

Arne Næss on Environmental Ethics

Naess, A., 1989. *Ecology, Community And Lifestyle*. Translated by D. Rothenburg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Introduction: Ecosophy T: from intuition to system: Ecosophy T is Arne Næss's set of personal values about how to act in the environment: it is a personal philosophy based on ecology (i.e. the scientific study of the environment). Other ecosophies are possible (the "T" in "Ecosophy T" stands for "Tvergastein", Arne Næss's mountain hut); however, they all share the intuition that human beings are an interconnected and inseparable part of the environment. Arne Næss refers to the process by which human beings become aware that they are an interconnected part of a larger system (i.e. the environment or "Self") as "Self-realisation"; he argues that this can be inspired by identification (when human beings become aware of this interconnectedness during experience of the environment). Arne Næss argues that the environment has intrinsic value, and rejects the idea that its value is derived from its usefulness to human beings. These key ideas lead to deep ecology, which Arne Næss refers to as a "movement" (involving thought and action) instead of a philosophy (involving thought alone). Deep ecology is an attempt to inspire acknowledgement of the interconnectedness between human beings and the environment.

1. The environmental crisis and the deep ecological movement: Homo sapiens can self-consciously regulate its population and environmental impact; however, it has chosen not to for several reasons. First, global techno-industrial culture is directed by science, and the science of ecology has not attributed positive or negative value to the destruction of the environment. Second, material wealth (i.e. production and consumption) has been conflated with quality of life, so most human beings accept destruction of the environment if it increases material wealth. Third, ecological predictions about the future are indefinite, so politicians are reluctant to enact radical and unpopular change based on them. The deep ecological movement campaigns against environmental damage and destruction, because it is based on the intuition that human beings are an interconnected and inseparable part of the environment, and so all living things (including ecological life, e.g. rivers) have intrinsic and equal value. Generally, supporters of the deep ecological movement share eight basic views that affirm the intrinsic value of human beings and other living things, and the right of all living things to flourish (i.e. fulfil their potential).

2. From ecology to ecosophy: ecology is the interdisciplinary scientific study of the environment (including living things and ecological life (e.g. rivers)). The science of ecology does not attribute positive or negative value to the destruction of the environment; however, there is no reason why it should not (like conservation biology (e.g. diversity of organisms is good)). Generally, scientists argue that only primary qualities exist in reality (e.g. size, shape, weight), and that secondary qualities (e.g. colour, taste) and tertiary qualities (e.g. emotion) are projected by human beings; however, Protagorean 'both-and' theory proposes that things are defined by the relationships they have with other things, which means that subjective and tertiary qualities define part of reality. Emotional reactions to the environment (which are tertiary qualities) are as intrinsic to its definition as its primary qualities; this increases the value of the environment, because the organisation of its parts make it greater than the sum of its parts. Emotional reactions are part of the environment, which means that the environment is part of human beings; the environment has intrinsic value as part of an interconnected whole: this is the intuition that ecosophies are based on.

3. Fact and value; basic norms: members of the deep ecological movement should announce their norms and values loudly to support changes in public attitudes, because this will lead to human beings developing ecosophies. Engaging in debate exposes the unprovable axioms that public attitudes are based on and assumptions in developed societies. Opponents and supporters of deep ecology share most fundamental values (e.g. liberty, equality, fraternity); however, they do not share norms about how human beings should act in agreement with them. Engaging in debate can turn opponents of deep ecology into supporters, by showing that environmentally friendly actions are logically derived from fundamental values, but environmentally harmful actions are not. Moreover, members of the deep ecological movement should undermine material wealth (i.e. production and consumption) as the ultimate political objective; instead, the ultimate objective of perfection may be more meaningful and may create greater happiness. In Ecosophy T, Self-realisation is the fundamental value (or ultimate objective), because it leads to human beings behaving benevolently from inclination (a consequence of awareness that the self/individual is an interconnected and inseparable part of the Self/environment).

