

DEEP ECOLOGY IN CONTEXT

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the ideas presented by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in his *deep ecology*, setting those ideas briefly into the context of other perspectives that touch upon ecological thought.

1. Introduction

Ecology, as a science, is not, of course, a new subject and imaginative and thought provoking writings on matters ecological have been published for many years. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published more than 30 years ago, and Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, with its 'Land Ethic' and the moving essay 'Thinking Like a Mountain,' was first published in 1949. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that the last fifteen or so years have seen a significant increase in ecological and environmental thinking and writing, no doubt in part a response to the mounting evidence of pollution, species loss, climate change, the destruction of the rain forests and so on.

In very broad terms, these writings and ideas can be divided into two main schools:

- those that take an anthropocentric, technocentric, instrumental and supposedly rational stance; and
- those whose approach is more holistic, ecocentric, reflective and, in some cases, spiritual.

It will come as no surprise to you to discover that the first of these two schools, broadly defined as 'stewardship,' has had the greater impact, not only generally but also upon land-use and planning policy in particular, and, indeed, at least to date, upon the debate about 'sustainability.' That is to say that in so far as ecological thought has had any impact at all, it has been in terms of sustaining an 'external' environment for the present generation of humanity and for the immediate generations to come. The proposals have been mostly about 'better management,' managing growth, recycling waste, green consumerism, reducing omissions with catalytic converters and so on. In this school, the dominant ethos of materialism, consumption and the inevitable benefits of market forces and

economic growth, remain largely unchallenged. We simply have to find ways of doing these things more ‘sustainably.’

But there is a more radical perspective, and Joseph Grange has described the difference between the two schools as being between ‘dividend’ and ‘foundational’ ecology:

“Dividend ecology”...regards the interaction of humankind and nature solely from the perspective of investments and returns...(whereas) “foundational ecology”...seeks the ground of our relation with nature as well as its corresponding depths in the human psyche.ⁱ

In my own work, under the working title *The Voice of the Land*, I, too, have drawn such a distinction, marking the way in which a dominant, although inadequate, language of economics and financial accounting has come so to dominate our relationship with the land that it obscures many other equally, if not more, important criteria and limits the scope of necessary discourse.

Following this kind of division, the literature of deep ecology, makes a distinction between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ ecology. This distinction has sometimes been misrepresented to suggest that Arne Naess was inferring that there were, therefore, shallow and deep ecologists. This is not so and, indeed, Naess has said that, since it appears to be defamatory, he is rather unhappy with the use of the word ‘shallow’ and that he prefers the phrase ‘reform ecology’ to characterise those ecological approaches that take a more pragmatic approach than he does, being inclined more readily to accept current value systems as given. He argues that his approach is ‘deep’ not that it is somehow more profound but in that it is characterised by probing deeply into the nature of the ecological problem.

Depth...applies to the distance one looks in search of the roots of the problem...ⁱⁱ

Deep ecology, or as Naess sometimes prefers to call it, the ‘deep ecological approach,’ therefore stands alongside the second and more radical of the two schools described above. What then is this approach?

2. Deep Ecology and the Deep Ecological Approach

In his 'deep ecology,' Arne Naess develops an "ecophilosophy" that brings together the principles of ecology and philosophy to act as a foundation for thought and action. Placing humanity *within* nature, deep ecology is concerned with relationship and wholeness. It embraces both theory *and* practice, thinking *and* feeling, unity *and* diversity.

As a philosophy and as a movement for change, deep ecology sees relationship and community not as an imposed, external, intellectual human construct but as "an essential component of what...entities are in themselves."ⁱⁱⁱ None of us, no living thing, no river or mountain, can be isolated and set apart: "an organism is interaction."^{iv} The community, the "relational field", is there, at one and the same time, in both the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Here is not the place to describe in detail the formulation of the deep ecological approach - a task made the more difficult by the fact that Naess stresses that his approach is open, tentative, and potentially subject to revision,^v his "tendency to revise, revise and re-revise."^{vi} Nevertheless, if this approach is to be explored within the realm of planning and land-use, enough of its elements must be identified to enable that exploration to take place. Four of these elements are of relevance:^{vii}

- * Total views
- * Normative-derivational systems
- * Identification
- * The Deep Ecology Platform

This paper focuses upon the first two, leaving out any detailed description of the deep ecology platform and any exploration of the important notion of "identification".^{viii} In particular, my focus is upon the second. In doing this, I am conscious of Harold Glasser's comment:

The significance of the (deep ecological approach) rests on its concern for practical decision-making; not in the *correctness* of the approach, but in its ability to help structure and focus our thinking about decision-making.^{ix}

(i) Total Views

Naess's deep ecological 'total view',^x has four levels (see Figure). At the first level lies a deep foundation of unproven and unprovable ultimate values or norms. They are ultimate in the sense of being fundamental, in the sense of being the end result of a process of "deep questioning", and in the sense of not being derived (see below).^{xi} These roots are found to lie in the realm of feeling and spontaneous experience. At base, therefore, deep ecology is normative and intuitive:

Evidence *always* ultimately rests upon something which is neither proven nor provable, explained nor explainable.^{xii}

At the second level stands the deep ecology platform (see Figure), developed, in 1984, by Naess and the American philosopher George Sessions. This platform lays out a set of principles for policy and action, a platform for the deep ecology movement, including:

- every living being has intrinsic worth;
- richness and diversity of living beings has intrinsic value;
- humans do not have the right to (indeed would be foolish to) reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs; and
- a change in policies is required.

The platform is set out in full in Appendix 1.

