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Why Deep Ecology Had to Die

Ronnie Hawkins

Arne Naess formally introduced "the deep ecology movement" to the philosophical community in 1973. I discovered it somewhat later, shortly after I had my eyes opened to our situation by Paul and Anne Ehrlich's *Extinction* (1981). The fact that we humans were engaged in exterminating other species left and right came as quite a shock to me, since it was not common knowledge back then, not even for a recent zoology major. I was familiar with Ehrlich from talk shows, warning of dire consequences if we let our human population continue to climb, and while I was just a kid when I first saw that ominous J-curve, I agreed that such growth obviously couldn't go on forever. *Extinction*, however, spelled out the many direct and indirect ways in which we humans were driving other life forms out of existence around the globe, many of them tremendously wasteful and not even related to feeding people, though all accompanying our growing, collective human "demand." Not only could I not accept that all the wonderful animals I had studied in my classes were being destroyed consciously and even willfully by human beings, I couldn't understand why it wasn't clear to most people that the kinds of processes taking nonhuman life "today" would surely have an impact on our human lives "tomorrow." Given this awareness, it was no surprise that deep ecology quickly took root in my philosophical outlook.

The Early Years of Deep Ecology: Future Promise, Dashed Hopes

I first became aware of deep ecology in the pages of the *Earth First! Journal*. Coming out of the wave of outrage and optimism that was the late 60s and early 70s, I cheered the brave souls standing up against the forces degrading and destroying *life*, and the near-simultaneous emergence of both the activist environmental community and the animal rights community felt like a natural progression of some of that change-catalyzing energy. My discomfort with the animal research I had taken part in while in medical school – invasive neurological experimentation on young stumptailed macaques, which were already, unbeknownst to me, increasingly endangered in the wild by the research trade – led me to add my voice to the call for a different way of living, and when I came across Naess's writings, I found that "*the equal right to live and blossom*" for all lifeforms (Naess 1973, 96) *was*, for me, an "intuitively clear and obvious value axiom." The vision imparted in all urgency by *Extinction*, moreover, was a holistic one, forcing me to recognize not only the exploitation of individual animals but the accelerating extirpation of habitats around the world. I resonated strongly with the "deep, long-

range ecology movement" of which Naess spoke, my perception of our human place in the scheme of things enhanced but also imbued with a troubling sense of responsibility.

Around this time the recognition that human life was not the only kind of life that mattered was dawning on the political level. Tracing my own family roots back to the Missouri hill country, I first became acquainted with bioregionalism attending a couple of Ozark Area Community Congresses, followed by the First North American Bioregional Congress in 1984. David Haenke, one of the principal organizers of OACC, convened a committee at this Congress to address the formation of "a Green political organization in the USA," winning approval for a statement that began "It is essential that this organization have a bio-centric vision--one which puts the needs of all life forms at the center of decision-making..." (Feinstein 2014). The emerging Green movement drew people from the ongoing peace movement and those struggling for justice within human societies together with environmental and animal rights activists – people acutely aware of the need for changes in society aimed at ending oppression and destruction, if addressing it in different ways and under different circumstances. It seemed we were all converging toward the same goal, and I felt hopeful that positive change was coming. Little did I know that my hopes for common-cause-building were about to be dashed, and brutally.

The First National Green Gathering was held in Amherst, Massachusetts, in July of 1987. I would have attended had I not been abroad studying tropical agroecology while going for a PhD in (environmental) philosophy. It was probably fortunate that I only became aware of Murray Bookchin's infamous tirade against deep ecology after the fact, though its sting was hardly diminished in written form. Published as "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology," Bookchin spews venom at a "vague, formless, often self-contradictory, and invertebrate thing called deep ecology" (Bookchin 1987, 2), "a black hole of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas" (ibid, 4), with followers who indulged in "orgies about 'biocentrism'" (7). In contrast, social ecology, the school of thought he claimed for his own, was upheld as rejecting "a 'biocentrism' that essentially denies or degrades the uniqueness of human beings, human subjectivity, rationality, aesthetic sensibility, and the ethical potentiality of this extraordinary species" (16); the aggressive anthropocentrism was breathtaking.

I was sickened by the invective and deeply disappointed at the effect his outpouring seemed to have on the infant Green movement, fracturing the activist community and staving off the development of a biocentric consciousness – an awareness in no way demeaning to the human species, only displacing it as the sole center of value. Moreover, instead of recognizing the nature of exponential growth – enormous

numbers developing rapidly toward the end – and hence the urgency of putting on the brakes, Bookchin overlooked the increasingly destructive ecological effects of a surging human population, pronouncing "the so-called 'population debate'" "a debate that has raged for over two hundred years" (ibid, 12) and charging that deep ecology's main proponents were "splashing around in the cesspool of Malthusianism" (ibid, 14) by drawing attention to the issue. Bookchin reportedly played a major role in articulating the "Ten Key Values" adopted by the first national green organization at its founding meeting in 1984, three months after the bioregional congress at which Haenke had spoken. Biocentrism was nowhere to be found, although "ecological wisdom" topped the list; however by 2000 this too had been demoted, moving down into third place (Feinstein 2014). Green political organizations have since made some headway at state and national levels, a development I applaud, but it seems that the heady enthusiasm of the "movement" has long since dissipated, and I have often wondered what might have happened if Bookchin had not lashed out in such a vicious and frightening manner so soon after its birth. Whatever hopes I had for the initial fervor ushering in a new perception and a rapid change of attitudes and actions were dashed, as good people ran from the Malthusian label, fearful of getting spattered with "the muck of deep ecology" (Bookchin 1987, 10).