4. Ecosophy, technology, and lifestyle: the status of material wealth (i.e. production and consumption) as the ultimate political objective of developed societies is not supported by any great philosophy; however, it is so firmly established that it is difficult to displace. Increasing material wealth is an ideological objective, which is not supported by logical chains of reasoning. Members of the deep ecological movement should help change the attitudes of individuals and societies towards ecological consciousness, by creating grass roots organisations (e.g. The Future is in Our Hands (FIOH)) and campaigning politically. This change should make environmentally friendly action less of a chore and more of an opportunity. However, members of the deep ecological movement should not be perceived as anti-technology; they simply argue that technological advances should not be unquestionably accepted, especially if they have a negative effect on health, employment, or the environment. Moreover, soft technology that reduces interference with the environment but satisfies the vital needs of human beings should be developed (with the support of governments in developed societies). Hard and advanced technologies that damage or destroy the environment, and require specialisation and expertise that disconnects and separates human beings from the environment, should be rejected.

5. Economics within ecosophy: generally, developed societies separate economics from ethics, and prioritise economic growth at the expense of the environment; this creates an incomplete view of what is positive and negative for society. Historically, Gross National Product (GNP) (i.e. the annual value of goods and services produced by a country) has been used as a measure of welfare. This is problematic, because GNP is a misleading measure of welfare; among other things, pursuing GNP growth positively views sales of antidepressants and cigarettes, negatively views soft technologies that facilitate sustainable living (but do not generate much profit), and can only be fuelled by resource consumption that damages and destroys the environment. Instead of pursuing GNP growth, developed societies should pursue the values and priorities of human beings revealed by deep interviews, because this pursuit is more likely to improve quality of life. Finally, environmentalists should avoid trying to calculate the value of the environment monetarily in order to account for it in economic calculations: human beings do not calculate the value of their arms and use this to make decide whether to keep them or donate them for money; likewise, human beings should not try to calculate the value of another part of themselves (i.e. the environment).

6. Ecopolitics within ecosophy: environmentalists should engage in and learn about politics so that they can better influence political opinions. Significant ecopolitical issues include the politics of pollution, resources, and population (specifically, the issues caused by human overpopulation); environmentalists should campaign for long-term, global, and nonhuman perspectives to be considered when addressing these issues. In order to promote global change, environmentalists should attempt to strengthen the power of local communities to be self-determining and self-reliant; this increases experience of the environment, and is likely to lead to widespread acknowledgement of its intrinsic value. Environmentalists should attempt to influence political opinions through Gandhian nonviolent direct action, and should be wary of creating green parties: it may be more sensible tactically to work to change existing political parties in a green direction. Members of the deep ecological movement should be more pragmatic: they should refrain from criticism of imperfect politicians or solutions to environmental issues if they are moving in the right direction; they should work with other movements (e.g. the peace movement); and they should engage with present political issues from day to day. Ecopolitics is moving slowly, but must be engaged with for results to be seen. Changes in the attitudes of human beings can be affected by changes in political policies.

7. Ecosophy T: unity and diversity of life: human beings cannot be isolated from the environment or the evolutionary process; awareness of this should facilitate an appreciation of the intrinsic value of all living things, and their right to life. Moreover, when human beings identify the connections and similarities between themselves and other living things, they become aware (i.e. intuit) that they are an inseparable part of an interconnected whole or Self; in other words, they begin the process of Self-realisation. Awareness of the interconnected and inseparable whole or Self is facilitated by experiencing nature unmediated (e.g. friluftsliv, literally "exuberance in nature" or "free nature"); developed societies should provide more opportunities for this. Historically, the Bible has supported the ecological movement by highlighting the interconnectedness between human beings and the environment; however, philosophy from Plotinus to Descartes undermined this. Ecosophy T is one way of promoting environmentally friendly action that is compatible with the fundamental values that most human beings (including opponents of the deep ecological movement) share. However, it is imperfect and impossible to express in totality, and other ecosophies are possible. Notwithstanding this, members of the deep ecological movement should continue to campaign non-violently for change.