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An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement and Diverse Ecosophies

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The **Trumpeter's** mission is to pursue and present *ecosophies*. "Ecosophy" was introduced by Arne Naess in 1972 in an ecophilosophy talk given at a conference in Eastern Europe on the future of research. He coined the word from two ancient Greek roots, *ecos* - meaning home place, and *sophia* - meaning wisdom. Naess used the term to refer to any articulated philosophy of life in harmony with ecocentric values. Pursuing an ecosophy is searching for ecologically wise and harmonious living. There are multitudes of diverse ecosophies.

Ecosophies are often elaborated through an existing ultimate philosophy such as Buddhism or Taoism, or they can be premised on pure normative principles and elaborated through philosophical analysis.

Naess calls his own ecosophy, Ecosophy T. It is deeply influenced by *Norwegian friluftsliv* (a movement to experience living in the outdoors, see **Trumpeter**, Spr 97, p. 93f), Gandhian nonviolence, Mahayana Buddhism and Spinozan pantheism. The T stands for Tvergastein, Naess' mountain hut in Norway, where much of Ecosophy T was worked out. A basic norm in Naess' Ecosophy T is self realization! - for all beings.

In his ecophilosophy framework for cross cultural analysis of grass roots social-political movements, Naess distinguishes between four levels of discourse (see the chart below). In forming cross cultural global movements some general consensus develops that focuses the movement through *platform principles* (as is the case for many movements — literary, philosophical, social, political, etc.), such as the principles of social justice, or the principles of peace and nonviolence, or the principles for the Deep Ecology Movement.

The aim of ecophilosophy is a **total** or **comprehensive view** of our human and individual situation. We move toward a total view via deep questioning to ultimate norms and premises, and articulation to practices. Much cross cultural work is done at the level of platform principles, and we can have a high level of agreement at this level that Naess calls Level II. From level II we can engage in **deep questioning** and pursue articulating our own ecosophy, which might be grounded in some major worldview or religion, such as Pantheism or Christianity. This level of ultimate philosophies is called Level I. **There is considerable diversity at this level.** From level II principles we can develop specific policy recommendations and formulations, or Level III. From Level III application leads us to practical actions, Level IV. There is considerable diversity at the level of policies, but even more at the level of practical actions.

The world has great cultural diversity related to history, specific characteristics

of the ecosystem wherein cultures dwell, as well as rich biological and ecological diversity. The first platform principle of the DEM is that intrinsic value is found in the human **and** natural world. The second is that diversity and richness of life are good in themselves. (For the whole platform see below.) One can support the DEM and also the movements for social justice and world peace.

Naess does not refer to followers of the DEM as deep ecologists, and he does not use the term "shallow ecologist". He speaks of **supporters** or **followers** of the DEM. The movement is characterized by its platform principles, which do not represent an ultimate philosophy or ism. Naess' ecophilosophy framework of analysis for the environmental movement and crisis is an inclusive and comprehensive one, aimed at getting a total view, understanding holistically. Ecophilosophy helps us to appreciate and live in harmony with diverse ecosophies, as well as to develop our own ecosophy.

Comment: In deep questioning we move toward ultimate premises and norms. In the process of derivation and application we move toward platform support and developing policies and practical actions. This is a continuous back and forth process which keeps our understanding and practices in harmony with a changing world. In the three grassroots movements mentioned above the principles are international. It is important to note that there can be great diversity at the level of ultimate philosophies. We do not all have to subscribe to the same ultimate ecological philosophy in order to work co-operatively for the benefit of the planet and its communities of beings. [The above chart is a simplification of Naess' Apron Diagram. See Drenghson and Inoue, Editors, **The Deep Ecology Movement**, North Atlantic Books, 1995, pp. 10-12).]

## **Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement**

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy **vital** human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.

5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
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 to try directly or indirectly to implement the necessary changes.

(Quoted from **Deep Ecology** by Bill Devall and George Sessions, Gibb Smith, Salt Lake City, 1985.)

Comment: These DEM platform principles are endorsed by a growing number of people from diverse cultures. Supporters do not all share the same ultimate philosophies, some are Buddhists, some Christians, some Neo Pagans, some Taoists, some develop their own ecosophy, and so on. Their support for the principles of the movement leads them to practical actions, some collectively pursued, and others unique to their own philosophy and situation. Those who support the platform are called followers or supporters of the Deep Ecology Movement. (For a good discussion of the difference between ecosophies, Naess' deep questioning approach and the Deep Ecology Movement see Harold Glasser's paper "On Warwick Fox's Assessment of Deep Ecology," **Environmental Ethics** 19, Sp 97, pp. 69-86.)

