Education for Local and Global Ecological Responsibility: Arne Næss's Cross-Cultural, Ecophilosophy Approach[1]

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Abstract

This paper explains Arne Næss's approach to understanding contemporary grassroots movements, and especially the long range deep ecology movement. Some critics reject what they call "deep ecology" and criticize "deep ecologists," but in so doing they confuse Næss's personal ultimate philosophy—which he calls *Ecosophy T*—with his description of global socio-political movements (Glasser, 1996, 1997). Næss's interdisciplinary, cross-cultural approach involves a four level framework for discourse that is fruitful for local and global environmental study. It helps us clarify how local actions and global responsibility can become a part of all our relationships. This approach stresses respect and appreciation for all forms of diversity: personal, cultural and ecological. Using it we can help students and ourselves design personal ecosophies as living philosophies of ecological harmony.

Résumé

Ce document explique l'approche d'Arne Næss pour comprendre les mouvements communautaires contemporains, et notamment le mouvement d'écologisme radical à large spectre. Certains critiques rejettent ce qu'ils nomment l'« écologisme radical » et s'opposent aux « écologistes radicaux », mais confondent la philosophie absolue et personnelle de Næss, l'*écosophie T*, ainsi que sa description des mouvements sociopolitiques mondiaux. L'approche interdisciplinaire et interculturelle de Næss nous donne un cadre de quatre niveaux en vue d'un discours fructueux pour l'étude environnementale locale et mondiale. Elle nous aide à clarifier comment les actions locales se relient à la responsabilité globale dans toutes nos relations. Au moyen de cette approche de questionnement profond, nous pouvons tous créer notre propre écosophie, qui

correspond à toute philosophie vécue dont les valeurs mènent à l'harmonie écologique. Nous pouvons aider les étudiants à concevoir leur propre écosophie et à apprécier celles des autres. Cette approche insiste sur l'appréciation et le respect de toutes les formes de diversité : personnelle, culturelle et écologique.

Grassroots Movements and Cross-cultural Studies

The grassroots movement for ecological responsibility arose during the last hundred years. Some major figures and events mark its development, for example the debates between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot about preservation vs. conservation. Writers East and West (see Brown et al., 1999; Bowers, 1993; Devall, 1994; Mander & Goldsmith, 1996; Norberg-Hodge, 1991; Shiva, 1993) ascribe the global environmental crisis primarily to the paradigms and development models of modern western industrialism. As industrial development based on these models has spread, so has large scale degradation of the human and natural environment. The more intensely its economy has been applied, the more intensely it has pushed against the limits of the natural world's ecological processes, functions and communities. What are some consequences of using this model?

If we take our ecological footprint—the land measure of our impact on the natural world—we find that as members of modern industrial states, we have very large feet (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996). Our ecological footprints are 50 or more times larger than those of nonindustrial people. Cross-cultural interdisciplinary studies and research have given us this knowledge.

There is almost universal agreement among scientists from most UN nations that the over-all impact of environmental destruction, caused by modern technology—magnified by human numbers, is seriously disrupting major ecological processes and functions. To mention two: the build up of greenhouse gasses and effects on health and climate, and the thinning of the ozone shield and its effect on plant and animal life. These are problems of gigantic scale, and overwhelming evidence suggests that they are primarily the result of human industrial activity (Brown et al., 1999). Many feel alarms are sounding. The *rate* of species extinction is increasing. It now exceeds the rate during the aftermath of the large asteroid collision 63 million years ago. We do not know what the ultimate effects of these changes will be for humans. The more we learn about the diversity of biological and ecological functions and processes, the more we realize how little we know about this vast, complicated planetary system. This ignorance

is not incompatible with wisdom, but being aware of it is necessary for wise actions (Drengson, 1981). Precautionary principles are advised.

