

An Eco-feminist

Looks at Deep

Ecology

JANET BIEHL

Social Ecology

VS.

Deep Ecology

MURRAY BOOKCHIN



S p e c i a l S u p p l e m e n t

KICK IT  OVER

it's deep, but is it broad? an eco-feminist looks at deep ecology

by Janet Biehl

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Recently, a number of male deep ecologists have been claiming that there are theoretical affinities between deep ecology and ecofeminism. One deep ecologist calls deep ecology "that form of environmentalism which comes closest to embodying a feminist sensibility."¹ Kirkpatrick Sale, too, maintains, "I don't see anything in the formulation of deep ecology... that in any way contravenes the values of feminism or puts forward the values of patriarchy."² Bill Devall and George Sessions, co-authors of *Deep Ecology*, the authoritative text of the new ideology, even see affinities between the way women generically view the world and deep ecology: "Some feminists claim that deep ecology is an intellectual articulation of insights that many females have known for centuries."³

Indeed, as Ynestra King has pointed out, an unusually large number of male ecologists are writing articles as avowed adherents of ecofeminism these days. Many of them are advocating an alliance in some form or another between the ecofeminist and deep ecology movements.

Deep ecology's advocates repeatedly assure us that deep ecology's distinction is to ask searching questions. Writes Arne Naess, "The essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions. The adjective 'deep' stresses that we ask why and how, where others do not."⁴

In this spirit, ecofeminists have a number of deep, searching questions to ask of male deep ecologists about the alleged affinities between the two. These questions are central in any discussion of the prospects for a union between the two movements.

Differences Among Humans

Deep ecologists are critical of what they see as Western society's "anthropocentrism," which is defined by one deep ecologist, John Seed, as "human chauvinism... the idea that humans are the crown of creation, the source of all value, the measure of all things."⁵ In anthropocentrism, humans see themselves as separate from nature, we are told, and objectify nature in order to exploit it. In Michael Zimmerman's characterization, the anthropocentric worldview "portrays *humanity* itself as the source of all value and... depicts nature solely as *raw material* for human purposes"⁶ (emphasis added). Anthropocentrism is thus "deeply implicated in the global environmental crisis," says Devall and Sessions.⁷ Anthropocentric humans lose track of the "oneness" of all nature, we are told. They/we need to purge themselves/ourselves of deadly anthropocentrism to regain consciousness of the oneness of nature and thereby stop exploiting it.

For ecofeminists the concept of anthropocentrism is profoundly, even "deeply" problematical. It assumes that humanity is an undifferentiated whole, and it does not take into account the historical and political differences between male and female, black and white, rich and poor.

Ecofeminists, among others, have shown that historically not all of

"humanity" has been privileged to be depicted as "the source of all value," to use Zimmerman's language. It is mainly economically privileged white males who have been seen as "the source of all value." Other humans -- women, blacks, the poor -- have, like nature itself, been depicted as "raw material for human [read male] purpose."

In Western culture men have historically justified their domination of women by conceptualizing women as "closer to nature" than themselves. Women have been ideologically dehumanized and called less rational than men, more chaotic, more mysterious in motivation, more emotional, more sexual, more moist, even more polluted. Far from being seen as a "source of value," women have been, like nature, seen as a source of "raw material for human purposes." Women's bodies have thus been freely plowed and mined like the earth for their reproductive capacity -- the "raw material" in question.

Ecofeminists have tried repeatedly to show that women are no closer to nature innately than men are, and further that the fulfillment of women's human capacities has been denied them under patriarchy; that both men and women are capable of reason and emotion and sensuality; and that the human mind that evolves out of first or primal nature is both a female mind and a male mind.

Moreover, ecofeminists need to attain their individual and social fulfillment in a way that does not accept the capitalist, industrial, patriarchal, managerial society that Western men have developed. Rather, they seek to create alternative, nonhierarchical contexts in which both male and female potentialities can truly be fulfilled.

Deep ecologists, by single-mindedly defining the human problem as anthropocentrism -- the centrality of all humans and their "domination" of nature -- ignore millennia of patricentric history and implicitly include women in their indictment. By not excluding women from anthropocentrism, deep ecologists implicitly condemn women for being as anthropocentric as they condemn men for being -- that is, for presuming to be above nature, for mastering it.

The problem is not simply that deep ecologists have failed to except women from anthropocentrism. It would not improve matters simply to "subtract" women from the ranks of anthropocentrists. This gender-blindness is symptomatic of deep ecologists' stubborn, willful ignorance of the social causes of problems. They assert that all our problems are primarily caused by our attitude toward nature and how we treat nature. They do not sufficiently emphasize that the way we view nature itself has a social origin, let alone explore what its origins are in history. They have no inkling that societies have existed that, as Murray Bookchin has pointed out, could "revere" nature (such as ancient Egypt) and yet this "reverence" did not inhibit the development of full-blown patricentric hierarchy.

Thus women are caught in a circular trap in deep ecology. On the one hand, they have been defined as closer to nature by patricentric culture (and, as we shall see below, continue to be so defined by deep ecology); on the other hand, they are held accountable for "anthropocentrism" and are blamed for being as removed from nature as men are. Women are left going around in circles in deep ecology. Clearly

this body of thought was not formulated with women in mind.

Differences Between Human and Non-human Nature

Not only does deep ecology ignore differences among groups of humans, such as men and women. It also ignores differences between human and nonhuman nature. "The central insight of deep ecology," as expressed by Warwick Fox, is "the idea that we can make no firm ontological divide... between the human and the non-human realms... [T]o the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness."⁸ Devall stresses as a principle of deep ecology "the identity (I/thou) of humans with non-human nature... There are no boundaries and everything is interrelated."⁹ According to Sessions and Devall, we must "cease to understand or see ourselves as isolated and narrow competing egos and begin to identify with other humans from our family and friends to, eventually, our species... to include the nonhuman world."¹⁰

One wonders just what happens to the significance of species in nature when we can make "no ontological divide" between or among them. If all is the same in nature, are all differences among species illusions? Is humanity's self-awareness as a species a delusion? Is anthropocentrism itself based on a delusion of separateness as a species?

Thus, just as deep ecologists ignore social history -- especially that of patriarchy -- they also ignore natural history. One wonders how deep ecologists explain any of the leaps, or discontinuities, apparent in the paleontological record, or the evolution of mind.

It is clear that deep ecologists' ignorance of social history is a major issue for ecofeminism. But why should deep ecologists' ignorance of natural history be of concern to ecofeminism?

The answer is that deep ecologists make use of what they see as female consciousness to buttress their ahistorical view of nature. In at least a decade of feminist theory it has been seen as both a nightmare and a blessing that women experience a "sense of relatedness," an attenuation of the boundaries between self and other, that men do not experience. A decade of feminist psychoanalytic work has shown that women develop "soft ego boundaries," whereas men develop "rigid ego boundaries." This has been both good and bad for women: good in the sense that connectedness is real and women are more aware of it; bad in the sense that the lack of clearly defined ego boundaries creates difficulties in women's individuation and development of autonomy, attributes that are necessary to become rational beings and to fulfill their potentiality. Thus, boundaries and lacks thereof have been a subject of profoundly ambivalent dialectical philosophizing by feminist theorists such as Nancy Chodorow, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Jane Flax, among others.¹¹

Deep ecologists steam-roller over this dialectic between self and other, between the individual and the collectivity. A vague "connectedness," they seem to feel, is all important. Their solution is to forget all of the agonizing individuation so necessary for the development of women's personalities and sense of control over

their destinies. Never mind becoming rational; never mind the self, they seem to say; look where it got men, after all; women were better off than men all along without that tiresome individuality; and women should give up their attempts to attain it. Presumably, women are supposed to be connectedness, women have no ego boundaries, and there are no boundaries in reality. We have to "cultivate ecological consciousness," according to deep ecologists. All of us need, we are told, "a more receptive, 'feminine' approach."¹²

Deep ecologists, who are often highly individualistic middle-class men themselves, in effect render the feminist dialectical discussion about boundaries irrelevant. Just as women naturally experience "connectedness" with other people, we are told, all humans must now experience connectedness with nonhuman nature. There is no boundary between human and nonhuman nature in deep ecology; a person is an "inseparable aspect of the whole system wherein there are no sharp breaks between self and other."¹³

Deep ecologists are fond of adducing Eastern metaphysics as exemplary of the kind of self on which we should model ourselves. "Taoism tells us there is a way of unfolding which is inherent in all things... People have fewer desires and simple pleasures... 'To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between one's self and others.'"¹⁴ Women and men alike are thus asked to efface themselves before nature, to ignore their identity as a species in a surrender to boundaryless, cosmic "oneness." In reality, the fact is that women know from long experience that when they are asked to become "one" with a man, as in marriage, that "one" is usually the man. Ecofeminists should be equally suspicious of this "ecological" oneness.

Moreover, deep ecologists tend to promote a disregard of reason, even of subjectivity. Reason and subjectivity are what *distinguish* humans in nature, however. But for deep ecologists, to affirm them would be to uphold a boundary -- and boundaries, as they have told us, do not exist in nature. Worse, in deep ecological terms, to give boundaries their due would be to be guilty of anthropocentrism. According to Bill Devall, we must "begin our thinking on utopia... by trying to 'think like a mountain.'"¹⁵ Just as there is no boundary between human and nonhuman nature, there is also no boundary between the consciousness of a mountain and the consciousness of a human being, for deep ecologists.

