What is Living in Deep Ecology?

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This article asks what in deep ecology has the most enduring value, what escapes typical forms of negative criticism, what contributes most to the development of ecological thought, and what shows the most promise of transforming the larger society into an ecological one. Such exemplary qualities are discovered in Gary Snyder's reflections on the wild and the sacred, Arne's Naess's inquiry into the meaning of "free nature," Thomas Berry's depiction of the place of humanity in the Earth Story and the Universe Story, and Delores LaChapelle's exploration of the ethos and spirituality of place. It is found that a focus on such dimensions of deep ecological thought can reveal points of interconnection between what have been called "radical ecologies," and help guide us in the direction of the deep logos of the oikos.

You would not find the boundaries of *oikos*,
even by travelling along every path,
so deep a *logos* does it have.[1]

It has now been almost three decades since Bill Devall and George Sessions published *Deep Ecology*.[2] A decade before, Arne Naess had invented the term as a useful category for classifying the outlook of "a vast number of people in all countries"[3] who have a far-reaching ecological worldview. However, it was Devall and Sessions' book that did the most to transform deep ecology into a distinctive intellectual and activist movement with the aspiration of organizing these masses of ecologically conscious thinkers and activists and having a significant impact on society. At about the same time, *The Trumpeter* emerged as an important voice for deep ecology in the intellectual world, and Earth First!, which had been founded a few years before, quickly adopted the perspective of deep ecology and began to spread its influence in the environmental movement.

My own work in environmental philosophy has developed in the tradition of social ecology. However, I have always been interested in the ways in which diverse and in some ways complementary traditions such as social ecology, deep ecology, ecofeminism, bioregionalism, and socialist ecology can learn from and cross-fertilize one another. Over the years I have I published a number of articles with this goal in mind.[4] For much of this time, Murray Bookchin, the figure most closely associated with social ecology, argued not only that the two traditions were incompatible, but that the influence of deep ecology has been overwhelmingly pernicious. As a result of his tireless efforts, this position was taken as the definitive one for social ecology.

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[1] This is a variation on a saying of Heraclitus, who said "the boundaries of *psyche*." One can argue, as has Spinoza, for example, and as Zen practice presupposes, that the boundaries, or non-boundaries, of *oikos* and *psyche* are identical.

[2] Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985).

[3] Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," in *Inquiry 16 (1973),* reprinted in George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology in the 21st Century* (Boston and London: Shambala, 1995), p. 134.

[4] See, for example, "Not Deep Apart" in *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy 12* (1995): 98–104; "How Wide Is Deep Ecology?" in *Inquiry 39* (June 1996): 189–201; "The Matter of Freedom: Ecofeminist Lessons for Social Ecology" in *Capitalism Nature Socialism # 43* (2000): 62–80; and "A Dialogue with Arne Naess on Social Ecology and Deep Ecology (1988–1997)" in The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy 26 (2010): 20–39.

Bookchin described deep ecology as intellectually incoherent, "a vague, formless, often self-contradictory, and invertebrate thing," that is "spiced with homilies from Taoism, Buddhism, spiritualism, reborn Christianity, and in some cases eco-fascism." He contended that it misanthropically depicts humanity "as an ugly 'anthropocentric' thing" and "a malignant product of natural evolution." He warned that "self-professed deep ecologists" exhibit the "crude eco-brutalism that Hitler, in the name of 'population control,' with a racial orientation" used to "fashion theories of blood and soil that led to the transport of millions of people to murder camps like Auschwitz." And finally, he claimed that deep ecology is a theoretically naïve reductionism that reduces humanity to an animalistic level, "a black hole of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas," based on "a crude biologism."[5]

We now have three decades of significant development of deep ecology as both theory and practice on which to reflect. In this discussion, we will ask, looking back over this period of development, what in deep ecology has been of the most enduring value, what has not been subject to the kinds of criticisms leveled by Bookchin and others, what has contributed most to the development of ecological thought, and what has shown the most promise of transforming the larger society into an ecological one. The hope is that this inquiry will not only reveal points of interconnection between what have been called "radical ecologies," but, more importantly, that it will guide us in the direction of the deep *logos* of the *oikos*, and help us follow the deep way of nature.[6]

The Wild Way of Nature

Devall and Sessions dedicated *Deep Ecology* to Gary Snyder and Arne Naess. This was quite appropriate, since they are the two figures who have had the greatest impact on the development of the movement, and who have done most to give meaning to its vision of the way of nature. This is especially true of Snyder's profound influence on the spread of deep ecology as a broad cultural tendency beyond the limits of the academy, though I would argue that his thought has also been the most decisive in the ecophilosophical sphere in its widest sense.

In three decades of teaching environmental philosophy, the one book that I have used most frequently in my courses has been Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild*.[7] It is also the single work that I have always mentioned when asked what might be most helpful to inspire reflection on nature and the ecological. I know of no other work that is as transformative in its effects on the reader's thinking, valuing and imagining in these areas. I can understand why Devall and Sessions would conclude that "among contemporary writers, no one has done more than Gary Snyder to shape the sensibilities of the deep ecology movement."[8]

If we are to engage in the deep questioning that Naess holds to be the hallmark of deep ecology, one of the most basic questions that we can possibly pose is the question of the meaning of the

[5] All of these contentions appear in Bookchin's article "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement," which was originally published in *Green Perspectives: Newsletter of the Green Program* Project, nos. 4–5 (Summer 1987), was reprinted in several major environmental ethics anthologies, and can be found online at dwardmac.pitzer.edu.

[6] According to Laozi "the Way that can be followed is not the eternal Way. The Word that can be spoken is not the eternal Word."

[7] Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

[8] Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 83.

sacred. This question is at the core of Snyder's work and is the particular focus of one of his most important essays, "Good, Wild, Sacred."[9] He helps us answer the question of how we can move from a world in which the place of the sacred has been usurped by the ego and a multitude of ego-extensions, to a world in which the person, the community, and the land are valued as most sacred.[10]

Snyder suggests that this inquiry into the sacred begins with reflection on the self. In fact, the deep ecology literature in general is almost unanimous in agreeing that our questioning begins with the self, but the direction of inquiry is at issue. Snyder often directs us to Zen Master Dōgen Zenji's famous idea that "To study the self is to forget the self, and to forget the self is to find realization in the Ten Thousand Things," the multiplicity of beings in the world. Beginning to "study" the self and the world means beginning to *awaken* to these realities, allowing them to shatter our preconceptions about them, as they begin to manifest themselves.

Awakening means breaking out of what Thomas Berry, another figure revered by deep ecologists, has called" the pathology of our times" which consists of being trapped in "an autistic relation of the human to the natural world."[11] Snyder explains the sacred as precisely that which helps us escape from this prison of ego. It "refers to that which helps take us (not only human beings) out of our little selves into the whole mountains-and-rivers mandala universe."[12] When we begin to awaken, we find the way of nature in ourselves, in the places in which we dwell, in ecosystems, in the whole biosphere, and in the living Earth.

What has struck so many as powerful and compelling in Snyder's account of this way of nature is his depiction of its quality of wildness. Thoreau famously said that he wished to "speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness." Snyder has inspired the deep ecology movement through the word he has long been speaking for the wild in all its forms: not only wild nature "out there," but wild nature within us and among us, particularly in the form of wild culture and wild mind.

At his readings, Snyder sometimes asks audience members "Are you an animal?" After giving them some time to come to terms with what they perhaps grudgingly realize to be the right answer, he follows this up with the next embarrassing question, "Are you a wild animal?" Many find that this to be one of the hardest yes/no multiple choice exam questions they have ever encountered. When he lets them in on the secret that that there are only two kinds of animals, *wild* ones and *domesticated* ones, the shock of recognition begins to register on quite a few faces.

