

The Basics of Deep Ecology

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The deep ecology movement will thrive whatever professional philosophers like myself publish about their conception of it. Perhaps what I say about it is expressed in a way that is not natural for many of its warm supporters. But we cannot expect, or even wish, to have a single way of expressing ourselves. I have mine.

Supporters of the deep ecology movement refer approvingly to a diversity of philosophers, cultural traditions and religious trends. Some authors ask for clarification: Where is the essence or core? Is there a definite general philosophy of deep ecology, or at least a kind of philosophy? Or is it essentially a movement with exasperatingly vague outlines?

I do not think it is desirable to do more than tentatively suggest what might be the essential ingredients of a deep ecology theoretical point of view. In what follows I make some remarks which are formulated in a way that might be considered dogmatic. They are, however, only meant as proposals for people with a background similar to my own.

In order to facilitate discussion about deep ecology among philosophers, it may be helpful to distinguish a *common platform* of deep ecology from the fundamental features of philosophies and religions from which that platform is derived, provided it is tentatively formulated as a set of norms and hypotheses (factual assumptions). The term platform is preferred to principle because the latter may be misunderstood to refer to ultimate premises. Furthermore, the formulations of a platform should be short and concise (as a synopsis), whereas the fundamental premises are Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or of other religious kinds, or they are philosophical with affinities to the

basic views of Spinoza, Whitehead, Heidegger, or others. Different sets of fundamentals are normally more or less incompatible, or at least difficult to compare in terms of cognitive contents. Supporters of deep ecology may have great difficulties in understanding each other's ultimate views, but not sets of penultimate ones as formulated as a kind of platform they have largely in common.

The platform of the deep ecology movement can be grounded in religion or philosophy, including ethics. It can also be said to be *derived* from these fundamentals. As used here, the term “derived” is open to a variety of interpretations. If the validity of a norm or a hypothesis is justified by reference to one definite set of assumptions of a philosophical or religious kind, the norm or hypothesis is in a sense derived from those assumptions. The set acquires a character of premises for particular conclusions. But closely similar or even identical conclusions may be drawn from divergent or even incompatible premises. This explains in a natural way that diversity of views at the deepest level can be felt by some to be bewildering and makes deep ecology too vague to deserve analytical scrutiny.

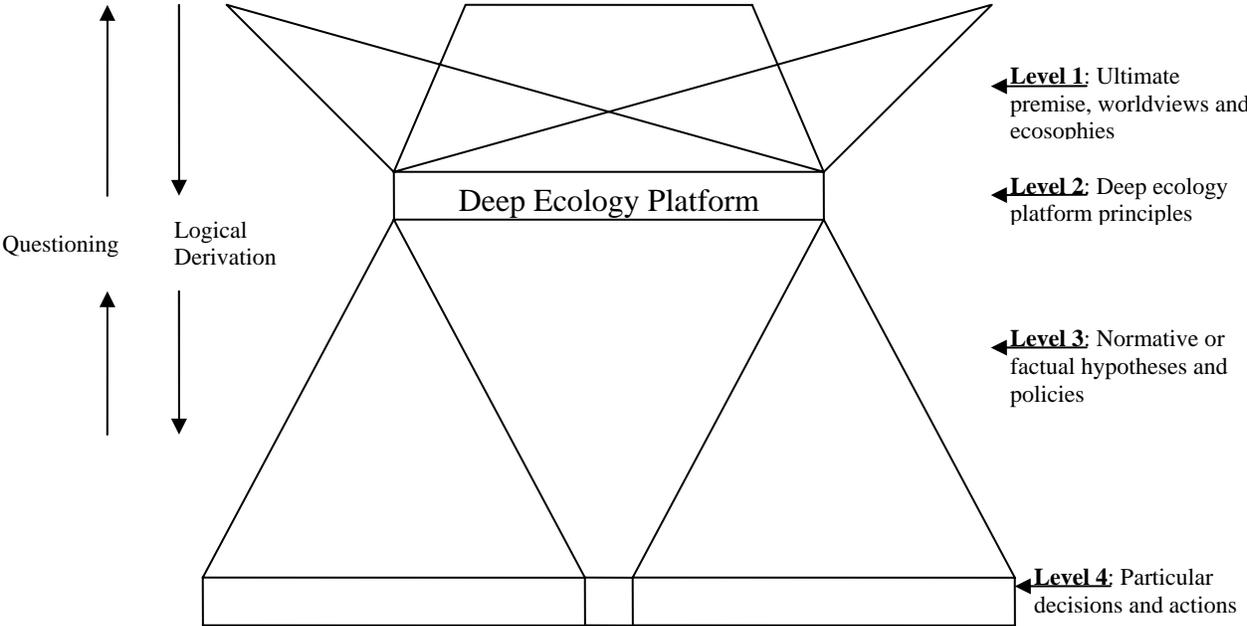
One must avoid looking for one definite philosophy or religious view among the supporters of the deep ecology movement. There is a rich manifold of fundamental views compatible with the deep ecology platform. And without this, the movement would lose its transcultural character. The transcultural character of the movement makes it natural that the wording of a version of the platform cannot be the same everywhere. A term like “our planet,” for instance, is unsuitable where people do not have any clear notion corresponding to the Western concept of a planet.