And here we are obliged to return again to social history. For it was precisely men who created the cultural boundary between men and women in constructing a gender barrier. Marginalized for millennia, passive and receptive for millennia, "connected" to the point of self-effacement for millennia, women are now intensely striving for subjectivity, precisely for *selfhood* and for a full recognition of their subjectivity and selfhood in a new society.

This aspiration is the revolutionary heart of the feminist and ecofeminist movements. Many of our lives now involve new and radical insight into our own condition of chronic oppression. We

have come into subjectivity and consciousness of our oppressed situation in patriarchy, and we have affirmed our own rationality after millennia of being defined as irrational by patriarchy. We are becoming *active* where we had long been taught to be merely *reactive*, and we are becoming *creative* rather than passively *receptive*. We are externalizing ourselves into fully embodied and well-defined beings.

To ask women, with their new subjectivity, to "think like a mountain" is a blatant slap in the face. It asks women to return to the arena of their oppression -- to their nonbeing and nothingness -- indeed, even to embrace it.

Yet deep ecologists tell us to abjure the self and become "receptive" in the interests of male-defined "nature." As Nancy Hartsock has pointed out, it is telling that now, just when women and other oppressed groups have come into subjectivity, subjectivity itself is suddenly condemned. Now we are asked to be "receptive," to return to oblivion in the name of the liberation of nature. It is, Hartsock points out, the privileged people at the centre -- white men -- who are now obliged to be receptive and listen, and not those of us who have been marginalized and receptive by coercion in the past.¹⁶

To drop our recent, painfully attained recognition of the socially and historically created gender boundary would be to return to the oblivion of unconsciousness. Behind the smoke and mirrors of "goddess" worship is a terrifying renunciation of self, a retreat into oppression. Deep ecology requires, in effect, that women remain egoless, unformed, and supine, presumably in the name of a Taoist oblivion of the self. To feminist sensibilities, deep ecologists appear to be paraphrasing the Wizard of Oz, saying, "Pay no attention to that gender divide behind the curtain!"

Deep ecology denies the reality of difference, let alone the reality of gender oppression, at the same time that it appropriates an aspect of feminist psychology for its own quasi-religious purposes. Deep ecology trivializes the emancipation of women, a centuries-long revolutionary process of coming into self-awareness and individual freedom, when it talks of dissolving the self and the boundary lines of the self-determining ego. Indeed, it asks women to abjure the very selfhood that can resist the rationalization that produced the industrial crisis.

Wilderness

Deep ecologists' ignorance of the social becomes strikingly apparent in their discussion of wilderness, "[the] sacred place, [the] *sanctum sanctorum*" of nature.¹⁷ We are told that humans need the experience of wilderness, among other reasons, to "cultivat[e] the virtues of modesty and humility."¹⁸ Again, it is precisely humility, with its passive and receptive obedience to men, that women are trying to escape today.

Historically, especially in North America, men have responded to nature by defining it as wilderness -- usually as a pretext for trying to master the natural world. Countless stories exist in American literature of men in the wilderness -- of Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and the like; their descendants in our day are John Wayne and the Marlboro Man. Just as nineteenth-century American literature expressed a cultural male desire to depart into the wilderness to escape from the overly domesticated Victorian woman's sphere -- one in which women were denied personhood and therefore became tedious to men -- so deep ecologists seek to

escape into the wilderness to avoid an overly rationalized and mechanized society that denies nature's complexity and thus becomes tedious as well. In both cases men are trying to escape an oppression that they have created themselves, to escape in both cases from what is precisely a social problem: first, the domestication of women, and second, the rationalization of society. The point is to reclaim women and society as free, not to leap into an allegedly chaotic, nonsocial realm called "wilderness."

Although deep ecologists seek affinities with Native Americans, it is notable that Indians have to word for "wilderness." Luther Standing Bear, an Oglala Sioux remarks, "We do not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild.' Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful, and we were surrounded with the blessing of the Great Mystery."

The concept of "wilderness" and the egocentric male soloist -- who sees "wilderness" as a challenge or an object of conquest or a realm of personal freedom -- is connected to the Western male social mentality. Indeed, Luther Standing Bear's commentary reveals that the concept of wilderness has a social origin: "Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it 'wild' for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the 'wild west' began."¹⁹

To define nature as "wilderness" is to presuppose a separation between men (literally) and nature. Indeed, "wilderness" is precisely the *nonsocial*. Deep ecologists perpetuate this conceptual separation, even as they ask people to respond to it with "humility" rather than "mastery". Men are just as cut off from external nature, let alone internal nature, in deep ecology, as they ever were. Far from dissolving the boundary between humans and nature, deep ecology basically validates it.

(To his credit, Jim Cheney has criticized male deep ecologists for aggrandizing the male self by extending it to all of nature rather than denying it. He quotes Lewis Hyde: "the disappearance of the self is really self-aggrandizement on a grand scale."²⁰ Guyatri Spivak's criticism of postmodernism could also apply to deep ecology: she says it is "about men apologizing for their own mistakes; women, go elsewhere." An aggrandizement in false apology is still an aggrandizement.)

Just as white patricentric males define rational women as irrational as a pretext for their domination, so they define nature as a "wilderness" as a pretext for its domination. The description of "sacred" nature as wilderness -- presumably "irrational" nature -- is analogous to the conventional Western description of women as irrational humans. But only when men are separated from nature is nature perceived as irrational; and only when men are culturally divided from women are women perceived as irrational.

The point is that women are not "chaotic" but rational; and nature, too, is not "chaotic" but rather follows a logic of development toward increasing complexity and subjectivity, replete with differences, individual variations, and the slow formation of selfhood. If ecofeminists are serious about combating the domination of nature that they see as analogous to their domination, they must fight this conceptualization of nature as irrational and of selfhood as an impediment to natural evolution, just as they have fought their own conceptualization as irrational, egoless, and "natural".

Overpopulation

The implications of deep ecology for ecofeminism are more than theoretical. As deep ecologists themselves so confidently and correctly point out, there are political implications as well as theoretical ones in their viewpoint. "Certain outlooks on politics and public policy flow naturally from this [deep ecological] consciousness."²¹

At the March 1987 conference of ecofeminism at the University of Southern California, for example, George Sessions expounded the principles of deep ecology before an audience of ecofeminists. He read point number four, which states: "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."²²

It is a central thesis of deep ecology that there are "too many" people on the planet. According to Arne Naess, "I should think we must have no more than 100 million people if we are to have the variety of cultures we had one hundred years ago."²³ Deep ecologists invoke Malthus on this issue: "Malthus, in 1803, presented an argument indicating that human population growth would exponentially outstrip food production, resulting in 'general misery,' but his warning was ignored by the rising tide of industrial/technological optimism," lament Devall and Sessions.²⁴

Now, Malthus is notable for his view that population increases geometrically while the food supply grows arithmetically. This view has been repeatedly shown to be false since his day; even during his lifetime agriculture and industry were growing faster than the population.

But Malthus is also notable for the view that "natural" forces such as diseases and starvation will relieve "overpopulation," as if by natural law, and that nothing should be done to mitigate suffering from social conditions. This includes women's suffering at the hands of men: "It may appear to be hard that a mother and her children, who have been guilty of no particular crime themselves, should suffer for the ill conduct of the father; but this is one of the invariable laws of nature; and, knowing this, we should think twice upon the subject, and be very sure of the ground on which we go, before we presume to counteract it."²⁵ No friend of women would call obedience to men an "invariable law of nature"; yet deep ecologists ask ecofeminists to take this writer to heart on overpopulation.

At the USC conference, Sessions interrupted his own recitation to patronizingly ask ecofeminists what they intend to do about the overpopulation problem: He stated that the ecofeminist position on overpopulation was as yet unclear to him.

Ecofeminists understand that men have historically mined women for their reproductive capacity as they have mined nature for its resources; the domination of women and the domination of nature have been parallel. As feminists of all tendencies have stressed, childbearing and childrearing are often onerous and often obviate any other kind of work. The denial to women of reproductive choice has often entailed a suppression of their development and personality, a curtailment of their selfhood and freedom, and a foreclosure of any future but one of childrearing.

By denying women their selfhood in the name of a denial of the ego, men have often reduced women to mere baby-making machines, that is, to only one of their many biological functions. They have curtailed women's full participation in society's second nature -- in culture -- thus denying them the full exercise of both their first and second nature, their biological selfhood.

Which is not to say that many women don't choose to have children, or that their childbearing capacity is not important to them. The point is that in varying degrees throughout the world, men have tried to leave women little choice in life but to be childbearers. In some patriarchal cultures a plenitude of children enhances a man's status in society. The more children his wife bears, the higher his status among other men.

Fortunately, women have responded to this in recent years by demanding full control over their own reproductive capacities. Women do not want childbearing to be mandated by the status requirements of male culture. Whether women decide to have or not to have children, the decision must ultimately be theirs.

Apparently it must be spelled out to Sessions that a woman's participation in society as a political, social, intellectual, and emotional being often goes hand in hand with her decision not to have children or to have fewer than men want for their status needs. Amazingly, at a conference whose stated goal, among others, was to make the connections between deep ecology and ecofeminism, Sessions completely failed to grasp that the answer to the "overpopulation problem" was staring him directly in the face: feminism itself. Perhaps the most important single factor today in reducing population is the increasing control women have over their bodies and reproduction.

