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In A Dark Wood, Searching For Light In The Forest Debates: A Reply To Alton Chase

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Chase's Argument

How can someone write a five-hundred-page book on the ecology movement and the politics of forests in the Pacific North-west, including over 80 pages of footnotes, and get the story so wrong? That was the question that perplexed me when I finished reading Chase's *In A Dark Wood*. Reading the first several chapters of this book, I thought Chase was about to engage in some constructive social and philosophical analysis. Instead, each chapter got weirder and weirder. I felt like Alice walking through the looking glass.

Chase claims he is engaged in an objective analysis of the ecology movement. He claims he is fair to both the ecologists and the loggers. Not so. His book debunks and discredits the ecology movement and presents industrial loggers as innocent victims of what he calls "the rising tyranny of ecology." He portrays forest activists as preservationists who are guided by biocentrism—a philosophy that, he claims, unwittingly leads to fascism.

Chase claims that ecology is not a science. It is a philosophy grounded in German metaphysics, especially in Hegel. Chase claims the philosophy of ecology is dangerous to Western civilization. He dismisses Arne Naess as just another misguided follower of Hegel, even though Naess has grounded much of his own philosophy in Spinoza, *not* Hegel.

In his chapters on the battles over forests in the Pacific Northwest, Chase dismisses forest ecologists as people who confuse fact with value, who are engaged in poor science, and who are activist preservationists who disregard the findings of their own studies.

Chase says nature is change, not stability. Nature is resilient, civilizations are fragile. Based on those premises, Chase argues that the Endangered Species Act is both bad science and based on anti-human philosophy. Large scale salvage logging, below cost timber sales, clear cutting of ancient forests, and human caused extinctions are all part of wise use forestry.

In Chase's narrative, the most misguided, dangerous theory in ecology is the theory of ecosystem stability. There is no "balance of nature," says Chase, and ecosystem management is another term for preservation.

Like the notion of purposeful evolution, the ecosystem served as an ultimate standard of morality, changing the very meaning of life. Just as evolution-as-progress seemingly enhanced the significance of humans, so ecosystems seemed to diminish it. As eugenics measured people by where they fit on the scale of being, the ecological vision judged them on whether they performed or usurped their proper role in the ecosystem. (p. 118)

The idea of biocentrism won, according to Chase, in the cultural battle over forests of the Pacific Northwest. After 1990, the idea of biocentrism became part of the ideology of the upper class supporters of the ecology movement, part of official government policy, and accepted by forest activists.

Embracing teleology, it confused philosophy with science and fact with value. Filling a vacuum created by the death of the Lockean consensus, it embraced new values based on systems ecology, which from the beginning was less a preservation science than a program for social control. Supposing that protecting ecosystems was the highest imperative for government, it increasingly viewed the exercise of individual liberty as a threat. (p. 413)

The battle over forests of the Pacific Northwest, and especially the battle over old growth redwoods in Humboldt County, California, is a battle over the philosophical bedrock of Western civilization. This battle is class warfare. “Promoted by government, activists, and scientists, biocentrism had become a philosophy of America’s ruling classes, the media, government, universities, church hierarchy, and teaching professions.” (p. 359)

In the last half of this book, in the chapters on the forests of the Pacific northwest, Chase sounds more and more like he is writing a public relations statement for the industrial logging industry—there is no need to reduce levels of timber extraction from the excessive cutting levels of the 1970s; there are trees everywhere; massive salvage logging is good for forest health; there is no biodiversity crisis; industrial loggers are exercising their individual property rights; clearcutting a forest is just like nature’s way of forest change; biocentrists are political extremists who are attacking hard-working logger families.

In chapter after chapter, Chase adopts the strategy of throwing barrages of bombs hoping that one or more will hit its target. Where to begin? As a forest activist, social observer of many of the events and meetings Chase describes in this book, a student of social change, and a supporter of the deep, long-range ecology movement, I find Chase’s narrative misleading at best and perverse at worst.