In posing the questions of our animality and our wildness, Snyder helps us question all the dualisms that millennia of hierarchical civilization have imposed on us and on the world. These questions challenge us to face the reality of our materiality, physicality, and corporeality, and to recognize the spirituality in all of these. They challenge the dualistic mythology that juxtaposes the illusions of an ordered, disciplined, controlled culture and a disorderly, violent, uncontrolled natural world. We are challenged to face and affirm the reality of a world of discordant harmony, chaotic cosmos, creative destruction, ordered anarchy. We are part of "the shimmering food-

[9] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, pp. 78–96. A short excerpt from this article appeared in *The Trumpeter*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1986): 3–4.

[10] The question of the sacred is identical to the question of the nature of ultimate value (beyond intrinsic and extrinsic value), and the nature of ultimate good (beyond individual and collective good).

[11] Thomas Berry, "The Spirituality the Earth"; online at earthheart.org.

[12] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 94.

chain, the-food web" that is "the scary, beautiful condition of the biosphere," in which "eating is a sacrament," and "we too will be offerings."[13]

This is the kind of deep ecological questioning that remains very much alive. It is questioning about what "wild" and "domesticated" mean for ecosystems and places, communities and cultures, for minds and spirits, for you and me. It leads us to a deeper conception of freedom that goes far beyond the conventional negative, "freedom from," or "doing what I want to do" kind of pseudo-freedom. Free minds and free spirits are not really like well-conditioned American middle-class adolescents, but more like wild nature—rich and diverse, spontaneous and creative, good and beautiful, at once orderly and chaotic. Free communities and free cultures have these same qualities of wildness.

These ideas have been powerful because they relate so intimately to the transformation of ethos, the structure of everyday practice and ordinary experience. Snyder has said that "the truly experienced person, the refined person, delights in the ordinary."[14] To be really meaningful and transformative, the good and the sacred cannot be some distant ideal; we must be able to find them all around us, all the time, in our own lives and those of our families, friends and communities, in the creativity and self-expressions of our culture, and at all levels of nature.

Free Nature

This brings us to the next, closely, related dimension of deep ecology that is very much alive. This is a concern for what Naess has called "free nature." He uses this term to refer not only to strict wilderness, but also to nature that is relatively free to act autonomously, to follow its own way of developing and flourishing.[15] Deep ecology has an expansive vision of freedom as encompassing not only "the individual," and "society" but also the ecosystem, and the entire natural world.

Spinoza, one of the philosophers who has been most influential in shaping deep ecological thought, is helpful in interpreting this larger concept of freedom. He defines the freedom of a being as follows: "That thing is called 'free,' which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and of which the action is determined by itself alone. On the other hand, that thing is necessary, or rather constrained, which is determined by something external to itself to a fixed and definite

[13] Ibid, p. 184.

[14] Ibid, p. 153.

[15] Unfortunately, this complex topic cannot be discussed in any detail here, but the later Heidegger, whose outlook is often compared to the Daoist or Zen sensibility, and who has influenced many deep ecologists, is an important thinker concerning the question of the way of beings and the mode of being of beings. He certainly helps get us to the most fundamental issues, which are ontological. How do beings appear to us? Do things appear to us as instruments to be used for egoistic or anthropocentric purposes, as objects that are just neutrally there as background conditions of our activity, or as beings that have their own unique mode of manifesting themselves that must be attended to carefully and allowed to be? It is pertinent that a key citation in Marcuse's discussion of "Technological Rationality and the Logic of Domination" is Heidegger's statement that "Modern man takes the entirety of Being as raw material for production and subjects the entirety of the object-world to the sweep and order of production (*Herrstellen*)" and that "the use of machinery and the production of machines is not technics itself but merely an adequate instrument for the realization (*Einrichtung*) of the essence of technics in its objective raw material."[*Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950), p. 266 (Marcuse's translation), in *One-Dimensional man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 153–154.] The abject failure of Heideggerianism is no reason to neglect Heidegger's crucial insights concerning nature, domination, and the concept of *physis* as "*self-blossoming emergence*," "opening up," and "unfolding." [*An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 11–12.]

method of existence or action."[16] For Spinoza, the only being that is fully free is "God or Nature," the totality of being. Individual beings can be said to be relatively free to the extent that they approximate such full self-determination. From an ecological (and social ontological) standpoint, these beings must be seen as parts of larger systems or wholes, and freedom takes on a deeper meaning and reaches a deeper level of truth when it is interpreted contextually, in relation to those wholes.[17]

An implication of such a contextual approach is that the freedom of the part must be understood as dependent on the freedom of the whole. Its freedom is an inseparable part of a larger freedom. The part can have the appearance of freedom if its freedom is temporally, spatially, and ontologically abstracted from the larger context of freedom. However, the illusion of freedom dissipates when the context comes into the picture. This can occur either theoretically, when deeper reflection on internal relations and structural determination reveal the dependence of the part on the whole, or materially and historically, when constraints on the flourishing of the whole begin to exhibit clearly their effects on the flourishing of the part.[18]

Thus, we cannot be free unless the Earth is free, that is, that is, unless there is a "free nature." This is the implicit significance of the famous idea that "no one can be free unless all are free,"[19] if that famous concept is expanded and developed in an Earth-conscious, ecosophical, manner. This means that if we believe in freedom we will dedicate ourselves to free the Earth from the forces and institutions that drive imperiously toward the domination of nature and threaten to put an end to the way of nature, from the biospheric, to the communal, to the personal, and even to the molecular level. Some activist movements have tried to draw out the radical implications of the truth implicit in this deep ecological concept of free nature, most notably, Earth First! in its principles and practice of "*No Compromise* in Defense of Mother *Earth," and* "Live Wild or Die."[20]

Arne Naess stresses the importance of such struggle when he defends "the fight to preserve and extend areas of wilderness and near-wilderness ('free Nature')" on the grounds that "large wilderness areas are required in the biosphere for the continued evolutionary speciation of plants

[16] Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2009); online at www.gutenberg.org; Part 1, Definition 7.

[17] Those immersed in the narrow Anglo-American liberal conception of freedom might be shocked by the idea that that ecological crisis could really be about issues of freedom and liberation. Their reaction follows from the fact that the crisis results above all from systemic constraints on the flourishing of life on Earth. Thus, it is not about what they conceive freedom and liberation to be about. Indeed, the most crucial questions concerning freedom and liberation are not about what they conceive freedom and liberation to be about. For a detailed discussion of concepts of freedom, including the impoverished concepts that often prevail in the Anglo-American academic subculture, see "The Third Concept of Liberty: Theorizing the Free Community" in *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism*, pp. 53–91.

[18] However, neither occurs automatically, as much of the present discussion will imply to the careful reader. "The context comes into the picture" theoretically when there is a process of critical and emancipatory theoretical practice at work and it "comes into the picture" practically when there is a process of critical and emancipatory social practice at work.

[19] Bakunin wrote in 1871 that "I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free." [Sam Dolgoff, ed. *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism,* ed. S. Dolgoff (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 237.] Emma Lazarus wrote in 1882, "Until we are all free, we are none of us free." [Elaine Bernstein Partnow, ed. *The Quotable Woman: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Facts on File, 2011), p. 168.]

[20] For information on the movement's ideas and activities, see the *Earth First! Journal* website at earthfirstjournal.org, at which it continues to describe itself as "guided by a philosophy of deep ecology."

and animals."[21] We might also say that we must defend these areas of intensive and extensive wildness because they are a privileged field for the emergence of the sacred, of great value, and of great good. We might also say that they are exceptional sites that exhibit great creative force and inspire great wonder and awe, in a world threatened by both biotic reduction and a reductive rationality.