Session's inability to grasp this is more than just myopia. Although embracing feminism as a solution to "overpopulation" clearly would best solve what he sees as a serious problem, it would also wreak havoc on his sexist ideology, for an alliance with ecofeminism would entail including women as full, participating, individuated persons with rational selves into his political movement. But his ideology, which prescribes selflessness for women and asks them to "think like a mountain," could not contain this; indeed, this would blow it apart. For in deep ecology woman is the model non-being, the model "thinking mountain."

The solution to "overpopulation" that Sessions et al. propose is fertility programs. "Optimal human carrying capacity should be determined for the planet as a biosphere and for specific islands, valleys, and continents. A drastic reduction of the rate of growth of population of homo sapiens through humane birth control programs is required."²⁶

It is only too well known that so-called fertility programs often become programs to sterilize both Third World women and women of colour in the United States. Far from granting women free choice in reproduction, these programs often attempt to coerce women into not having children at all. Because deep ecology lacks a commitment to the full actualization of all women's human potentialities, particularly their selfhood, there is no more in its recipes that would prevent the coercive rationalization of women into reproductive factories than there is in present patriarchal governments.

It would be arrogant and presumptuous beyond belief for a group of white men wandering around in a "wilderness," experiencing "humility" in a nature that they see as irrational -- as irrational as they think women are -- to tell women whether women should give birth. Moreover, it would be foolish beyond belief for women to allow them to do so, for indeed it would mean acceding to "fertility programs."

Despite all their piety about wilderness and nature, deep ecologists' "solution" to "overpopulation" would rationalize them in the same way that modern industrial society rationalizes nature, producing the very society that deep ecologists denounce.

Deep ecologists denounce industrial society in one breath and in the next demand the technique of fertility programs. They would rationalize women in the name of an emancipatory nature. They would deprive women of reproductive choice in the name of a spiritual connectedness with the natural world. They would ask women to abjure their selfhood and subjectivity in the name of a oneness with the natural world. They would ask women to do without individuality and control over their own lives in the name of "humility" toward the natural world. And they would ask women to give up their awareness of boundaries -- and, by extension, of oppression -- in the name of antianthropocentrism.

Conclusion

In the schism between deep ecology, with its avoidance of social and natural history, and social ecology, with its orientation toward these histories, male deep ecologists seem intent nonetheless on forming an alliance with ecofeminists.

Ecofeminists have nothing to gain in such an embrace. The alleged affinities between deep ecology and ecofeminism exist mainly in the minds of male deep ecologists. Deep ecology's strange mixture of macho John Wayne confrontations with "wilderness" and Taoist platitudes about self-effacement are suited more to privileged white men with a taste for outdoor life than to feminists and their struggle for selfhood, individuation, and a truly human status in both nature and society. Deep ecology traps women in nonsensical and circular arguments.

Both social ecofeminists and spiritual ecofeminists have by and large resisted the attempted seduction by deep ecology. Ecofeminists roundly hissed Sessions at the USC conference in response to his question. Ecofeminism's affinities, if it is to have any, must be with a tradition that stresses ecological individuation and har-

mony rather than deep-ecological self-oblivion. □

Footnotes

1. Kirkpatrick Sale, "Shades of Green: Kirkpatrick Sale Speaks on Ecological Politics." *Kick It Over*, Winter 1986/87, p. 8.
2. Jim Cheney, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology." (unpublished ms.)
3. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), p. 93.
4. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 74.
5. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 243.
6. Michael Zimmerman, "Feminism, Deep Ecology and Environmental Ethics." *Environmental Ethics* 9 (Spring, 1987), p. 22.
7. Devall and Sessions, p. 182.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
11. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*; Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*; and Jane Flax, in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference*.
12. Devall and Sessions, p. 33.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
15. Bill Devall, "The Deep Ecology Movement." *Natural Resources Journal* 20 (1980), p. 309.
16. Nancy C.M. Hartsock, "False Universalities and Real Difference: Reconstituting Marxism for the Eighties." *New Politics* (Spring, 1987), p. 88.
17. Henry David Thoreau, quoted in Devall and Sessions, p. 109.
18. Devall and Sessions, p. 110.
19. Luther Standing Bear, in T. McLuhan, ed., *Touch the Earth* (1971).
20. Cheney, p. 16.
21. Devall and Sessions, p. 65.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
23. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 76.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
25. Quoted in John L. Hess, "Malthus Then and Now." *The Nation*, April 18, 1987, p. 498.
26. Devall, p. 311.

SOCIAL ECOLOGY

by Murray Bookchin

In past issues, Kick It Over has aired debate about "overpopulation" and immigration issues which have been surfacing in the ecology movement in the United States and elsewhere. These differences came out in the open at the first national "Green Gathering" held in Amherst, Massachusetts this past summer, where it became apparent that these are illustrative of a broader philosophical chasm. In the following article, Murray Bookchin offers, for the first time, a full-blown critique of the "deep ecology" position. We recommend that you arm yourself with a dictionary, as we at Kick It Over have not yet come to an agreement as to how articles with a lot of unfamiliar words and concepts should be notated. Good luck and bon voyage!

The environmental movement has travelled a long way beyond those annual *Earth Day* festivals when millions of school kids were ritualistically mobilized to clean up streets and their parents scolded by Arthur Godfrey, Barry Commoner, Paul Ehrlich, and a bouquet of manipulative legislators for littering the landscape with cans, newspapers, and bottles.

The movement has gone beyond a naive belief that patchwork reforms and solemn vows by EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] bureaucrats to act more resolutely will seriously arrest the insane pace at which we are tearing down the planet.

This shopworn "Earth Day" approach toward "engineering" nature so that we can ravage the Earth with minimal effects on ourselves -- an approach that I called *environmentalism* in the late 1960s -- has shown signs of giving way to a more searching and radical mentality. Today, the new word in vogue is "ecology" -- be it "deep ecology", "human ecology", "biocentric ecology", "anti-humanist ecology", or, to use a term that is uniquely rich in meaning, "social ecology".

Happily, the new relevance of the word "ecology" reveals a growing dissatisfaction among thinking people with attempts to use our vast ecological problems for cheaply spectacular and politically manipulative needs. As our forests disappear due to mindless cutting and increasing acid rain, the ozone layer thins out because of the widespread use of fluorocarbons, toxic dumps multiply all over the planet, highly dangerous, often radioactive pollutants enter into our air, water, and food chains -- and innumerable hazards threaten the integrity of life itself -- far more basic issues are raised than any that can be resolved by *Earth Day* cleanups and faint-hearted changes in existing environmental laws.

More and more people are trying to go beyond the vapid environmentalism of the early 1970's and develop a more fundamental, indeed, a more radical, approach to the ecological crises that beleaguer us. They are looking for an *ecological* approach: one that is rooted in an ecological philosophy, ethics, sensibility, image of nature; an ecological movement that will transform our domineering market society into a non-hierarchical co-operative society -- a society that will live in harmony with nature because its members live in harmony with each other.

They are beginning to sense that there is a tie-in between the way people deal with

each other, the way they behave as social beings -- men with women, old with young, rich with poor, white with people of colour, First World with Third, elites with "masses" -- and the way they deal with nature.

The question that now faces us is: what do we really mean by an *ecological* approach? What is a *coherent* ecological philosophy, ethics, and movement? How can the answers to these questions and many others *fit together* so that they form a meaningful and creative whole?

If we are not to repeat all the mistakes of the early seventies with the hoopla about "population control", the latent antifeminism, the elitism, the arrogance, and the ugly authoritarian tendencies, we must honestly and seriously appraise the new tendencies that today go under the name of one or another form of "ecology".

Two Conflicting Tendencies

Let us agree from the outset that the word "ecology" is no magic term that unlocks the real secret of our abuse of nature. It is a word that can be as easily abused, distorted, and tainted as words like "democracy" and "freedom". Nor does the word "ecology" put us all -- whoever "we" may be -- in the same boat against environmentalists who are simply trying to make a rotten society work by dressing it in green leaves and colourful flowers, while ignoring the deep-seated roots of our ecological problems.

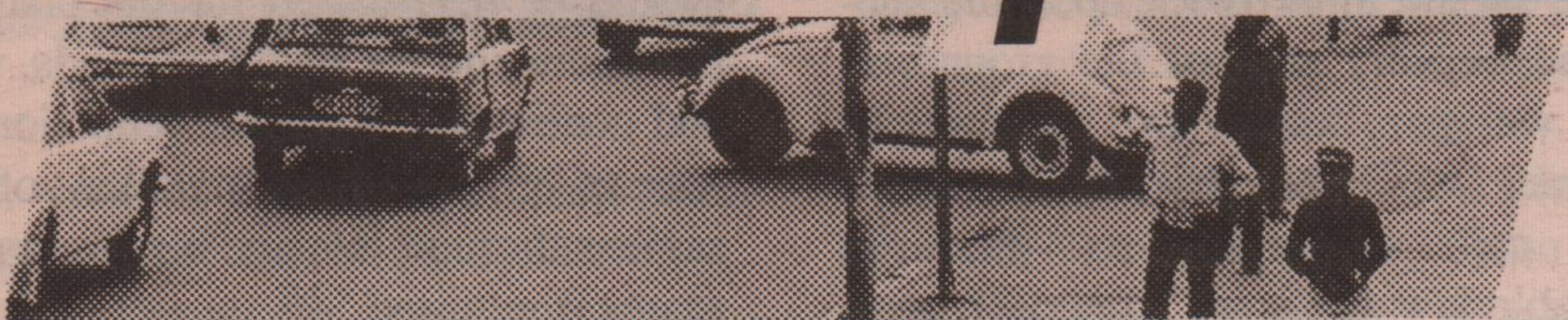
It is time to honestly face the fact that there are differences within the so-called "ecology movement" of the present time that are as serious as those between the "environmentalism" and "ecologism" of the early seventies. There are barely disguised racists, survivalists, macho Daniel Boones, and outright social reactionaries who use the word "ecology" to express their views, just as there are deeply concerned naturalists, communitarians, social radicals, and feminists who use the word "ecology" to express their own views.