Chase ignores writings by philosophers who are supporters of the deep, long-range ecology movement. Having dismissed Arne Naess as a philosopher who is reviving German metaphysics (which he is not) he doesn’t even comment on Naess’ many books and articles on the shallow and deep, long-range ecology movements nor on the “platform” of the deep, long-range ecology movement.

Chase dismisses biocentrism without even giving his readers a clear definition of it. He asserts that biocentrism is just another name for preservationism. Not so. Max Oelschlaeger in his much more scholarly and thorough book, *The Idea of Wilderness*, clearly distinguishes between preservationism and ecocentrism:

Ecocentrists believe that natural systems are the basis of all organic existence, and therefore possess intrinsic value, humankind is an element within rather than the reason to be of natural systems, and is hence dependent upon intrinsic value, ethical human actions (actions which promote the good life for humankind) necessarily promote all life on earth (preserves such intrinsic values as diversity, stability, and beauty). (p. 294)

On Holism

Arne Naess’ intuition, and that of many supporters of the deep, long-range ecology movement, is that single individuals have intrinsic value. The importance of a species is

immeasurably greater than that of an individual. However the idea of intrinsic value is categorically different from importance. Naess doubts that an ecosystem can have intrinsic value.

In my own books, not cited or discussed by Chase, I discuss the importance of developing ethical relations with individual bears, mountain lions, and other top predators in our own neighborhood (especially in "Dwelling in Mixed Communities" in *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends*). In my interviews with forest ecologists and many supporters of the deep, long-range ecology movement, I find they take a mild holistic approach rather than a hard holism. In the current political situation in the United States, mild holism, emphasis on communal responsibilities and on community stability is a balance to the excessive egoism and individualism that pervades political discussions. Many social libertarians in the United States assert that even the mildest form of government regulation of excessive logging, destructive road-building on unstable slopes, destructive land use practices that lead to water pollution problems for downstream users, and protection of productive wetlands is "fascism."

On Class Warfare

Chase does not even mention the imperatives of capitalism and the political and economic power of international logging corporations. The impact of massive clear cutting by these corporations on the landscape of the Pacific Northwest is displayed in the book *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry* (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1994). One difference between a clear-cut and a forest fire or other natural event, is that nature never built massive networks of logging roads and removed all the biomass from a forest to be transported to a lumber mill.

Corporations are primary actors in the battle over forests of the Pacific Northwest. Discounting the future at ever more rapid rates, corporate capitalism has accelerated logging during the past half century. There is no evidence that industrial forestry can ever grow an old-growth forest, and especially no evidence that industrial foresters will ever grow two-hundred to a-thousand-year-old redwood trees. Chase claims there is no consensus on a definition of old-growth forest, but by any reasonable definition, old-growth redwoods are not a renewable resource.

On Social Policy Concerning Forest Dynamics

Chase makes no mention of the intensive discussions among forest activists on developing social policy that account for naturally occurring changes in forests at the stand level and landscape level of analysis. *The International Journal of Ecoforestry*, for example, has published numerous articles on the role of fire and disturbance in forest systems. Intellectuals, scientists, and activists in the deep, long-range ecology movement are well aware that forests are dynamic systems. The ecoforestry approach to forests and the conservation biology approach, taken by The Wildlands Project, both explicitly recognize the importance of natural disturbance. Ecologists working with The Wildlands Project explicitly propose planning for large core wildlands reserves that will allow for maximum natural disturbance be it fire, flood, or drought for example. Chase's chapter on The Wildlands Project (Chapter 26) is so superficial that the reader has no sense of the extensive development of regional wild lands projects currently underway nor the theoretical grounding of The Wildlands Project. Chase commits a fallacy of slippery slope when he says "In addition to entailing perhaps the forced relocation of tens of millions of people, the project risked ecological calamity as well." (p. 356) For a thorough statement of philosophy and current program of The Wildlands Project, readers can obtain *Wild Earth*, "The First Thousand Days of the Next Thousand Years," (Winter, 1996)

Having refused to discuss various philosophies of Nature and nature as the Tao, as that which is, as Buddha, and having rejected nature as having intrinsic value, and having rejected the view that forests have a life beyond human comprehension, Chase is left with the postmodern position that nature is only a social construction. Since, to Chase, ecology is not a “true” science, there is no way for ecologists or supporters of deep, long-range ecology movement, to rationally respond to him. He puts us in a true double bind, a kind of evil that can never be forgiven. He introduces Kuhn’s theory of paradigm changes in science, but then asserts that while the Copernican paradigm change revealed true, objective attributes of nature, biocentrism is only a change in our perception of nature. (p. 260) Chase thus sets himself up as an arbitrator of truth, in contradiction to the Kantian view that he asserts is the basis of his criticism of ecology.