The Middle Years: Criticism and an Uncomfortable Coexistence

A decade following the Bookchin debacle found me as an assistant professor of philosophy at a large state university, teaching environmental philosophy among other courses. Deep ecology was one of several "radical" schools of environmental thought included in the first three editions of the Zimmerman et al. anthology (1993, 1998, 2001) that I used as a textbook, a book which also covered foundational readings in animal rights theory. During most of my time in that role, the leading contenders for a fruitful philosophical approach to relations with our "environment" seemed to be deep ecology and ecofeminism, and I tried to convey the important insights and legitimate criticisms associated with each one. The strongest criticism ecofeminist thinking brought to bear against deep ecology, it seemed to me, was metaphysical – in conceiving ourselves as "part of nature," do we envision an "expanding self" that engulfs and thereby conceptually extinguishes "other" forms of life, erasing differences among species as well as important differentiations within our own species, projecting what are really the narcissistic interests of an androcentric "self" upon all else in a great out-spewing of masculinist ego? The criticism was perhaps most clearly articulated by Val Plumwood (1993, 173-182). One reason the criticism had such bite, I think, is that the metaphysical charge was accompanied by perceptibly gendered differences among key

players; unlike the animal rights movement, which at the grassroots level at least was largely female, the gender makeup of the Earth First!/deep ecology camp tended to be male, with some of its leaders seemingly flaunting the tough-guy image. The charge points to a difference in the way one apprehends the world, one captured by Marilyn Frye in contrasting *the loving eye* with *the arrogant eye*: "the loving eye is one that pays a certain sort of attention" to what is *other* to itself; it "knows where one's self leaves off and another begins" (Frye 1983, 75). In human relationships, we must admit that there are many instances in which the "arrogant eye" of one partner – and more often, though not always, the male – dominates the shape of the interaction; he often "blows his stuff all over her," figuratively if not literally. In light of this frequently encountered relational distortion, responding to John Seed's proclamation that "'I am protecting the rain forest' develops into 'I am part of the rainforest protecting myself'" (Seed 1988, 36), Plumwood counters with "[w]hat John Seed seems to have in mind here is that once one has realised that one is indistinguishable from the rainforest, its needs will become one's own. But there is nothing to guarantee this –one could equally well take one's own needs for its" (Plumwood 1993, 178).

The importance of appreciating difference, and the independence of "the other" with whom one stands in relation, should not be overlooked, any more than should the biological continuity between humanity and all other life forms and the part-whole relationship our species bears with respect to the biosphere. Indeed, I think it is an essential aspect of the stance that a good scientist takes toward whatever part of nature she or he may be studying, that is, a stance of openness to learning about and from that "other." On the other hand, I didn't think John Seed, whom I got to meet when the Earth First! Roadshow came to Florida, would be guilty of making the mistake of projecting his own needs upon nature, nor would it generally apply to the conservation biologists tasked with determining what protections endangered species need in order to survive. Both lines of "radical" environmental thought critiqued the traditional anthropocentrism of western culture, an assumption of our human separateness from and superiority over the rest of nature codified by Descartes and widely taken for granted. Ecofeminist writings tended to explore the parallels between the oppression and exploitation of nonhuman beings and that of certain human subgroupings by others, uncovering the dualistic thinking that has been used for centuries to justify such practices (e.g., Plumwood 1993, 41-59). The focus of deep ecology, on the other hand, tended to emphasize an appreciation of nonhuman nature and the importance of taking a long-term, global perspective to correct our own species' trajectory on this planet. More subtle differences could be discerned, of course, but the biggest stumbling block

to the two approaches enjoying a comfortable coexistence always seemed to be the population issue.

This area of contention was spelled out in point #4 of the deep ecology platform: "The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease" (Naess 1986, 111). The "platform" was intended by Naess to be a set of short statements upon which people hailing from many different cultures and holding "a rich manifold of fundamental [religious or philosophical] views" could agree in light of our common planetary situation (Naess 1986, 106). There was nothing misanthropic about the two claims of point #4, and Naess's writings always made clear his concern for humans as well as nonhumans; the goal of population reduction was to be pursued voluntarily, possibly over "hundreds of years." To those not accustomed to thinking about species relationships within the biosphere, however, the notion of challenging the very human desire to have children and the social momentum of just about every human subgroup to "grow" and increase its competitive standing was daunting, at best. Moreover, it raised the hackles of many environmentally-concerned feminists in light of abuses committed by coercive governments against women in the name of "population control." Ariel Salleh, one of the more outspoken of the early ecofeminists, charged that the "artificial limitation of the human population" was "a solution that interestingly enough cuts right back into the nub of male dependence on women as mothers and creators of life – another grab at women's special potency" (Salleh 1984, 340). In the background of this debate, moreover, lingered the spectre of the chastisement administered to J. Baird Callicott for his honest but imprudent observation that, were we to apply the logic of Aldo Leopold's land ethic with an eye to positioning within the trophic pyramid, "[a]s omnivores, the population of human beings should, perhaps, be roughly twice that of bears, allowing for differences of size" (Callicott 1980, 326) –an observation likely prompting Tom Regan's charge of "environmental fascism" (Regan 1983, 62). As a political philosophy that promotes the coercive subordination of human individuals to the hegemonic interests of a hierarchical human grouping, fascism would appear rather different from the acknowledgment that human beings are becoming disproportionately numerous relative to other life forms on the planet. In a foretaste of things to come, however, a small-scale moral panic seems to have arisen within circles of academic environmental philosophy at the brazenness of suggesting that we consider ourselves on a level playing field with other species in this regard, one that I'm afraid resulted in the scapegoating of Callicott until he redeemed himself by duly recanting this most controversial aspect of the "ethical holism" he originally articulated.

Over time, moreover, it seems that a willingness to take a holistic perspective in and of itself gradually came to be a marker of the continuing rift between supporters of deep ecology and certain ecofeminists and other critics, who seemed not only to object to conceiving of either the biosphere or the human species as a "whole" but eventually began treating the adjective "holistic" as something of an epithet, a term requiring no further explanation for the essential badness it conveyed. Some outstanding exceptions to this attitude can be found in the early work of Marti Kheel, who maintained, in rejecting dualistic thought, that "moral worth can exist *both* in the individual parts of nature *and* in the whole of which they are a part" (Kheel 1985, 140), and in the writings of Val Plumwood, who seems to make some degree of common cause with Naess's version of deep ecology in *Environmental Culture* (2002, 196-217). Her earlier criticisms of "the expanding self" notwithstanding, Plumwood recognizes "both continuity and difference between humans and nature," acknowledging that, "in the western tradition especially, there is a need to stress continuity between self and other, human and nature, in response to the existential gulf created by dominant hyper-separated (radically distanced) and alienated anthropocentric models of nature and of human identity" (ibid, 201). She also dares to speak, if not of population issues directly, of "our species," not only in terms of its differently positioned subdivisions but *as a whole*, pointing to the alarming "reality of our ever-increasing encroachment on the natural systems on which we depend," and noting that "the present level of human resource use, in which human activity consumes as much as 40 percent of the net photosynthetic product of the earth," is "in a pattern which has been doubling every 25-30 years," a figure showing that "our species is reaching for the goal of diverting most of this planetary energy for its own immediate purposes, increasingly requisitioning for itself the biospheric resources others need to survive" (Plumwood 2002, 121).