The Earth Story

Another area in which deep ecology is very much alive is in its emphasis on the necessity of an ecocentric perspective, which, when fully developed, means a Gaian or geocentric perspective. One of the sources of deep ecology mentioned by Devall and Sessions is the "Perennial Philosophy." It is true that many insights of Aldous Huxley and others who claim this tradition can be of value to proponents of deep ecology, but we might also think of the concept in a wider sense. There is a Perennial Philosophy not because reality remains static, or because truth remains the same; the way of truth only endures through constant metamorphosis, surprising reversals, and the emergence of the new. There is a Perennial Philosophy because we are all part of one great story, a story that is always becoming one by always incorporating many, and because we have an enduring need to reflect upon and make sense out of that story.

Over the years I have imposed on myself a strict rule to mention one thing to every class that I have taught, no matter what the subject-matter. This one thing is that we are living in the Sixth Greet Mass Extinction of life on Earth. I usually add that if an extraterrestrial were sent here to report on our planet, there would be no doubt what the big news would be to take back to the home planet. It would be the story of the Sixth Great Mass Extinction and the global biodiversity crisis. I found it shocking when most of my students reported that had never gotten that news during perhaps fifteen years of primary, secondary and higher education (and all of it on this very planet!).

The point of this little exercise has been to stress the importance of living one's life as part of the Earth Story, and to suggest that it is necessary to escape the confines of official history and open oneself up to the Real of natural history. There has been no one who has done more to help us situate ourselves in natural history through both the Earth Story and the larger Universe Story than has Thomas Berry. He has done this not only by suggesting that we should rethink our condition theoretically, but also by proposing that the necessary resituating requires a fundamental transformation of the nature of the key social institutions—religion, education, politics and economics—and by suggesting some of the ways in which such a transformation might be carried out practically.

In both his "Deep Ecology" section of the book *Environmental Philosophy*[22] and his anthology *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, George Sessions begins, very wisely I think, with Thomas Berry's powerful essay "The Viable Human." This essay opens with the statement that "*to be viable, the human community* must move from its present anthropocentric norm to a geocentric norm

[21] Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects" in *Deep Ecology in the 21st Century*, p. 69.

[22] Michael Zimmerman, Baird Callicot, George Sessions, Karen Warren and John Clark, eds. *Environmental Philosophy* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 1993, 1998, 2001).

of reality and value."[23] Berry's great contribution is his insight that all societies and communities are motivated by their deepest dreams and guide their lives through the stories or narratives that express these dreams most powerfully. In *The Universe Story*, Berry and Brian Swimme reinterpret the history of the Universe, beginning with the Big Bang, as the sacred story of the emergence and unfolding of value and goodness in the entire cosmos. Berry's perspective is often called "creation spirituality" because it emphasizes the fact that the Universe is not simply the sum total of all beings, but constitutes rather an ongoing miracle of creativity in which each step in its self-manifestation deserves to be cherished and celebrated as a revelation of the divine or sacred. A central message of Berry's thought is that we need a vast cultural revolution in which all major social institutions are transfigured so that their primary practical function becomes care for the Earth and its inhabitants in the most explicit sense. By participating in such institutions we will be able to affirm the sacred and the value of creation in every aspect of our everyday lives.

Berry does not hesitate to specify what it is that stands in the way of such a recovery of the sacred. An entire world stands in the way, and a decisive break with that world—a radical conversion experience—is necessary. "Our main experience of the divine, the world of the sacred, has been diminished as money and utility values have taken precedence over spiritual, aesthetic, emotional, and religious values in our attitude toward the natural world. Any recovery of the natural world will require … a conversion experience deep in the psychic structure of the human.[24] How does conversion take place? Perhaps more importantly, how does it "take"? On the one hand, it arises out of crisis and trauma in which old structures of meaning lose their validity. On the other hand, and this is where Berry has made such a remarkable contribution, it occurs when there is the emergence of a new story and new symbolic and imaginary structures, that are grounded in millennia of human experience, that are in touch with own time, and that reach out creatively toward the future. Such narratives (which are a middle way between the nihilistic abandonment of narrative and the fundamentalist dogmatic narrative) are capable of generating meaning, creating hope, and inspiring faith in the inherent goodness of being. In so doing, they can sustain a new ecological ethos or way of life.

It is ironic that some critics of deep ecology have attacked what they see as a "misanthropic" tendency in the movement, since one of its most valuable qualities is the extraordinarily affirmative depiction it presents of human life in touch with the wonders of nature. The evidence for supposed misanthropy comes mainly from minor or fringe figures, while the most influential and admired writers, like Snyder, LaChapelle, Naess, and Berry, have emphasized the possibilities for a life filled with love, friendship, sharing, joy, ecstatic states, aesthetic appreciation, spiritual fulfillment, and deep communion with nature. Berry, in particular, has spelled out the unique significance for the entire universe and the Earth of the human form of nature's self-expression. "The human," he says, is "that being in whom the universe comes to itself in a special mode of conscious reflection,"[25] and "that being in whom this grand diversity of the universe celebrates itself in conscious self-awareness."[26] It would be difficult to overestimate the emancipatory significance of this inspiring vision of hope and of faith in the goodness of humanity for a society

[23] Thomas Berry, "The Viable Human." in George Sessions, ed. *Deep Ecology in the Twenty-First Century* (Boston and London: Shambala, 1995), p. 8.

[24] Thomas Berry, "The Viable Human," p. 12.

[25] Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p.16.

[26] Ibid, p. 198.

that is increasingly nihilistic, depressed, anxiety-ridden, confused, distracted and aimlessly hyperactive. If Berry is right, ego-transcending, celebratory contemplation is more deeply-rooted in our nature than is egocentric, competitive consumerism.

The Culture of Place

If one living dimension of deep ecology has been its focus on the big picture of nature and the Earth, a complementary one has been its focus on the little picture of specific place, locale, landscape, and bioregion. I have always been impressed by the fact that Arne Naess affirmed the importance of place so powerfully by naming his personal ecophilosophy after his cabin Tvergastein. My own life is deeply rooted in the almost three-hundred years and twelve generations that my family has lived in New Orleans, but it is also grounded significantly in another place, a small cabin in the woods on a sandy creek called Bayou LaTerre (Earth Bayou) where I have spent considerable time over the past twenty-five years. "La Terre" is a wonderful term, in that it connotes not only "the Earth," our home planet, but also "the land" as a specific place or locale that we can know intimately and love. The cabin itself has the nickname "Stillpoint," which was chosen to echo the Daoist concept of the "still point" around which everything moves; however, the profound esoteric meaning is that it was built just a few hundred feet from the ruins of an old still that was hidden deep in the woods.

One of the lessons that bioregional thought has taught us is the deep influence over our thought and character of having a "place in nature" where we spend a lot of time and which becomes part of us and vice versa. This is another area in which Gary Snyder has had the most profound insights. Several chapters of *The Practice of the Wild* (especially "The Place, the Region and the Commons") are unsurpassed as an expression of the bioregional spirit, which is about opening oneself up to the way and spirit of the place. This is the meaning of reinhabitation, which means an everyday practice of awakened living in place. As Snyder explains it, "the wild requires that we learn the terrain, nod to all the plants and animals and birds, ford the streams and cross the ridges, and tell a good story when we get home." In the process one gains a bioregional education. "To be well-educated" in this bioregional sense "is to have learned the songs, proverbs, stories, sayings, myths (and technologies) that come with this experiencing of the nonhuman members of our local ecological community…"[27] We can do this work (and play) of reinhabitation in any bioregion, not only up on a mountaintop or down on the bayou, but, even, as Snyder phrases it in a brilliant poem, "Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information."[28]

Delores LaChappelle also deserves recognition for having gone as far as anyone in drawing out the bioregional, land-based, place-based implications of deep ecology. LaChapelle, like Snyder, places enormous importance on the experience of the sacred in everyday life. Her special contribution was to develop so extensively the possibilities for bioregional, place-based practice through the use of ritual and forms of symbolic expression. Her book *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex* is not only a treatise on applied deep ecology, but also a sourcebook and manual of bioregional,

[27] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 18.

