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The Three Great Movements

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At the end of this century we see a convergence of three areas of self-destructiveness: the self-destructiveness of war, the self-destructiveness of exploitation and suppression among humans, the self-destructiveness of suppression of non-human beings, and of degradation of life conditions in general. The two first gave rise to the global peace movement and the global social justice movement, the third gave rise to the much younger global movement, that of deep ecology.

By this term, 'deep ecology', I refer here in a loose way to groups struggling to make it clear that reducing the negative impact of humans on the conditions of life on Earth requires more than envisaged in any major political program of today. It requires significant changes both in the rich and the poor countries which affect social, economic, technical and life style factors. Its goals include the protection of the planet and its richness and diversity of Life for its own sake..2. The specific kind of urgency accorded to this third movement is due to the time factor: it is obvious that delays rapidly make the ecological crisis more difficult to overcome.

It is of historical interest to trace the various kinds of physical, social and other changes which have triggered the convergence of the three movements. Here I shall not try anything like that, but will offer some general reflections about these movements, starting with conceptual considerations.

It is not by chance that I have used the term 'self' in the short characterizations of the lines of thinking, feeling and acting. The terminology suggested itself when I was trying out a conceptual unification of a normative system with 'Self-realization!' as the basic norm—expressed, inadequately of course, through one single word. For those who habitually look at the three global movements with the conceptualizations of the third movement in mind, the concepts of 'ecosystems', not man/environment', are central. The human self is then basically an ecological self, that is, a kind of part of ecosystems, and the doings of humans in war and peace and as masters or slaves are processes going on with accelerating speed and causal weight all over the globe.

The self-destructiveness of present policies seems clear to a great many, and it has been adequately formulated, but 'to turn the tide' seems politically overwhelmingly difficult. The self-destructiveness of wars has been announced clearly since the atomic bomb changed 'everything'. The long range self-destructiveness of large scale exploitation and suppression based on race, sex, or dominant economy are by now gradually seen to undermine the exploiters or suppressors themselves. (The false masculinity has crippled the male sex.) At least this is clear if we take into account concepts of self on a scale nearer to the great Self than to the concepts of hard egos. The development of human maturity may perhaps be said to be impaired, when stiffened into counter-intuitive perceptions of the classes and other human beings with whom one interacts. In this case, according to my terminology, there is a limit of Self-realization not being transcendable. But it seems that most humans most of the time have either been exploited or suppressed most of their lives. The high levels of self-realization have been difficult, but not impossible to reach under such circumstances.

In most cultures some animals have been taken better care of and treated more respectfully than some humans. During the early days of the Industrial Revolution in England this presumably was the case with pets and even pigs. In the same country, however, a brand of utilitarianism arose that strengthened the third line of thinking and feeling—that of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832): "The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But, can they suffer?"

So far as I can understand, all-round maturity of humans facilitates acts of identification with every kind of living being. This again facilitates negative attitudes towards wanton limitation of the fulfilment of life potentialities of such beings. When manifest exploitation and suppression are performed a reason is demanded: are they necessary for the satisfaction of *vital* needs of humans? The deepening and widening of the human ecological self results in increasingly limiting its own realization, when exploitation and suppression are applied. Potentialities of self-realization are destroyed. In this sense the third movement seeks to reduce the self-destructiveness of present globally relevant human behavior.

Within the three great movements there are numerous organizations. One of the kinds of problems they all have is that of eager members who wish to change or, more often, to expand the basic mandates of the organization. The successful 'movement against nuclear weapons' had in some countries to use much time to restrain members who wished to expand it as a more general peace organization. That would have reduced its thrust.

Amnesty International is a tremendously successful organization within the human rights movement—part of the general loosely connected social justice movement (in my terminology). Its success is in part due to careful limitation of a core problem: to get political prisoners out of more or less devastating prisons through nonviolent action. Main procedure: letters to people in power. Because of its success some eager members, and also outsiders, are of course pressing the organization to extend its mandate, for instance, into being a general human rights organization.

The deep ecology movement has as a general aim to participate in overcoming the ecological crisis, but supporters have in common, for instance, a strong sense of the intrinsic value of every living being and a kind of right to live and blossom that is independent of usefulness. Like other movements, especially as long as it seems to be successful, it will always be under pressure to extend its mandate. But mostly such efforts tend to confuse more than strengthen the movement. But cooperation with other movements is obviously an important task. The contemporary complex social situation makes isolation rather unnatural.

Again, the very special situation today must be kept in mind: an increasing portion of the populace in the industrial countries are aware of the colossal changes taking place on land, in the oceans and in the atmosphere, threatening everybody everywhere. The interconnectedness of everything is manifested in a more dramatic and convincing way than in 1970 and 1980. Many of those who were young in 1970 and got some ecological education are now firmly established and influential. But it is not my job to trace the ecological, social and political factors determining the historically important convergence of the three movements and the ascendancy of the ecological issues on par with the traditionally most crucial social and political ones.

There is today an important difference between the third and the two first movements: the latter have powerful supporters among politicians whereas the radical ecology movement is practically entirely without political supporters. But this unfortunate situation may soon change. The Brundtland Report advocates social changes that will turn out to be impossible to implement without a shift to a radical ecological approach..

Notes

1. Part of a lecture, University of Victoria, Canada, 1989.
2. The term 'deep ecology' is said here to be used in a loose way in order to emphasize that my own efforts to formulate a platform for the deep ecology movement in 8 points requiring about 200 words should not be taken too seriously. There are thousands of people who might be unmoved by one or more of the points as formulated by me, but who support the third movement as I conceive it. —It would be arrogant and pretentious of me to compare the deep ecology movement with the historically tremendously important and strong movement against war, exploitation and suppression, *if* the term were to be closely associated with my own modest effort in the way of terminology.

As an example of other characterizations than through the 8 points which George Sessions and I have proposed, one might refer to the chapter "Deep Ecology" in Walter and Dorothy Schwarz, *Breaking Through*, Green Books 1987, where they quote Michael McCloskey, Donald Worster, Neil Evernden, Frithjof Capra and others.

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