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On Ultimate Norms in Ecosophy T

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This essay does two things. It offers one possible interpretation of Arne Næss's ultimate ecosophic norms, and it shows how these norms can support the following three statements in the deep ecological platform (dep.):

(dep. 1): The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.

(dep. 2): Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.

(dep. 3): Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.²

I shall trace deep ecological argumentation from Næss's ultimate premises to these platform principles. I will move stepwise down his normative hierarchy, which is conceived on analogy to a hypothetical-deductive system.³ This is not a strict formal logical system, but a "practical" derivative argumentation.

Ecosophy T:⁴ The Bergson-Spinoza Connection

Inspiration for Ecosophy T has been drawn from a number of sources, most importantly Benedict de Spinoza and Mahatma Gandhi.⁵

However, few readers of the literature of deep ecology have seen clearly how Næss uses Henri Bergson in his reading of Spinoza. In this presentation, I shall take Bergson's summary of Spinoza as a point of departure to Næss's philosophy. This scheme is in line with Næss's insistence that Ecosophy T could be read in the light of Bergson: "[...] together with Spinoza he [Bergson] is one of the most important harbingers of the deep ecology movement I am working on."⁶ Bergson views Spinoza's basic intuition as follows:

[...] it is the feeling of a coincidence between the act by which our mind knows truth perfectly, and the operation by which God engenders it. [...] when man, sprung from divinity, succeeds in returning to it, he perceives that what he had at first taken to be two opposed movements of coming and going are in fact a single movement.⁷

By the phrase "a single movement," Bergson is alluding to Spinoza's holism. At once a whole and a multitude of parts, created nature (*natura naturata*), may be understood as the effect of an internal causal unity in this whole; that is, as creative nature (*natura naturans*).⁸ Thus, "Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived."⁹ This is to say that every human being, like every other being, ontologically speaking, "is in God" or Nature (with a capital N), and "... emanates from the Deity." In Ecosophy T, therefore, the human purpose is to reach an adequate understanding of his or her being-in-Nature, an understanding that may be seen, as Bergson writes, as an epistemological re-entry into creative nature. This is achieved through the understanding of concrete particular beings as expressions of the Deity. Spinoza assumes that Nature is the immanent cause of itself and of all other things, and that, as a result without limits. Nature (with capital N) must be completely present in all its effects (or it would be divisible) and as much present in the parts as in the whole. It follows that particular things differ only in the modal sense. Thus Spinoza can write: "The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God."¹⁰ Humans are able to understand themselves as striving *sub specie aeternitatis*.¹¹ From this point of view, what human beings first and foremost achieve is an understanding of their own striving to persist in being, not within abstract and quantified time, but as a kind of (Bergsonian) duration within eternity.¹² Linking Spinoza to Bergson's distinction between duration (*la durée*) and abstract time (*temps*), Naess, in Ecosophy T, develops this concept further:

Ecosophy T concentrates especially upon the aspect of general unfolding in *suo esse*. For life in general it implies the "creative evolution" (Bergson), the steady extension of the biosphere, from the comfortable, lukewarm, shallow seas to arctic oceans and steaming hotwater springs.¹³

Næss appears to interpret this creative evolution of particular beings—indeed of all nature through the striving to persist in its being—as an expression of the ultimate norm of Ecosophy.

(N1): "Self-realization!"¹⁴

According to Spinoza, the power each particular being has to struggle for self-preservation is an expression of the power of God in his active aspect,¹⁵ so that those who realize themselves can be said to be living the life of God. Næss links this with Gandhi's concept of self-realization and the distinction between a "little self" (with a lower-case 's') and "the big Self" (with a capital 'S').¹⁶ The Self (or Nature) is absolutely infinite and, by necessity, finds expression in all finite beings. Every act of (self-)expression is constitutive of the particular being's striving for better self-perseverance. Spinoza assumes this to be a necessity, hence Bergson's notion of an action whereby God brings about a non-arbitrary realization. It is the human condition to participate fully in the realization of the Self. Hence, the norm to "Seek complete self-realization!," that is, to seek an understanding of the being from which one proceeds, Nature. The Norm (N1) applies to all finite rational beings, and not to Nature in itself. Nor does one need such norms, if one has achieved adequate understanding; the norms are simply intended as crutches for the liberation strategies for constrained humans.¹⁷ The ultimate aim of these strategies is a complete self-realization.¹⁸

The two related concepts of "Self" and "self," representing Nature and the individual respectively, are fundamental to the understanding of the dual usage of the term "self-realization." Næss presumes, on the one hand, an all-inclusive Self, or Nature; on the other hand, the concept a person of inadequate self-insight would form of himself as an isolated or social ego.¹⁹

