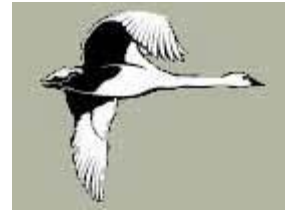


## The Trumpeter (2001)

### How Many Realities? : Editorial



Alan Rike Drengson

As readers of *The Trumpeter* know, there has been a spate of books and articles lately attacking environmentalism. The Deep Ecology Movement in particular has come in for considerable criticism, often based on serious misunderstandings of what it is.

For a long time mainstream organizations have concentrated on amelioration of environmental problems, a Shallow Ecology Movement approach. Corporations have fought environmental regulations in legislative bodies and other forums, but have also waged campaigns to convince us that they are ecologically responsible.

A new tack has been taken which denies that there are serious problems. There are a number of forms to this attack, which will not be reviewed here. Instead, I will comment on the link between the *redesign and reinvent nature view* with the *Modern/Post Modern debate*.

The dominant narrative in the West is still Modernism, but it is challenged on a wide front. The Deep Ecology Movement challenges its values, development models and definitions of progress, especially as these are applied to our relations with Nature. Post Modernism also challenges Modernism by deconstructing the root metaphors that shape its way of seeing and controlling the world. Modernism uses “objective” methods to give an account of the world that is value free. However, excluding values from the world—as a basic principle—forces one to locate them elsewhere; they must be either subjective or supernatural. For Modernism there is no supernatural, and so it is left with subjectivism or group consensus. Why then prefer the Modernist approach over any other? Post Modernism attacks the Achilles heel of Modernism, its failure to ground its own value assumptions, which leads us to ask, why pursue progress as defined by Modernism? Post Modernism has shown that the institutional science and technology of Modernism are not value free.

One irony of Modernism is that in pursuit of objectivity it has created a diorama of abstract symbols and theory which is a shadow of the natural world as we spontaneously experience it, in wildlands for example. If values are not found in the natural world, then they must reside only in human consciousness, or subjective or collective human preferences. Post Modernism takes these implications to their logical conclusion which supports talk of many realities. We encounter this kind of talk more and more, even in scholarly works.

Are there many realities, and no single comprehensive reality? If so, is Nature as many things as there are people? Is this all there is to it? For Deep Ecology supporters Nature exists independent of humans. Wildlands enable us to discern Nature’s will with minimum human interference. Some supporters of the Deep Ecology Movement emphasize the wisdom found in ancient human cultures which dwell within wild Nature. Critics say this is a romantic and regressive way of thinking, while conceding that it is one of the many “realities” found in Western society today. Another is virtual “reality” and its friend artificial “intelligence.” These are electronic word games played while the natural world is being disintegrated, people are being alienated from the land, and authentic cultures destroyed.

By emphasizing the relativity of all values and the role of human culture in the

construction of our sense of the natural world, Post Modernism helps Modernist institutions continue to exploit Nature in an unbridled fashion. There is no way to resolve which of these social constructions is more appropriate to the natural world. We can compare them with respect to how humans fare within these societies in relation to power. If there is no single natural reality which has integrity and evolutionary direction, and the world or Nature is just a social construction, then there is no moral reason we should not redesign it however we please, consistent with human justice. In New Age thought the “many realities” language can become a way of avoiding responsibility for the present state of affairs (massive human caused species extinction, e.g.) by living in a different “reality”, or by believing that we can change the world just by thinking in a certain way.

In contrast to Modern/Post Modern devaluing of Nature, ecophilosophy approaches the natural world as it is in itself, as knowable unmediated by social concepts. There is one, unified, multidimensional reality. There are, to be sure, many ways of conceptualizing this reality and of living in the natural world. We can create our own sur-reality, or experienced reality, if we subjectively inhabit the world, but survival requires that we know Nature as best we can so that our practices will be ecosophic. There are disciplines for bringing us back to center that ground us in our particular place. Deep Ecology Movement principles affirm that other beings exist in their own right, with their own inherent values.

Many supporters of deep ecology hold that self-realization for all beings is a basic value norm. Consciousness emerges from natural processes which come from the Earth. Awareness is not a human monopoly. Our ignorance is great and we cannot know all of the intricate functions and structures of Nature. However, we can live sustainably if we honor and respect all the values of which we can become aware. To dwell wisely in a place we must be in harmony with its ecological reality. This is ecosophy. Ecophilosophy is the pursuit of ecosophy as such ecological wisdom and harmony. There are many ecosophies and they succeed to the degree that they achieve harmony with the biological and ecological reality of the natural world. And while institutional science is not value neutral, inquiry and exploration are processes of continuing deep questioning; self-correction is possible. Correction of errors comes through such ongoing research activity.

The second platform principle of the Deep Ecology Movement is that diversity and richness are good in themselves. Biological and ecological diversity also have extremely important diverse functions. As organisms and their social organization become more complex, the more they depend on the complexity and diversity of natural system functioning. Modernism’s industrial corporate systems, however, are monoculturing processes that eliminate diversity and concentrate power and wealth. They generate wealth by liquidating ecosystem capital and exploiting labor. The increasing rate of extinction of species and the shrinking of the middle class are two results of this process, which in turn give rise to social and natural breakdown and chaos.

The Deep Ecology Movement is neither Modern nor Post Modern. It transcends both by grounding its practices in the natural diversity and rich values found in the ecological reality in which we participate. Honoring the first platform principle of the Deep Ecology Movement—that all beings have intrinsic value regardless of their usefulness to humans—enables supporters to better harmonize their lives and actions with the real values of the natural world, as these are richly revealed around and within us.

## **A Comparison of Modernism, Post Modernism and Ecophilosophy**

### **Modernism**

1. Reality is not personal, has no inherent value, but is ordered by laws of nature;
2. We can understand nature by knowing these laws;
3. Empirical science is the only way to know these laws;
4. Humans can live well by applying this knowledge to practical matters;
5. This theoretical and practical knowledge enables humans to master nature through technology.

## **Post Modernism**

1. Reality is neither personal nor orderly;
2. All ways to know nature are relative;
3. Nature has no inherent values transcending human cultures;
4. Humans might not understand nature, but what knowledge they have gives them great power;
5. There is no meaning in life other than what we ourselves create.

## **Ecophilosophy**

1. Reality is both personal and ordered;
2. This order is created by multidimensional interaction of multitudes of conscious beings striving to realize themselves;
3. The powers of Nature are in us and enlightened understanding is possible with total unification of ourselves and all of our diverse ways of knowing;
4. Nature is filled with a diversity of intrinsic values which can be discovered, as well as opportunities for creating new ones;
5. Completion and fulfillment are found in continuous improvement of ourselves and authentic dwelling in harmony with Nature and each other (ecosophies).

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The Trumpeter

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