The differences between these two tendencies in the so-called "ecology movement" consist not only of quarrels with regard to theory, sensibility, and ethics; they have far-reaching *practical* and *political* consequences. They consist not only of the way we view nature, or that vague word "Humanity", or even what we mean by the word "ecology"; they also concern how we propose to *change* society and by what *means*.

The greatest differences that are emerging within the so-called "ecology movement" of our day are between a vague, formless, often self-contradictory and invertebrate thing called "deep ecology" and a long-developing, coherent, and socially-oriented body of ideas that can best be called *social ecology*. "Deep ecology" has parachuted into our midst quite recently from the Sunbelt's bizarre mix of Hollywood and Disneyland, spiced with homilies from Taoism, Buddhism, spiritualism, reborn Christianity, and, in some cases, eco-fascism. *Social ecology* draws its inspiration from such outstanding radical decentralist thinkers as Peter Kropotkin, William Morris, and Paul Goodman, and others, who have advanced a serious challenge to the present society with its vast hierarchical, sexist, class-ruled, statist apparatus and militaristic history.

Let us face these differences bluntly:

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VS DEEP ECOLOGY

A CRITIQUE BY MURRAY BOOKCHIN

"deep ecology" despite all its social rhetoric, has virtually no real sense that our ecological problems have their ultimate roots in society and in social problems. It preaches a gospel of a kind of "original sin" that accurses a vague species called "Humanity" -- as though people of colour are equatable with whites, women with men, the Third World with the First, the poor with the rich, the exploited with their exploiters.

This vague undifferentiated "Humanity" is essentially seen as an ugly "anthropocentric" thing -- presumably, a malignant product of natural evolution -- that is "over-populating" the planet, "devouring" its resources, destroying its wildlife and the biosphere. It is as though some vague domain called "Nature" stands opposed to a constellation of non-natural things called "Human Beings" with their "Technology", "Minds", "Society", etc. "Deep ecology", formulated largely by privileged male white academics, has managed to bring sincere naturalists like Paul Shepard into the same company with patently anti-humanist and macho mountain-men like David Foreman of *Earth First!*, who preach a gospel that "Humanity" is some kind of cancer in the world of life.

It is easy to forget that it was out of this kind of crude eco-brutalism that a Hitler, in the name of "population control" with a racial orientation, fashioned theories of blood and soil that led to the transport of millions of people to murder camps like Auschwitz. The same eco-brutalism now reappears a half-century later among self-professed "deep ecologists" who believe that Third World peoples should be permitted to starve to death and desperate Indian immigrants from Latin America should be excluded by the border cops from the U.S.A. lest they burden "our" ecological resources.

This eco-brutalism does not come out of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. It appeared in *Simply Living*, an Australian periodical, as part of a laudatory interview of David Foreman by Professor Bill Devall (who co-authored the book, *Deep Ecology*, with Professor George Sessions -- the authorized manifesto of the "deep ecology" movement). Foreman, who exuberantly expressed his commitment to "deep ecology", was to frankly inform Devall that "When I tell people how the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid -- the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve -- they think this is monstrous ... Likewise, letting the USA be an overflow valve for problems in Latin America is not solving a thing. It's just putting more pressure on the resources we have in the USA."¹

One can reasonably ask such questions as what does it mean for "nature to seek its own balance" in a part of the world where agribusiness, colonialism, and exploitation have ravaged a once culturally and ecologically stable area like East Africa. Or who is this all-American "our" that owns the "resources we have in the U.S.A."? Are they the ordinary people who are driven by sheer need to cut timber, mine ores, operate nuclear power plants? Or are they the giant corporations that are wrecking not only the good old U.S.A., but have produced the main problems these days in Latin America that send largely Indian folk across the Rio

Grande? As an ex-Washington lobbyist and political huckster, David Foreman need not be expected to answer these subtle questions in a radical way. But what is truly surprising is the reaction -- more precisely, the lack of any reaction -- which marked Professor Devall's behavior. Indeed, the interview was notable for the laudatory, almost reverential, introduction and description prepared by Devall.

What is "Deep ecology"?

"Deep ecology" is so much of a "black hole" of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas that one can easily express utterly vicious notions like Foreman's and still sound like a fiery radical who challenges everything that is anti-ecological in the present realm of ideas.

The very words "deep ecology", in fact, clue us into the fact that we are not dealing with a body of clear ideas but with a bottomless pit in which vague notions and moods of all kinds can be sucked into the depths of an ideological toxic dump.

Does it make sense, for example, to counterpose "deep ecology" with "superficial ecology" as though the word "ecology" were applicable to *everything* that involves environmental issues?

This is not an example of mere word-play. It tells us something about the "mind set" that exists among these "deep" thinkers. To parody the word "shallow" and "deep ecology" is to show not only the absurdity of this vocabulary but to reveal the superficiality of its inventors. Is there perhaps a "deeper ecology" than "deep ecology"? What is the "deepest ecology" of all that gives "ecology" its full due as a philosophy, sensibility, ethics and movement for social change?

This kind of absurdity tells us more than we realize about the confusion Naess-Sessions-Devall, not to speak of eco-brutalists like Foreman, have introduced into the current ecology movement as it began to grow beyond the earlier environmental movement of the seventies. Indeed, the Naess-Sessions-Devall trio rely very heavily upon the ease with which people forget the history of the ecology movement, the way in which the same wheel is re-invented every few years by newly arrived individuals. Well-meaning as they may be, they often accept a crude version of highly developed ideas that appeared earlier in time. At best, these crudities merely echo in very unfinished form a corpus of views which were once presented in a richer context and tradition of ideas. At worst, they shatter such contexts and traditions, picking out tasty pieces that become utterly distorted when they re-appear in an utterly alien framework. No regard is paid by such "deep thinkers" to the fact that *the new context in which an idea is placed may utterly change the meaning of the idea itself*. German "National Socialism", which came to power in the Third Reich in 1933, was militantly "anti-capitalist" and won many of its adherents from the *German Social-Democratic* and *Communist* parties because of its anti-capitalist denunciations. But its "anti-capitalism" was placed in a strongly racist, imperialist, and seemingly "naturalist" context which extolled wilderness, sociobiology (the word had yet to be invented but its "morality of the gene", to use E.O. Wilson's expres-

sion, and its emphasis on "racial memory", to use William Irwin Thompson's expression), and anti-rationalism -- all features one finds in latent or explicit form in Sessions' and Devall's *Deep Ecology* (unless otherwise indicated, all future references and quotes come from this book, which essentially has become the bible of the "movement" that bears its name).

Note well that neither Naess, Sessions, nor Devall have written a single line about decentralization, a non-hierarchical society, democracy, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communal-

"Deep ecology... has... no real sense that our ecological problems have their roots in society and social problems."

ism, and tolerance, that was not worked out in painstaking detail and brilliantly contextualized into a unified and coherent outlook, by Peter Kropotkin a century ago and his admirers from the thirties to the sixties in our own time. Great movements in Europe and an immense literature followed from this writers' works -- anarchist movements, I may add, like the *Iberian Anarchist Federation* in Spain, a tradition which is being unscrupulously "red-baited" by certain self-styled "Greens" because of its "leftism".

But what the boys from "Ecotopia" proceed to do is to totally recontextualize the framework of these ideas, bringing in personalities and notions that basically change their radical libertarian thrust. *Deep Ecology* mingles Woody Guthrie, a Communist Party centralist who no more believed in decentralization than Stalin (whom he greatly admired until his physical deterioration and death) with Paul Goodman, an anarchist, who would have been mortified to be placed in the same tradition with Guthrie (p. 18). In philosophy, Spinoza, a Jew in spirit if not in religious commitment, is intermingled with Heidegger, a former member of the Nazi party in spirit as well as ideological affiliation -- all in the name of a vague word called "process philosophy". Almost opportunistic in their use of catch-words and what Orwell called "double-speak", "process philosophy" makes it possible for Sessions-Devall to add Alfred North Whitehead to their list of ideological ancestors because he called his ideas "processual", although he would have differed profoundly from a Heidegger who earned his academic spurs in the Third Reich by repudiating his Jewish teacher, notably Edmund Husserl, in an ugly and shameful way.

