



vol. 1, no. 3 spring 84

THE TRUMPETER

Voices From the

Canadian Ecophilosophy Network

The new subtitle for **'The Trumpeter'** reflects suggestions from readers and more explicitly establishes the context for the network. As was noted in earlier issues, philosophy in the context of environmental concerns becomes ecophilosophy when it is recognized that the source of environmental problems lies in our values, life styles, and world view. Environmental crisis is a reflection of a crisis in culture and character. The acknowledgement and perception of serious environmental problems caused by human activities reflects a growing awareness of environmental limits and of human limitations.

It is now widely known that modern industrial society, for a variety of reasons, is more destructive of the natural environment than any previous culture. This is partly because of the power of its technology, but also because of the way in which it uses that technology. And, it is not only the natural environment that is disrupted, threatened and assaulted by powerful technologies, but also the human environment. Coincident with this increased damage there has developed an increased awareness of the interconnectedness of human life with the rest of the biotic community. This is one of the main insights of modern ecology, but it is also an ancient one and has formed part of the wisdom of many traditional, non-industrial cultures.

It is convenient for purposes of discussion to say that the four major systems on which we depend are: 1. oceanic fisheries; 2. crop lands; 3. grasslands; 4. forests. If we consult UN and other studies of the state of these four systems we find that each is undergoing serious degradation. Pollution and destruction of habitat is one of the major causes of species extinction, which is occurring at an unprecedented rate.

There are four major categories of threat to these biospheric systems. They are: 1. pollution from modern industrial processes and products; 2. destruction of soils and aquifers from over-use, and improper use; 3. degradation of water and air from contamination resulting from combustion of various fuels; 4. destruction of habitat and the threat of biocide from the instruments of modern warfare.

If we ask why industrial society is so destructive of the environment a number of answers can be given. Some have concluded, the deep ecologists among them, that contemporary industrial societies are destructive of the environment because they share a common set of beliefs, attitudes, methods and values in relation to nature. Modern applied science and technology are not, as has been alleged, value free, but represent a specific set of assumptions which constitute a particular way of looking at, and approaching the world. They condition perception and lead us to act toward the environment in a certain way, with a certain spirit. In short, modern science-technology represents a specific world view that was born in modern times during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, and which developed an alliance with industrial technology in the 19th century. This reductionist, mechanistic, desacralized view of nature is the one we have inherited in the 20th century.

This world view has had as one of its driving motives to eliminate all teleological explanations of natural processes. Science as a world view has aimed at abstract, generalized descriptions of natural processes, which are supposedly value free, and which can be expressed in terms of quantified, mathematical formulas. This kind of abstractionist approach has

lead to the bias that "objective" knowledge of nature must avoid all consideration of subjects. Explanations that refer to a telos are ruled out, as introducing extraneous, unnecessary considerations that border on religion and philosophy. In part the explanatory power of modern science achieves success by leaving out large areas of our experience, but it also conditions our expectations and tends to narrow the experienced gestalts that constitute our consensual reality. Science allied with technology has aimed at prediction and control of natural phenomena. Its empiricist philosophy drove a wedge between nature and value. Values became consigned to the subjective. Our culture has generally adopted this attitude toward nature.

As modern disciplines evolved, most theoreticians developed the same "objective" mechanistic approach. This was true even in the social sciences. Psychology tended to narrow its focus to behaviour. Economics tended to be consigned to describing economic processes in terms of measureable factors such as GNP, rate of growth, dollar costs, and the like. Such issues as quality of life and equitable distribution were for the most part avoided. A primary assumption of modern economics is that it can be value free, whereas, the major direction of economic studies has promoted and justified the formation of policies that appeal to utilities and efficiencies that only take account of short term, capital considerations. In appraising modern industrial agriculture, e.g., it is often claimed that it is the "most productive in the world." But "most productive" does not take account of its social consequences, its effects on soil fertility and loss, or its larger environmental effects. Its productiveness is measured in terms of labour productivity, and short term production of commodities. The same sort of bias is built into most of our standard measures of progress.