A holistic perspective – the apprehension of living organisms and the living systems that encompass them as wholes, complex structures with emergent features that cannot be "reduced" to sets of separate component parts – is one that I think lies at the heart of the new perception that the deep ecological movement originally promised to deliver, a corrective to the "crisis of perception" that Fritjof Capra identified plaguing industrial society at the end of the twentieth century (Capra 1995). According to Iain McGilchrist (2009), it is also the perspective of the right cerebral hemisphere, which directs a very different sort of attention toward the world than the use-oriented left hemisphere, that is, an appreciative and empathetic approach to "the other" much like Frye's "loving eye." Rediscovering the ability to see things three-dimensionally, both in immediate context and also from a position of "standing back" to assess larger relationships, would seem to be a desirable goal. It also happens to be the perspective needed to correct the

mechanistic metaphysics lurking at the heart of reductionistic "scientific" materialism, inflicting a *life*-blindness that many philosophers rightfully repudiate, although some unfortunately go on to charge all of "science" with being at fault, even as science itself moves on to attain a new appreciation of *life* in all of its complexity.

The Sudden and Untimely Death of Deep Ecology

While not without its critics, deep ecology continued to hold its own alongside other approaches to environmental philosophy into the dawning of the new millennium. But any tensions that existed within the subdiscipline, or in any other field for that matter, were tempests in teapots compared to the panic that engulfed just about the entire population of the United States of America on September 11, 2001, when the Trade Center towers went down in a massive cloud of pyroclastic dust, marking an event that is still yet to be thoroughly and honestly analyzed by the academic community. It was my experience that, during the immediate post-9/11 years, a fear-laden atmosphere developed within academia, such that anyone hesitant to wave the flag and "circle the wagons" against any and all possible threats to "our group" risked being suspected of disloyalty, leading to a blanket of self-censorship descending over the university community. And while "the face of the enemy" (Keen 1986) was being painted by some zealots upon all Muslims, Afghanis, Iraqis, and just about anyone else not in the mold of the clean-cut American patriot, the longtime foes of animal rights and environmental activists were quick to use this in-group paranoia for tarring the most outspoken as similarly threatening acts of "terror" against the status quo, in this case branding them "eco-terrorists." Deep ecology, in addition to inspiring some self-identified "eco-warriors," was itself already a kind of heresy insofar as it put "the group" in question – in this case the species itself as seen "from the outside," in terms of effects beyond its boundaries. It seems to me no coincidence that the stampede away from admitted association with deep ecology emerged out of this post-9/11 context – a social milieu that, it must be said, also generated policies of military aggression and publicly admitted torture that have yet to be clearly disavowed by the majority of Anglo-American academics. I believe a social dynamic has been at play that has led to all sorts of unfortunate occurrences – a dynamic that, should we become reflexive enough to understand its workings, we might be able to defuse, or at least redirect into more appropriate collective activities in light of our species' "whole" situation.

The first clear-cut evidence that came to my attention of a move to "kill off" deep ecology, however, was the banishment of the entire "Deep Ecology" section from the fourth edition of Zimmerman's anthology (Zimmerman et al., 2005, 2001, 1998, 1993), the earlier editions of which I had used year after year in my teaching. In his preface to

the new edition, Zimmerman himself refrained from any comment on this surgical excision of deep ecology other than to say that it resulted from his decision to include a new section, "Environmental Continental Philosophy," which "required" the expurgation, and that this had been "the most difficult decision" that he had had to make as the anthology's general editor (vii). It was left to Callicott, perhaps still smarting from his own social censure, to explicitly state that "after September 11, 2001, responsible environmental philosophers wish to distance themselves from militant ideologies associated with groups that have used illegal and even violent means to achieve their ends," singling out animal rights as an "increasingly militant movement" but also calling deep ecology "vaguely anti-intellectual" and noting that its platform had been adopted by "members of the radical green movement, including its covert operatives, the 'ecowarriors' of Earth First! in the 1980s" (Callicott 2005, 6). Deep ecology was said to have been "integrated into the ecofeminism section" of the volume, but I searched in vain for a positive explication of the position.

The inclusion of continental and phenomenological approaches could have been a welcome *addition* to the Zimmerman et al. volume. However, the complete erasure of deep ecology felt like a slap in the face, with its implication that even the historical existence of this once-inspiring movement ought to be expunged from our memories. Moreover, the lead essay of the new section, "Nature as Origin and Difference," by Steven Vogel, seemed almost to have been chosen with the intention of kicking sand in the eyes of as many "true believers" in deep ecology as possible, since its take-home message was basically that what they care so deeply about, and are sometimes willing to fight for, *simply does not exist*. In addition, especially given Callicott's put-down of deep ecology as "anti-intellectual," the seeming rejection by Vogel of the validity of a scientifically informed perspective was deeply disappointing, at least to this philosopher struggling to inform students about the basics of our grim "environmental" situation today.