One could go on indefinitely with this sloppy admixture of "ancestors", philosophical traditions, social pedigrees, and religions that often have nothing in common with each other, and, properly conceived are commonly in sharp opposition with each other. Thus a repellent reactionary like Thomas Malthus and the neo-Malthusian tradition he spawned is celebrated with the same enthusiasm in *Deep Ecology* as Henry Thoreau, a radical libertarian who fostered a highly humanistic tradition. "Eclecticism" would be too mild a word for this kind of hodge-podge, one

that seems shrewdly calculated to embrace everyone under the rubric of "deep ecology" who is prepared to reduce ecology to a religion rather than a systematic and deeply critical body of ideas. However, behind all of this is a pattern. The kind of "ecological" thinking which enters into the book surfaces in an appendix called "Ecosophy T" by Arne Naess, who regales us with flow diagrams and corporate-type tables of organization that have more in common with *logical positivist* forms of exposition (Naess, in fact, was an acolyte of this repellent school of thought for years) than anything that could be truly called organic philosophy.

If we look beyond the spiritual "Eco-la-la" (to use a word coined by a remarkable eco-feminist, Chiah Heller) and examine the context in which demands like decentralization, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, and tolerance are placed, the blurred images that Sessions and Devall create come into clearer focus. Decentralism, small-scale communities, local autonomy, even mutual aid and communalism are not intrinsically ecological or emancipatory. Few societies were more decentralized than European feudalism, which, in fact, was structured around small-scale communities, mutual aid, and the communal use of land. Local autonomy was highly prized and autarchy formed the economic key to feudal communities. Yet few societies were more hierarchical. Looming over medieval serfs, who were tied to the land by an "ecological" network of rights and duties that placed them on a status only slightly above that of slaves, were status groups that extended from *villeins* to barons, counts, dukes, and rather feeble monarchies. The manorial economy of the Middle Ages placed a high premium on autarchy or "self-sufficiency" and spirituality. Yet oppression was often intolerable and the great mass of people who belonged to that society lived in utter subjugation to their "betters" and the nobility.

If "nature-worship" with its wood-sprites, animistic fetishes, fertility rites, magicians, shamans and shamanesses, animal deities, gods and goddesses that presumably reflect nature and its forces, pave the way to an ecological sensibility and society, then it would be hard to understand how ancient Egypt managed to become and remain one of the most hierarchical and oppressive societies in the ancient world. The pantheon of ancient Egyptian deities is filled with animal and part-animal/part-human deities with all-presiding goddesses as well as gods. Indeed, the Nile River, which provided the "life-giving" waters of the valley, was used in a highly ecological manner. Yet the entire society was structured around the oppression of millions of serfs and opulent nobles, indeed, a caste system so fixed, exploitative, and deadening to the human spirit that one wonders how notions of spirituality can be given priority to the need for a critical evaluation of society and the need to restructure it.

That there were material beneficiaries of this spiritual "Eco-la-la" becomes clear enough in accounts of the priestly corporations which "communally" owned the largest tracts of land in Egyptian society. With a highly domesticated, "spiritually" passive, yielding, and will-less population -- schooled for centuries in "flowing with the Nile", to coin a phrase -- the Egyptian ruling strata indulged themselves in an

orgy of exploitation and power for centuries.

The Art of Evading Society

The seeming ideological "tolerance" which "deep ecology" celebrates has a sinister function. It not only reduces richly nuanced ideas and conflicting traditions to their lowest common denominator; it legitimates extremely regressive, primitivistic, and even highly reactionary notions. These gain respectability because they are buried in the company of authentically radical contexts and traditions.

Consider, for example, the "broader definition of community (including animals, plants); intuition of organic wholeness" with which Devall and Sessions regale their menu of "Dominant" and "Minority" positions in their book (pp. 18-19). Nothing could seem more wholesome, more innocent of guile, than this "we-are-all-one" bumper sticker slogan. What the reader may not notice is that this all-encompassing definition of "community" erases all the rich and meaningful distinctions that exist between animal and plant communities, and above all between non-human and human communities. If community is to be broadly defined as a universal "whole", then a unique function which natural evolution has conferred on human society dissolves into a cosmic night which lacks differentiation, variety, and a wide array of functions. The fact is that human communities are *consciously* formed communities. They are *societies* with an enormous variety of institutions, cultures that can be handed down from generation to generation, lifeways that can be radically changed for the better or the worse, technologies that can be redesigned, innovated, or abandoned, and

"Natural evolution has conferred on human beings the capacity to form a 'second' or cultural nature out of 'first' or primeval nature."

social, gender, ethnic, and hierarchical distinctions that can be vastly altered according to changes in consciousness and historical development. Unlike most so-called "animal societies" or, for that matter, communities, human societies are not instinctively formed or genetically programmed. Their destinies may be decided by factors -- generally, economic and cultural -- that are beyond human control at times, to be sure, but what is particularly unique about human societies is that they can be radically changed by their members -- and in ways that can be made to benefit the natural world as well as the human species.

Human society, in fact, constitutes a "second nature", a *cultural* artifact, out of "first nature", or primeval, nonhuman nature. There is nothing wrong, "unnatural", or ecologically "alien" about this fact. Human society, like animal and plant communities, is in large part a *product* of natural evolution -- no less so than beehives or anthills. It is a product, moreover, of the *human* species, a species that is no less a product of nature than whales, dolphins, California condors, or the procaryotic cell. "Second nature" is also a product of *mind*, of a brain that can think in a richly conceptual manner and produce a highly symbolic form of communication. Taken together, "second nature", the human species which forms it, and the rightly conceptual form of thinking and

communication so distinctive to it, emerge out of natural evolution no less than any other life form and nonhuman community. This "second nature" is uniquely different from first nature in that it can act thinkingly, purposefully, willfully, and, depending upon the society we examine, creatively in the best ecological sense or destructively in the worst ecological sense. Finally, this "second nature" we call society has its own *history*: its long process of grading out of "first nature", its long process of organizing or institutionalizing human relationships, conflicts, distinctions, richly nuanced cultural formations, and, in so doing, it actualizes a large number of potentialities -- some eminently creative, others eminently destructive.

Finally, a cardinal feature of this product of natural evolution we call "society" is its capacity to intervene in "first nature" -- to alter it, again in ways that may be eminently creative or destructive. But the capacity of human beings to deal with "first nature" *actively, purposefully, willfully, rationally*, and, hopefully, *ecologically* is no less a product of evolution than the capacity of large herbivores to keep forests from eating away at grasslands or of earthworms to aerate the soil. Human beings and their societies alter "first nature", at best in a rational and ecological way, or at worst, in an irrational and anti-ecological way. But the fact that they are constituted to act upon nature is no less a product of natural evolution than the action of any life form on its environment.

"Deep ecology" contains no history of the emergence of society out of nature, a crucial development that brings social theory into organic contact with ecological theory. It presents no explanation of -- indeed, it reveals no interest in -- the emergence of hierarchy out of society, of classes out of hierarchy, or of the State out of classes. In short, it ignores the highly graded social as well as ideological development which gets to the roots of the ecological problem in the social domination of women by men and men by men, which ultimately gives rise to the notion of dominating nature in the first place.

Instead, what "deep ecology" gives us, apart from what it plagiarizes from radically different ideological contexts, is a deluge of "Eco-la-la". "Humanity" surfaces in a vague and unearthly form to embrace everyone in a realm of universal guilt. We are then massaged into sedation with Buddhist and Taoist homilies about self-abnegation, "biocentricity", and pop spiritualism that verges on the supernatural -- this for a subject matter, ecology, whose very essence is a return to an earthy naturalism. We not only lose sight of the social and the differences that fragment "Humanity" into a host of human beings -- men and women, ethnic groups, oppressors and oppressed; we lose sight of the individual self in an unending flow of "Eco-la-la" that preaches the "realization of 'self-in-Self' where the 'Self' stands for organic wholeness" (p. 67). That a cosmic "Self" is created that is capitalized should not deceive us into the belief that it has any more reality than an equally cosmic "Humanity". More of the same cosmic "Eco-la-la" appears when we are informed that the "phrase 'one' includes not only men, and individual human, but all humans, grizzly bears, whole rain forest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil and so on" (p. 67).

A "Self" so cosmic that it has to be capitalized is no real "self" at all. It is an ideological category as vague, faceless, and depersonalized as the very patriarchal image of "Man" that dissolves our uniqueness and rationality into a deadening abstraction.

On Selfhood and Viruses

Such flippant abstractions of human individuality are extremely dangerous. Historically, a "Self" that absorbs all real existential selves has been used from time immemorial to absorb the individual uniqueness and freedom into a supreme "Individual" who heads the State, Churches of various sorts, adoring congregations -- be they Eastern or Western -- and spellbound constituencies. It does not matter how "Self" is dressed up in ecological, naturalistic, and "biocentric" attributes. The Paleolithic shaman, adorned in reindeer skins and horns, is the predecessor of the Pharaoh, the institutionalized Buddha, and, in more recent times, a Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini.