[28] Gary Snyder, "Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information," in *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996), pp. 99–104.

earth-based forms of communal self-expression.[29] Her book is subtitled "Concerning Deep Ecology and Celebrating Life," thus echoing Berry's idea that we are beings whose nature it is to celebrate all of creation.

LaChapelle poses the question of what it would look like (also sound like, taste like, even smell like!) to have a culture in which such celebration is part of everyday life. She poses the question of the nature of our rituals, which are a dominant part of our entire ethos. She contends that:

> essentially, you have no choice in this—it is not whether you do ritual or don't do ritual; because one cannot be here on this earth with other fellow mammals/humans and not do ritual… Your choice lies in what kind of ritual. If you want to do rituals designed to keep humans apart, to encourage competition and anger and hatred then there's that kind of ritual… However, the ritual I am dealing with concerns putting all parts of the human together deep inside the individual, for putting humans together in society and for facilitating human interactions with nature.[30]

Obviously, LaChapelle is using a rather broad definition of ritual in which more explicitly defined ritual activities form a subset of a larger sphere of social ritual that constitutes a large part of the social ethos or habitus. The assumption behind such an analysis, which should not be so astounding, is that we are what we do. We shape our being through the activities (we might say "activities and passivities"), and particularly through the repeated activities and passivities in which we engage, from the most mundane process of walking through our community either mindfully or distracted by some device, to formal ceremonies in which we express our allegiance either to the maternal Earth or the patriarchal state.[31] Thomas Berry's "Welcome to the Universe" ceremony is an excellent example of how we can, through our ritual or ceremonial practice, begin prefiguring the future ecological society and culture that are now emerging. In this ceremony, which is inspired by many indigenous traditions, the new child is introduced to all the beings on our planet and beyond. The family and community act as witnesses to and partners in this encounter between new life and the wonders of the universe.[32]

Almost everything we do under the existing system of domination, and especially our everyday ritualistic activity, reinforces domination.[33] It reinforces anthropocentrism, for our deeply

[29] Dolores LaChapelle, *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex Rapture of the Deep: Concerning Deep Ecology and Celebrating Life* (Durango, CO: Kivaki Press, 1988). Her earlier article "Sacred Land, Sacred Sex" was reprinted in *The Trumpeter*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Winter, 1987): 12–22.

[30] Ibid, p. 149.

[31] This should certainly be interpreted as an exclusive "or." Though it is not the topic of the present discussion, I argue that the patriarchal state is a historical institution that, as a the result of its origins in conquest and domination, and its evolution in dialectical interaction with historical forms of social domination, has a structure that renders it ecocidal in nature, and that a commitment to the good of the Earth requires, minimally, disloyalty to that institution. See "Against Principalities and Powers: Critique of Domination Versus Liberalization of Domination" in *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 93–126.

[32] I had the privilege of participating in such a ceremony that he performed for one of my grandchildren.

[33] It seems clear that the ubiquitous ritualistic activity of television-viewing is a major instrument for indoctrination by and socialization into the system of domination, given the corporate and state hegemony within mainstream broadcasting and the fact that the average person will watch close to two million commercials during his or her quota of nine years per capita of TV viewing. Less obvious is the effect of spatiality in late-capitalist, statist, megatechnological society. Existence within a hyper-urbanized landscape of skyscrapers, malls, housing developments,

consumerist culture turns nature and other species into commodities for human consumption.[34] But even more fundamentally, it reinforces egocentrism, since that culture does not urge us to buy commodities primarily for the greater glory of humanity; rather, it drives us to consume obsessively in a futile quest to fill a void that arises out of a constitutive lack in the civilized ego.[35] And beyond shaping our sensibilities and subjectivity, it builds anthropocentrism and egoism into the institutional structure of society. One of the most urgent messages of bioregional and deep ecological thinkers concerns the need for a fundamentally transformed culture to reverse these subjective and objective autonomisms, so that everyday activity automatically contributes to the flourishing of the ecological community rather than automatically threatening it.

Thomas Berry is notable among deep ecological thinkers for his vision of a fundamentally transformed ecological society in which ecological and bioregional realities will shape all the major spheres of social determination: social institutions; social ideology; the social imaginary; and the social ethos.[36] In such a society the culture of place will be an integral expression of a bioregional community that is, in Berry's words, a community that is "self-propagating, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing, and self-fulfilling."[37] One of the deep questions we need to ask in response to such a wide-ranging bioregional vision is the question of what, realistically, could possibly take us from a world that is thoroughly dominated by ecocidal forces and institutions to a world of such bioregional self-activity.

The Deep Ecology of Value

Deep ecology has contributed both theoretically and practically to the struggle against the human domination of nature through its critique of anthropocentrism, by its affirmation of the value of every living being, and by inspiring many to defend that value. However, the area of value theory is one in which deep ecology is in need of revitalization through a deeper questioning and reconsideration of some of its own presuppositions. In particular, it needs to question the degree to which it has continued to adhere to an ethical individualist idea of intrinsic value subsisting within separate organisms or persons. It also needs to question the meaning and validity of the concept of biocentric egalitarianism, which continues to be thought of as a central tenet of the movement.

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superhighways and industrial parks shapes ones conception of the relative power of the person (not to mention that of the natural world) vis-à-vis that of the social system.

[34] The dominant economistic ideology, which absolutizes and universalizes the existing historic mode of production, promotes the confused idea that a "commodity" is merely anything that is consumed, or, more accurately, that anything that is consumed must be a commodity. This leads to the absurd idea that a break with commodity consumption would be proportional to the degree of non-consumption. In reality, the historical artifact called "the commodity" is an object (often called a "good" or "service, " though it might in fact be an "ill" or "disservice") that is produced in order to be exchanged for purposes of profit and capital accumulation.

[35] The term "civilized ego" is used advisedly. A naïve Lacanianism, following in the wake of vulgar Freudianism, might take what these thinkers discovered about civilization to be some form of transhistorical truth about a true or essential "Self." In fact, their findings are one of the great immanent critiques of civilization, in that they show the ways in which guilt, lack, "surplus repression," and subjection to the Law are all functions of historically-determined forms of statist, capitalist and, perhaps above all, patriarchal society.

[36] This is my own formulation of the major spheres of social determination. For details, see *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism*, pp. 31–37.

[37] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), p. 162.