## Mind in the Waters

### Frank Trocco

We were in the Everglades National Park: Twenty students, three faculty, and billions of birds, alligators, mosquitoes, and snakes. Southern Florida is one of the best, and saddest, ecosystems in which to teach environmental education (EE) field studies. On the one hand, it is an awesome environment, rich with life of every description. On the other, since all that life is dependent on access to water, and human tinkering, draining, diversion, and pollution of the water systems has been so dramatic, the peninsula shows the scars of development everywhere. One moment your students are marvelling at flocks of nesting Wood Storks perched atop a dense stand of aquatic Bald Cypress trees, the next

they are driving by acres of drained swamp being converted into housing lots: the former nesting sites of the dwindling Wood Storks.

The EE analysis that we employed while in natural areas was quite unique for the eighties. We were training graduate students, and for a full year of field work our class groups would live in (i.e., camp, hike, and travel through) a myriad of ecosystems: forests, plains, deserts, badlands, bogs, mountains, marshes, and coastal lands. Generally, our time was spent interpreting these areas as complex communities of plants, animals, and minerals which were co-inventing and co-evolving their existence, each one on the border of other communities, and each one made up of communities (just as the human body can be seen as a cooperating community of organisms). With this "community within a community" conception, it eventually became impossible to separate the image of "ecosystem" from that of "community."

Because of this outlook, it was obvious (although, in retrospect, it may only have been obvious to those of us who were living daily in the out-of-doors) that we could interpret the dynamics of our human community (of twenty-three scholars) analogously to the ways that we looked at the ecosystems that we were actively investigating. That is, one can make generalizations about all ecosystems, and make statements about specific ecosystems, that apply to our human-ecosystem community. As this examination deepened, the words "ecosystem," "community," "natural community," and "human community" became interchangeable in our seminars and discussions. We found that our inner and outer terrains were identical.

This methodology had a good deal of flexibility, and could illustrate both a rudimentary metaphorical similarity, or a deep non-metaphorical correspondence, between the individual and nature. For example, a wild ecosystem, such as a forest, is a combination of diverse plants, minerals, and animals working in resonance with each other. Regardless of whether we interpret them as fundamentally competitive or cooperative environments, it's unmistakable that a certain level of overall harmony exists in vibrant ecosystems. Indeed, the very fact of their continued existence over millions of years suggests qualities such as interdependence, resilience, adaptability, and good (although inexplicable) communication skills. Certain metaphors can be drawn out of these ideas that correspond to human situations and issues. In this way, the concepts of forest ecology can provide apt metaphors in discussions about communication and cooperation among human communities. Various examples can be pulled out of the natural history of any vigorous ecosystem to provide metaphors about human need for the attributes that wild systems have developed over eons: resilience, diversity, longevity, and overall cooperation.

An extension of this idea is that people actually can be described as small replicas of the Earth. In our bodily functions and homeostatic balance, we mimic the vast complexity of the planet as a whole. Since humans evolved from the chemicals and stuff of the earth, it makes a certain amount of, perhaps far-

fetched, sense, that the earth, and its ecosystems, were the original template for the human design (and, by extension, for the architecture of all living things).

But a question arises. After all, we were teaching graduate students to interpret wild ecosystems, and this analysis was far afield from the usual fare of food chains, bird identification, and ecological systems theory. Why did we work with this type of commentary that seems to blur the boundaries between wild and human communities? Simply, because it was our *intention* to blur those boundaries. In confusing the borders, we hoped to unify the two communities.

One of the biggest issues in EE is in providing an academic setting where individuals are able to recognize and understand their profound attachment to the planet. The typical fare in EE programs, food chains, animal and plant identification, environmental issues, ecological systems theory, and even wilderness experiences, has only a limited effect. Their combined impact can remain relatively shallow in relation to the years of cultural conditioning and pressure that Westerners are embedded in. However, when we associated a student's community, and eventually their individual identity, with planetary ecosystems, a kinship between the human community and wild ecosystems developed, and the student's bond with the earth was strengthened. It became an even stronger tool when the explication was able to touch an individual's psyche - as the similarity moved beyond metaphor.

I was walking along a trail with Carolyn, a Masters student in EE, heading for the perimeter of the Everglades swamp with our assembly of students. The emotions among the members of our group ranged between excited and mildly overwhelmed, and Carolyn was definitely at the overwhelmed edge. We were about to leave the trail and hike off into a remote waist-deep section of the glades. All morning, the scuttlebutt in the group had been of snakes, spiders, and alligators, somewhat overshadowing the added discomfort of wading for hours in cold murky water. Why were we doing this crazy thing? We were looking for orchids. A botanist, who was studying a rare southern species, had promised to take us along on her research expedition to help her locate the elusive arboreal flowers.