However, Vogel's essay presents a great deal of material that is itself open for "deconstruction." In it he offers "four views of nature," one termed "nature as origin," its "deconstructive" critique, an alternative view of "nature as difference," and finally a position highlighting "human *practice*" that has roots in Hegelian Marxism (Vogel 1999, 296). "Nature as origin" is the position that he claims proponents of deep ecology hold, and one with which I agree in certain respects. However, Vogel peppers his essay with jabs at a straw position that I refuse to own, a view he associates with "romanticism" and "vitalism" (terms that McGilchrist might be proud to reclaim), one of "nature" as "a pure world" (ibid, 301), a world "absolutely untouched by humans" (ibid, 305) that its

proponents are "pining" (299) away for. I'm afraid this cartoon image is very far from the conception that most avid defenders of nature carry around in their heads. Those on the front lines of the fight to save nonhuman species from extinction, for example, are likely to be among the most aware that very little nature today is in any sort of "pure" or "untouched" condition; conservation biologists who speak of "the eternal, external threat," the constant encroachment of human activities upon their study populations, certainly labor under no such illusions. Do I expect to see us "return" to the Garden of Eden? No; but I would like to live on a planet that was not being increasingly stripped of its full complement of life forms, and I don't think that's too much to ask of a purportedly self-aware and moral species.

Vogel accuses certain figures of "playing a kind of shell game" by "trading on various ambiguities" (304), but in his deconstruction of "nature as origin" he is the adept sliding the walnut shells around the table almost faster than the eye can see. He does admit at least once that "the *concept* of nature is culturally produced and reproduced" (298, emphasis added), but more often it is "nature" without scare quotes, not a certain concept of nature, that he asserts "doesn't exist" (ibid), leaving it unclear whether or not there might be a real peanut somewhere under the verbal shells. "*There is no nature*," he gleefully declares, at least "in the sense...of an origin" (ibid, 300, italics in original). But, ridding the term of its "romantic" fluff, I am happy to own the concept of "nature as origin," when nature is understood as "a world that precedes humans," something "ontologically prior to human activity" and human "social structures" including language (297). It is upon this notion of nature, however, subsequently reinterpreted as "the origin or foundation on which everything else is built," that Vogel unleashes the forces of "[p]oststructuralism's celebrated anti-foundationalism" (298), even though, in my understanding, it was precisely some postulated "social structures" – a rather different kind of entity – that were the target of the original poststructuralists. And it is at this point that I would ask Vogel what may be an impolite question to pose: do you deny the existence of a biosphere "ontologically prior" to the evolutionary emergence of our human species? Might Vogel, perchance, be a creationist, holding that there was nothing at all before "processes of linguistic and social construction" (ibid) brought it all into being, processes generated by humans appearing *de novo* on the planet, if not springing up purely from "the word" of God? An image comes to mind of the "Darwin tetrapod" swallowing the "Jesus fish," only to be engulfed itself by the poststructuralist piranha.

I'm not ashamed to state that I believe in the prior existence of an evolving biosphere, one in which human beings are a relatively late-appearing life form, and I "found" my

belief on conceptual structures that are ultimately "based on experiences" to be had in the human life-world, which the early Husserl believed underwrote the sciences (Klaver 2005, 283). These include my own experiences, experiences like finding fossils in rock strata and noticing homologies of form among vertebrates, as well as experiences I trust were had by others, like comparing beak sizes and shapes on birds from adjacent islands, or reading the output of instruments deciphering genomes and proteomes. Nor am I afraid of admitting to seeing nature, or the biosphere, or the entire "Earth System" under study by climate scientists, as "an immense and complex organic whole, a massive order in which humans are embedded and out of which they emerge" (Vogel 1999, 297). Adhering to this view, moreover, does not by any means necessitate falling into the dualistic trap of trying to separate an "artificial" social world from the world of nature; we humans, on this view, are very much a part of nature, as are the social processes whereby we construct the cultural and linguistic "worlds" shared by different subgroupings of our species – social processes which we are only just beginning to understand, and must grapple with, if we are to change our trajectory.

Vogel's third construal, "nature as difference," which he claims plays "a more positive" role in poststructuralist theory, is that "nature" is "the name we might give to the otherness of the world, to that which is always left out of any attempt to grasp the world as a whole and bring it entirely to light" (301). The point, we are told, is simply "that no worldview or vocabulary can call itself final and complete, that in showing the world to us in some particular way it also at the same time (and necessarily) does not show it to us in some other way," such that "it always both reveals and conceals" (ibid). But this is surely not a fresh insight; of course to describe nature, or anything at all, in terms of certain aspects is to leave other aspects out of the description, unless the "map" we make with our linguistic description is to be congruent with the "territory" itself, an admitted impossibility. But to leap from the impossibility of a "final and complete" description to a denial of *the existence of* "a world independent of a particular social and linguistic framework" (ibid) is to confuse the epistemic with the ontological. As an unabashed realist, I have no problem accepting that *there is* a "nature" that exists independently of all of our human representations of it, in all of its "concrete reality and thereness" (302); we humans are part of this "concrete reality," among other parts that are "other" to us, even if it is not a "nature we can [fully] know" (ibid). So I reject using the term "nature" to stand for "the difference between thought and thing." The nature I believe in is fully "thinglike" in its concreteness, except that the "objects" it comprises are not "things" in the way that automobiles and refrigerators and television sets are "things"; they are animated, living beings, and I would reaffirm that a nature peopled by such beings is indeed the kind of extant "thing" that we *can*

"honor, respect, protect," and attempt to preserve (ibid). The fact that this concrete nature can never be fully understood by us, let alone completely "controlled" or "mastered," simply attests to its immense complexity and aliveness, which, once the reductionist cartoon of a fully predictable universe mechanistically obeying "causal laws" is relinquished, is a state of affairs that we must recognize and accept.

Yes, "all practical transformations of the world must produce 'unanticipated' side-effects" (ibid) – a good reason why we should defend nature's integrity instead of increasingly violating it. However, having just explored yet another way of denying the existence of the nature certain people want to defend – since, on the "difference" view, nature again "isn't anything at all" (303) – Vogel turns upon that position too, and it's back to the "shell game" again. In the apparent interest of playing the game of "criticism" – surely not in the interest of working out a serious philosophy of nature – he now comes around to acknowledging that there is, in fact, in contradistinction to the Kantian thing-in-itself implication he now finds hidden in the "nature as difference" position, something he calls "ordinary nature: mountains, forests, rural landscapes" (304). Following this admission, however, he doesn't evidence any particular appreciation for it – the notion that an urban landscape might be significantly impoverished of biodiversity, living beings of the wild, nonhuman sort, in comparison to a rural one, seems to be something not only beyond his concern but possibly beyond his comprehension.