The modern industrial world view sees nature as a resource; it has no values in itself. It is viewed primarily as a machine, a clockwork like mechanism and as a source of raw materials to be turned into valued products through the industrial process. In the cowboy era of industrial society, the natural world was approached as if it had no limits. Since it was thought that it could be described accurately in completely atomistic terms, it was not realized that it is an interconnected, organic system, and that damage in one sector can be felt in far distant places and ways. However, as industrial society developed, it began to be

realized that there are natural limits, and that the resources of nature are not infinite. Thus was born a new form of environmental consciousness in the modern West, and since the late 19th century four distinct forms of ecological consciousness have arisen. These have been aptly characterized by John Rodman as: 1. resource conservation; 2. wilderness preservation; 3. moral extensionism; 4. ecological sensibility. His description of these is based on a careful historical analysis and an astute philosophical appraisal. In what follows these forms of consciousness will be described and related to the mechanistic world view described above. We will compare them to the shallow-deep ecology spectrum, and will finally relate this discussion to the claims that we are in the process of a shift in world view, or a shift in paradigms, being brought on by environmental crisis, recent developments in theoretical physics, field ecology and humanistic psychologies. We will consider whether this shift need be to a form of cybernetic consciousness, which represents a mere translation of the mechanistic world view into the subtle new forms of information technology. We will consider in what ways deep ecology, or ecological sensibility, represents a transformation of world view, and the emergence of a radically new consciousness, which nonetheless has deep historical roots in a number of different traditions and religions.

We can only sketch these very complicated matters and important details will be left out. Therefore, a selected list of references will be provided for those who want greater depth. In future issues of The Trumpeter (beginning with Vol. II) we will explore the implications of the new ecological sensibility for various areas of human activity, such as the development of appropriate technologies, agriculture, and so on. In these issues, contributions from members of the network will be published, and from time to time a list of subscribers. (Please let me know if you do not want your name and address published.)

As Rodman points out, the resource conservation movement began to develop as the frontier in North America was running out. Toward the end of the 19th century, and early in the 20th, people such as Gifford Pinchot and John Muir began to argue vigorously for conserving resources. Their efforts typified the two main forms of movement that developed against thoughtless exploitation of wilderness, forests, waterways and grasslands. However, they did not agree on certain fundamental issues.

Pinchot stood for wise resource conservation and development based solely on considerations of human use, whereas Muir argued passionately for wilderness preservation. Muir's personal philosophy went beyond wilderness preservation as it was to develop into a political movement.

Resource conservation as a form of ecological consciousness is consistent with combatting environmental degradation up to a point. However, its attitudes toward nature are largely instrumentalist, and it finds itself allied historically with the same general outlook that we described above as mechanistic, holding that nature is not the source of intrinsic values, but that its values are given to it through its use by humans. When resource conservation is allied with a philosophy that unifies the mechanistic side of modern science and technology with industrialism, it comes to be part of a technocratic philosophy which sees progress in terms of human abilities to reshape the Earth according to human desires. The technocrat emphasizes the manipulative control of nature through the power of modern technological forces. One problem with this whole approach is that once values are consigned solely to the discretion of humans, they lose their objective reference and become reduced to competing interests. The resource conservationist ultimately can find no good reason to preserve wilderness or natural lands unaffected by human activity, unless it be only for human interest.

The wilderness preservation form of consciousness, like the resource conservationism described above, also tries to restrict unbridled exploitation of nature. In many respects it does not question the basic direction of human development allied with technological progress. However, it does attempt to find in natural objects and ecosystems certain values, identified historically with beauty, the sublime, and with certain religious feelings associated with places that inspire a sense of the sacred. The wilderness preservation movement historically focused its attention on preservation of areas of pristine beauty and of high scenic quality, and tended to ignore less appealing areas. It also ignored broader questions of ecosystem integrity. In some of its manifestations it was associated with the philosophy that valued wilderness primarily as a place where humans could be rejuvenated from the negative effects of urban living and civilization. In this form it is hardly distinguishable from resource conservation.

Wilderness preservation reached a horizon

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in the middle of this century when it began to be realized that preservation of wilderness is not enough, and that wilderness could not be preserved by itself, that the interconnectedness of the ecosystems is such that a piecemeal approach will ultimately fail. Some elements of wilderness preservation philosophy came close to identifying values in nature that are inherent in it, but the main tendency was to see these as derived from a divine source on the one hand, or from some mystical form of pantheism on the other.