My Spiritual Journey

Chase used his interpretation of my spiritual journey as a central pathway in the birth of biocentrism in the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Chase sees my spiritual journey as fundamentally flawed. (Chapter 10)

Chase has never walked with me into the dark woods, or in the massive clear cuts, or along the streams and seashores of the Pacific Northwest. He has never sat with me in zazen nor attempted to interview me on my perspective on my own spiritual journey. When a man makes such harsh statements about another man’s spiritual path, he would be more compassionate by providing food for that man’s spiritual growth. Chase does not provide any food, only poison.

I did come to California in 1968, but not, as Chase asserts, on a spiritual quest. I came to take a job at Humboldt State University in Arcata. When I arrived in Arcata, the old logging culture was still alive and active. The first Redwood National Park bill had just been signed by Lyndon Johnson, and the Sierra Club was considered a radical preservation group.

When I came to Humboldt county I was not an activist in the Sierra Club or any other conservation group, but when I saw my first truckload of ancient redwood rushing down highway 101 to the Arcata Redwood mill, I knew that something was wrong. I was outraged—not my sense of aesthetics, but the sense that too many ancient redwood forests had already been cut. The integrity of some watersheds should remain intact.

I was not a hippie, was not attracted to the drug culture or counterculture. I had no desire to stop logging. I only sensed that at least one intact watershed of ancient trees should remain beyond my lifetime. Why can’t we stop cutting in just one watershed—lower Redwood Creek? “We want jobs and money,” was the answer from foresters, loggers, and many local intellectuals. That answer was not adequate to me then, and it is still not adequate for me now, two decades later after even more billions of board feet of timber have been removed from the forests of Humboldt county.

The narrow, economist’s view of the forest as a “renewable natural resource”, was inadequate to me. The economist’s view provided no basis for ethics, no answer to the question of how humans should live in relation to the forest?

David Rains Wallace, writer and student of ecology, calls northwestern California and southern Oregon, “the Klamath knot”, where theories of ecology lead to more questions than they answer. In this region the science of ecology helps explore the mysteries of the place but does not fully explain this place. My sense of place, my growing awareness of this place, I discovered, evoked in me an erotic, pansexual pantheism. As I was drawn deeper into the mystery of the forest, ever deeper questions about change and impermanence arose in my mind.

Chase, in his account of my personal spiritual journey, ignores my interest in Buddhism, especially in Zen. Buddhism teaches impermanence. Life changes. Chase never mentions the parallels between Buddhist teachings and contemporary systems theory, discussed, for example, in the extensive writings of one of my teachers, Joanna Macy (*World as Lover, World as Self*)

In our mountains and rivers sesshins, our Arcata Zen group has walked, in meditation, the rapidly changing coastline of the Lost Coast, in southern Humboldt county, near where three great geologic plates converge a landscape of immense storms, earthquakes, fires, and floods. Natural change is part of our consciousness. The upwelling along the shore brings into our awareness a sense of connection to the great forces of nature that continue to shape the landscape, climate, and the meaning of our lives in the mystery of this place.

My spiritual journey has taken many twists and turns, but none of them are recognizable to me in reading Chase's account of the coming of the deep, long-range ecology movement to this small part of California. Chase never mentions sense of place in his diatribe against biocentrism. He never discusses the subtexts and sensibilities of this place of many rivers and mountain ranges emerging over millions of years from convergence of geologic forces in the "Klamath knot."