Vogel's fourth and preferred view of nature is sketched under the heading "nature and practice," a view he traces to the Hegelian idea that "we know the real world because we are involved in constituting it," but given a Marxist twist insofar as the "constituting" is to be understood "materialistically, as concrete human labor" (304). Again he hammers home the point that the world we live in has been and continues to be actively altered by human beings, and so its nature cannot be considered "untouched," contra the straw position he set up earlier. Interestingly, however, he goes on to admit that this world that we have constructed through our practices "for better or worse" is now "mostly for worse" (306), since it is "warming too quickly" (would "warming" be acceptable if it happened more slowly?) and has other indicators of being in "poor environmental health." Given his multiple rejections of "nature" being anything at all, however, he seems at a loss to explain how such judgments can be made; apparently questions of health or sustainability are to be "decided" by us, but not through such means as "studying nature," because – here the shell game returns, a lifting up of the walnut shell to again reveal the absence of a peanut – "*there is no way nature really is*" (307, italics in original). Reading this, I think, for example, of Alan Rabinowitz, the field

biologist who went to Belize to study jaguars living in the wild and what they needed to survive, and who succeeded in establishing the world's first jaguar preserve (1986). What would Rabinowitz think, if he were told that he's been wasting his time, studying jaguars, because *there is no way that they really are*? I expect he would agree that what he learned about them, he learned in part through his "practices" of intervening in their far-from-pristine habitat, but also through interacting with them as living beings having an agency of their own, an agency not simply of his linguistic or material construction.

Similarly, I imagine that the scientists studying the changing climate and other aspects of the "Earth System" would be surprised to learn that *there is no way* that planetary-scale nature *really is*. Of course the reality is dynamic, and of a staggering degree of complexity, such that there is no way we can fully "know" or precisely "predict" what the system is doing. But there are many parameters that we can measure and juxtapose, such that those who make an effort to "grasp the gestalt" can attain a rough multidimensional picture of the globe. Steffen et al. graphically document exponential increases following the mid-twentieth-century "Great Acceleration" in many things, from the human population, which tripled, to species extinctions, atmospheric CO_2 concentration, and the total number of telephones on the planet, land-line and cell, to name a few (2011, 742-743, 745). There exists quite a bit of coarse-grained data, if requiring more piecing-together the farther one looks back in time, detailing the way, to the extent that we can determine it, that the Earth System *really was* before these recent changes took place, as well as on the way it *really is* now and on where it seems to be headed, given its present trajectory. What the Earth System scientists seem to be most concerned about, moreover, is that our myriad anthropogenic changes will at some point force the system "past a bifurcation point," shoving it out of the "basin of attraction" that has maintained the relative stability of the Holocene epoch and into another (dynamically) "stable state" likely to be much less hospitable for us and our evolutionary cohorts (ibid, 755; Barnosky et al. 2012). And for those who think concern about nonhuman life forms is simply a matter of sentimentalism or "romanticism," of the nine planetary systems that have been identified as needing to be kept within certain bounds in order to maintain a "safe operating space" for humanity, the "biodiversity" system appears to be the one whose boundaries have been the farthest exceeded (Rockstrom et al. 2009, 472). The ontological point of this discussion, however, is that to try to comprehend the planetary system as a whole is to accept its robust existence, to realize that *there really is a way that the system is*, a way that is independent of the ways in which we humans think about it or "construct" it conceptually, however faithfully we may try to track it with our representations. *There really is a peanut under the walnut shell that bears the label "nature."* And the way this

immense system functions, has functioned over millennia, and will function in the future, is not simply a matter of what has "already been put there by previous [human] social practices," a most hubristic, anthropocentric idea. The sum of our collective human activities has now reached such a size that it is affecting the Earth System dramatically, but the system has an integrity of its own that we did not put there, and we'd better hope that it includes sufficient resilience to maintain its basic "state" in the face of all our anthropogenic changes (see Folke et al. 2010).

One thing that becomes apparent from Vogel's essay is that, not only does he fail to grasp the ontology of the Earth as a system, he manifests little or no evident appreciation of living entities as whole beings, let alone any empathy for them. He follows his hypothesizing of "nature" as nothing but a "gap" between our concepts and a concreteness that is always other to them by engaging in a side discussion on "the logical problem produced when one tries to speak at all about that which by definition cannot be spoken of" (303), a discussion that is interesting in light of the hemispheric asymmetry described by McGilchrist (2009). As McGilchrist characterized the right hemisphere's propensities, it is the one that puts us in empathic touch with living organisms, human and nonhuman. The supposedly "silent" right hemisphere may intuit our connectedness with other life in a way that the "linguistic left" is indeed unable to put into words, and if the left hemisphere dominates an individual's perception, then ways of relating to nature that are open to a person whose hemispheres are working in a coordinated manner may no longer be available, much less articulable. In Vogel's discussion of "nature and practice," it seems clear from his Marxist approach that his primary orientation toward the natural world is that of the use-oriented left hemisphere, seeing it simply as "material" from which humans build things; as he notes, his home was built of wood, which he traces back to two-by-fours from the lumber yard and ultimately to "timber" taken from "some forest" or other, but of the living trees and the nonhuman beings that once inhabited that forest he has nothing to say. No wonder he fails to "get" where proponents of deep ecology are coming from!