Many platforms have been put forth as a basis for collective action to deal with these perceived global problems. These principles include aim, value and action statements. For example, platforms have been articulated for the four grass-roots, global movements of this century: the Social Justice Movement, the Peace Movement, the Environmental Movement, and the Appropriate Technology Movement. The principles of these movements have emerged from the bottom up. They have been carried forward by the work of thousands of non-government organizations, researchers, and scholars in countries all over the world.

In comparing different cultures we notice not only differences, but some *similar practices and values*, and some common principles and agreements. Some agreements are implicit, not spelled out, but simply acted out on a day to day basis. Some common elements and principles are embodied in traditions and international agreements, such as UN declarations, treaties, and other cross-cultural instruments. For example, there are now widely embraced universal standards of human rights and decency. There are international standards pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war. There are also some agreements about standards in trade and environmental safety. There are some almost universal agreements about biological diversity, endangered species and other subjects pertaining to the integrity of the Earth's ecological communities and ecosystems. Of course, none of these agreements are perfectly enacted or universally adopted. Many nations ignore ones they have signed, but still they have acknowledged the principles.

This general level of agreement among diverse nations is remarkable, considering that not long ago there was much greater division in the world. It is also remarkable when we consider that cross-cultural discussions of worldviews and of different value systems have only recently emerged through the work of various investigators. In the 19th century, most comparative cross-cultural work was ethnocentric. Few of the authors had direct experience with the practices central to the philosophies of other cultures they wrote about. Many bridges have been built since through cross-cultural cooperation and experience on the part of many people.

The over-arching aim of cross-cultural *ecophilosophy* is to have a comprehensive, long range, global view of our situation as planet Earth dwellers. Critical to this undertaking is insight into the values we embrace and of the quality and type of relationships we create with one another and with the natural world. Education helps us to achieve this larger understanding necessary for wise actions.

Ecophilosophy is an inquiry that respects human and biological diversity, and the rich values found within cultures and Nature. For our purposes we will describe it as comprehensive and deep value inquiry (on which full cost accounting depends). We each should seek to articulate our own ultimate values. We can proceed *as if* to avoid ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism. The narrow immature approach is an *egocentric* one, and the wider, more mature, ecologically and socially responsible approach is bio or ecocentric. Social and ecological responsibility are intertwined. An ecocentric approach is inclusive, and includes cultures along with their natural contexts, their land. It includes all values found on Earth. It *appreciates* intrinsic values found in both the human and natural world. Comprehensive value inquiry helps to build bridges, paths, networks and connections that cross-cultural boundaries. These help us to act with harmony and beauty in international cooperation for the Earth. Fruitful cross-cultural discussions and inquiry require that we assent to *principles of mutual respect, openness and appreciation*. Humour and play also help to further this larger understanding.

Ecophilosophy aims to discover the many forms of ecological wisdom. In search of wisdom, we seek a comprehensive sense of our situation as humans of a particular culture, on planet Earth, with its great diversity of cultures and beings. The pursuit of this comprehensive, cross-cultural understanding has been advanced through *six main areas* of study and cooperation. These have furthered our ability to understand one another in a global context, with respect for cultural diversity, unique places and specific historical traditions. These areas of study and cooperation are:

- *Cross-cultural research*,
- *Comparative studies and cultural exchanges*, for example in the humanities and arts,
- *Negotiated frameworks for international cooperation* based on trade, disaster relief, etc.,
- *Grassroots movements and NGOs* such as the peace, social justice, and environmental movements,
- *Cooperative scientific and technological studies and undertakings*, such as atmospheric research, and
- *International networks* with the development of telecommunications, jet transport, email, the WEB and so on. (This is not an exhaustive list.)

These six areas continue to work, despite cultural diversity, because there are some shared values. For example, because we care for and live on a common Earth, we share certain ecological values, and because of our origins

we share a common humanity, despite wide cultural differences. These areas of participation help many people from diverse nations to experience a sense of planetary care and community. They feel good about human and cultural creativity. Cooperation on issues of peace and nonviolent resolution of conflicts is possible because we share some basic values on human rights and about appropriate means for resolving differences. Such cooperative undertakings involve significant levels of maturity, *for they depend on mutual respect, acceptance of diversity in races, cultures, worldviews and religions*. How can we better advance these shared values in education to encourage pursuit of wisdom in our relations with each other and the natural world (Kohn, 1992; Nicholls, 1989)? The effort to gain this comprehensive depth is called ecophilosophy (*Næss*, in Drengson and Inoue, 1995, p. 3-9).