The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement

Chase blames the "tragedy" of the political struggles over Pacific Northwest forests on the "misguided" philosophy of "biocentrism." A more accurate "ultimate norm" for the deep, long-range ecology movement is "ecocentrism." Ecocentrism does represent a paradigm shift in culture away from humans as the center of the cosmos to humans as a part of the cosmos, not lord and master but, as Aldo Leopold says, "plain citizens."

Chase mentions that philosophers in the deep, long-range ecology movement are interested in ecosophy, not only in ecology. However Chase never presents any comments on the deep, long-range ecology movement as a search for ecosophy. Ecosophy is the search for wisdom. Alan Drengson, a philosopher and editor of *The Trumpeter* provides an eloquent statement of ecosophy as a search for wisdom arising from place;

Ecosophy is wisdom which arises from a place and resides in it, and it is also the wisdom to dwell harmoniously in the place. While ecosophy arises within a particular place, by showing us all of a place, it opens to unlimited space, and is global, universal and expansive. It deepens and evolves as a free creative presence in which multitudes of beings participate. It can be reached by way of the narrative and other trails... . Ecosophy is ecological wisdom and harmony involving comprehensive, compassionate appreciation for Nature with Its myriad communities of beings. As compassion it is a wise sensibility that is harmonious in *ecos* with others. Ecosophy is ecological wisdom, pursued and realized through the practice of disciplines, which bring harmony and understanding into our ecological relationships... . ("Ecosophy Seen From the Narrative Trail", *The Trumpeter*)

Redwood Summer

Redwood Summer was a series of protests, demonstrations, and public education, held in northwestern California in 1990. These events were part of a larger process of cultural reconstruction. After a century of domination by industrial logging corporations, grassroots citizen groups in northwestern California began a process of reclaiming forests based on the ancient doctrine of public trust—the state has responsibility for air, water,

wildlife and wildlife habitat for the intrinsic value of the forests and for the values forests provide for present and future generations of humans.

Chase denounces the Forest Forever initiative, the 1990 citizen written ballot initiative that set about to redress the excesses of industrial logging practices. Against the overwhelming opposition of Big Logging Corporations, including over \$7 million spent by Big Logging to defeat the initiative, it received over 48% of the vote. More than any other environmental or Big Logging Corporation initiative, it brought to public attention the gross logging practices of Big Logging corporations. Industrial forestry engages in massive clearcutting and transformation of native forests into tree plantations. Corporate strategy focuses on maintaining high, short-term profits in changing market situations. These practices negatively impact community stability, the fishing industry, wildlife habitat, and air and water quality. Many forest activities, in 1990, concluded that existing rules of the Board of Forestry under the California forestry act were inadequate. Indeed, many concluded that the rules were written to foster the interests of large logging corporations.

Headwaters Forest

Chase presents the battle over Headwaters forest and lands controlled by the Maxxam Corporation in Humboldt County as a prime example of misguided preservation versus wise use of redwood forests. Again Chase has it all wrong. Earth First! and the Environmental Protection and Information Center presented to Congress comprehensive proposals for restoration of over 44,000 acres of mostly clear-cut lands and watersheds. These proposals included worker retraining, restoration work, long-range community stability and protection of habitat for northern spotted owls, marbled murrelets and other creatures. By a large, bipartisan vote, the House in the 103rd Congress approved an act introduced by Congressman Dan Hamburg incorporating many of these features.

David Harris, in his book *The Last Stand: The War Between Wall Street and Main Street over California's Ancient Forest* (Times Books, 1995), concludes the big winner in the battle over Headwaters forest in Humboldt county was Houston based financier Charles Hurwitz. Chase and environmentalists can agree on that assessment. Chase never presents an alternative to Hurwitz's strategy of looting the forests ("I believe in the golden rule. Those who have the gold, rule," Chase quotes Hurwitz as saying after he acquired Pacific Lumber Company using junk bonds). The environmentalists did present democratic alternatives, including support for worker ownership of Pacific Lumber Company through an Employee Stock Option Plan, worker cooperatives, government investment in restoration, and a debt for nature swap involving massive debts the corporation owed the federal government from defaulting on a savings and loan corporation in Houston.