In tracing an increasing left-hemisphere dominance in western culture over time, moreover, McGilchrist also offers this take on its culmination in "post-modernism":

> [I]f reality is a construct without any objective existence, and if words have no referent, we are all absolutely impotent to say or do anything that has meaning.... Separating words from their referents in the real world, as post-modernism does, turns everything into a nothing, life itself into a game. But the coupling of emotionally evocative material with a detached, ironic stance is in fact a power game, one that is being played out by the [postmodernist] with his or her audience. ... [The approach is

> one of showing] a jokey, gamesy, but chilling indifference to subjects that spontaneously call forth strong human emotions—to gain control of others and make them feel vulnerable. … [Postmodernism] is closely allied with all forms of reductionism...[which], like disengagement, makes people feel powerful. ... Reductionism is an inescapable consequence of a purely left-hemisphere vision of the world.... Its model is simple, and it has ramified into popular culture, where it has been adopted unreflectively as the 'philosophy' of our age. Within that culture it has had a corrosive effect on higher values, inducing a sort of easy cynicism, and encouraging a mechanistic view of the human. (McGilchrist 2009, 423-424; one might easily add, to the last sentence, "and of nature as well")

Vogel and some others writing in the area of "continental environmental philosophy" do indeed seem to have something of a "jokey, gamesy" style, with a hint of mean-spiritedness lingering just beneath the surface. The proponents of deep ecology and other positive philosophical approaches to nature obviously do have strong feelings about their subject matter, which they try to express in words that do have referents, even if those feelings can't be fully articulated. When one mockingly informs them that what they care about simply does not exist, one is not contributing to the development of a better human-nature relationship, one is acting more like a schoolyard bully, as McGilchrist suggests (ibid, 424), holding their sincerity up to ridicule. But if there was a social dynamic in play by which deep ecology had to be not only banished from the scene but soundly trashed, its adherents shamed and socially "punished," then the choice of Vogel's essay to lead the new trend was surely a stroke of brilliance.

Fortunately, the second essay of the new section, "What Is Ecophenomenology?" by David Wood, came as a contrasting breath of fresh air, with a couple of caveats. Irene Klaver, in introducing the new section, had to clarify a "terminological confusion" that I continue to find disconcerting (Klaver 2005, 287). Wood hammers away at "naturalism," characterized as a view "which ultimately treats everything – including humans – as reducible to the operation of causal laws" (Wood 2003, 311), laws generally associated with "determinacy, with linearity, and with a certain kind of automatism," where all movement ultimately results from "an impact of matter on matter" (Wood, 319). These laws may work just fine in accounting for the movements of planets and billiard balls, where movement is simply a response to an external force, but it is woefully inadequate for dealing with self-propelled living beings. But why should this way of seeing the world be called "naturalism" at all, when the most "natural" way of apprehending living beings in nature is as, in the words of Paul Taylor, "teleological centers of life," whose movement comes *from within*? As Klaver explains, a "naturalist" to most

environmentally-oriented people is "someone who is well versed in natural history, especially botany and zoology," while "in a larger philosophical tradition" the term means "something very different" (Klaver 2005, 287), something that basically takes us back to the metaphysics of billiard balls. Mechanistic materialism is a reactive philosophy that emerged in the nineteenth century, following the untimely death of vitalism (see Lee 2013, 92-112); perhaps it is time for the "larger traditions" in both philosophy and science to update their metaphysics, as well as the terminology used to express their respective claims.

Wood's essay otherwise deserves praise as a herald of the new metaphysics needed, offering the beginnings of a "bridge" (312) between "causal connectedness" and intentionality. He plays no shell game with us, maintaining "[o]f course I do not really doubt the existence of things" (317), even as he calls our attention to their temporality. Wood discriminates clearly between the living and the nonliving: rocks and machines have "a certain organized integrity," but "to capture the kind of integrity we find in living organisms, we need to speak of self-organization and (dynamically) of growth, self-maintenance, self-protection and reproduction" (318); there is purposiveness in nature, with living beings "*embody[ing]*" the ends of individual and species survival (321). Perception, moreover, requires the existence of "spatially and temporally embodied beings"; living bodies and their perceptions make up "fundamental *dimensions*" of the world (311-312, italics in original). Well said – yes, these dimensions of the world, elaborated by living, perceiving beings, are what the mechanistic materialist attempts to deny and erase, leaving us with a lifeless, meaningless universe, one whose deficiencies should be starkly obvious today.

Wood gives deep ecology credit for grasping the fact that "the earth really is a strongly interconnected whole" (323), and again the issue of human population size seems to be the focal point of his criticism, the supposed calls for its "drastic" reduction on the part of deep ecologists prompting him to "understand" the charge of fascism, attributed to "an over rigid holism" on their part (ibid). Delving more deeply, but unfortunately not very explicitly, into what he finds objectionable about deep ecology, he proposes that "[t]he central question has to do with the way in which *closure* operates within deep ecology," (323, italics in original); the insistence that we take "urgent measures" to reduce the human population for the good of the planet, he claims, "offers a dramatic case study of the economy of boundary management" (ibid). Wood finds that deep ecologists are "understandably worried" about the gap between the actual impact of our collective actions upon the biosphere and "our grasp, whether individual or collective," of this impact. He points out that we human individuals can only directly

experience a small part of the vast planet we inhabit, and hence we find it hard to appreciate the state of its biogeophysical systems.

I agree with Wood that issues of "boundary management" are central to the set of concerns raised by deep ecology; attempting to view anything "as a whole" entails demarcating it as in some way "bounded" off from what is not part of "it." But I disagree – if this is indeed the problem to which he is pointing – that we are unable to "grasp" wholes such as "the Earth" or "the human species"; these may lie beyond our immediate "phenomenology of perception," but we can surely apprehend them conceptually if we make the effort, and I think it's crucial that we try, given what scientists are telling us about our global situation. Within the biosphere, moreover, we can not only conceptualize "humanity" as a biological species but also acknowledge a kind of "closure" to the type of cultural/linguistic "world" that, by and large, only humans share – a "world" that is capable of becoming increasingly self-reflexive as the active cognitive processes involved in its construction become consciously known to us. As it stands now, however, there are often tightly-policed boundaries separating different such "worlds" embraced by different subgroupings of our human species, and serious questions arise regarding the degree to which the boundaries of these super-individual subgroupings should be "defended." Moreover, turning attention to the issue of the social dynamics involved in such boundary-maintenance gets us to the heart of this essay, why deep ecology had to "die" shortly after the start of the new millennium.

