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The Deep Ecology Movement

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IN 1973 (INQUIRY 16, PP. 95-100) THE NAME "DEEP ecology movement" was introduced into environmental literature by Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer Professor Arne Naess. Environmentalism emerged as a popular grass roots political movement in the 1960's with the publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*. Those already involved in conservation- preservation efforts were joined by many others concerned about the detrimental environmental impacts of modern industrial technology. The longer range, older elements of the movement included writers and activists like Thoreau and Muir, whereas the newer awareness was closer to the wise use philosophy of people like Gifford Pinchot.

Naess's written presentation was preceded by a talk he gave in Bucharest in 1972 at the Third World Future Research Conference. In his talk Naess discussed the longer-range background of the ecology movement and its connection with an ethic respecting nature and the inherent worth of other beings. As a mountaineer who had climbed all over the world, Naess enjoyed the opportunity to observe political and social action in diverse cultures. Both historically and in the contemporary movement Naess saw two different forms of environmentalism, not incompatible with one another. One he called the "long-range deep ecology movement" and the other, the "shallow ecology movement." The word "deep" in part referred to the level of questioning of our purposes and values, when arguing in environmental conflicts. The "deep" movement involves deep questioning, down to fundamentals. The shallow stops before the ultimate level.

Naess had long first-hand experience in the world peace and social justice movements, and he was a committed practitioner of the way of nonviolence taught by Gandhi. He also was a philosopher of science and logic who had done innovative work on language and communication. He was well placed to identify the main features of the emerging grass-roots environmental movement, which was supported by social activists from all parts of the political spectrum.

Naess's talk, and the paper published from it, explained the difference between the shallow and the deep ecology movements in broad terms. He explained

that the distinctive aspects of the deep ecology movement were its recognition of the inherent value of all other living beings, and the use of this view in shaping environmental policies. Those who work for social changes based on this recognition are motivated by love of nature as well as for humans, an extension of care in all our dealings. They recognize that we cannot go on with industrialism's business as usual. We must make fundamental changes in basic values *and* practices or we will destroy the diversity and beauty of the world, and its ability to support diverse human cultures.

In 1972, not many people appreciated that Naess was characterizing a grass-roots *movement*, not stating his personal ultimate philosophy. Since then, he has articulated a set of platform principles to clarify matters. Grass-roots political movements often join people with diverse ultimate beliefs and backgrounds. In order to state the shared objectives of the movement a platform is often put forth. The platform presents the more general principles which unite the group in terms of shared projects and aims.

Naess and others have proposed a set of eight principles to characterize the deep ecology movement as part of the general ecology movement. These principles can be endorsed by people from a diversity of backgrounds who share common concerns for the planet, its many beings and ecological communities. In many Western nations supporters of the platform principles stated below come from different religious and philosophical backgrounds, their political affiliations differ considerably. What unites them is a long-range vision of what is necessary to protect the integrity of the Earth's ecological communities and ecocentric values. Supporters of the principles have a diversity of ultimate beliefs. "Ultimate beliefs" here refers to their own metaphysical and religious, basic grounds for their values, actions and support for the deep ecology movement. Different people and cultures have different mythologies and stories. Nonetheless, they can support the platform and work for solutions to the environmental crisis. A diversity of practices is emerging, but the overlap is considerable as can be seen in hundreds of environmental conflicts all over the world.

Supporters of the platform principles stated below come from all walks of life, and a wide variety of cultures and religions. Because they live in different places, the courses of practical action which follow from commitment to the platform are also diverse. Here are the proposed platform principles of the deep ecology movement as originally formulated by Naess and George Sessions:

### **The Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement**

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values & are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy **vital** human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes.

(Quoted from *Deep Ecology* by Bill Devall and George Sessions, Gibb Smith, Salt Lake City, 1985, p. 70)

Anyone who endorses these eight principles, is called by Naess and others a supporter of the deep ecology movement. As mentioned, Naess stresses that those who support these principles can do so from a wide range of different ultimate views. Just as birds build different kinds of nests in different habitats, so human cultures which grow out of ecological places with respect for their inherent values develop diverse forms of practice, technology and social order.

Sometimes people confuse the "deep ecology movement" as defined above, with Naess's own ultimate ecocentric philosophy, or ecosophy (way to realize ecological wisdom and harmony). Arne Naess calls his own total view Ecosophy T (not deep ecology), after the name of the hut (Tvergastein) where he developed his own personal ecophilosophy. It is on the basis of ecosophy T that he personally supports the platform principles of the deep ecology movement.

Naess tries to make his total view surveyable by starting with only one norm, *Self-Realization!* He was influenced by Spinoza, Buddhism and Gandhi. Self-realization! is taken to imply: "Self-realization for all beings!" The exclamation point is used to mark that this is not a mere description, but that it says some thing that ought to be. Naess feels the norm as a basis of his own ecosophy. He urges others to develop their own ecosophy based on their own ultimate view. Self-realization for humans he says, can be realized in a variety of ways. His own approach is to extend his sense of identification to a larger sense of Self. Humans naturally have this capacity as Naess and others have observed cross-culturally. We have the capacity to connect with a much larger sense of self, transcending ego, by extending our sense of identification beyond the usual narrow focus on ego to a wider sphere of relationships. It is not difficult for us to identify with other living beings. We can actually practice or cultivate this capacity. One way is to practice extending our care and affection. We can explore this larger Self in a variety of ways.