Ecosystem Management

Chase dismisses "ecosystem" as a "pseudoscience" concept in ecology. He dismisses "ecosystem" as vague, as unproven, and as a manifestation of the philosophy of holism which he equates with fascism.

Ed Grumbine, by contrast, provides a systematic, thorough, comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the concept of ecosystem and ecosystem management in his article "What is Ecosystem Management?" (*Journal of Conservation Biology*, 8,1 27-38) He finds five general goals of ecosystem management under the overall goal of sustaining ecological integrity—1. Maintain viable populations of all native species in situ; 2. Represent, within protected areas, all native ecosystem types across their natural range of variation; 3. Maintain evolutionary and ecological processes (i.e., disturbance regimes, hydrological processes, nutrient cycles, etc.); 4. Manage over periods of time long enough to maintain the evolutionary potential of species and ecosystems; 5. Accommodate

human use and occupancy within these constraints.

Ecosystem management, then, is a counter-balance to the hubris of modernity, the hubris that philosopher Stephen Toulmin calls “empire resourcism” (in his book *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*).

This hubris has led to the current biodiversity crisis. Chase discounts the opinion of scientists who argue that there is a crisis as a result of human caused extinction. However, the Global Biodiversity Assessment, published by the U.N. Environment Program is a comprehensive peer reviewed report on Earth’s biodiversity. The report concludes that species have become extinct, due to human activities, at 50 to 100 times the average expected natural rate (published in 1995).

There are values, deep in the woods. These values bear on the question do corporations or individuals following their own narrow self-interest have the right to willfully cause the extinction of another species? Having dismissed ecosystem and ecology, Chase refuses to address that question or to tell the stories of social reconstruction currently underway in Oregon and northwestern California.

The translation of theory of ecosystem management into practice in northwestern California has been through a process called “watershed analysis.” Several watersheds, including Pilot Creek administered mostly by Six Rivers National Forest, were selected as pilot projects. Not only natural history but social history was included in the research conducted in the process of developing a watershed analysis.

Values of the watershed include fisheries, wildlife habitat, recreation, and potential forest products including lumber. Logging does not drive the practice of ecosystem management as it has driven national forest management over the past three decades. Instead, logging may occur in a specific watershed at a specific time based on comprehensive assessment of the state of the forest system.

My own research on the evolving art of “ecosystem management” in northwestern California reveals that Six Rivers National Forest and a wide variety of citizen groups have been engaged in a learning process revealing gaps in scientific assessment and variations in values that different groups have concerning the forest. Social assessment by researchers at Six Rivers National Forest, on the Pilot Creek watershed analysis, revealed wide consensus among various groups of citizens on the value of maintaining the integrity of the watershed.

Chase would provide a better service to his readers had he bothered to explain how ecocentric supporters of the deep, long- range ecology movement, such as myself, have participated in many, many field trips, public meetings, and private discussions with representatives of the Forest Service and other government agencies, citizen groups including loggers and members of the fishing industry, and scientists in an open and democratic process over the practice of “ecosystem management”. As a case study on this process, I recommend reading the Watershed Analysis document on Pilot Creek published by Six Rivers National Forest, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement written on Pilot Creek by Six Rivers National Forest and citizen comments on these documents.

The participants in The Wildlands Project constantly ask ‘what is the human part of the forests, grasslands, mountains, deserts?’ This is the alternative to Disneyland, Marineworld USA, and the Shopping Mall. Regardless of Chase’s assertions to the contrary, humans will continue to depend on wild nature for air, water, and life.

How Shall we Live?

We always live with contradictions in our personal lives. I love trees, and I love burning wood in my fireplace. Moderate use of firewood, drawn from local sources in the bioregion is appropriate in terms of energy sources, economy, and ethics. As bioregional poet and philosopher, Gary Snyder, points out, we eat each other. We consume in order to live, but our mindful attention is most important. Respect for our food and energy is part of mindfulness in Buddhism. The “middle way” is advocated in my book *Living Richly in an Age of Limits*.

What is the Human Part of the Deep Woods?