There has developed within ecological value theory a critique of traditional ideas of intrinsic value as inadequate to account for the generation of value within species, ecosystems, and, in general, wholes larger than individual organisms. This critique proposes that there be a move beyond any residual ethical individualism to a more holistic, systemic, and fully ecological axiology. I would argue that Holmes Rolston's theory of systemic value is the greatest advance within mainstream environmental philosophy toward a dialectical and holistic value theory, in short, toward a deeply ecological one. He bases this theory on what he calls "a weak organic holism" or "communitarian holism."[38] This theory takes a developmental approach to value and takes into account the crucial fact that value is not merely a property that individual beings happen to possess, but rather is a dynamic, emergent phenomenon. In this connection, Rolston proposes a concept of "projective nature," that interprets an ecosystem or other biotic sphere as a matrix out of which value emerges. This analysis points to the fact that "things do not have their separate natures merely in and for themselves, but they face outward and co-fit into broader natures," so that "value seeps out into the system, and we lose our capacity to identify the individual as the sole locus of value."[39] When value is interpreted this way, as part of "a holistic web," we must conclude that "intrinsic value, the value of an individual for what it is in itself, becomes problematic."[40] More generally, to the degree that a naïve, common sense ontology of individual, separate, or atomistic objects and selves is abandoned, the idea of locating value at the level of the individual becomes less coherent.[41]

In this connection, the Buddhist philosophical concepts of *sunyata*, that all things are empty of inherent existence, and *pratitya samutpada*, the dependent origination or conditioned arising of all things, are also helpful in rethinking concepts such as "intrinsic value," "intrinsic good" and "intrinsic nature." Again, Gary Snyder gives us guidance. He entitles a major collection of his works *No Nature*, quoting in the preface the great Rinzai Master Hakuin Zenji, who refers to "self-nature that is no nature/ … far beyond mere doctrine."[42] Snyder comments that "there is no single or set 'nature' either as 'the natural world' or 'the nature of things.' The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional."[43] When we consider the nature and locus of value, we need to consider this fluidity and openness that pervades the world of things, in addition

[38] Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 172.

[39] Ibid, p. 216.

[40] Ibid, p. 217. One should not hastily jump to the conclusion that such a statement necessarily opens the way for the reemergence of a misanthropy in which the value or good or human beings is not adequately recognized. The fact that the question of value cannot be reduced to a question of what is possessed by an individual being in itself does not imply that the value of individual beings is somehow dissolved entirely into the matrix of value within larger ecological wholes. The discussion below of Spinoza's thought as an inspiration for deep ecology sheds light on this issue.

[41] In fact, the problem of value moves not only from the individual to the super-individual realm but also to the sub-individual one. It can only be understood through an analysis of the dialectic of value between these three levels, though it must also be recognized that to reduce the topology of value to such a three-level scheme is still a simplification of a much more complex picture.

[42] Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. v.

[43] Ibid.

to the conditioned nature of every thing. Such a consideration will lead us to be skeptical of attributing simple location to value, or, indeed, to any other quality or reality.[44]

If we take seriously the systemic nature of value and the relativity of the boundaries we draw between things (or that our conditioned natures draw through us), biocentric egalitarianism becomes highly problematical. This concept is usually expressed in terms of "equal right" to flourishing. However, the very language of rights and equality, given its tendency to reinforce an ethical individualist perspective, poses difficulties when applied to holistic and ecological phenomena. It is certainly possible to talk coherently about "the rights of nature" if one's meaning is very carefully stipulated, but the concept of rights inevitably seems strained when applied to species, ecosystems, or the entire biosphere. There are also reductio ad absurdum issues if all organisms are attributed an "equal right" to flourishing whenever any level of teleonomic behavior, conatus, or striving toward some good can be observed.[45] This position has the same problems as "right to life" positions that imply a significant right of this kind for ova and spermatozoa. In view of all of these difficulties, the best policy is to abandon moral extensionist frameworks[46] to the greatest degree possible and to reformulate ethics in a more strictly ecological manner.[47]

Biocentric egalitarianism is an idea that has never made sense to most people, and with good reason. The fatal problem for this theory is not that most people are too anthropocentric to accept it. It is rather that many people are too ecologically astute to accept it. Biocentric egalitarianism makes a lot of moral extensionist sense, but it, and moral extensionism in general, doesn't make much ecological sense. We might look to Spinoza, the traditional Western philosopher who has perhaps most profoundly influenced deep ecology, to show that biocentric egalitarianism is based on a questionable individualist value theory that is inconsistent with an adequately holistic, developmental, and ecological one**.** Guilherme's recent discussion of Spinoza is one of the most sophisticated and thought-provoking analyses of ecosophy and deep ecology. It confronts directly the question of whether, from an ecological, holistic perspective, different life forms should be

[44] It would be serious mistake to dismiss this concern as a straw man argument. Not all contemporary environmental ethicists have paid attention to anti-reductionist, anti-reificationist analyses such as Whitehead's discussion of "the fallacy of simple location." To the extent that ethicists are committed to an obsolete atomistic or individualist metaphysics (and the science that founds it) they fall into the fallacy of "simple location of value." This means that they reduce the analysis of value to states that can be attributed to individual beings. This applies, of course, to the utilitarian reduction of intrinsic values or goods to states of consciousness (and "the general good" to the summation of individual goods), but also to views that reduce intrinsic value or goodness to the flourishing of individual beings. The implications of a radical critique of such views is that they cannot explain value and good adequately, even if the analysis is extended to larger wholes such as individual ecosystems or species. Whitehead's complementary analysis of "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" is also crucial for understanding these issues. For discussion of these fallacies, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: New American Library, 1955), 160–162; *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 11–12, 207–208; and *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press), pp. 57–59.

[45] For example, it could be argued consistently though absurdly that, given that bacteria are teleonomic organisms and given that they constitute over 50% of the biomass on earth, there is a strong case for a bacteriocentric ethics.

[46] Moral extensionism is the project of applying ethical theories based on anthropocentric (and usually ethical individualist) presuppositions to greater-than-human and larger-than-individual moral realities such as species, ecosystems, and the biosphere.

[47] Though holistic environmental ethicists, deep ecologists and social ecologists have made some progress in this project, their contributions have not been synthesized and developed adequately. Sketching such a synthesis and *dépassement* is not the purpose of the present article, but I am attempting to carry out this project under the aegis of a radically dialectical social ecology that would, among other things, address the contributions of diverse ecological tendencies more adequately than has previous dogmatic social ecology.

seen as exhibiting different levels of value that depend on their place in the larger ecological whole. Guilherme asks whether Spinoza's ultimate substance, God or Nature, "would value an amoeba just as much as it values a human being," and whether it "does not hold any sort of preference towards its modifications or relative entities."[48] He contends that "conferring partiality to the substance" would not constitute anthropocentrism or "ascribing it with human features," if this substance is seen as being "akin to an organism" as is in fact implied by its quality of being "*natura naturans* or creator (i.e. the active force of nature)."[49]

The implication of the argument is that to the extent that substance can be seen as having the qualities of a conscious living organism, "it is possible to hold that the substance does hold some sort of preference towards some of its modes."[50] This preference or "partiality" constitutes, in fact, true impartiality, since it means assessing value from the standpoint of the less limited whole rather than that of the more limited part. The principle of biocentric equality holds that all things in the biosphere have an equal right "to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger Self-Realization."[51] However, this formulation itself indicates the nature of the problem. The assertion of such a right involves either a contradiction or a very weak claim. If it is interpreted as an absolute right that cannot be overridden, then the concept of "within the larger Self-Realization" can have no real moral force. However, "equal right" in any coherent moral or legal theory of rights always means an equal prima facie right, not an absolute right that cannot be overridden. But if it means this, then it is not clear that the self-realization of a very simple being that has little significance for the self-realization of the larger whole would have much moral significance at all. Furthermore, when we move from an ethical individualist position to a communitarian, holistic, or organicist one, the concept of an "individual right" loses much of its meaning. It becomes a form of mere ethical shorthand for a more complex moral relation.

Interestingly, after exploring the organicist implications of Spinoza's position, Guilherme reformulates his interpretation in eco-communitarian terms. He says that problems will arise if "human beings do not establish a communitarian relation with the other entities, from the smallest modes to ecosystems."[52] Such a relationship with "the smallest mode" will imply a respect for its conatus (we might say the *dao* or way of that being), that is, its striving to persevere in its own existence and to reach its own perfection. However, a communitarian relationship with the larger eco-community will imply that the way of that "smallest mode," or even that of considerably larger ones, must never take precedence over the way, or the unfolding good, of the larger whole, the eco-community.