The "Deep" Reasons Why Deep Ecology Had to Die

The term "deep" in "deep ecology" can be understood to mark a contrast with "shallow" approaches to environmental concerns, and it pops up again in "deep questioning," a use that Naess seems to prefer. "Deep" can convey yet another meaning, however; it describes our connectedness with all other living beings, a connectedness that is "deep" to our skin, "deep" to our genomes, "deep" to the energy that animates the protoplasm in our living cells. Since our species' closest connections are with the other primates, moreover, the depth of our connectedness is also expressed in the "deep" salience of relationships with other members of the groups we belong to and in the powerful emotions aroused if we sense, or are discovered contributing to, the violation of group norms. To bring these dynamics into focus, we need to move beyond philosophy's traditionally exclusive focus on individuals and accept that we humans are group-living animals, members of groups *as well as* individuals. "In the beginning was the group," writes political theorist C. Fred Alford (1994, 1). Frans de Waal expresses a similar observation with respect to his research subjects, which include monkeys and chimpanzees as well as humans: "the double

meaning of 'belonging to' says it all: they are part of and possessed by the group" (de Waal 1996, 169), a situation that is at once experienced as pleasurable by highly gregarious social animals and at the same time confining, restrictive of many possible behaviors in the way that life in a small village is restrictive, posing a limitation on individual freedom that de Waal terms "the social cage" (ibid, 166).

It is our "social cage" that constrains what we can think and talk about in polite society, in our departments and with our friends and neighbors; it demarcates a boundary, often implicit but no less rigid, defining what may and may not enter the discourse of our subdisciplinary groupings as well as what is acceptable in public or political speech. The functioning of the "social cage" is largely unconscious; as Katie Marie Norgaard describes the processes preventing the inhabitants of Bygdaby, Norway, from explicitly acknowledging the evidence of climate change apparent all around them, "[s]ocial norms of attention—that is, the social standard of 'normal' things to think about—are powerful, albeit largely invisible social forces shaping what we actually *do* think about" (Norgaard 2011, 112). Not only are these social forces active largely below the level of consciousness, moreover, it may be that the stronger they are, the less we are aware (or want to be aware) of them. In a classic experiment designed to investigate why "bystanders" often fail to help others in distress, for example, Latane and Darley found that subjects' reports of how "influenced" they felt by the presence of others ran "directly counter to the experimental results"; the presence of a "stooge" refusing to help inhibited the helping behavior of one group of subjects dramatically, far more than did the presence of a friend or a stranger, yet those same subjects reported experiencing the least amount of influence (1970, 65). If such findings are indicative, they seem to show that *we are strongly influenced by the social cage, but we don't want to admit to ourselves how much we are influenced by it; we don't want to "see" ourselves as if "from the outside,"* in part because to do so would catch us acting not so much as autonomous individuals but more as parts of larger social groupings, caught up as we are in powerful processes that tend to maintain these entities as wholes with their own emergent properties, to which we tend to be subservient.

In a similar vein, Lorraine Code speaks of a "social imaginary," comprising "often-implicit but nonetheless highly effective systems of meanings, metaphors, and interlocking explanations-expectations within which people, in specific time periods and geographical-cultural climates, enact their knowledge and subjectivities and articulate their self-understandings as knowers" (Code 2006, 245). When one explicitly questions tacit group norms and thereby makes the operation of the social cage visible, one risks receiving strong negative feedback from other members of the group. Code recounts

how Dr. Nancy Olivieri came to be construed as a "whistleblower" for challenging, from within the ranks, the extant social imaginary of knowledge production within her medical research community (ibid, 237-277); more recently she acknowledges the riskiness of whistleblowing in the context of addressing climate change skepticism and "social ignorance" (Code 2014). Alford, in an empirical study of the personal accounts of whistleblowers, supports her claim with the statistic that "somewhere between half and two-thirds" of whistleblowers lose their jobs (Alford 2001, 18), and notes that many of them are also often ostracized and pathologized, written off as mentally unstable or morally bankrupt, labeled "nuts and sluts," as whistleblowers joke among themselves (104). It is Alford's analysis of what happens to the whistleblower, and why, that I see at play in the "death" of deep ecology.

Just as the first "scapegoat" was designated to carry off the sins of the Israelites, cleansing and unifying the group through its suffering as it bore away their collective "shadow" – what the tribe would rather not know about itself – into the wilderness, so whistleblowers are scapegoated for what they know about the sins of the "tribes" they belong to. The whistleblowers studied by Alford are the rare individuals who, unlike their colleagues within the organizations they work for, are unable to "double," to form a second identity capable of living within the bounds of the organization's social cage, insofar as doing so would require abandoning the ethical integrity of their original identities. To the other members of the group, those who act as parts subservient to the organization, "the most terrifying thought is that representatives of the outside are on the inside, traitors in our midst"; "[t]he whistleblower becomes an insidious disease, a boundary violator" (99). As Alford summarizes, "[i]n creating the whistleblower, the organization is stating that there is a certain type of person it cannot stand in its midst, not necessarily one who goes outside the organization but one who appears to remember *that there is an outside*" (Alford 2001, 20, emphasis added).

Those who subscribe to the deep ecology platform, and especially its controversial fourth point, while themselves members of the human species, are individuals who are able to conceptualize, and criticize, its growing size and present trajectory. They are not afraid to "blow the whistle" on their own group, even as they share with all humans, indeed all living beings, the deeply rooted impulse to reproduce. Like organizational whistleblowers, deep ecologists are guilty of remembering that our human project *has an outside*, that it can encroach into the living spaces of beings that are "other" to it, living outside its "boundaries." While in times of relative peace such an outlier viewpoint might be tolerated in environmental discourse, in an era of moral panic over possible threats to a tightly bounded political subgrouping of our species, the power

structure within environmental philosophy circles had to throw out their own obvious boundary violators, and drive them off, like the scapegoat, into the "wilderness" they held so dear. The wellsprings of this scapegoating process lie deep within our nature as animals "of the group"; to circle their own wagons against a larger society already suspicious of any recognition at all that humans might be surrounded by an environment, "responsible" environmental philosophers had to purge the traitors from their midst. And this, I suggest, is why deep ecology had to "die."

THE FUTURE: MOVING BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SOCIAL CAGE?