Moral extensionism is in many respects an attempt to rectify the shortcomings of resource conservation and wilderness preservation. It also marks an attempt to end the split between fact and value that became enshrined in Western thought from the 19th century on. Peter Singer's position toward animal liberation typifies moral extensionism. His writings are not directly concerned with wilderness preservation or resource conservation, but with our treatment of animals and the extension of moral rights to them. Other writers, such as Christopher Stone, have suggested the extension of legal and moral rights to such natural entities as forests and river drainages. Singer bases his arguments on the capacity for suffering. If a creature can suffer, then it has the right to be treated with care and respect. In the case of the extension of legal rights to other natural entities, the arguments by Stone and others are not based on suffering, but are developed on analogy to the kind of standing given in courts to ships and corporations as legal (fictional) persons. In the British tradition of law, on which the North American systems are based, only persons have standing, and ships and corporations have standing in court by virtue of legal definition as persons. Why not, Stone reasoned, extend this to forests and rivers? As Rodman points out, moral extensionism fails to escape forms of anthropocentrism that the deep ecologists have so thoroughly critiqued. Furthermore, the tendency in moral extensionism is to perpetuate the traditional, atomistic, mechanistic metaphysics which itself provides no basis for recognizing the inherent value of communities and ecosystems.

Moral extensionism (especially as related to philosophy of nature) is in part a reaction to the inadequate prudentialism of resource conservation and the vague reverentialism of wilderness preservationism. It represents an attempt to locate values in nature that are not merely human oriented or instrumental, but it does

not succeed in making the full shift to a wider ecological consciousness. The reason it fails to make this shift is that it does not engage in a deep reevaluation of our conventional modes of valuing and perceiving the natural world. It is an attempt, basically, to reform or revise the traditional world view, and as a result it does not bring about the transformation of perception that is required for a revolution in our ethics and treatment of nature. In short, it has not made the transition to a deep ecological consciousness, although, to be sure, it is far deeper than the shallow ecological consciousness of resource conservation. All three of the positions so far discussed can be viewed as part of a larger movement toward a deepening ecological consciousness.

The 4th form of ecological consciousness, which is still emergent, involves a comprehensive approach and inquiry. It is not merely an attempt to patch up an aging world view that is now inadequate. It involves the development of new forms of sensibility, which include cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, sensual and other elements. It is not merely a new intellectual way of extending rights. Ecological sensibility takes seriously the basic insights and principles of field ecology and applies these to all dimensions of human life and consciousness. Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess, John Rodman, Bill Devall, George Sessions, Val and Richard Routley, et al. are examples of people who attempt to center their philosophy of nature on a nonanthropocentric orientation. For them all natural entities have their own telos or way, and each of these is to be respected. This is not merely a matter of believing that rights as legal concepts can be extended to nature. It involves a quite different way of perceiving the natural world. The emerging ecological sensibility also sees our treatment of nature as not separate from our treatment of humans. As Simon Weil once observed, with deep ecological sensibility, it is unlikely that we will succeed in creating human communities that are free of oppression as long as we treat the natural world in an oppressive way. Ecological sensibility focuses not only on such issues as animal suffering and air pollution, but also attempts to develop basic ecological understandings of the full range of human and natural activities and processes. It approaches reality as multi-dimensional.

The deep ecologists seek to bring about a rebirth of the sense of wonder about the natural world, and this is not the result of

argument or threat, but of a deeper and deeper inquiry into our ends and into the ultimately mysterious nature of existence itself. What the deep ecologists call our attention to, then, is the "plurality of perspectives," none of which is by itself privileged. Deep ecologists see intrinsic value in natural entities and communities, and recognize a gestalt of value giving characteristics such as diversity, complexity, integrity, harmony, stability, scarcity and the like. Ecological sensibility, then, is a comprehensive approach to environmental issues, one that is genuinely holistic and transdisciplinary. It grows out of the insight that we cannot separate entities from the rest of the biosphere, nor can we isolate elements of our current world view that have negative effects and eliminate them, without undertaking a reevaluation of the whole orientation. The deep ecologists, then, seek principles which transcend the bias of one narrow perspective, and which will enable us not only to understand the source of environmental problems but to shed light on the total human condition.