The concept of "higher modification" can be defended on the basis of the nature of the value experience and value attainment in question, that is, from the perspective of Spinoza's "Substance" or what Hegel would have seen as "Substance as Subject" or "Spirit." Yet value cannot be "simply located" and systemic value is also relevant. The "highest modification" does not take precedence over larger wholes of which it is a part. "Self-consciousness" in a "mode of substance" gives that mode a certain ontological and axiological standing, but self-consciousness as the Earth's self-

[48] Alex Guilherme, "Metaphysics as a Basis for Deep Ecology: An Enquiry into Spinoza's System" in *The Trumpeter* Vol. 27, No. 3 (2011), p. 69)

[49] Ibid, p. 70.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid, p. 71

[52] Ibid, p. 73

consciousness" or "nature becoming self-conscious" (as Elisée Reclus put it[53]) takes precedence over the mode qua mode's consciousness of itself.

Guilherme sees encouraging practical consequences of such an analysis in that they are compatible with what might seem reasonable to what we might call "the rational non-egoist" or eco-communitarian. He concludes that:

> When faced with the dilemma of destroying an ecosystem for harvesting its wood, the human being will have to ponder whether it is worth destroying that particular environment for that purpose or whether it is more beneficial to harvest the wood somewhere else or even to replace the wood by another material; or when faced with the opportunity of killing a virus and saving the human host, let us say small pox, the human being will be able to decide for the human life with no qualms for the human life is a higher modification of the substance (within the reading that the substance holding a preference for its higher modifications) or simply because the human being's *conatus* calls for it, the human being's striving for enduring for as long as it possibly could demands it.[54]

This is the kind of complex and challenging moral reasoning that makes sense in a world in which value and good are located at various levels of being, within communities of communities, within sub-systems of systems, within wholes within wholes.

Deep Ecopolitics

One thing that was very much alive in the early days of deep ecology was the vision of the kind of free, ecological society that should replace the present imperial, ecocidal one. Devall and Sessions in *Deep Ecology* present a very good sketch of the nature of such a society. They describe it as reflecting the values of a dissident "minority tradition," which it certainly is from the perspective of the dominant powers and interests in the world today. However, it also reflects very much the wisdom of the "majority tradition" consisting of most of the human communities that have ever existed across the history of our species. As Snyder notes, the transition from an authoritarian, statist system of political organization to a democratic, participatory, bioregionally-based one, means reclaiming a lost legacy: "we are asking how the whole human race can regain self-determination in place after centuries of having been disenfranchised by hierarchy and/or centralized power."[55]

This analysis is echoed in *Deep Ecology*, in which Devall and Sessions depict ecological communities in the following way (and most of what follows uses precisely the same terms as they do). These communities are decentralized, non-hierarchical, democratic, self-regulating, and relatively small in scale. They value local autonomy and personal responsibility. They practice leadership through example rather than through coercion or domination. They function through

[53] Reclus began his monumental 3500-page work of philosophy and social geography, *L'Homme et la Terre* with the statement that "l'Homme est la nature prenant conscience d'elle-même." [Paris: Librarie Universelle, 1905), vol. I, p. i.] For an analysis of Reclus' view of nature, see John Clark, "The Earth Story, the Human Story" in John Clark and Camille Martin, eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013), pp. 3–7.

[54] Guilherme, pp. 74–75.

[55] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 42.

mutual aid and voluntary cooperation, rather than through competition. They practice communalism in a broad sense that includes animals and plants as members of the community. They have achieved a material simplicity of wants. They are peaceful and nonviolent. They are open to a variety of approaches to ultimate meaning and forms of religious experience. They have common rituals in which the whole community participates collectively. And finally, they are guided by a deep form of communication with nature and an intuition of organic wholeness.[56] Thirty years later, this still seems to be an excellent depiction of the ecological community—we might well say the deeply ecological community.

This vision has never died and it certainly lives on in Earth First! and other radical environmental tendencies inspired by deep ecology. However, it has faded into the background for many in the movement—especially among those in its more academic and intellectual wing. A crucial political theme that has been increasingly neglected, and even intentionally deemphasized, is Naess's affirmation of a strong link between deep ecological concerns and an "anti-class posture." Naess points out that "diversity of human ways of life is in part due to (intended or unintended) exploitation and suppression on the part of certain groups. The exploiter lives differently from the exploited, but both are adversely affected in their potentialities of self-realization."[57]

George Sessions has argued that "an 'anti-social-class posture' … while held by most Deep Ecology supporters, is not specifically an ecological issue."[58] He contends that class analysis should therefore be excluded from general statements such as the Deep Ecology Platform. However, in another article, Naess states that "in my estimation, Green parties, including the Norwegian one, do not sufficiently see that solidarity and compassion for people in the Third world, especially for the children, demand a tenfold increase in the contribution to the daily fight against devastating hunger and degrading torture in many poor countries as a *more ecologically sound solution*."[59] Note that he formulates aid to malnourished and abused children as a specificaally "ecological" issue, which we must certainly see it to be if we take a dialectical, holistic, and deeply ecological perspective.

Thomas Berry is also quite clear about the link between the social institutional structure and ecological crisis. He stresses above all the effects of corporate capitalism, stating that "the natural world of living beings other than humans is still at the mercy of the modern industrial corporation as the ultimate expression of patriarchal dominance over the entire planetary process."[60] However, he sees the problem as larger than capitalism, as central as it is to the entire system of domination. He has often described that larger system as consisting of "the four basic patriarchal oppressions," which he enumerates as "rulers over people, men over women, possessors over non-possessors, and humans over nature." In other words, the problem of oppression and domination has its roots in the history and legacy of an entire complex system of domination that encompasses the state, patriarchy, capitalism, and the domination of nature.[61]

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[56] These concepts pervade the work, but see especially the summary of the differences between the "Dominant Position" and the "Minority Tradition" on pp. 18–19.

[57] Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," p. 152.

[58] George Sessions, *Deep Ecology in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 190.

[59] Arne Naess, "Politics and the Ecological Crisis : An Introductory Note, " in *Deep Ecology in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 452. Emphasis added.

[60] Berry, *The Great Work*, p. 163.

[61] Berry, "The Viable Human," p. 14.

This is where a radically dialectical ecology would be guided by a much stricter and more critical conception of "internal relations" than that of those who accept the concept merely as a way of expressing the trivial truth that all things are in some way connected. The actually-existing systems of social domination and domination of nature are inextricably interrelated, and profoundly condition one another. It would be foolhardy to assume that the two forms of domination can be addressed as if they were separate, any more than patriarchal domination can be conceptualized merely as domination of women with no implications concerning the domination of nature (or domination of men, for that matter). Any ecologist who aspires to depth and who has doubts about this interconnection should consider carefully the work of ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant,[62] Val Plumwood,[63] Ariel Salleh[64] and Vandana Shiva,[65] who have analyzed the intricate connections in both the social ideology and the social imaginary between domination of women and domination of nature.[66]

A similar case should be made on the issues of population and immigration. The Deep Ecology Platform addresses the issue of population to the extent that it correctly recognizes that a large and still growing human population creates severe stresses on both human society and the biosphere. However, it does not address the question of the causes of high fertility rates or what might actually result in a lowering of those rates. Given the prevalence of deceptive ideology and confusion in this area, some who agree with the general point about population might well advocate policies that are ineffective or counterproductive in addressing the problem of population, while being socially unjust and injurious in other ways.[67] Naess addresses this issue perceptively. He says that in shallow ecology, "the right is claimed to defend one's borders against 'illegal aliens,' regardless of what the population pressures are elsewhere."[68] In deep ecology it is recognized that "the pressure stemming from the industrial societies is a major factor, and population reduction must have the highest priority in those societies."[69] While the latter point is well-taken, the most crucial one is that an ecological approach requires that problems be addressed contextually and holistically, and that imaginary political boundaries not be used ideologically to obscure real ecological continuities.