Is there not a free, independently minded, ecologically concerned, indeed, idealistic self with a unique personality that can think of itself as different from "whales, grizzly bears, whole rain forest ecosystems [no less!], mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil, and so on"? Is it not indispensable, in fact, for the individual self to disengage itself from a Pharonic "Self", discover its own capacities and uniqueness, indeed, acquire a sense of personality, of self-control and self-direction -- all traits indispensable for the achievement of *freedom*? Here, I may add, Heidegger and, yes, Nazism, begin to grimace with satisfaction behind this veil of self-effacement and a passive personality so yielding that it can easily be shaped, distorted, and manipulated by a new "ecological" State machinery and a supreme "SELF" embodied in a Leader, Guru, or Living God. All this in the name of a "biocentric equality" that is slowly reworked, as it has been so often in history, into a social hierarchy. From Shaman to Monarch, from priest or Priestess to Dictator, our warped social development has been marked by "nature worshippers" and their ritual "Supreme Ones" who produced unfinished individuals at best or de-individualized the "self-in-Self" at worst. This was often done in the name of the "Great Connected Whole" (to use *exactly* the language of the Chinese ruling classes who kept their peasantry in abject servitude, as Leon E. Stover points out in his *The Cultural Ecology of Chinese Civilization*.)

What makes this "Eco-la-la" especially sinister, today, is that we are already living in a period of massive de-individualization -- not because "deep ecology" or Taoism is making any serious inroads in our own cultural ecology, but because the mass media, the commodity culture, and a market society are "reconnecting" us into an increasingly depersonalized "whole" whose essence is passivity and a chronic vulnerability to economic and political manipulation. It is not an excess of "selfhood" from which we are suffering but selfishness -- the surrender of personality to the security afforded by corporations, centralized government, and the military. If "selfhood" is identified with a grasping, "anthropocentric", and devouring personality, these traits are found not so much among the ordinary people, who basically sense they have no control over their destinies. It is found among the giant corporations and State leaders who are not only plundering the planet but also women, people of colour, and the underprivileged. It is not de-individualization that the oppressed of the world require -- much less passive personalities that readily surrender themselves to the cosmic forces -- but re-individualization that will render them active agents in remaking society and will arrest the growing totalitarianism that threatens to homogenize us all as part of a Western version of the "Great Connected Whole".

We are also confronted with the delirious "and so on" that follows the "tiniest

microbes in the soil," with which our "deep ecologists" identify the "Self". Here, we encounter another bit of intellectual manipulation that marks the Devall-Sessions anthology as a whole: the tendency to choose examples from God-Motherhood-and-Flag for one's own case, and to and cast any other alternative visions in a demonic form. Why stop with the "tiniest microbes in the soil" and ignore the leprosy microbe, the yearning and striving viruses that give us smallpox, polio, and, more recently, AIDS? Are they too not part of "all organisms and entities in the ecosphere ... of the interrelated whole ... equal in intrinsic worth ... (p. 67)", as Devall and Sessions remind us in their effluvium of "Eco-la-la"? At which point, Naess, Devall, and Sessions immediately introduce a number of highly debatable qualifiers, i.e., "we should live with a minimum rather than a maximum impact on other species" (p. 75) or "we have no right to destroy other living beings without sufficient reason" (p. 75) or, finally and even more majestically: "The slogan of 'noninterference' does not imply that humans should not modify [!] some [!] ecosystems as do other [!] species. Humans have modified the earth and will probably [!] continue to do so. At issue is the nature [!] and extent [!] of such interference [!]" (p. 72)

One does not leave the muck of "deep ecology" without having mud all over one's feet. Exactly who is to decide the "nature" of human "interference" in "first nature" and the "extent" to which it can be done? What are "some" of the ecosystems we can modify and what are not subject to human "interference"? Here again, we encounter the key problem that "Eco-la-la", including "deep ecology", poses for serious, ecologically concerned people: the *social* bases of our ecological problems and the role of the human species in the evolutionary scheme of things.

Implicit in "deep ecology" is the notion that a "Humanity" exists that accurses the natural world; that individual selfhood must be transformed into a cosmic "Selfhood" that essentially transcends the person and his or her uniqueness. Even nature is not spared from a kind of static, prepositional logic that is cultivated by the logical positivists. "Nature", in "deep ecology" and David Foreman's interpretation of it, becomes a kind of scenic view, a spectacle to be admired around the campfire (perhaps with some Budweiser beer to keep the boys happy or a Marlboro cigarette to keep them manly). Nature becomes something different from an *evolutionary* development that is cumulative and *includes* the human species, its conceptual powers of thought, its highly symbolic forms of communication and, grading into "second nature", a social and cultural development that has its own history and metabolism with pristine "first nature". To see nature as a cumulative unfolding from "first" into "second nature" is likely to be condemned as "anthropocentric" -- as though human self-consciousness at its best is not nature rendered self-conscious.

The problems "deep ecology" and "biocentricity" raise have not gone unnoticed in the more thoughtful press in England. During a discussion of "biocentric ethics" in *The New Scientist* 69 [1976], for example, Bernard Dixon observed that no "logical line can be drawn" between the conservation of whales, gentians, and flamingos, on the one hand, and the extinction of pathogenic microbes like the smallpox virus. At which point, God's gift to misanthropy, David Ehrenfeld, cutely observes that the smallpox virus is an "endangered species" in his *Arrogance of Humanism*, a work that is so selective and tendentious in its use of quotations that it should be renamed "The Arrogance

of Ignorance." One wonders what to do about the AIDS virus if a vaccine or therapy should threaten its "survival"? Further, given the passion for perpetuating the "ecosystem" of every species, one wonders how smallpox and AIDS viruses should be preserved? In test tubes? Laboratory cultures? Or, to be truly "ecological", in their "native habitat", the human body? In which case, idealistic acolytes of "deep ecology" should be invited to offer their own blood streams in the interests of "biocentric equality." Certainly, "if nature should be permitted to take its course," as Foreman advises us for Ethiopians and Indian peasants, plagues, famines, suffering, wars, and perhaps even lethal asteroids of the kind that exterminated the great reptiles of the Mesozoic should not be kept from defacing the purity of "first nature" by the intervention of "second nature". With so much absurdity to unscramble, one can indeed get heady, almost dizzy with a sense of polemical intoxication.

At root, the eclecticism which turns "deep ecology" into a goulash of notions and moods is insufferably reformist and surprisingly environmentalist -- all its condemnations of "superficial ecology" aside. It has a Dunkin' Donut for everyone. Are you, perhaps, a mild-mannered liberal? Then do not fear. Devall and Sessions give a patronizing nod to "reform legislation", "coalitions", "protests", the "women's movement" (this earns all of ten lines in their "Minority Tradition and Direct Action" essay), "working in the Christian tradition", "questioning technology" [a hammering remark if there ever was one] and "working in Green politics" [which faction, the *fundis* or *realos*?]. In short, everything can be expected in so "cosmic" a philosophy. Anything seems to pass through "deep ecology's" Dunkin' Donut hole: anarchism at one extreme and eco-fascism at the other. Like the fast-food emporiums that make up our culture, "deep ecology" is the fast food emporium of quasi-radical environmentalists.

Despite its pretense of "radicalism", "deep ecology" is more "New Age" and "Aquarian" than the environmental movements it denounces under these names. "If to study the self is to forget the self," to cite a Taoist passage with which Devall and Session regale us, then the "all" by which we are presumably "enlightened" is even more invertebrate than Teilhard de Chardin, whose Christian mysticism earns so much scorn from the authors of *Deep Ecology*. Indeed, the extent to which "deep ecology" accommodates itself to some of the worst features of the "dominant view" it professes to reject can be seen with extraordinary clarity in one of its most fundamental and repeatedly asserted demands: namely, that the world's population must be drastically reduced, according to one of its acolytes, to 500 million. If "deep ecologists" have even the faintest knowledge of the "population theories" Devall and Sessions invoke with admiration -- notably, Thomas Malthus, William Vogt, and Paul Ehrlich -- then they would be obliged to add: "by measures that are virtually eco-fascist." This spectre clearly looms before us in Devall's and Sessions' sinister remark: "... the longer we wait [in population control] the more drastic will be the measures needed" (p. 72).

The "Deep" Malthusians

The "population issue" has a long and complex pedigree -- one that occupies a central place in the crude biologism promoted by Devall and Sessions -- and one that radically challenges "deep ecologists'" very way of thinking about social problems, not to speak of their way of resolving them.

The woefully brief "history" Devall and Sessions give us of the population issue on page 46 of their book can only be considered embarrassing in its simple-mindedness were it not so reactionary in its thrust.

Thomas Malthus (1766-1854) is hailed as a prophet whose warning "that human population growth would exponentially outstrip food production ... was ignored by the rising tide of industrial/technological optimism." We shall see that this statement is pure hogwash. What Devall and Sessions call the "rising tide of industrial/ technological optimism" was, in fact, the nineteenth century radicals who opposed the vicious abuses inflicted by industrial capitalism on the oppressed of the world, often in the name of Malthusianism. Devall and Sessions thereupon extoll William Catton, Jr. for applying "the ecological concept of carrying capacity" to an ecosystem (I used this expression years before Catton in my mid-sixties writings on social ecology, famines, and plagues (Malthus later added "moral restraint") were necessary to keep population down -- especially, among the "lower orders of society" whom he singles out as the chief offenders of his inexorable population "laws". (Cf. Chapter 5 of his *Essay*, which, for all its "concern" over the misery of the "lower classes", inveighs against the poor laws and argues that the "pressures of distress on this part of the community is an evil so deeply seated that no human ingenuity can reach it.") Malthus, in effect, became the idologue par excellence for the land-grabbing English nobility in its effort to dispossess the peasantry of their traditional common lands, and the English capitalists to work children, women, and men to death in the newly emerging "industrial/technological" factory system.