Chase asserts that “civilizations are fragile, nature is resilient.” Yes, civilizations that become empires are fragile when they destroy the integrity of their forests. The first written story from civilization, the Epic of Gilgamesh, narrates the destruction of an ancient forest because of the hubris of the warrior king of that ancient civilization. From ancient China to current globalization, forest destruction is conducted in the name of increasing profits and economic growth. Once remote areas of the Earth are looted for resources to continue the economic growth of “empire resourcism.” Logging corporations have moved into boreal forests of Canada, to the most isolated forested regions of South America, and to Siberia in the pursuit of short-term profit. Destruction of local communities, destruction of cultural diversity, destruction of the integrity of the forests has been documented in numerous studies, reports, and personal accounts of indigenous peoples whose cultures have been impoverished by industrial logging.

The Political Situation

Chase’s book will be used by the representatives of the industrial logging industry in their continuing effort to discredit forest activists. Industrial logging corporations and reactionary social movements are mobilizing increasing support for repeal of all conservation laws of the 20th century. Indeed, the 104th Congress has already succeeded in undermining Option 9, the President’s Northwest Forest Plan, and attacking all conservation, preservation, and environmental legislation. The “logging without laws” rider is a tragic example of this reactionary politics. This rider, attached to a recissions appropriation bill in mid-1995, requires that all timber sales in National Forest and BLM lands that had been canceled due to environmental considerations or Option 9 considerations, to proceed without allowing any administrative appeals or court reviews. Many logging corporations see this rider as a chance to pick up valuable ancient trees for a low price. This rider was justified by proponents as a way to improve “forest health.” Having confused preservationism and ecocentrism throughout his book, Chase furthers the disinformation campaigns of industrial logging corporations whether he intends to or not.

Epilogue, New Year’S Eve of 1996

Driving, home along the Eel River, after attending a men’s retreat at Heartwood Institute, in the mountains east of Garberville, I stop at Bull Creek, a tributary of the Eel River. Upper Bull Creek was heavily logged during the post-World War II logging boom. In the 1950s and again in the 1960s, the watershed was hit with massive floods. Sediment from clearcuts, roads, denuded hillsides filled Bull Creek, burying once thriving orchards and ranches in the floodplain of upper Bull Creek watershed. The lower sections of the watershed are old-growth redwood forests within Humboldt Redwoods State Park. The State of California with help from Sierra Club, Save the Redwoods Leagues and other groups, developed and implemented a plan to stabilize the stream banks in lower Bull Creek through rip rapping and planting alders and other trees along the banks. Creative human intervention for restoration of the stream banks was necessary after massive human interventions through logging unstable slopes in the upper watershed.

I walk to the Flatiron Tree, a massive old growth redwood that fell during a storm last winter. In the growing darkness of early winter, the moist forest is alive with energy. The fallen giant is not dead. It is alive with new redwood sprouts from its trunk, host to many species of fungi and moss. Standing next to the fallen giant I hug it and begin to cry—tears of joy. I am a tree hugger. I am proud to be a tree hugger. I stand with the fallen tree and with all forests. I know that trees have standing. I come for a long line of tree huggers, guardians of the forest, in the dark woods. Huwawa, the guardian of the Cedar Forest in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Pan-calling us into the dark woods throughout the tragic, hubris filled history of Western civilization, The Druid guardians of the forests of Europe, Raven and the great Bearguardians of the forests in most of the indigenous cultures of the boreal and temperate forests of the northern hemisphere, John Muir, Dave Brower and all the Earth First! protesters.

In the dark woods I am a bear becoming human or a human being bear. The sky bear, Ursus Major, is rising above this forest on this winter night. The earth bear is sleeping in her den. In a dark wood I am home, bearing up to the suffering, bearing witness for the integrity of myself as part of the forest, bearing forth in the silence with energy flowing through the forest, the intelligence of the forest.

Deep in the dark woods is the spirit, the breath of life. Rivers flow through my veins and the ocean swells with new storms in my body. Coming to my senses, deep in the dark woods, I know that I am home. I think of Nancy Newhall's affirmation at the conclusion of *This is the American Earth*, "tenderly now, let all men turn to the earth."

The Trumpeter