Platform and Practice

As has already been hinted, the well-known Deep Ecology Platform in some respects stands in the way of what is most alive in deep ecology. The Platform is sometimes supported as a list of

[62] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

[63] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[64] Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1997).

[65] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Boston: South End Press, 2010).

[66] This cannot be discussed in detail here, but the infamous debate over whether "the domination of nature," or "the domination of human by human," is primary is fruitless. We have no reason to think that both forms of domination are not grounded in primordial aspects of human knowledge and perception, and of the human interaction with nature, out of which processes of objectification and instrumentalization emerged. The relationship between forms of domination can only be seen as dialectical, and not simply causal.

[67] See John Clark, "The Tragedy of Common Sense; Part One: The Power of Myth" in *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 21:3 (2010): 35–54; and "The Tragedy of Common Sense; Part Two: From Ideology to Historical Reality" in *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 21:4 (2010): 34–49.

[68] Naess, "The Deep Ecology Movement," p. 73.

[69] Ibid, p. 73.

principles that can be accepted by many people with different ultimate philosophies and which thus create a common basis for action. Deep ecology supporters are distinguished from those who hold various more fundamental ecosophies and the Platform is defended pragmatically as being easier to accept and less controversial than the more specific and demanding tenets of an ecosophy. However, as is so often the case, the truth turns out to be the precise opposite of what common sense pragmatism would predict. Paradoxically, the ideas and visions that inspire deep personal and social transformation are inevitably those that are *more* difficult to accept, *more* controversial, and *more* divisive. They are "*to the Jews a stumbling block*, and to the Greeks foolishness."[70] The ease always comes later, along with its own threats and opportunities.

The first famous "Platform," *The Platform Sutra of Huineng* (638–713 AD), which has inspired a large 1500-hundred year old movement called Ch'an or Zen, and helped transform the lives of multitudes of people over the ages, did not hesitate to proclaim difficult truths, and in fact explicitly stressed their extreme difficulty for those who do not yet follow the way. Of the truth of awakening, Huineng says:

> Great nirvana, unexcelled,
> Is complete illumination, always silently shining:
> Ordinary fools call it death ...[71]

If we understand the place of the social imaginary and the social ethos in the shaping of the person and culture, we will see how limited a function a document such as the "Deep Ecology Platform" can possibly have. Even were the Platform brilliantly and sensitively formulated, it could only take on deep significance if processes of personal and cultural transformation—the elements of deep practice—are already occurring; in other words, if the Platform is an expression of the movement. In this case, a Platform, if well-formulated, can help draw out the implications that are implicit in the movement and accelerate the movement of the movement.

The Deep Ecology Platform has problems fulfilling even this limited function, because it is not, in fact, very well-formulated.[72] If we look at the aspects that relate to social practice, it makes a very limited contribution, primarily because of its extreme vagueness concerning the roots of ecological problems and the direction of action needed to solve the problems. The "apron diagram" response, which explains that specific policies can be "derived" from the general statements,[73] misses an important point. General statements may be so vague and general that they can be used to legitimate a range of actions that might: 1) help significantly to solve a problem; 2) help to mitigate the problem in a relatively insignificant way; or 3) act to distract attention away from effective solutions and thus help to aggravate the problem. The points in the Deep Ecology Platform that are relevant to practical social action exhibit this kind of ambiguity.

[70] 1 Corinthians 1:23. Perhaps we should say today, in a world that is starkly divided between disavowers and deniers, that they are a stumbling block to the Left, and foolishness the Right.

[71] Hui-Neng, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng: Grand Master of Zen* (Boston and London: Shambala, 1998), p. 54. Of course, Huineng's Platform Sutra was not really a platform, and was meant to wreck principles.

[72] Some might ask how "well-formulated" a platform can be, assuming that the "platform" of a "movement" must necessarily be a brief statement of general principles. Such a view is misguided. To take an example from another (much more significant) ecological movement, the platform of The Greens/Green Party USA adopted in May, 2000 at the Green Congress in Chicago is a statement of almost 5000 words covering thirteen major topics. There is no reason why a platform has to be this detailed, but there is also no reason to think that there is something about the nature of a platform that dictates that it should be limited to a sketchy statement of a few principles in 200 words.

[73] "Appendix A: Ecosophy T" in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, pp. 225–226.

Some examples of such ambiguities in the text of the Platform[74] might be helpful (though some of these repeat rather obvious issues that have often been raised). The Platform states that "humans have no right to reduce [biotic] richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs." The vagueness of the terms used here undercuts their significance. Because of divergent conceptions of the human good, radical ecologists can argue that applying such a criterion strictly would require the abolition of the dominant order, while reformists can use a looser definition of "vital" that would preserve the legitimacy of that order. The Platform asserts that "present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening." The implications of this statement are also vague. How excessive is it? How much worse is it getting and how quickly? How do we weigh concern about this "worsening" against other important values? Furthermore, what does it say to the reader that the most damning statement in the platform is merely that "human interference is worsening?" The present level of "interference" is ecocidal in nature, has led us into the Sixth Great Mass Extinction of life on Earth, and has brought us to the brink of global ecological collapse. Is it possible that a small dose of catastrophism might be salutary at this point?[75] The Platform asserts further that "the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population" and "the flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease." Again, the implications are unclear. Even if we agree with this statement, what actions should we advocate? How much flourishing, if any, ought to be sacrificed for the sake of other values? What are the causal factors that need to be addressed? What approaches to the problem will be most effective?

The last part of the Platform focuses on the issue of "change." It is striking that it states explicitly that changes must address "basic economic, technological, and ideological structures," but the only one of these areas that is discussed with any specificity is the "ideological." Necessary change is described as being effected through "appreciation" and "awareness." Such subjective changes are obviously necessary, but in the absence of significant emphasis on complementary material and institutional changes, this comes close to being a paradigm case of an abstract idealist analysis. The Platform states that "the ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living." This is an excellent point, but does not divulge the secret of precisely what kind of world it is that is obsessed with "higher standard of living." It misses the chance to mention that we live in a late capitalist society with a system of values that makes people less happy, more depressed, more anxious, more nihilistic, less social, more isolated, more distracted, less mindful, etc. as they obliviously (though in most cases quite non-maliciously) engage in ecocidal levels of material consumption.

The Platform concludes with a rather anti-climactic climax: "Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes." In reality, every moment of our lives we participate directly and indi-

[74] The version of the Platform found in *Deep Ecology*, which has taken on canonical status, is cited here. This text is ubiquitous in discussions of deep ecology, including, for example, at the website of the Foundation for Deep Ecology at www.deepecology.org.

[75] Though I argue that catastrophism must give way to apocalypticism. See "Carnival at the Edge of the Abyss," [forthcoming; draft online at https://www.academia.edu/7872010/_Carnival_at_the_Edge_of_the_Abyss_New_Orleans_and_the_Apocalyptic_Imagination_], in which I contend that "Apocalypse implies cataclysmic change, but a kind of change that does not result in mere destruction and loss. Rather, the change opens up new utopian, antistitial possibilities that emerge out of what has existed all along within the interstitial gaps of civilization."

rectly either in creating the necessary changes or in standing in the way of them. However, the system of social determination determines that most efforts to "participate in the attempt" to create change merely reinforce the system. If we're honest, we'll recognize that as long as we operate within the limits of that system, the vast majority of what we do constitutes, at best, third degree ecocide. The Platform unfortunately gives us too little sense of what is at state at this crucial point in Earth history, and what kind of action we need to undertake in response.