There are a number of varieties of this ego-concept. Some are extremely inadequate and concentrate one-dimensionally on what it means to be human. Others set up a model of free humans as a goal of self-realization

to be earnestly pursued.²⁰ In addition to this passive striving for liberation, there is the active striving of the free.²¹ The difference between pleasure and joy is tied to these two types of freedom.²² Adequate self-understanding is that through which one realizes oneself as a part of the whole, all-encompassing Self, which does not exist separated from particular beings. Though inspired by Gandhi and not Spinoza, this Self-understanding is paralleled in Spinoza's writings on thinking as part of the infinite intellect.²³

At least two important questions can be raised in connection with the injunction to seek complete self-realization. First, what does it mean to seek or strive? Second, what is the identity of the inadequate and the actualized Self-realizing humans, respectively?

Human struggle for Self-realization may be adequate or inadequate, a situation characterized by constrained passivity or free activity respectively. The aim is to find a strategy of liberation from a constrained and passive to a free and active level of being. This is the basic idea in Bergson's reading of Spinoza's intuition as two opposing movements (the free and the constrained) that unites in one.

Inadequate self-realization is to be understood as constrained realization to the extent that one does not recognize being part of a free non-arbitrary Nature. Only a person of inadequate self-understanding will assume that he or she is in possession of a free will unconstrained by Nature. An atomistic view of human beings as separated from the gestalt of wills in the life-world does, from an ecosophic point of view, entail an inadequate and constrained view of the human condition. People with such inadequate self understanding would need ecosophic norms as a moral guide in practical life.

An adequate understanding of one's own struggle involves that one understand oneself as an expression of the infinite powers of Nature's creation. Through a completely adequate recognition and realization of (N1), humans come to understand that their struggle follows by necessity from the struggle of Nature, and that it has an inner link with other parts of the environment through a common inner cause, Nature. This is an amoral element in Spinoza that goes beyond his concern with "good" and "bad" values.²⁴

In the final analysis, Ecosophy T too is amoral in the sense that one recognizes one's non-accidental necessity as being above any norm. As being-in-Nature, or in the Self, through an adequate understanding, one is raised even above one's own normative system. This does not mean that one understands one's own struggle as part of Nature as a whole. The relation between Nature and the particular parts is not a relation between part and whole, but one between unity and plurality. Those who can see their own striving in this way, will see themselves as parts of creative nature and in the light of the inner unity that brings about creative nature as a non-separately existing whole and as a plurality of parts.²⁵

Between the "adequate" and "inadequate" poles, people strive to put aside private (constrained) self-realization and recognize their being-in-the-Self.²⁶ What consequences does this have for the identity of the individual? Ecosophic self-realization is a recognition of biospheric interdependence in the Self. Everything is connected in an eco-social unity. The individual is part of coexistence with Nature, a coexistence that is for the best of all concerned.²⁷ Individuals realize themselves through identification with the extended Self or Nature. Self-realization is achieved through identification and symbolic coexistence with Nature. The sense of taking part in a greater context is basic to the individual's self-respect and self-esteem. If this greater context is destroyed, "[...] nothing appears to remain [of the self]."²⁸ This does not, however, imply that self-realization is bound up with particular groups. Inadequate self-recognition as an isolated ego independent of the deeper eco-social unity is a misconceived and "shallow" self-recognition, as opposed to a "deep," adequate understanding of the self within the biosphere.²⁹ An increase in recognition of biospheric togetherness is according to the ecosophy pleasurable, while a private ego-realization is tragic and full of sorrows.³⁰ Which is not to say that private ego-realization is perceived as misery; the individual in question may well experience happiness, but this happiness is passive and not active. These passive joys are like "the pleasures of slaves under the tyranny of passions."³¹

Endotes

¹ I am indebted to Arne Næss for extensive comments and academic generosity, and to an anonymous reviewer of this journal. In the summer of 1997 I enjoyed a friendly exchange of views with Næss which resulted in an article by me and a most arresting reply by him, forthcoming as Peder Anker, "From Skepticism to Dogmatism and Back: Remarks on the History of Deep Ecology," *Philosophical Dialogs: Arne Næss and the Progress of Ecophilosophy*, Andrew Brennan and Nina Witoszek (eds.), (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). This article about ultimate norms in his ecosophy represents my reply to his comment, and the readers of the *Trumpeter* may enjoy reading it in that context. Also notice that this essay represents one of several possible *interpretations* of Næss's Ecosophy T. For this methodological approach see Arne Naess, *Interpretation and Preciseness*, (Oslo: Dybwad, 1953).

² Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, David Rothenberg (trans. and ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 29, and Arne Naess, *Ekspertenes syn på naturens egenverdi* ("The experts' view of the intrinsic value of nature"), (Oslo: Tapir Forlag, 1987), p.11.

³ Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises", *The Ecologist*, Vol. 18 Nos. 4/5, 1988, p.131. Bill Devall Bill and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Inc., 1985), p. 226. See also Arne Naess, "A Systematization of Gandhian Ethics of conflict resolution", *Conflict Resolution*, Vol.2 no.2, June 1958, p.141.

⁴ T - as in the initial of Næss's 'Tvergastein' cabin located in the Norwegian mountains. The esoteric reference to Tvergastein illustrates the concrete 'rootedness' of Næss ecosophic work in his own life. T can also be understood as short for *tolkning* - the Norwegian word for 'interpretation'. See Næss's *Interpretation and Preciseness*, 1953.

⁵ Arne Naess, *Freedom, Emotion and Self-Subsistence: The Structure of a Central Part of Spinoza's Ethics*, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975). On Gandhi, see Naess, *Conflict Resolution*, 1958. Arne Naess, *Gandhi og atomalderen* ("Gandhi and the Atomic Age"), (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1960), p. 28f. Johan Galtung and Arne Naess, *Gandhis politiske etikk* ("Gandhi's political ethics"), (Oslo: Tannum, 1955), 2nd edition (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1968, chapt.3. For reasons of space, I shall place less emphasis on Gandhi.

⁶ Arne Naess, "Det handler om planetens overlevelse" ("It is a matter of the survival of this planet"), interview in *Klassekampen*, 05.09.92, (my trans.). Næss refers directly to Bergson on two central points: self-realization and creative development (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 85, 166). Though Spinoza remains Næss's main source of inspiration, Bergson's readings of Spinoza provide a suitable point of departure for an interpretation of Ecosophy T. Indeed, in his own education Næss learned to appreciate Bergson (in early 1931) long before he engaged with the writings of Spinoza and Gandhi.

⁷ Henri Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," *The Creative Mind*, (New York: Citadel Press, 1992), p. 113.

⁸ Spinoza, E 1P29Sch. E=Ethica, P=Propositio, Sch=Scholium, Dem=Demonstratio, Pr=Praetatio, Cor=Corollarium, Aff=Affectuum, D=Definitiones. All quotations from Baruch de Spinoza, *Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I-II, Elwes, R.H.M. (trans.), (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

⁹ Ibid. E1P15.

¹⁰ Ibid. E5P24.

¹¹ Ibid. E5P29Dem.

¹² Ibid. E3P6-7, E3P45Sch, E5P29Sch.

¹³ Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p.166.

¹⁴ Arne Naess, *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil* ("Ecology, Society and Lifestyle"), 5th edition, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1976). (New identical edition 1992), p. 312; *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p.197. As far as I can see, first formulated in Næss "Systematization of Gandhian Ethics," 1958, p.142

¹⁵ Spinoza, E3P6Dem, E2P3Sch.

¹⁶ Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 84f.

¹⁷ Spinoza, E4P68, E5P10Sch.

¹⁸ Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p.159.

¹⁹ Næss, *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil*, 1976, p. 270, 314; *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 201.

²⁰ Spinoza, E3P39Sch, E4P44Sch, E4Pr, E5P10Sch, cf. Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 84 f.

²¹ Ibid. E5P36Sch.

²² Ibid. E5P3Sch.

²³ Ibid. E2P11Cor.

²⁴ Ibid. E4P68Dem.

²⁵ Ibid. E1P29Sch.

²⁶ Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 84.

²⁷ Næss, *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil*, 1976, p. 276-277; *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 173-4.

²⁸ Næss, *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil*, 1976, p. 320, (my trans.); *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 173.f.

²⁹ The term "shallow" is in inverted commas to show that it refers to an inadequate basic ecological understanding, and not to "shallow people". It is this "shallow" anthropocentrism that Næss wishes to change. He does not say that the "shallow" ones cannot be "deep" when it comes to other issues. The term "shallow" seems to imply, and has in fact been taken to imply, that those outside the environmental movement are "one-tracked" and "narrow-minded" in all areas, but this view cannot legitimately be attributed to Naess.

³⁰ Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 85

³¹ Spinoza, E4P66Sch, E5P42Sch; the proposition follows from putting the two references together.