The discussion has four levels to take into account: verbalized fundamental philosophical and religious views; the deep ecology platform; the more or less general consequences derived from the platform—guidelines for life styles and for policies of every kind; and, lastly, prescriptions related to concrete situations and dateable decisions made in them. The term “dateable” refers to the trivial circumstance that a decision is made at a definite time even if it has taken a year to arrive at.

From the point of view of derivation one may use the following diagram, usually called the Apron diagram. The direction of derivation proceeds down the page, as is usual, and convenient. But some may prefer the opposite: having the roots on the deepest level at the bottom of the page and letting the other levels develop like the branches of a

tree. Still others would prefer a more holistic or artistic illustration avoiding straight lines, preferring circles. The root may be conceived in terms of the premise/conclusion relation or in terms of psychological or social motivation, or in terms of some other relations. The Apron is a premise/conclusion diagram.

The Apron Diagram



The Apron diagram is of a rather abstract nature. Why not give an example of a justification of a concrete action formulated in terms of the apron? Let NN be a mythical person, a supporter of the deep ecology movement, living somewhere near the unique old growth forests of the Northwestern United States of America. He happens to have fundamental beliefs of a Spinozistic kind, but has no knowledge of Spinoza. One early Monday he spikes some trees, puts up some posters clearly announcing that trees in the neighbourhood are spiked. I use NN as an example of how he, in principle, not in practice, makes use of the Apron diagram. The concrete action of spiking is chosen because of its

controversial character. Some supporters do not find the spiking procedure justifiable. Exactly where is the disagreements to be located?

Example

Level 1

A set of ultimate Spinozist premises

Level 2

N & H The 8 point platform principles of DEM

<u>Level 3</u>	{	<p>H1 The logging at P decreases richness & diversity & is not necessary to satisfy vital needs</p>	<p>H Logging at P is illegal</p>	<p>N Direct actions should be non-violent</p>
			<p>N Treespiking, properly done, is non-violent and may contribute to stop logging</p>	<p>H All normal means to stop it have been tried but have failed</p>
		<p>H Logging at P should be stopped now</p>	<p>N Treespiking at P is justifiable and urgent</p>	<p>N Supporters of DEM living near P and considering spiking should participate</p>
<u>Level 4</u>	{		<p>N I, NN, satisfy the & above conditions.</p>	
			<p>H I could start Monday</p>	
			<p>H It is now Monday</p>	
			<p>N (NN:) Spike!</p>	

Abbreviations: N – norm; H – hypothesis; DEM – deep ecology movement; NN – a person

In assessing constructive criticism of deep ecology as a form of activism it is useful to try to find out which level is involved. An example: In the introduction to his the *Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Oxford: Blackwell 1983), Robin Attfield says:

I do not accept, with the so-called 'deep, long-range ecology movement,' the view that our principal loyalty should be focussed not on fellow-humans or fellow creatures but on the biosphere as an organic whole, . . .

I suppose there are some supporters of the deep ecology movement who propose focussing loyalty on the biosphere as an organic whole in the sense suggested by Attfield. The conception of the biosphere as an organic whole and of such a kind of loyalty belongs to the realm of metaphysics, that is level one, rather than to the other levels. Therefore, the fact that Attfield does not accept the view he describes, is not relevant in argumentation for or against the deep ecology movement. You may or may not have your principal loyalty focussed on the biosphere as an organic whole, you cannot even be sure what is meant by the terms. One main point in deep ecology is the *deep* argumentation, that is, argumentation from ultimate (philosophical, religious) premises, but there is room for very different sets of such premises.

If the view outlined by Attfield seemed to be implicit in deep ecology views on level 2 platform principles, his non-acceptance would amount to a non-acceptance of something basic in the deep ecology movement (in so far as it is verbally articulated). If the view seemed to be implicit in views belonging to level 3, this would also be relevant to acceptance of deep ecology, and the same applies to level 4. Attfield could mean that, on the whole, decisions made or advocated by supporters of deep ecology platform seem to imply the view he does not accept. Perhaps, perhaps not.

Conclusion: distinction of levels is useful when trying to pin down exactly what a criticism is focussing on.

