

## Unit 3 Handout 4: DesJardin's Environmental Ethics

### Chapter 9 Deep Ecology

#### Introduction

**Deep Ecology** is not a single systematic view, but a family of theories.

- Naess's distinction:
  - Deep versus shallow ecology: **shallow ecology** is the fight against pollution and resource depletion. **Deep ecology** is holistic; it takes a total field perspective.
- What distinguishes DE as a philosophical approach: its call for a complete change in philosophical outlook from the flawed "dominant perspective"
  - DE demands a reawakening of something very old (as opposed to a new vision): an *ecological consciousness*
  - DE claims that the "dominant world view" is responsible for environmental destruction.
  - Thus DE claims that those committed to shallow ecological solutions are treating the symptoms, while what should be being examined is the source of the symptoms, the illness itself.
  - To allude to this radical (old) perspective, DEers use poetry, Buddhism, spiritualism, and political activism to try and express the view.

#### The Deep Ecology Platform

To attempt to bring about this change in worldview—to reawaken our collective ecological consciousness—DE proceeds in 2 direction:

- they are dedicated to working toward that change themselves, *actively*
- They seek to articulate an alternative philosophy to replace the old one: this is called *ecophilosophy* (a particular ecophilosophical theory is then called an *ecosophy*).

Naess and Sessions: the DE platform as **a set of shared principles**:

- (1) The flourishing of human and non-human life has intrinsic value.
- (2) Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth.
- (3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.

- (4) Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- (5) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
- (6) Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies.
- (7) The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* rather than adhering to a *high standard of living*.
- (8) Anyone who believes all of this has a moral obligation to do anything in his/her power to bring about the change we all need.

## Ecology and Ecophilosophy

- Like Leopold, Naess argues for a humble and restrained approach to environmental change, and that the place to begin looking for what we should do begins with Ecology
- Thus, Ecology informs Ecophilosophy:
  - We gain a better understanding of the world, and on the basis of this, are in a better position to offer ethical evaluations and prescriptions.
  - But Naess is aware of the limits of science's ability to inform ethics: *ecology should never be taken as a final authority on environmental disputes*.

## Metaphysical Ecology

- DEers are committed to a version of *metaphysical holism*. On this view humans are fundamentally part of their surroundings, not distinct from them.
- The environment, in an important sense, determines what we are:
  - When Naess speaks of the “relational total-field image” he really means to say that human nature is essentially linked to our relationships between nature and each other. Without such connections and relations, humans would literally become different beings.
  - Thus, DEers deny the existence of individuals (at least in any deep or significant sense).
  - p. 210: we can think of the entire ecosystem as an energy circuit, and the individuals as a confluence of physical/chemical processes (areas of energy exchange).

Discussion: Are parts prior to their wholes or are wholes prior to their parts?

## From Metaphysics to Ethics

- With no important notion of what an individual is, accept as derivative from the fundamental whole, then the distinction between object and subject break down. Without

this distinction, we also can no longer make the distinction between the objective and the subjective.

- This leaves open the possibility that evaluative judgments about the value and beauty of the wilderness, for example, can be shown to be as rationally justified as the judgments of science.

**Exercise:** Examine the discussion of Naess's claim that what we normally think of as subjective judgments (e.g. that a particular wilderness area is beautiful) can be shown to be true and rational. (See page 214). What is Naess's line of reasoning? How does Naess propose to solve environmental debates, or for that matter, moral conflicts? Finally, do you agree or disagree? Please explain and be specific.

### Self Realization and Biocentric Equality

- **Self-realization:** a process through which people come to understand themselves as existing in a thorough interconnectedness with the rest of nature.
  - for DEers, the underlying self is the self that is one with the natural world
  - DEers retain a commitment to self realization, self-interest, self-fulfillment, but deny that this is the individualistic understanding of the self.
  - Self vs. self
- To have a sense of **Biocentric Equality** is to recognize that all organisms and beings are equally members of an interrelated whole and therefore, have equal intrinsic worth.

### Practical Implications

- Humans ought to live in simple, relatively nontechnological, self-reliant, decentralized communities.
- By analogy to the concept of an ecosystem, communities ought to be organized regionally, existing as "bioregions" rather than as more traditional political organizations.
- The ideal of such a community: ecotopia

### Criticisms

- The "you can't criticize it" criticism.
- another version of ecofascism
- DE gives an unfair portrayal of the current state of things: not everyone but them believes the dominant world view.
- DE is based in principles which are, at bottom, racist, or at least a kind of Western Imperialism.
- DE blurs together the concepts of several eastern religions and inaccurately portrays eastern religions as united and as environmentally friendly; neither of which are true.

**Homework #4:** In 2 pages max DOUBLE SPACED, and sent to me as an email attachment:

Examine the discussion of Naess's claim that what we normally think of as subjective judgments (e.g. that a particular wilderness area is beautiful) can be shown to be true and rational. (See page 214). What is Naess's line of reasoning? How does Naess propose to solve environmental debates, or for that matter, moral conflicts? Finally, do you agree or disagree? Please explain and be specific.