Many promising pathways lie ahead for environmental philosophy to explore, I think, if we can loosen the boundaries of our subdisciplinary social cages enough to pick up on the best ideas available from both "sides" of these defensively constructed barriers. This, however, will entail relinquishing the automatically pejorative use of words like "holism," "naturalism," "essentialism," "universalism," "fascism," and so on – if there is a reason to make a criticism, it should be spelled out in terms that help correct the problem, not leveled by simply waving toward a projected "ism" without bothering to define the terms of the charge. Deep ecology, at the very least, is a strand of thought within environmental philosophy that has inspired many over the four decades or so of its lifetime to date. To pretend it never existed is to be party to a falsehood; to try to kill it off before it has ceased to inspire would seem to be a shame.

Moreover, fostering the ability to consider our human groupings from both the inside and the outside, as I think examining the attempted killing off of deep ecology forces us to do, can enable an exploration of the phenomenology of participating in group processes like scapegoating, becoming aware of the feedback loops of praise and blame and the "good feeling" that can accompany going along with the crowd even when it's at cross purposes with what one would do as an individual. Can we think of instances when the urge to "group up" has been so strong that it has overridden our own direct perception, as in the Solomon Asch experiment? What's it like to paint "the face of the enemy" on members of an "other" group, and how does one find a way to overcome this simplistic, dualistic logic? Can we distinguish the subordination of our individual selves to certain forms of human subgrouping from the much-feared subordination to an ecological whole?

Ramachandra Guha, whose critique of deep ecology is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper, was right on target in identifying militarism, along with consumption, as a major cause of environmental destruction (1989, 234). Military operations are a huge driver of the great grab for fossil fuels presently underway, fuels to be used in boundary defense (and offense) between subgroupings of our human species, perpetuating

violent conflicts that recklessly spew carbon into the atmosphere and wreak environmental havoc in countless other ways. Moreover, reassessing the social dynamics motivating "good people" to go out and kill strangers they have never met should also entail examining the processes that make people willing to subordinate themselves within hierarchies, social structures that Bookchin was correct to criticize.

On this note, perhaps we should consider what is meant by "ecofascism" once again. David Orton has made the point that the proponents of the "wise use" movement in North America – those eager to exploit living nature unmercifully for the benefit of humanity and especially that of their own pockets, and who can presently mobilize the coercive power of the state to get their way almost all of the time – are the ones for whom the term is most appropriate (Orton 2000). Sadly, most other environmental philosophers have been so busy running from the term themselves that they have failed to see that it is "Goliath," an emergent social structure maintained by group forces operating through the beliefs and activities of thousands of individuals who are largely unconscious of the effects of the roles they play, which is the real "fascist" here, not the handful of Davids who spring up from time to time to challenge it. Callicott, for example, illustrates the guidance of his "first- and second-order principles," designed to make clear that our primary duties are still to fellow humans, by suggesting that, for Sartre's young man caught in a dilemma between fighting for France and staying with his aged mother, the right choice would be to defend the nation-state, presumably because the existence of this "transorganismic entity" takes precedence over the happiness of one of its individual members (Callicott 1999, 126-127). But, given the world we live in, are we now being asked to choose between loyalty to a particular human subgrouping, operating in a self-justifying, hegemonic manner, and loyalty to the living Earth itself? Even David Wood, it seems, got caught up in the post-9/11 panic, declaring that there are sometimes "emergencies" forcing one to classify others as either "friend or foe," even as he admits that such a response is a product of "the reptilian brain" (Wood 2003, 323). For Wood to say "the argument that there are circumstances in which democratic societies might suspend democracy is not as totalitarian as it might seem" (324) is quite chilling in light of the attacks on civil liberties in general as well as on all kinds of activism that have followed in the wake of our so-called war on terror.

The "war on terror," like the "war on drugs" – an earlier mass movement legitimating the expansion of invasive, coercive state power that, I would maintain, constitutes an example of a large-scale, institutionalized moral panic – is slowly being unmasked as an embarrassingly shameful hurricane of irrationality that, having been instigated by a relatively few manipulative individuals, swept up many otherwise reasonable people in

its frenzy; the recent release of the US Senate's report on the CIA's torture program illustrates one aspect of this whirlwind that most Americans still would rather not acknowledge. And it seems, somewhere in this post-9/11 decade-and-a-half, university faculty in many fields lost their ability to integrate what they "know" into a coherent picture of what's going on, either for educating the public, discussing among themselves, or even analyzing in their own heads, let alone making moral judgments about it. This seems to be the case with many of the newer technologies – fracking, deepwater drilling, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, geoengineering – that remain largely off limits to intellectual debate, and even the die-hard reductionists think better than to apply their beloved Newtonian physics to the "collapse" of the Trade Center towers. There has come to be a certain taboo-ization of open and honest discourse on many topics, a stubborn unwillingness to engage with the current social imaginary that is hardly to the credit of the academy.

Deep ecology introduced a way of perceiving ourselves within the larger whole of the biosphere, one that makes us stand back from fixation on the travails of our human subgroupings, with all their associated rivalries and enmities, and consider the ways that all of us as a species affect the "otherness" of nature; it might help us break through these social taboos as well. Moreover, if the growth of human populations everywhere is in itself a driving factor in the accelerating extinction of nonhuman life forms, this is a relationship that we need to allow ourselves to "see," not hide from, nor we should we try to cover up its moral implications. "Standing back" to gain a large-scale perspective does not in itself entail the detachment and moral disconnection of a drone operator. We don't need to reduce our human population "by whatever means necessary," such as "randomly and indiscriminately shooting [its] members," as Callicott describes our culture's commonly adopted approach to overpopulating deer (1999, 124) and the one still being taken toward certain "other" human subgroups – and in fact we needn't treat nonhuman populations in this way either (see Bekoff 2013). In choosing to think differently from the currently prevailing winds, we humans can collectively exercise a great deal of choice over the number of children we bring into the world, as well as how much we consume and whether we wage war; to pretend otherwise is to buy into the determinism of a metaphysics badly out of date. Accepting responsibility for the fact that many unfortunate actions have been carried out *by groups of which we are members*, including the larger, all-encompassing "group" of our species, is not to deny that different subgroupings have contributed in different ways; it is simply a needed step to take toward the rectification of all these wrongs. To the extent that the "whistleblowing" of deep ecology contributes to this realization, its proponents deserve

praise for their courage in standing up to the group, not condemnation and premature burial for their audacity.

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