Regretfully, we must now pronounce this Platform dead (except in the limbo of philosophical analysis, where it will continue to generate rather boring critiques and defenses, much like my own). Fortunately, the Platform has been of significance mainly in the academic world,[76] while the decisive influence of deep ecology has been in the world of local community activists, bioregional educators, restorers of the land, defenders of the wild, and warriors of the spirit. Its influence has been ecophilosophical in a very broad sense, rather than programmatic.

The Awakening Earth Community

The most crucial question about deep ecology today is what it can contribute to the growth and development of the awakening Earth community that is in the process of being born. At this moment in geo-history, everything depends on whether the planetary community of local and regional communities will come to consciousness of itself, and act consciously for itself as the consciousness of the Earth. For this process to unfold, we need, as Thomas Berry has emphasized, a deeply traumatic and transformative awakening experience, in which a sense of the sacredness of the Earth takes hold of our entire being. One of the deepest questions we must ponder is what might cause, or allow, this lightning to strike us. We need to learn how to develop a certain kind of negative capability, the ability not merely to act, but to make ourselves susceptible to being acted upon in a revelatory manner.

Arne Naess gives us a suggestion concerning this question when he quotes Spinoza's definition of joy (*laetitia*) as "man's transition from lesser to greater perfection," and "the affect by which, or through which, we make the transition to greater perfection," adding that "instead of 'perfection' we may say 'integrity' or 'wholeness.'"[77] Aldo Leopold once said (in my least favorite famous eco-quote) that "one of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds."[78] I suggest that we might say instead, in the spirit of Naess and Spinoza, that one of the greatest rewards of ecological wisdom is that it can help us live together joyfully in a world of healing community.

[76] Despite the existence of certain serious forums like *The Trumpeter*, deep ecology lives on in the American academic subculture primarily through a few brief selections that are widely reprinted in environmental ethics textbooks and anthologies and which have shaped its image for several decades of teachers and students. They know it primarily through the Deep Ecology Platform, several short selections from Arne Naess on "Self-Realization" and "Biocentric Egalitarianism," and two of Bookchin's obfuscatory diatribes. These readings have the virtue of reducing the movement to a few simple ideas that can be presented easily, memorized for tests, and debated pro and con. But sadly, we have another example of how academia often works, even if inadvertently, to eviscerate what is most alive in a theory or philosophy.

[77] Arne Naess, "the Place of Joy in a World of Fact" in *Deep Ecology in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 254

[78] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), p. 197. It is true, as Leopold says, that the educated professional ecologist knows more about the damage than the average layperson, but those who really know and feel the wounds most deeply are the natives who have the deepest experience and love of the land community.

The most essential goal of an ecological movement and an ecological wisdom is not to develop a correct set of ecological ideas with which people can agree, but rather to co-create with the Earth the wild, free, and joyful ecological community in which all the members share their journey toward integrity and wholeness.[79] One of the most far-reaching proposals along these lines is Alan Drengson's deep-ecology-inspired concept of an "ecostery." Ecosteries are:

> *loved places where ecological values, knowledge and wisdom are learned, practiced and shared.* They can be in any place, a semi-permanent camp in a natural forest clearing, a small cabin by a lake, a house in town, or a rural farm, occupied by a single person, family, group or community… "Ecostery" is from "ecos," the ancient Greek word for household. Our *ecos* includes our home, neighborhood and ecological community. "Stery" comes from "monastery," a place where people live by rules of devotion and respect. Its members share the same values, and work together to live a complete, sacred life here and now.[80]

This expresses well the need for intensive practice, for the realization of the ecological ethos in its fully-developed form, here and now. It is only through experiments in such deep practice that we can hope to inspire the Great Ecological Awakening, without which we are lost. Such an awakening would be both a social revolution and a conversion experience (both of which mean a "turning around") in which millions of people leave the old world behind in order to devote their lives to creating the ecological community in their neighborhood, town, village or countryside. Perhaps what is needed is an ecostery that draws its inspiration from *oikos*, the Earth household, and the phalan*stery*, the utopian philosopher Fourier's community of maximum unity through maximum diversity, based on eros or "passionate attraction" and the power of natural harmony.

This would take us back to Gary Snyder's vision of the ecological ethos as a communal and eco-communal life that is "wild and free," in the sense of having spontaneous order, meaning, and creative power. Bill Devall in *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* specifically points out the basis of such an ethos in an erotic sensibility grounded in the primordial nonduality of our being:

> Recalling eros from banishment and integrating it through our practice requires moving from our minimal self further into wild territory, listening to feelings long suppressed. In Marcuse's terms, what is required is a new sensibility that draws on the qualitative, elementary, preconscious world of experience. Unless this "primary experience" changes there will be no radical social change.[81]

In short, Eros must be called back into the *oikos*. There will be no radical social change until the "primary experience" of a large segment of the society at large is transformed, until they move

[79] This goal differs from the vague formulation of the deep ecology Platform in a very obvious way: it requires specific *eco-communitarian practice* that can be assessed in relation to the system of *eco-communitarian values* on which it is based. To recycle bottles or to put solar panels on one suburban home would not qualify as "co-creating with the Earth the wild, free, and joyful ecological community." To spend many years or decades of one's life developing a radically ecological base community or intentional community would qualify.

[80] "Introduction" from The Ecostery Foundation website at www.ecostery.org.

[81] Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Books, 1988), p. 54.

from living in the culture of *Thanatos*, the world of death and domination, to living in the culture of *Eros*, the world of creativity and celebration. The emergent ecstatic ecological community needs to gain the power to inspire *positive envy* in large masses of people. To put it another way, the ecological way of life, following the way of nature, has to appear so fulfilling and satisfying that these masses will develop an intense desire to live that life. And there must be an abundance of places that can easily be found (in one's own neighborhood, just across town, a short distance away in the countryside) in which to live such a life.

Those who value the flourishing of the earth community beyond the self-interest of any individual or group, and who realize that we are in the midst of one of the greatest crises in the history of life on Earth, will dedicate every moment of their lives to (in the words of *Deep Ecology*'s subtitle) "living as if Nature mattered" and to bringing in the Ecozoic Age , described by Thomas Berry as the age in which there is "a new mode of human-Earth relations, one where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the *primary concern*."[82] In such a community, everything will conspire to give the community members the sense of having a compelling and deeply valuable vocation or calling, a path of "right livelihood." They will have the feeling that the great work, the good work, the real work,[83] is also the good life.

We might consider finding a new ecological meaning in the old words of the *Internationale*, "Nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout"—"we are nothing, let us be all." We are facing the nothingness of late modern nihilism, and we are facing the nothingness of mass extinction. Let us begin moving from this dreadful encounter with nihilism to a spirit and practice of determinate negation. In this way, through the creative negation of our own disintegration, we can become "All" by realizing our communitarian nature as an expression the All of the entire Earth community. This is the living All that is never a closed, completed All, but an open, always becoming All.[84]

To follow this path means merely thinking that we are All, or going through a process of imaginary ego-inflation that we hope might take us beyond the ego. Rather, it means living and acting as All, in every moment of our lives. We must abjure all such abstract idealist nonsense as distant visions and ideal vistas and throw ourselves into the here and now, rediscovering the reality of immanence and of the decisive moment. This would mean living a life of concrete universality, of achieving realization through the Ten Thousand Things. This would mean becoming a follower of the way, and a follower of the common. This would mean living the deep *logos* of the *oikos*.

[82] Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story*, p. 15. Emphasis added.

[83] See Gary Snyder, "On 'I went into the Maverick Bar,"; online at www.english.illinois.edu.

[84] I develop the nature of this project at length in *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism.*

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