Malthusianism contributed in great part to that meanness of spirit that Charles Dickens captured in his famous novels, *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*. The doctrine, its author, and its overstuffed wealthy beneficiaries were bitterly fought by the great English anarchist, William Godwin, the pioneering socialist, Robert Owen, and the emerging *Chartist* movement of the English workers in the early 19th century. When improved economic conditions revealed that population-growth tends to diminish with improvements in the quality of life and the status of women, Malthusianism was naively picked up by Charles Darwin to explain his theory of "natural selection". It now became the bedrock theory for the new *social Darwinism*, so very much in vogue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that saw society as a "jungle" in which only the "fit" (usually, the rich and white) could "survive" at the expense of the "unfit" (usually, the poor and people of colour). Malthus, in effect, had provided an ideology that justified class domination, racism, the degradation of women, and, ultimately the empire-building of English imperialism, later to phase into German fascism, with its use of industrial techniques for mass murder.

All of this occurred long after the English ruling classes, overstuffed on a diet of Malthusian pap, deliberately permitted bait for very different purposes than Catton's) and George Perkins Marsh for warning "that modern man's impact on the environment could result in rising species extinction rates" (by no means a novel notion when the passenger pigeon and bison were facing extinction, as everyone knew at the time). "The environmental crisis", we are solemnly told, "was further articulated by ecologist William Vogt (*Road to Survival*, 1984), anticipating the work of radical [!] ecologist Paul Ehrlich in the 1960s" (page 46).

Devall and Sessions often write with

smug assurance on issues they know virtually nothing about. This is most notably the case in the so-called "population debate", a debate that has raged for over two hundred years and more. It is a debate that involves explosive political and social issues that have pitted the most reactionary elements in English and American society (generally represented by Thomas Malthus, William Vogt, and Paul Ehrlich) against authentic radicals who have called for basic changes in the structure of soci-

"Hunger has its origins not in 'natural' shortages of food or population growth, but in social and cultural dislocations."

ety. In fact, the "Eco-la-la" which Devall and Sessions dump on us in only two paragraphs would require a full-sized volume of careful analysis to unravel.

First of all, Thomas Malthus was not a prophet; he was an apologist for the misery that the Industrial Revolution was inflicting on the English peasantry and working classes. His utterly fallacious argument that population increases exponentially while food supplies increase arithmetically was not ignored by England's ruling classes. It was taken to heart and even incorporated into social Darwinism as an explanation for why oppression was a necessary feature of society and for why rich, white imperialists, and the privileged were the "fittest" who were equipped to "survive" at the expense of the impoverished many. Written and directed in great part as an attack upon the liberatory vision of William Godwin, Malthus's mean-spirited *Essay on the Principle of Population* tried to demonstrate that hunger, poverty, disease, and premature death are "inevitable" precisely because population and food supply increase at different rates. Hence war, vast numbers of Irish peasants to starve to death in the potato "famines" of the 1840s on the strength of the Malthusian notion that "nature should be permitted to take its course."

Malthusianism was not only to flourish in Hitler's Third Reich; it was to be revived again in the late 1940's, following the discoveries of antibiotics to control infectious diseases. Riding on the tide of the new Pax Americana after World War 2, William F. Vogt and a whole bouquet of neo-Malthusians were to challenge the use of the new antibiotic discoveries to control disease and prevent death -- as usual, mainly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Again, a new "population debate" erupted, with the Rockefeller interests and large corporate sharks aligning themselves with the neo-Malthusians, and caring people of every sort aligned themselves with Third World theorists like Josua de Castro, who wrote damning, highly informed critiques of this new version of misanthropy.

Paul Ehrlich and his rambunctious *Zero Population Growth* fanatics in the early seventies literally polluted the environmental movement with demands for a *government bureau* (no less!) to "control" population, advancing the infamous "triage" ethic as a standard for aiding or refusing aid to so-called "undeveloped" countries. The extent to which this "ethic" became a formula for dispensing food to countries that aligned themselves with the U.S.A. in the Cold War, and for refusing aid to those which were nonaligned, would make an interesting story by itself. Ehrlich, in turn, began to backtrack on his attempts to peddle a seventies version of neo-Malthusianism -- perhaps until recently, when "deep ecology" has singled

him out for a prophetic place in the pantheon of "radical" ecology. Rumour has it that black students in Ehrlich's own academic back yard viewed his *Population Bomb* as basically racist and neatly tailored to fit the needs of American imperialism.

In *Food First*, Francis Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins have done a superb job in showing how hunger has its origins not in "natural" shortages of food or population growth, but in social and cultural dislocations. (It is notable that Devall and Sessions do *not* list this excellent book in their bibliography.) The book has to be widely read to understand the reactionary implications of "deep ecology's" demographic positions.

What is no less important: demography is a highly ambiguous and ideologically charged social discipline that cannot be reduced to a mere numbers game in biological reproduction. Human beings are not fruit flies (the species of choice which the neo-Malthusians love to cite). Their reproductive behaviour is profoundly conditioned by cultural values, standards of living, social traditions, the status of women, religious beliefs, socio-political conflicts, and various socio-political expectations. Smash up a stable, pre-capitalist culture and throw its people off the land into city slums and, due ironically to demoralization, population may soar rather than decline. As Gandhi told the British, imperialism left India's wretched poor and homeless with little more in life than the immediate gratification provided by sex and an understandably numbed sense of personal, much less social, responsibility. Reduce women to mere reproductive factories and population rates will explode.

Conversely, provide people with decent lives, education, a sense of creative meaning in life, and, above all, free women from their roles as mere bearers of children -- and population growth begins to stabilize and population rates even reverse their direction. Indeed population growth and attitudes toward population vary from society to society according to the way people live, the ideas they hold, and the socio-economic relationships they establish. Nothing more clearly reveals "deep ecology's" crude, often reactionary, and centralist, anti-hierarchical, and "radical" rhetoric aside -- than its suffocating "biological" treatment of the population issue and its inclusion of Malthus, Vogt, and Ehrlich in its firmament of prophets.

The close connection between social factors and demography is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe, improved living conditions began to reduce rates of population increase, in some cases leading to negative population growth rates. During the inter-war period, such declines became so "serious" to countries readying themselves for World War 2, that women were granted awards for having sizable numbers of children (read: cannon fodder for the military). More recently in Japan, industrialists were so alarmed by the decline in the country's labour force due to the legalization of abortion that they demanded the abrogation of this legislation.

These examples can be generalized into a theory of demography in which the need for labour often plays a more important role historically in population fluctuations than biological behaviour and sexual desire. If women are seen as female fruit-flies and men as their mindless partners, guided more by instinct than the quality of life, then Devall and Sessions have an argument -- and, almost certainly, a crude patronizing, gender-conditioned outlook that requires careful scrutiny by feminists who profess to be "deep ecologists". If

people are not fruitflies, then "deep ecology" reeks of the odor of crude biologism that is matched only by its naive reading of Malthus and Company.

Not surprisingly, *Earth First!* whose editor professes to be an enthusiastic "deep ecologist", carried an article titled "Population and AIDS" which advanced the obscene argument that AIDS is desirable as a means of population control. This was no spoof. It was carefully worked out, fully reasoned in a Paleolithic sort of way, and earnestly argued. Not only will AIDS claim large numbers of lives, asserts the author (who hides under the pseudonym of "Miss Ann Thropy", a form of sinister humour that could also pass as an example of macho-male arrogance), but it "may cause a breakdown in technology [read: human food supply] and its export which could also decrease the human population" (May 1, 1987). These people feed on human disasters, suffering, and misery, preferably in Third World countries where AIDS is by far a more monstrous problem than elsewhere.

Until we can smoke out "Miss Ann Thropy" (is it David Foreman again?), we have little reason to doubt that this mentality -- or lack thereof -- is perfectly consistent with the "more drastic ... measures" Devall and Sessions believe we will have to explore. Nor is it inconsistent with a Malthus and Vogt, possibly even an Ehrlich, that we should make no effort to find a cure for this disease which may do so much to depopulate the world. "Biocentric democracy", I assume, should call for nothing less than a "hands-off" policy on the AIDS virus and perhaps equally lethal pathogens that appear in the human species.

What is social ecology?

Social ecology is neither "deep", "tall", "fat", nor "thick". It is *social*. It does not fall back on incantations, sutras, flow diagrams or spiritual vagaries. It is avowedly *rational*. It does not try to regale metaphorical forms of spiritual mechanism and crude biologism with Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, or shamanistic "Eco-la-la". It is a coherent form of *naturalism* that looks to *evolution* and the *biosphere*, not to deities in the sky or under the earth for quasi-religious and Supernaturalistic explanations of natural and social phenomena.

Philosophically, social ecology stems from a solid organismic tradition in Western philosophy, beginning with Heraclitus, the near-evolutionary dialectic of Aristotle and Hegel, and the superbly critical approach of the famous Frankfurt School -- particularly its devastating critique of logical positivism (which surfaces in Naess repeatedly) and the primitivistic mysticism of Heidegger (which pops up all over the place in "deep ecology's" literature).