Carolyn was beside herself. She had been in the middle of some tense emotional issues lately, and the closer we got to the water the more scared she became. I assured her that it was not mandatory for her to go on the hike, and that she was free to go back to our camp for the morning, and read about orchids instead. This relieved her, but she said that she'd walk along with us until we stepped off into the water. It was then that I noticed, it must have been in the tone of her voice, that she really did want to go into the swamp. It was simply a scary and unfamiliar experience, and she was preoccupied with the troubles she was having. What she actually wanted, she said, was to learn about the swamp, but also get over the internal issues that were weighing her down. I said to her,

"You know, perhaps understanding the swamp, can help you understand your-

self.” (We had been discussing the ideas around community and ecosystems for some weeks.)

”Whatdayamean? Like, I’m a community and the swamp is a community and I have to learn to cooperate with myself and be my own best ally? Not be afraid when there aren’t things to be afraid of?”

”Well, yes, but it can go deeper than that. After all, there are real things to be wary of in the swamp, like snakes and alligators, but there’s also something that can be quite a bit scarier.”

”I don’t understand.”

”We all have deep dark stuff in our psyches that we’re afraid of. You’re not the only one. Most of the time we may not even know it’s there, but it doesn’t go away, and it waits for the opportunity to control our behavior. It’s only when we penetrate down to that stuff, really understand it, and look at it in the daylight, that its hold on us softens.”

”Yeah, I know. I’ve been going to therapy for years trying to get at those things, and hopefully get them out of my mind.”

”Yes, I think that various kinds of therapy can work quite well to free us from some of our crazy-making, but sometimes you have to actually look at, and touch, those hidden places in order to comprehend them.”

”You mean I have to physically touch my consciousness? My brain? Give me a break, Frank. How am I supposed to do that?”

”Well, we’ve been saying for weeks that not only are human communities and wild ecosystems the same, but that the earth and people are identical. One mimics the other. We are smaller versions of the planet.”

”Right.”

”So, if that’s true, if we are the earth, if there is a kind of Zen-like oneness or congruency there, then looking and searching and understanding the dark, hidden, and scary places on the planet is the same thing as looking at those places in ourselves. Travelling into wild places gives us another perspective on who we are as people.”

”You mean that going in the swamp is like going into my brain?”

”Perhaps, let’s say your psyche or consciousness.”

”That’s weird. But it makes a certain amount of sense, if I just think about it as a metaphor. Wilderness areas are the wild, untamed, unknown, and uncharted portions of the planet - just like I have wild and unknown places in my consciousness. If I go into those places on the earth, and examine them, really

look closely at the hidden recesses, perhaps it will help me understand my own dark secrets?"

"I think its worth a try. And, Im not totally sure it's a metaphor."

Carolyn went on the hike. I can't say that it was easy for her, or that she solved all her problems, but two-to-three hours of sloshing through dark water and weeds, with the image that she was travelling through her consciousness, was the beginning of a new perspective about wilderness. This approach became a standard posture whenever our group went into unfamiliar wild places.

That evening we attended a ranger talk at the campground. The ranger showed us slides of two maps of the world which illustrated the decline of wilderness over the last hundred years. Wilderness areas were in black, and the 1885 map had plenty of it. The 1985 map was different. Vast areas of black had turned white, representing development, and the black areas that were left were chickenpoxed with white squares.

I thought to myself about the implication of these two images: "What if wilderness is the primal consciousness of the earth, and what if the earth's consciousness and the human psyche are interactive?" Yes, these are enormous leaps, but the suggestion is momentous. It means that as we change the wilderness, as we cut down the forests, fill the swamps, and pave the prairies, we are altering and polluting, not simply our physical environment, but our minds. Our human consciousness is changing, perhaps adapting, to a non-wilderness world. The very way that we think is at stake, but curiously, there's no way to tell. We can't measure it. What could possibly be our barometer to distinguish human consciousness in the 1800s from our consciousness in the 1900s? Perhaps, only the maps themselves.

In the end, were left with where we are now: A severely depleted Earth, and vast ecosystems made into the shadow of what they once were. I have faith that if we ever lessen our relentless assault on the planet, the Earth will remember how it used to be and replenish itself. If not, it's easy to project even less wilderness as time goes on. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, every infant is born into a world with less and less wild places, and more and more buildings and pavement. Their consciousness is developing on an Earth that, every moment, contains less of its original and pristine biosphere. In this light, human consciousness can be pictured as a slowly increasing planet/person aphasia.

If our psyches are in collaboration with what is left of the wild earth, there is great promise in that union. It's time to put our minds together, so we can get our minds back.

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