There have been several attempts to develop the orientation of ecological sensibility in greater detail with respect to this more comprehensive understanding. Some efforts in this direction have made use of the notion of paradigm shifts borrowed from Thomas Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions. Many people, including deep ecologists, think that our culture is going through a shift in paradigms, which involves a change from atomistic, mechanistic paradigms, to holistic, organic, process oriented ones. Among this group of writers are some new age thinkers who adopt some of the views of de Chardin. There are others who are personalist (such as Roszak) and are allied with certain older wisdom traditions, as well as with an emerging ecological sensibility. Deep ecologists such as Sessions, Naess and others have criticised some of the new age versions of the paradigm shift as being anthropocentric. The new age philosophers do for the most part introduce a new metaphysics and epistemology that gets around some of the short-comings and difficulties of the empiricist, atomistic, clockwork view of nature; but in some cases they retain anthropocentric aims to control nature, and they hold that humans have the destiny to use information technology and genetic engineering to direct the future of evolution (algeny). When this is linked with cybernetics and systems theory it gives rise to what Morris Berman calls the cybernetic consciousness. This is actually neither a

"revolution" in world view, nor a transformation of consciousness, but is merely a translation of the older domination oriented world view into new language. The computer simply replaces the mechanical device in the machine metaphor. Its introduction does not add a new way to enhance human skills, for relating to and appreciating nature, but in the cybernetic consciousness is seen as a way to replace human skills with computer machinery and robots in order to master nature. Allied with resource development and systems theory this becomes an ideology which further extends the power of large organizations, such as multinational corporations and government bureaucracies. It contributes to the drive toward uniformity and centralization which moves away from a sense of place and connectedness to the Earth. Its addiction to technique and information means it knows more and more about less and less, but has no understanding of subjects and wholes.

In contrast to these varieties of new age philosophy we can cite the personalist philosophy set forth by Roszak, and the pernetarian, deep ecology philosophy that I sketch in some of my writings. These are only two of the many examples we could mention of the numerous efforts under way to bring together the elements of the new ecological sensibility. Some of them draw on the Christian ethic of love, or on the insights of Eastern religions such as Taoism and Zen Buddhism, and some attempt to bring out the Earth wisdom of various North American Native religions. Others have attempted to show the relevance of the metaphysics of Spinoza and Whitehead. The pernetarian synthesis that I have sketched, as the name implies (per-sons in net-works of plane-tarian relationships), sees the concept of person as having a scope that extends to all subjects, not just human, and attempts to develop the implications of the insight that humans and the planet are inextricably intertwined.

Deep ecologists do not think that deep ecology sensibilities can or should be a fully developed doctrine, but rather that it involves an on-going activity of discovery that ever deepens our appreciation, wonder and delight in the natural world and in the development of our capacities to find richer and richer ends that are realized by simple means. Economic ends are subordinate to other concerns and have meaning in relation to helping us to realize these richer ends. Technology should be subordinate to human mastery and should not dominate our future. It should be scaled to human size, and

should be appropriate to our biospheric, communal responsibilities to one another and to other beings. Ecological wisdom and harmony, or ecosophy, is something each of us realizes in our own personal lives through a process that opens us more and more to the wonder and delight of living in the excitement of a world we do not fully know, made up of a multitude of other beings, who as our companions have their own ways and destinies. In both human and natural communities diversity is cherished for its own sake and not only because it promotes stability in the biological communities on which we depend. The deep ecologists, then, seek a wholeness and harmony of self, community and ecosphere, and an approach which avoids the fragmentation of specialist abstraction and the oppression and domination of all forms of totalitarianism. They seek to be aware in depth of the details of place and to make personal commitments to their own bioregions, as well as cultivating a growing sense of global concern. Given these commitments and concerns, ecosophy involves a reconnection to the poetic immediacy of the present, while enabling us to see the implications of our actions over space and time.

The above exposition merely sketches some of the larger features of this complex subject. The books and articles listed below each contain further references which can be followed according to interest.

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