The Ecology Movement

When Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, she received both receptive and hostile responses. Vested interests attacked her character and integrity. However, many who read her book thought that she spoke the truth. They felt as she did. Modern industrial methods are putting toxic substances into the food chains. They disrupt the ecological and evolutionary processes that maintain a habitable Earth. Valuable species and traditions are being lost.

Carson's love for the natural world deepened her field ecologist's understanding of ecological communities, and she communicated this to others. She helped them to see the world through a field ecologist's eyes—as an interconnected whole. Environmental concern, *as a major political force in the West*, is often dated from the publication of *Silent Spring*. In the 10 years that followed, up to the first Earth Day in 1972, the lessons of field ecology permeated the ecology movement, research and education. Conditions were ripe for some basic distinctions.

By 1972 the global, grassroots social and political environmental movement had two main forms. These were described by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss when he spoke on the environmental crisis and the ecology movement in an address given in Bucharest in Central Europe at a conference on The Future of Research. (See Drengson and Inoue, 1995, p. 3-9 for the presentation.) Næss noted that many people around the world are aware of increasing environmental degradation. They feel that something needs to be done. He explained the two main types of responses by distinguishing between the short term *Shallow Ecology Movement* and the long range *Deep Ecology Movement*.

Næss has been a follower of Gandhi's way of nonviolence since a young man. He is now 88. He has lived through wars and depressions. Norway was occupied by German armies for five years during the Second World War. He was a leader of nonviolent resistance to this occupation. He has lived and taught in many countries, and climbed in major mountain ranges all over the world. When he traveled around after the war, he participated in various local forums and international workshops. He was a leader in interdisciplinary cross-cultural research. He spoke with a growing number of people with extensive cross-cultural experience. He carried on scholarly research in many languages and corresponded with many scholars in other parts of the world.

As Næss traveled and studied, he noted the ways in which people abide by principles cutting across cultural boundaries, such as Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and the principles of social justice. He identified two main reactions to the awareness that we are disrupting the natural world. The short term Shallow Ecology Movement relies on quick, technical fixes and pursues business as usual without any deep value questioning or long range changes in the system. The long range Deep Ecology Movement takes a broader view, looks for long term solutions and pursues deep questioning and new patterns of change and action. We cannot go on with business as usual. We must change our life styles toward higher quality of life, rather than increasingly higher levels of production and consumption.

The Shallow Ecology Movement does not question deeply for it focuses on short term, narrow human interests. Thus, it only tinkers with the built systems. It does not question its own fundamental methods, values and purposes. It does not look deeply into the nature of our relationships with each other and other beings. It assumes we can do okay without making fundamental changes. This is the approach generally followed by mainstream institutions.

In contrast, the deep questioning approach, the long range Deep Ecology Movement, examines our basic values and reflects on our fundamental relationships and who we are. Supporters ask how to change their activities to bring them into harmony with natural community processes. They realize we do not know how to manage the natural world, but must learn from the integrity and diversity naturally found there. We must learn to manage ourselves as responsible members of the ecosphere, which includes diverse social and species communities.

While the Shallow Ecology Movement is anthropocentric (humans first) and considers only human interests, the Deep Ecology Movement is based on platform principles that emphasize the need to respect the intrinsic

worth of all beings, humans included, and to treasure all forms of biological and cultural diversity.

Levels of Discourse and Diverse Ecosophies

Næss notes that there are four main levels of discourse used when we talk about values and actions in relation to the environmental crisis and social movements. (For Næss's more sophisticated apron diagram on these levels see Drengson and Inoue, 1995, p. 10-12.) For purposes of simplification these levels are as follows:

- *Level 1* involves ultimate philosophies with ultimate value and nature of the world premises,
- *Level 2* includes systems of principles and codes, for example the platform principles of political movements,
- *Level 3* involves policy and other guiding and interpretive formulations, and
- *Level 4* includes statements about practical actions.

