed, this approach is so dominant in ecophilosophy that many ecophilosophers persist in thinking that this is also the primary concern of deep ecologists. However, it is simply an empirical fact — look at the literature! — that deep ecologists are not primarily concerned with environmental axiology (i.e., environmental value theory). Rather, deep ecologists are primarily concerned with advocating the realization of a certain state of being, specifically, the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible. 4

This is a crucial difference in emphasis. The whole point of arguing for the intrinsic value of this or that nonhuman entity is to attempt to establish the legitimacy of certain moral "oughts." If I can successfully argue that A is valuable in and of itself, then it follows, on moral grounds, that everyone ought to act toward A in certain ways and not act toward A in other ways irrespective of her or his personal feelings about A. Arguments for intrinsic value, in other words, imply certain codes of conduct. In contrast, deep ecologists explicitly reject approaches that issue in moral "oughts" and seek instead to invite and inspire others to realize, in a this-worldly sense, as expansive a sense of self as possible. Thus, for example, Naess writes:

Care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves ... just as we do not need morals to make us breathe ... [so] if your 'self' in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral exhortation to show care ... you care for yourself without feel-

ing any moral pressure to do it - provided you have not succumbed to a neurosis of some kind, developing self-destructive tendencies, or hating yourself. 5

It clearly makes no sense to continue to refer to the three senses of deep ecology that I have outlined as Naess's popular, formal, and philosophical senses of deep ecology, when the term "deep ecology" itself refers to an idea that is untenable. (As I have noted, Naess makes it clear that the term "deep ecology" derives its name from what I have referred to as his formal, asking-deeper-questions sense of deep ecology.) I therefore suggest in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* that Naess's popular sense of deep ecology should be referred to as "ecocentric ecology" (i.e., "an ecocentric approach to ecology/living-in-the-world") as opposed to "anthropocentric ecology" (i.e., "an anthropocentric approach to ecology/living-in-the-world"). I also draw on recent work in transpersonal psychology to suggest that Naess's philosophical sense of deep ecology should be referred to as "transpersonal ecology," since this sense of deep ecology clearly refers to the realization of a sense of self that extends beyond (or that is "trans-") one's egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self. Transpersonal ecology aims, on the one hand, to "ecologize" transpersonal psychology (since theorizing in this area often fails to realize its obvious nonanthropocentric possibilities) and, on the other hand, to "psychologize" ecophilosophy (which, as I have noted, is typically conducted at an axiological level, i.e., at the level of value theory).

Transpersonal ecology represents one particular kind of approach to ecocentric ecology. When we consider this distinctive kind of approach to ecocentric ecology further, the question naturally arises as to how one is to realize, in a this-worldly sense, as expansive a sense of self as possible. The transpersonal ecology answer is "Through the process of identification." But transpersonal ecologists have a particular kind of identification in mind here. Specifically, rather than emphasizing a purely personal basis for identification, transpersonal ecologists emphasize a transpersonal — usually a cosmological — basis for identification. This can briefly be explained as follows. Emphasizing a purely personal basis for identification implies an emphasis upon identification with entities with which one has considerable personal contact. In practice, this tends to mean that one identifies with my self first, my family next, my friends and more distant relations next, my ethnic grouping next, my species next, and so on — more or less what the sociobiologists say we are genetically predisposed to do. The problem with this is that, while extending love, care, and friendship to one's nearest and dearest is laudable in and of itself, the other side of emphasizing a purely personal basis for identification is that its practical upshot (my self first, my family next, and so on) looks more like the cause of possessiveness, greed, exploitation, war, and ecological destruction than the solution to these seemingly intractable problems. In contrast, emphasizing a cosmological basis for identification means attempting to convey a lived sense that all entities (including ourselves) are relatively autonomous modes of a single, unfolding process; that all entities are leaves on the tree of life. A lived sense of this understanding means that rather

than identifying ourselves primarily or exclusively with our leaf (our personal, biographical self), our twig (our family), the leaves we are in close proximity to on other twigs (our friends), our minor sub-branch (our community), our major sub-branch (our race), our branch (our species), and so on, we come to identify ourselves more and more with the entire tree. At the limit, cosmologically based identification leads to an impartial (but nevertheless keenly felt) identification with all particulars (all leaves on the tree).

In terms of politics and lifestyle, cosmologically based identification is expressed in actions that tend to promote the freedom of all entities to unfold in their own ways (i.e., actions that tend to promote symbiosis). Actions of this kind include not only actions that consist in "treading lightly" upon the Earth (i.e., lifestyles of voluntary simplicity) but also actions that respectfully but resolutely attempt to alter the views and behavior of those who persist in the delusion that self-realization lies in the direction of dominating the Earth and the myriad entities with which we coexist.

That the self advances and confirms the myriad things is called delusion. That the myriad things advance and confirm the self is enlightenment. (Dogen Zenji, Zen Master, 1200-1253)

Notes

1. John Passmore, "Political Ecology: Responsibility and Environmental Power," *The Age Monthly Review*, February 1983, p. 15. Passmore is especially well-known for his overview of modern philosophy entitled *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968). He is also the author of *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1980).
2. Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: The Context, Influence, Meanings, and Distinctiveness of the Deep Ecology Approach to Ecophilosophy* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1990, forthcoming). This book derives from my Ph.D. dissertation of the same title (Murdoch University, Western Australia, 1988).
3. For an expansion upon this understanding of ecocentrism, see the first few pages of my paper "The Deep Ecology-Ecofeminism Debate and its Parallels," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 525.
4. For more on this point, see my monograph *Approaching Deep Ecology: A Response to Richard Sylvan's Critique of Deep Ecology* (1986), available from the Main Office, Dept. of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, G.P.O. Box 252C, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 7005.
5. Arne Naess, "Self-realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the

World," *The Trumpeter* 4(3) (1987): 3940.

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