The Apron Diagram furnishes only a static model. A supporter of the deep ecology movement will normally modify the sentences at the different levels from time to time. New information may change any hypotheses and therefore also change norms which, in part, have been justified on the basis of the hypotheses being changed.

New ethical or other intuitions may make the supporter change any norm. If a norm is changed, new sets of hypotheses are normally involved, and old ones are discarded. This again will cause reverberations in a smaller or greater part of the field.

Example: Diprinzio, supporter of the deep ecology movement, reads the *Canberra Times*: Melbourne:

Victoria's mountain people brought their own legend to Melbourne's streets today to show their anger about the State Government's plan to extend the Alpine National Parks.

The Alpine families arrived with their dogs, their drays and their stockwhips.
They rode in wagons or horseback wearing moleskins, bush hats and oilskins.
They provided one of the most colourful protests Melbourne has seen and were cheered by hordes of people lining the route to Parliament House.
The people of the high country say the Government's plan threatens to destroy their heritage and the future of the 120 families who have been grazing cattle in the Alps for the past 150 years.

The article and a most touching picture make this staunch supporter of deep ecology exclaim, "Yes, we cannot do this to the 120 families, the plan must be fought, today! I join the demonstration!" His decision is of a kind that belongs to level 4. But he soon realizes that it may go against a lot of his own norms and hypotheses of level 2 and level 3. The deep ecology platform clearly implies a "No!" if Diprinzio does not start to make changes at level 3. He feels that his tentative "Yes" might not touch the platform formulations if he makes proper changes to level 3 hypotheses. So he sees what can be done at level 3. There he finds hypotheses about compensation to people in similar awkward situations as the mountain people. He also tries to clarify and assess his position in general. After some reflection he reverses his conclusion: The plan should be upheld, but he decides to study it more carefully.

From a point of view of normative systematizations, what goes on when changes are made at one or more levels is rather complicated. But part of it is processes of derivation. The Apron Diagram pretends only to illustrate important differences of the levels of derivation and the specific character of level 2. It represents a condensed formulation of the deepest level norms and hypotheses which most supporters of the

deep ecology movement can agree upon. This level is illustrated as the penultimate (next to ultimate) level of argumentation characteristic of those supporters of deep ecology who try to articulate their very basic views. At the third and fourth levels disagreements may arise. At the first level supporters with entirely different backgrounds disagree, or find each other's views more or less incomprehensible.

A direction of derivation is not a measure of value priorities or of ethical priorities. And it does not imply that what is derived is a *means* in relation to what it is derived from. A simple example is enough to clarify this. From "Do not kill humans!" follows, if you concede "All mothers are humans," the conclusion "Do not kill your mother!" This rather concrete norm is here *derived* from the more general and abstract one. But this does not imply that humans in general have a higher value or a kind of priority in relation to mothers. It does not say that in a norm conflict you should be more careful not to kill humans than not to kill your mother. An absurd position! And lastly, it is rather strange to refrain from killing your mother as a means to a goal, namely not to kill humans.

The formulations of level 2 have the character of proposals. It may turn out that proposals will differ substantially or show a natural diversity of terminological and conceptual idiosyncrasies. Unhappily, it is quite common, in a broad sense, to mix the logical relation of derivation with other relations. These are at least as important but, nevertheless, are different.

Rather often the relation of justification, ethical or otherwise, coincides with the relation of derivation. Thus a general, more or less intuitive norm of "right to live and flourish" is adhered to by many people without considering exactly what the norm, taken so-called literally, has as consequences. Confronted with questions like "What about poisonous snakes?" or, "What about beetles eating our vegetables?" some will hesitate, but eventually take up a firm positive stand, justifying this by reference to the general norm. In such cases, the derivation relation coincides with the justification relation (for these people). Schematically: generally premise: "There is a right which every living being *x* has, in principle, to live and flourish." Special premise: "*y* is a living being." Conclusion: "There is a right which *y* has . . ." The conclusion is ethically as well as syllogistically derived from the general premise. In spite of the many cases of such coincidences, the relations should be kept apart by people interested in philosophical articulation of deep ecology principles.

There is no point in trying to formulate a short (or long) version of level 2 that all supporters of deep ecology would like. The most remarkable similarities of positions and attitudes belong to levels 3 and 4. There are typical shallow and typical deep argumentation patterns, and there are environmental policies and decisions in relation to which supporters of deep ecology show an astonishingly high level of agreement.