Næss (1991) calls his own personal (Level 1) ultimate philosophy *Ecosophy T*. It is based on the norm, "Self-realization for all beings!" It does not characterize a political movement. The Deep Ecology Movement is characterized by means of (Level 2) *platform principles*. Such platforms do not constitute a whole philosophy, but *invite support from people with diverse ultimate philosophies* (Level I), especially if these are *ecosophies*.

A major purpose of ecophilosophy is to articulate and understand ecosophies. Ecosophies are articulated and practiced ultimate philosophies based on ecologically and socially responsible values. Living an ecosophy gives rise to ecological harmony and beauty. Following Næss (1973, 1991) we say that *ecosophy* is ecological wisdom, as derived from the ancient Greek roots "ecos" meaning place, and "sophia" meaning wisdom. We emphasize that there is not just one ecosophy that all humans everywhere must accept. *There are very many ecosophies* and the possibilities for articulating new ones are almost unlimited. This abundant diversity is good in itself, but it is also good for a multitude of instrumental reasons, including survival—which many would say is good in itself. How do we nourish the development of ecosophies in contemporary societies? How do we encourage them locally and globally? In environmental education students should study diverse ecosophies. Consider the levels of discourse involved, learn cross-cultural approaches, how to describe and compare different value systems

and worldviews, and how to articulate their own personal ecosophies. This process connects the personal to the communal and global contexts. It should be a cooperative undertaking (Nicholls, 1989).

Cross-cultural studies have helped us to appreciate the diverse worldviews on planet Earth. At the level of international cooperation, we have created institutions that enable us to work together globally despite these cultural differences. As mentioned earlier, the broadly accepted principles of social justice and the principles of nonviolent resolution of conflict have become part of international agreements that most of us can affirm from our different ultimate philosophies or religions. Nations attempt to develop policies that honour such principles agreed to in international bodies and treaties. These policies encourage certain courses of action to improve conditions in specific contexts and places. Many transition strategies are being used in different places. (See Notes for websites.[2])

Just as we have made progress in the area of human rights and nonviolent resolution of conflicts, so too we have made progress in recognizing the seriousness and depth of the environmental crisis. Common themes have emerged. A number of agreements and declarations, put forth in different local, regional, national and international forums, affirm many of the platform principles that Næss and Sessions articulated in 1984 as a basis for collective actions in our different cultural settings. The platform principles proposed are the following eight points:

The Platform Principles of the Long Range Deep Ecology Movement

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes. (From *Deep Ecology* by Bill Devall and George Sessions, 1985.)

It should be stressed here that Næss and others do not regard this platform statement as the final word. Næss invites people to suggest modifications as they see fit. He has recently offered a new version of the *Eight Points* (Næss, 1999). It is important to underscore that this description of the Deep Ecology Movement is not an account of his personal philosophy, which he calls Ecosophy T. The platform principles are supported by people from diverse backgrounds. There are supporters who are Buddhists, Shintoists, Taoists, Shamanists, Christians, ecofeminists, and social ecologists, as is evident from the literature.

Ecosophy T and Other Issues

Næss's own personal philosophy, as already noted, is called *Ecosophy T*. In his writings he describes the influences from which he formed this philosophy. They include Spinoza, Gandhi, Mahayana Buddhism, and Norwegian *friluftsliv*. (The latter is the Scandinavian practice of Nature oriented outdoor activities; see Gelter paper in this volume.) The T (in Ecosophy T) refers to the name of his hut in the mountains of Norway, *Tvergastein*, possibly so named for the type of rocks found around it, or because a rock cross marker was once there. The T might also stand for the Norwegian word *"tolkning"* which means interpretation, a concept that is central to Næss's major work on language and communication entitled *Preciseness and Interpretation* (1953). (This book will be republished in the *Selected Works of Arne Næss* due from Kluwer in 2000.)

