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Naess, Arne (1912–)

In a lecture in Bucharest in 1972 the Norwegian philosopher Arne Dekke Eide Naess made the now famous distinction between the shallow ecology movement and the deep, long-range ecology movement. He has since remained one of the major international voices of deep ecology. Naess originally gained his reputation in philosophy from work in semantics, but he has also published several books on Gandhi, and on Spinoza, skepticism and philosophy of science. Naess identified, on the one hand, a shallow ecology movement that fought against pollution and resource depletion for anthropocentric reasons. Pollution and resource depletion were wrong because they threatened human health and affluence. The deep ecology movement, on the other hand, favors some form of biocentric egalitarianism as a guideline for environmental action. This distinction between anthropocentric and biocentric environmentalism is at the heart of deep ecology. Deep ecology therefore is a critique of a commonly held doctrine that the natural world has value only insofar as it is useful to humans.

Naess' main eco-philosophical work was published in 1989 as *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, which was based on the Norwegian *økologi, samfunn og livsstil*, issued in 1976. Naess has also contributed to the development of environmental philosophy in numerous articles and speeches and through action. The political program of deep ecology was formulated in the Deep Ecology Platform formulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions in 1985.

Because deep ecology questioned a dominating cultural paradigm, that of excessive anthropocentrism, it could claim to rely on a deeper level of argumentation than shallow ecology, that is, on the level of religion and philosophy. A worldview that can support the deep ecology platform is called an ecosophy, a term coined by Naess. A variety of religions and philosophies can have this function, but many are probably too anthropocentric. Naess' personal ecosophy is called Ecosophy T. T stands for his mountain cottage, Tvergastein, and points to the personal nature of ecosophies. Naess himself ascribes the origin of central values of his ecosophy to important childhood experiences. He used to spend hours at the age of four observing the ecosystem on the coastline, and at the age of eight he became attached to a particular mountain. What he calls shore-life philosophy values "richness, diversity, multiplicity, equivalence, equivalidity,

egalitarianism, peacefulness, cheerfulness" and also skepticism (Naess 1983: 211). The mountain became for him a symbol of a "benevolent, equiminded, strong 'father'" (Naess 1983: 212). The love of this mountain "reduced the need for anything supernatural," and he learned to value austerity, toughness, distance and aloofness (Naess 1983: 213).

Early on, Naess came under the influence of the ethics of nonviolence of Mahatma Gandhi, and the Gandhian influence on Ecosophy T is significant. Naess' ecological views are based on childhood experiences but they are shaped by, and a continuation and further development of, his Gandhian beliefs. The key concept of Naess' ecosophy is self-realization. Self-realization is the ultimate norm of his eco-philosophical system. According to Ecosophy T, all living beings are capable of self-realization. The concept of self-realization in Naess' philosophy has developed from his lifelong engagement with the philosophy of Gandhi. In one of his many books on Gandhi, Naess explains that, according to Gandhi, self-realization was the final goal of life. This was attained by a gradual perfection. All that humans do, say and think should have this self-realization as its goal. Gandhi also believed in the unity of life. To explain the central concept of self-realization and the mature experience of oneness in diversity in his ecological writings, Naess quotes the famous Hindu text Bhagavadgita, verse 6.29. Bhagavadgita was Gandhi's most sacred book, a source of wisdom he turned to whenever he needed to solve ethical dilemmas. Naess' use of the Bhagavadgita has to be understood in this Gandhian context. Verse 6.29 describes the yogin who "sees himself as in all beings and all beings in himself" (or "self" according to Naess) and who "sees the same everywhere." Bhagavadgita 6.29 sums up, according to Naess, the maximum of self-realization. It expresses the idea that all is connected to everything else and therefore that the self-realization of any living being is part of the self-realization of each one of us.

The ecosophy of Arne Naess as it is presented in his writings draws on the close connection between non-violence (*ahimsa*), the philosophy of oneness (*advaita*) and the goal of self-realization (*moksha*) in the religious thought of Gandhi. Naess understands the Bhagavadgita to say that solidarity with all beings and nonviolence depends on widening one's identification and that to see the greater self means to expand one's identification to include all living beings as one's self.

Naess finds the same doctrine of self-realization and unity of life expressed also in the philosophy of Spinoza. According to Spinoza's philosophy, every living being tries to realize its potential, its power or essence. Unity of nature means that everything is connected to everything else and that therefore the self-realization of one living being is part of the self-realization of all other beings. Naess uses Gandhian concepts to exemplify the similarity between Spinoza's philosophy and Gandhian thought. Naess argues that "adherence to Spinoza's system is consistent with being a *karma-yogi*" (Naess 1980: 323). *Karma-yogi* is here a concept borrowed from Gandhi. Vivekananda, who was a great influence on how Hinduism was received in the West, held that the Hindu ascetics should perform social service (*seva*). This new ideal he called *karma-yoga*. Gandhi was a foremost practitioner of this new ideal. He made social service a necessity for self-realization. Ecosophy T combines twentieth-century reinterpretations of Hindu asceticism by Gandhi and Vivekananda, the philosophy of Spinoza, and a belief in the world as the ultimate concern typical of religious environmentalism. This philosophy is further blended with traditional and twentieth-century Norwegian attitudes to nature and the outdoors, and the concept of solidarity with the weaker segments of society that is at the foundation of the Scandinavian welfare state system.

Gandhi lived before environmentalism and the environment was not his main concern. He is nevertheless recognized as the father of the environmental movement in India. Gandhi's famous statement that "the Earth has enough for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed," is a slogan for contemporary environmentalism. Gandhi is more than any other, probably, the father of the father of deep ecology. But in spite of the close relationship between the ecosophy of Arne Naess and Gandhi, the Indian environmentalist Ramachandra Guha has argued that the concerns of deep ecology are foreign to, harmful to or, at best, irrelevant to the people of India. Guha argues that in India the deep ecology idea of wilderness and natural parks is a threat to people living in the wilderness areas and that environmentalism in poor countries needs to be anthropocentric in order to address the gruesome living conditions of the urban slums and the many human tragedies caused by poverty. Naess argues that Guha misrepresents deep ecology (Witoszek and Brennan 1999). Naess actually defends weak anthropocentrism; Ecosophy T is a critique only of excessive anthropocentrism, a point often misunderstood by followers of deep ecology. Ecosophy questions the wisdom of emulating the economic growth and development path of rich countries and argues that alternative ways, such as Gandhi's vision of India as a village-based economy, still need to be explored.

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Further Reading

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- See also: Ahimsa; Bhagavadgita; Biocentric Religion – A Call for; Council of All Beings; Deep Ecology; Deep Ecology Institute; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Ecosophy T; Environmental Ethics; Frilufsliv; Gandhi, Mohandas; Hinduism; Left Biocentrism; Mountaineering; Radical Environmentalism; Re-Earthing; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Rock Climbing; Seed, John; Spinoza, Baruch; Yoga and Ecology.

Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) – See Amte, Baba; India.

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