Here is, slightly modified, an eight point proposal for level 2 published in *Ecophilosophy VI*, May 1984, p 5:

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. In view of the foregoing points, policies must be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present and make possible a more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things.
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 directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

The 8 formulations are of course in need of clarification, elaboration, and comments. Some are offered on pp.5 – 7 in *Ecophilosophy VI*. Here they are, slightly modified:

RE (1) Instead of biosphere we might use the term ecosphere in order to stress that we of course do not limit our concern to the life-forms in a

narrow sense. The term *life* is used here in a comprehensive non-technical way to refer also to what biologists classify as non-living: rivers (watersheds), landscapes, cultures, ecosystems, the living earth. Slogans such as “Let the river live” illustrate the broader usage so common in many different cultures. Only in our Western schools the term *living* is firmly associated with science of biology.

RE (2) So-called simple, lower, or primitive species of plants and animals contribute essentially to richness and diversity of life. They have value-in-themselves and are not merely steps towards the so-called higher or rational life forms.

Complexity, as referred to here, is different from complication. Urban life may be more complicated than life in a natural setting without being more complex in the sense of multi-faceted quality.

Why talk about diversity AND richness? Suppose humans interfere with an ecosystem to such a degree that 1000 vertebrate species are each reduced to a survival minimum. Clearly an unacceptable state of affairs. We demand abundance of interconnected habitats through “bridges.” The main point is that life on Earth may be excessively interfered with even if diversity is upheld.

RE (3) This formulation is perhaps too strong. But considering the mass of proclamations about what humans have the right to, it may be sobering to announce a norm about what they have no right to. That is, take into account situations in which they cannot evoke and appeal to a right. The formulation is not intended to automatically condemn all actions to which we cannot invoke a right as *wrong*.

The term "vital need" is left deliberately vague to allow for considerable latitude in judgment. Differences in climate and related factors, together with differences in the structures of societies as they now exist, need to be considered. Also the difference between a means to the satisfaction of the need and the need must be considered. If a whaler quits whaling he may risk unemployment under the present economic conditions. Whaling is for him an important means. But he and his boat are urgently needed in the control of overfishing and the use of barbarous methods. And the whaling nations are rich enough to finance such inspection, especially along the coasts of Third World countries. So there is not a question of vital need to kill whales.

RE (4) The stabilization and reduction of the human population will take time. Interim strategies need to be developed. But this in no way

excuses the present complacency, the extreme seriousness of our current situation must first be realized. But the longer we wait, the more drastic will be the measures needed. Until deep changes are made, substantial decreases in richness and diversity are liable to occur: the rate of extinction of species will be ten to one hundred times greater than in any other period of earth history.

It may validly be objected that if the present billions of humans deeply change their behaviour in the direction of ecological responsibility, non-human life could flourish.

RE (5) People in the materially richest countries cannot be expected to reduce their excessive interference with the non-human world to a moderate level overnight. Less interference does not imply that humans should not modify some ecosystems as do other species. Humans have modified the earth and will probably continue to do so. At issue is the nature and extent of such interference.

The fight to preserve and extend areas of wilderness or near-wilderness should continue and focus on the general ecological functions of these areas. Very large wilderness areas are required in the biosphere to allow for continued evolutionary speciation of animals and plants. Present designated wilderness areas are too small and too few.

RE (6) Economic growth as conceived and implemented today by the industrial states is incompatible with (1) – (5). “Green” economists have to be consulted.

Whereas “self-determination,” “decentralization,” “local community,” and “think globally, act locally,” will remain key terms in the ecology of human societies, nevertheless the implementation of deep changes requires increasingly global action in the sense of action across every border. And it often turns out that local communities or areas with scattered population are uncritically in favour of so-called development and must be forced to a more ecologically responsible policy by central authorities. There are important limits to decentralization of ecologically relevant decisions.

Support for global action through non-governmental organizations becomes increasingly important. Many of these organizations are able to act globally "from grass roots to grass roots," thus avoiding negative government interference.

Cultural diversity today requires advanced technology, that is, techniques that advance the basic goals of each culture. So-called soft, intermediate, and alternative technologies are steps in this direction. What is called “advanced” technology rarely fits the name.

RE (7) Some economists criticize the term “quality of life” because it is supposed to be vague. But on closer inspection, what they consider to be vague is actually the non-quantitative nature of the term. One cannot quantify adequately what is important for the quality of life as discussed here, and there is no need to do so.

RE (8) There is ample room for different opinions about priorities: what should be done first, what next? What is more urgent? What is necessary as opposed to what is highly desirable? Differences of opinion do not exclude vigorous co-operation. “The frontier is long.”

What is gained from tentatively formulating basic views shared today by most or all supporters of the deep ecology movement? Hopefully it makes it a little easier to localize the movement among the many alternative movements. Hopefully this does not lead to isolation but rather to even better co-operation with many other alternative movements. It might also make some of us more clear about where we stand, and more clear about which disagreements might profitably be reduced and which ones might profitably be sharpened.