Many other authors have developed ecosophies very similar to Naess's based on the idea of extending awareness and care to a larger ecological Self. However, other supporters of the deep ecology movement have ecosophies which do not start with the Self-realization! imperative. Warwick Fox and Alan Drengson have both observed that the extension of self and the idea of the ecological Self overlaps in many ways with work in transpersonal psychology. Fox calls these Self-realization types of ecosophies *transpersonal ecologies*. Matthew Fox's Creation Theology (which has a long history as a minority tradition in Christianity) is a transpersonal ecology in the form of a Christian philosophy and practice which finds the Christ principle and power of love revealed in the ongoing creation of the world. It is this that we should reverence. This opens us to the expansive sense of Self.

Other writers who support the platform principles of the deep ecology movement have criticized the extension of self identification on various grounds. Some prefer to find their ultimate premises and ecosophies grounded in a different conception of self, emphasizing the social self - in some cases, or stressing the difference between the way self identity develops for women in contrast to men in our traditions. In this way, some supporters of the deep ecology movement are ecofeminists, some are social ecologists and some Christians.

No supporters of the deep ecology movement are anti-human, as is sometimes alleged. Some vociferous environmentalists who claim to be supporters of the movement have said and written things which are misanthropic in tone. They have not explained how such statements are consistent with commitment to platform principle number one, which recognizes the inherent worth of all beings, *including humans*. Supporters of the deep ecology movement deplore antihuman statements and actions. They support Gandhian nonviolence in word and deed. Arne Naess says that he is a supporter of the ecofeminist, social ecology, social justice, bioregional, and peace movements. The platform principles of the deep

ecology movement are broad enough to be this inclusive.

Another dispute has centered on the critique of anthropocentrism offered by some supporters of the deep ecology movement. "Anthropocentrism" has a number of different meanings, and we must not let verbal misunderstandings be divisive. When we defend our loved ones or are moved more by human suffering than the suffering of other beings, we are acting as descendants, parents, friends, lovers, etc. One can support the deep ecology movement consistent with such feelings. What is inconsistent is refusing to recognize the inherent worth of other beings to the extent that one is willing to allow unmerciful exploitation and destruction of life forms purely for human convenience and profit. Anthropocentrism as a bias *against* other life forms fails to recognize that we are part of these lives and they are part of ours. Our human self in the deepest sense cannot be separated from the earth from which we have grown. Anthropocentrism is objectionable when it emphasizes "humans first!" *regardless of the consequences to other beings*. When we explore our own ecological Self we discover our affinities with other beings as part of our humanity. This once more emphasizes that the platform principles refer to the intrinsic worth of *all* beings, including humans. Supporters of the deep ecology movement platform are committed to recognizing and respecting in word and deed the inherent worth of humans *and* other beings. This leads to actions which minimize our own impacts on ecological communities and other human cultures.

If one accepts the platform principles of the deep ecology movement, this involves *commitment* to respect the intrinsic values of richness and diversity. This in turn leads one to critique industrial culture. This critique of industrial culture is wide, and cuts across cultural boundaries. It is presented from a diversity of places, both within and outside of industrial culture. It is partly from such a critique that support for indigenous peoples arises. The gist of the critique goes like this:

Industrial culture has represented itself as the only acceptable model for development. However, application of this model and its financial and technological systems to all areas of the planet results in destruction of habitat, extinction of species, and destruction of indigenous cultures. The biodiversity crisis is about loss of critical species which perform necessary biological functions, and it is also about loss of multitudes of other values which are good in themselves and depend on preservation of natural diversity and wild evolutionary processes. Industrial society is a monoculture in agriculture and forestry, and in every other way. Its development models construe the Earth as only raw material to be used to satisfy consumption and production to meet not only vital needs but inflated desires whose satisfaction requires more and more consumption. Its monocultures destroy cultural and biological diversity - both good in themselves.

If we do not accept the Industrial development model, what then? Endorsing the deep ecology platform principles leads us to attend to the ecosophies of aboriginal and indigenous people so as to learn from them values and practices which can help us to dwell wisely in neighboring places. We also learn from the wisdom of our places and the many beings which inhabit them. At the same time, the ecocentric values implied by the platform lead us to recognize that all human cultures have a mutual interest in seeing Earth and its diversity continue for its own sake and because we love it. Most want to flourish and realize themselves in harmony with other beings and cultures. Is it possible to develop common understandings which enable us to work with civility toward harmony with other creatures and beings? The deep ecology platform principles are a step in this direction. Respect for diversity leads us to recognize the forms of ecological wisdom which grow specific to place and context. Thus, supporters of the deep ecology movement emphasize place-specific, ecological wisdom, and vernacular technology practices. No one philosophy and technology is applicable to the whole planet.

In the West there is a renewal of Christian practices which support ecotheology based on reverential spirituality for Creation. The ferment of this with the new ecocentric paradigms influenced by field ecology and leading edge science has led writers like Thomas Berry to begin fashioning a "new story" as a basis for Western initiatives in creating an ecologically wise and harmonious society. All of these efforts can be seen as compatible with support for the platform principles of the deep ecology movement, with perhaps some slight modifications.

Bioregionalism is an activist form of support for the deep ecology movement. The Wildlands Project, The Arne Naess Selected Works Project, The Ecoforestry Institute educational programs, are all examples of applications of deep ecology movement principles at work in support of biodiversity preservation and restoration.

For an introduction to the movement see: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, by Arne Naess; *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology* edited by Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, *Deep Ecology* by Bill Devall and George Sessions and *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century* edited by George Sessions. For examples of how Buddhist thought and practice have influenced some Western ecosophies see the works of Gary Snyder. For applications and critiques from Third World perspectives see the writings of Vandana Shiva and Helena Norberg-Hodge.

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