Socially, it is revolutionary, not merely "radical". It critically unmasks the entire evolution of hierarchy in all its forms, including neo-Malthusian elitism, the eco-brutalism of a David Foreman, the anti-humanism of a David Ehrenfeld and a "Miss Ann Thropy", and the latest racism, First World arrogance and Yuppie-nihilism of post-modernistic spiritualism. It is rooted in the profound eco-anarchistic analyses of Peter Kropotkin, the radical economic insights of Karl Marx, the emancipatory promise of the revolutionary Enlightenment as articulated by the great encyclopedist, Denis Diderot, the *Enrages* of the French Revolution, the revolutionary feminist ideas of a Louise Michel and Emma Goldman, the communitarian ideas of Paul Goodman and E.A. Gutkind, and the various eco-revolutionary manifestoes of the early 1960's.

Politically, it is Green -- and *radically* Green. It takes its stand with the left-wing

tendencies in the German Greens and extra-parliamentary street movements of European cities, with the American radical eco-feminist movement that is currently emerging, with the demands for a new politics based on citizens' initiatives, neighborhood assemblies, New England's tradition of town-meetings, with unaligned anti-imperialist movements at home and abroad, with the struggle by people of colour for complete freedom from the domination of privileged whites and from the superpowers of both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Morally, it is avowedly *humanistic* in the high Renaissance meaning of the term, not the degraded meaning of "humanism" that has been imparted to the word by David Foreman, David Ehrenfeld, a salad of academic "deep ecologists", and the like. Humanism from its inception has meant a shift in reason, from deities to people -- who are no less products of natural evolution than grizzly bears and whales. Social ecology does not accept a "biocentricity" that essentially denies or degrades the uniqueness of human beings, human subjectivity, rationality, esthetic sensibility, and the ethical potentiality of this extraordinary species. By the same token, social ecology rejects an "anthropocentricity" that confers on the privileged few the right to plunder the world of life, including women, the young, the poor, and the underprivileged. Indeed, it opposes "centricity" of *any* kind as a new word for hierarchy and domination -- be it that of nature by a mystical "Man" or the domination of people by an equally mystical "Nature".

It firmly denies that "Nature" is a scenic view which Mountain Men like a Foreman survey from a peak in Nevada, or a picture window that spoiled Yuppies place in their tacky country homes. To social ecology, nature *is* natural *evolution*, not a cosmic arrangement of beings frozen in a moment of eternity to be abjectly "revered", "adored", and "worshipped" like the Gods in a realm of "Supernature" that subverts the naturalistic integrity of an authentic ecology. Natural evolution is nature in the very real sense that it is composed of atoms, molecules that have evolved into amino acids, proteins, unicellular organisms, genetic codes, invertebrates and vertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, primates, and human beings. It is nature moving in a cumulative thrust toward ever-greater complexity, ever-greater subjectivity, and finally, ever-greater mind with a capacity for conceptual thought, symbolic communication of the most sophisticated kind, and self-consciousness in which natural evolution knows itself purposively and willfully.

This marvel we call "Nature" has produced a marvel we call *homo sapiens* -- "thinking man", and more significantly for the development of society, "thinking woman". Her primeval domestic domain provided the arena for the origins of a caring society, human empathy, love, and idealistic commitment. The human species, in effect, is no less a product of natural evolution than blue-green algae. To degrade that species in the name of "anti-humanism", "Miss Ann Thropy" (to use the coarse language of an unknown *Earth First!* Mountain Man), to deny the species its uniqueness as thinking beings with an unprecedented gift for conceptual thought, is to deny the rich fecundity of natural evolution itself. To separate human beings and society from nature is to dualize and truncate nature itself. It is to diminish the meaning and thrust of natural evolution in the name of a "biocentricity" that spends more time disporting itself with mantras, deities, and supernature than with the realities of the biosphere and the role of society in ecological problems. Accordingly, social ecology does not try

to hide its critical and reconstructive thrust in metaphors. It calls "technological/ industrial" society *capitalism*. This is a word which places the onus for our ecological problems on the *living* sources and *social* relationships that produce them, not on a cutesy "Third Wave" abstraction which buries these sources in technics, a technical "mentality", or perhaps the technicians who work on machines. It sees the domination of women not simply as a "spiritual" problem that can be resolved by rituals, incantations, and shamanesses, important as ritual may be in solidarizing women into a unique community of people, but in the long, highly graded, and subtly nuanced development of hierarchy, which long preceded the development of classes. Nor does it ignore class, ethnic differences, imperialism, and oppression by creating a grab-bag called "Humanity" that is placed in opposition to a mystified "Nature", divested of all development.

All of which brings us as social ecologists to an issue that seems to be totally alien to the crude concerns of "deep ecology": natural evolution has conferred on human beings the capacity to form a "second" or cultural nature out of "first" or primeval nature. Natural evolution has not only provided humans with *ability* but also the *necessity* to be purposive interveners into "first nature" by means of a highly institutionalized form of community we call "society". It is not alien to natural evolution that a species called human has emerged over billions of years that is capable of thinking in a sophisticated way. Nor is it alien for that species to develop a new kind of community -- institutionalized, guided by thought rather than by instinct alone, and ever-changing -- has emerged called "society".

Taken together, all of these human traits -- intellectual, communicative, and social -- have not only emerged from natural evolution and are inherently human; they can also be placed at the *service* of natural evolution to consciously increase biotic diversity, diminish suffering, foster the further evolution of new and ecologically valuable life-forms, reduce the impact of disastrous accidents or the harsh effects of mere change.

Whether this species, gifted by the creativity of natural evolution, can play the role of a nature rendered self-conscious or cut against the grain of natural evolution by simplifying the biosphere, polluting it, and undermining the cumulative results of organic evolution is above all a *social* problem. The primary question ecology faces today is whether an ecologically oriented society can be created out of the present anti-ecological one.

"Deep ecology" provides us with no approach for responding to, much less acting upon, this key question. It rips out invaluable ideas like decentralization, a non-hierarchical society, local autonomy, mutual aid, and communalism from the liberatory anarchic tradition of the past where they have acquired a richly nuanced, anti-elitist, and egalitarian content. These ideas have been reinforced by passionate struggles by millions of men and women for freedom. It then reduces these ideas to bumper-sticker slogans that can be recycled for use by a macho Mountain Man like Foreman at one extreme, or flaky spiritualists at the other extreme. These bumper-sticker slogans are then relocated in a particularly repulsive context whose contours are defined by Malthusian elitism, anti-humanist misanthropy, and a seemingly benign "biocentricity". This biocentricity dissolves humanity, with all its unique natural traits for conceptual thought and self-consciousness, into a "biocentric democracy" that is more properly the product of human consciousness than a natural reality. Carried to its logical absurdity, this "biocentric democracy" --

one might also speak of a tree's morality or a leopard's "social contract" with its prey -- can no more deny the "right" of pathogenic viruses to be placed on an "endangered species list" (and *who* places them there, in the first place?) than it can deny the same status to whales.

The social roots of the ecological crisis are layered over by a hybridized, often self-contradictory form of spirituality in which the *human* "self", writ large, is projected into the environment or into the sky as a reified Deity or deities and abjectly "revered" as "Nature". Or, as Arne Naess, the grand Pontiff of this mess puts it: "The basic principles within the deep ecology movement are grounded in religion or philosophy" (p. 225) -- as though the two words can be flippantly used interchangeably. Selfhood is dissolved, in turn, into a cosmic "Self" precisely at a time when de-individuation and passivity are being cultivated by the mass media, corporations, and the State to an appalling extent. Finally, "deep ecology", with its concern for the manipulation of nature, exhibits very little concern for the manipulation of human beings by each other, except perhaps when it comes to the "drastic" measures that may be "needed" for population control.

There must be a resolute attempt to fully anchor ecological dislocations in social dislocations, to challenge the vested corporate and political interests we should properly call capitalism -- not some vague entity called "industrial/ technological" society, which even a Dwight D. Eisenhower attacked with a more acerbic term -- to analyze, explore, and attack hierarchy as a *reality*, not only as a sensibility. We must recognize the material needs of the poor and of the Third World people, to function politically, not simply as a religious cult, to give the human species and mind their due in natural evolution, not simply regard them as "cancers" in the biosphere, to examine economies as well as "souls" and freedom as well as immerse ourselves in introspective or in scholastic arguments about the "rights" of pathogenic viruses. In short, unless North American Greens and the ecology movement shift their focus toward a *social* ecology and let "deep ecology" sink into the pit it has created for us, the ecology movement will become another ugly wart on the skin of society.

What we must do, today, is return to *nature*, conceived in all its fecundity, richness of potentialities, and subjectivity -- not to *Supernature* with its shamans, priests, priestesses, and fanciful deities that are merely anthropomorphic extensions and distortions of the "Human" as all-embracing divinities. What we must *enchant* is not only an abstract "Nature" that often reflects our own systems of power, hierarchy, and domination -- but rather human beings, the human mind, and the human spirit that has taken such a beating these days from every source, particularly "deep ecology".

"Deep ecology", with its Malthusian thrust, its various "centricities", its mystifying "Eco-la-la", and its disorienting eclecticism degrades this enterprise into a crude biologism that deflects us from the social problems that underpin the ecological ones and the project of social reconstruction that alone can spare the biosphere from virtual destruction.

We must finally take a stand on these issues -- free of all "Eco-la-la" -- or acknowledge that the academy has made another conquest; namely that of the ecology movement itself. □