

## Is It a Plus to Have a Definite Metaphysics in Common?

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The monumental work of Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*,<sup>1</sup> ends on pages 352–354 with a kind of postscript that seems to envisage an unnecessary limitation of future cultural diversity. He writes:

Is salvation possible? Or have we so fouled this earth, so covered the green world beneath our second world, that no light can penetrate the world's midnight? Is there hope for the plant and animal people? Is there hope for us all? These are questions that must be answered by the postmodern mind, for only through that exercise of consciousness can our modern dilemma be transcended.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, as there is no definite “modern mind,” there will be no *definite* “postmodern mind.” Or, to be more explicit, I join the reaction against Western arrogant historical generalizations, speaking about the period of enlightenment, romanticism, modernity, and so on. The kind of philosophy of history I join is influenced by cultural anthropology. There are even today deep cultural differences and from that point of view there are different “minds” operating, opening many avenues for future development.

Jerry Mander's book *In the Absence of the Sacred*<sup>3</sup> has as a subtitle “The failure of technology and the survival of the Indian Nations.” He tells how some American Indian people continue with their old cultural traditions. These and many other examples from around the world should tell us that history is broad. What some of us hope for is a future with deep cultural and ecologically sustainable diversity, with only moderate areas *dominated* by humans and absence of wars and of *cruel* poverty. But these requirements hopefully do not prevent diversity. Peaceful coexistence of radically different green societies! All this to my mind does not necessitate common ultimate premises in human metaphysical or religious views. No definite sort of ‘mind’!

I hope mathematical physics, cosmology and other branches of the 'hard' sciences will thrive in at least one green society, together with the 'soft.' This requires the use of energy on a large scale and may necessitate energy austerity in other ways in that society. The appropriate global institution will have to decide how to maintain some measure of ecological justice. All of this can be done with cultural diversity.

Unfortunately, Oelschlaeger can be interpreted to be looking for something rather uniform. He writes:

*And there is an old-new way of being, beckoning on the horizon. Turtle Island is its name. Snyder's vision seems to make even the deep ecologist a vulgar pragmatist, and yet that primordial green world beckons with subtle gestures. Tao says no words; deep and obscure is its meaning.*<sup>4</sup>

Gary Snyder's Buddhist-inspired vision belongs to his personal total view. If we roughly define an ecosophy as a total view in part inspired by the ecological crisis, his vision is an ecosophy, of course only fragmentarily articulated in words. And he belongs to the small group of highly articulate, explicit supporters of the deep ecology movement. Good, but some supporters find the gestures too uniform.

The strength of the movement depends on bringing together of people of deeply different articulations of ultimate views: often, I am glad to say, using artistic means, *and* similarity of views and attitudes relating to the ecological crisis. This includes the similar way they personally try to live, mirroring a sort of "ecological consciousness." But they also recognize that social and political action is needed, which may or may not be articulated in terms of the "exercise of consciousness." Differences in terminology make themselves felt here as elsewhere.

I am sorry if I talk as if Oelschlaeger disagreed with the 'plurality' I stand for. It is, among other things, his use of the term *deep ecologist* in the above quotation that might lead some readers to misconstrue what he means. Does he refer to some writers? I acknowledge an international deep ecology *movement*.

"Turtle Island" is a name for "an old-new way of being," and the fundamental views involved in a description of that way belong to the ecosophy of many supporters of the deep ecology movement. But others do not quite feel at home with those articulations. "Tao says no words." How excellent! It is encouraging to see a line from ancient Chinese views of deep ecology. It is also encouraging to see how well process philosophy, Heidegger and other sophisticated Western views

are applicable. The doctoral thesis of Shahed A. Power, *Gandhi and Deep Ecology*,<sup>5</sup> shows convincingly how Hindu ultimate premises can furnish some ultimate premises for deep ecology movement attitudes. A manifold of ultimates is necessary for the global impact of the deep ecology movement.

It is strange to me to find that my expressions of enthusiasm for a Spinozist approach, including a Spinozist interpretations of hard science, sometimes is conceived as an effort to make others look at such an approach as the 'best.' I don't know what the 'best' implies here. Anyhow, the majority of supporters of the deep ecology movement have never thought about Tao, Whitehead, or Heidegger. They simply do not have the formal education implied, nor does their important contribution necessitate any elaborate, verbal expression of their ultimate views. But they have such views, and it is a pleasure to listen to their informal talk, sometimes at gatherings, demonstrations, or other great or small direct actions.

My remarks do not challenge any views clearly expressed by Oelschlaeger, but I wish to forestall some misinterpretations related to my understanding of the deep ecology movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The failure of technology and the survival of the Indian Nations*. San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1991

<sup>4</sup> Oelschlaeger, 352.

<sup>5</sup> Shahed A. Power, *Gandhi and Deep Ecology*, Doctoral thesis, University of Salford, 1991.