Næss's Ecosophy T has as its most basic norm "Self-realization for all beings!" If we reflect on Self realization, we will inquire into the nature of the self. Næss distinguishes between the small ego self and the larger ecological Self. He says we can gain a sense for this larger Self by extending our identification through caring. His own Ecosophy was worked out at Tvergastein high on Mt. Hallingskarvet, a place of extreme Arctic conditions. Næss does not urge everyone else to adopt his ultimate philosophy, but to develop their own ecosophies appropriate to their specific place. He hopes

people from different religious and philosophical backgrounds will support the platform of the Deep Ecology Movement. His ecosophy supports many other grassroots movements, such as the social justice, world peace, and ecofeminist movements. If people live in a Buddhist country, and are followers of Buddha, they can see how to support the platform from Buddhist teachings. They can formulate and support policies that will help to mitigate and prevent environmental degradation in their own place and area. They feel empowered to take certain practical actions knowing others are trying to support such principles in their own places and actions. Exactly what policies and actions depends upon their own personal history and cultural context. No single solution can be applied to every place. Næss likes to say, "The more diversity, the better." For example, the wise vernacular practices of ecoagriculture and ecoforestry are not machine standardized monocultures (Drengson & Taylor, 1997). Their common ground is a set of principles that entail a diversity of practices in harmony with local conditions, cultures, and ecological communities. The overall approach is to fit ourselves to our watersheds and specific places (ecos).

Næss notes that we cannot resolve the environmental crisis by imposing a single ecological worldview on every Earth dweller. This is an unsound approach for many reasons. There is not time. It will not work. Most importantly, it is wrong to try to force people to hold a certain worldview or religion. Moreover, diversity adds to the richness and goodness of our lives and to the richness of planet Earth. While we must work across cultural boundaries to resolve problems of international scope, we also need to focus on the way we live in our own particular places. Our quality of life depends on the quality of the relationships that we create with other humans and beings. It depends on our own level of emotional and intellectual maturity, and these depend on the breadth and depth of our concern and care, and not on who is the most competitive or number one (Kohn, 1992).

Diversity in Ultimate Philosophies and Practices

Suppose one accepts the eight platform principles as stated above, and questions deeply down to the level of his or her own ultimate values and philosophy. My ecosophy has grown out of Christian, Norwegian and North American culture—which includes Aboriginal elements, and also from Taoist, Shinto and Buddhist influences. For me the core Christian teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have much in common with other spiritual traditions that teach respect for all beings. Christianity is a multifaceted religion with a complex history. Some interpretations of Christian scriptures

seem to support human power to take control of the world and reshape it for our own exclusive benefit (White, 1967). Other interpretations, however, are not compatible with such actions (Fox, 1988). The ethic of love taught by Christ must be expressed in the flesh of our embodied lives; this is the essence of Christian spiritual practice. Reinterpreting Christianity ecocentrically is now a dynamic area called ecotheology.

Many peoples' ultimate philosophies are based exclusively on such religious traditions as Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Islam, Shamanism, and Neo Paganism. All of these spiritual traditions have at least one recognized interpretation emphasizing humility, love for others, and respectful treatment for all beings. Mahayana Buddhism, Shinto and Taoism explicitly stress respect for other beings and emphasize that we must live in harmony with and in gratitude to them, even if we must consume some of them. They stress that we are all intimately interrelated. What we do to the world, we ultimately do to ourselves. If I intentionally harm another, I also harm my spiritual self. The ecocentric version is that if I harm the Earth, I also harm myself. These principles are widely observed in different traditions.

If a person has no traditional religious background, they can create their own ultimate philosophy based on ecocentric principles. They can call their own philosophy "Ecosophy X," where for x they can use whatever name seems best to them. The number of possible ecosophies is very large, but each is also place specific. To keep one's home place in mind means dwelling in it, staying there for life. Making a commitment to stay in and care for a place also usually requires making a commitment to staying together as families, to keeping our communities alive and well, and to caring for our land. A person can work on perfecting their own ecostery (from ecos for place and stery from monastery) either alone or with others. An ecostery is a place where ecosophies are learned, practiced and taught. It is an evolutionary place with increasing ecological harmony and wisdom. We work in our own particular place to live our ecosophy, and as we realize it our places become beautiful. We never stop learning or adapting in this process since ecological places are of unlimited depth and complexity. They are also ever changing.

Deep Questioning in Business

Business as usual is being questioned not only by supporters of the long range Deep Ecology Movement. The recent "mean and lean" philosophy of top down management control in vogue, especially in North America, is being criticized in business and management studies. Many say that it has failed in many areas except in generating short term profits. They claim that

many companies have become anorexic by getting rid of so many employees. These companies' basic problems are partly a result of lacking a coherent philosophy based on values recognizing social and ecological responsibilities. Leading edge business management theorists say that what is most important is wisdom, moral and natural values, and not just the accountant's bottom line. Profit should not be the only purpose of business. Business should serve higher ends. Economics should not be the main purpose of life. There should be soul in business (Secretan, 1995; Dalla Costa, 1995). It is observed in writings, talks, and consultations that companies who value only the bottom line become destructive of people, society and nature. Thus, managers are urged to reclaim the higher ground, and to question deeply into their values, so as to clarify their personal philosophy and that of their companies. These critics say that taking a wider view leads to the unavoidable conclusion that companies must be in business for higher values and not just for profit. They owe it to their workers, customers, society, and the Earth. They say companies should use bottom up leadership and creative initiatives, and jettison the older power hierarchies, if they are to realize their best potentials and be in harmony with their context.

World Trade and Globalization

The forces of globalization, with their monoculturing power, have also been deeply criticized by Third World writers and activists such as Helena Norberg-Hodge (1991) and Vandana Shiva (1993) (see also Mander and Goldsmith, 1996). It is argued that we must bring these forces under control so that they do not destroy biological and cultural diversity and the traditions that support them. The work done in the four great movements of this century, the Social Justice, Peace, Environmental, and Appropriate Technology Movements, advance the aim of creating a world of international cooperation based on universal principles of civility that respect, recognize, and help to protect and restore the cultural and biological diversity needed to resolve environmental and social crises. Trade is an important way to expand relationships only if responsible. It must not be governed by undemocratic means for the exclusive benefit of special interests. The values and principles must be democratically upheld and socially and ecologically responsible.

Final Words

According to Næss and others, the platform of the long range Deep Ecology Movement does not describe an ultimate philosophy, but a platform for

multilevel cooperative and practical policies and actions. Thus, Næss calls those who endorse the platform SUPPORTERS *of the long range Deep Ecology Movement*, NOT deep ecologists—the latter term he regards as too immodest. It is a platform for international agreement and multicultural cooperation. It enables us to get to the roots of the environmental crisis in our own particular places and selves. It requires that we not go on with business as usual, and that we make fundamental ecologically responsible changes in education, international institutions, trade agreements, resource use practices, development models, and in our personal lives. If these changes are guided by the platform principles they will emphasize respect for all intrinsic values and for diversity. If we formulate policies and actions guided by these principles, we will help to further a local and global consensus for cooperative solutions to social and environmental problems.

Notes

[1] A different version of this paper was published in *Environmental Ethics and Environmental Education*: *Living together with Nature*, Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ethics and the Environment held at Konan University in Kobe, Japan, 1996, pp. 45-60.

[2] http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca; http://ecoforestry.ca; www.Turningpoint.org; www.ifg.org; www.naturalstep.org; www.rprogress.org; www.gpiatlantic.org; www.deep-ecology.net; http://www.ecospherics.net; www.twp.org; www.deep-ecology.org; www.nwei.org; www.landinst_development.midkan.net; www.isis.csuhayward.edu; www.naturalcapitalism.org; www.ecostery.org

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