The platform provides a base of commonly shared principles. Derived from this common base, the third level of Naess's deep ecological 'total view' is the level at which individuals and organisations formulate their own general and specific principles. And finally, at the fourth level, they play out the various courses of policy implementation and action that flow both immediately from these individual and corporate principles and, in turn, from both the platform and the ultimate norms.

(ii) Normative-derivational system

Naess's deep ecological total view is normative and systematic. Action is derived from values by the formulation of hypotheses so that derived norms, flowing from the ultimate norm(s), lead to concrete consequences.^{xiii} All

parts of the system may be affected by experience and intuition. According to Naess: the total view must have general and ecologically particular qualities of coherence and consistency; ultimate norms must lead to the platform; and lifestyles and action must demonstrably flow from it. The manner in which this coherence and consistency is achieved is by the two-fold process of "deep questioning" and "loose derivation".

As we have seen deep ecology is 'deep' because it is based upon asking deeper and deeper ecological questions until we arrive at an underlying set of values or norms that are then the foundation for practice. Again and again, we are to question "Why?" until we uncover the intuitive roots of the premises upon which we act.

Furthermore, this process of questioning reveals derivational contradictions and inconsistencies, our own and other's, and makes explicit values that are unspoken or even not consciously acknowledged - the implicit values that inform language and action.

The form of derivation is termed "loose" because it reflects Naess's (already stated) frequent reference to openness, tentativeness and reviseability:

There is no one definite way of tracing lines of derivation. It is to some degree arbitrary which norms and hypotheses are chosen as ultimate in the sense of not derivable. And even if the norms and hypotheses are arranged in a definite, authorised way, there is still room for differences in wording.^{xiv}

3. The Deep Ecological Approach and Planning and Land-use

How, then, might deep ecology or the deep ecological approach be applied to planning and land-use? Within the scope of this paper, there appear to be three main possibilities.

The first is that the method of deep questioning and loose derivation would help to articulate and thus challenge the values underlying present planning policy and land-use in general. As Naess stresses:

The vast majority of experts with influence on the policy of western industrial states avoid argumentation from fundamentals. They prefer to state which are the *preferences of the majority*, or are in harmony with *the stated goals of the government elected democratically* by the

populace...experience shows a marked unwillingness, perhaps sometimes combined with unability, to argue from fundamentals...(Argumentation from fundamentals) lays bare that shortsighted unecological policies have as a necessary condition absence of argumentation from fundamentals. When such argumentation is introduced there appear *inconsistencies* between basic norms and hypotheses and current policies.^{xv}

More particularly, the method would help to challenge present dominant language of financial accounting by requiring that developers and others justify their premises - the accountability principle. For, as Naess makes clear:

(The developer's) ethics in environmental questions is based largely upon how he sees reality...He considers his own strong positive feelings towards development to be based on objective reality, not on feelings. And as long as society is led by developers, he need not be passionate in his utterances.^{xvi}

Secondly, this method might, in the same way, be applied to particular planning and land-use issues such as: the widening of the M25; transport in city centres; public access to the Peak District National Park; the development of Terminal 5 at Heathrow; or the building of new settlements on green-field sites.

Thirdly, the deep ecological approach would help better to inform the discussion of sustainability which is widely claimed to be at the centre of planning policy at national and local level.^{xvii} Here, it would challenge what, in Naess's terms, might be referred to as 'shallow' sustainability, and point to more far-reaching consequences.

The principal advantage of this process of articulation is that it makes explicit that which is often hidden and, therefore, unacknowledged. By stripping back the layers of assumption, the process enables the parties to establish where their conflict really lies. The debate can then be focused on real rather than pseudo conflict. In this example, does the difference lie in the question of access or in some other 'hidden' realm? Is the real difference about the importance of jobs or about the ways in which human happiness is achieved? Thus, we can locate more effectively the realm in which our differences might be resolved. Here, the real conflict is found to lie not (as might at first have appeared) in the realm of local planning policy but in the

realm of national politics, that is in the wider realm in which the values of governance are defined.

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This paper only begins to point towards a deep ecological approach to planning and land-use and many general and more specific questions remain to be addressed.^{xviii} In particular, it remains necessary to identify ultimate norms for, and to explore appropriate deep ecological total views of, particular aspects of planning and land-use. But it is clear that the approach has sufficient relevance to merit further work and in undertaking such work we should be mindful of Naess's requirement that we be bold and open in our exploration.

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London, September 1996

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APPENDIX 1: THE DEEP ECOLOGY PLATFORM

- (1) The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The usefulness of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.
- (2) Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
- (3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- (4) Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- (5) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
- (6) Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures.
- (7) The ideological change is mainly appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
- (8) Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.^{xix}

NB. In discussion, Arne Naess has confirmed that Point 8 should be revised as follows: "...to implement the necessary changes peacefully and democratically."

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Endnotes

- i Grange, Joseph, 'On the Way Towards Foundational Ecology,' *Soundings* 60 (1977): 136 (in Fox, Warwick, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology*, Shambhala, 1990).
- ii Naess, Arne, *Ecology, community and life-style: outline of an ecosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, (First published 1989), 12.
- iii. Naess, Arne, *Ecology, community and life-style: outline of an ecosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, (First published 1989), 36.
- iv. *Ibid.*, 56.
- v. Naess, Arne, 'Notes on the Methodology of Normative Systems', *Methodology and Science* 10 (1977), 64-67.
- vi. Glasser, Harold, 'Deep Ecology Unravelling: A Few Fallacies and Misconceptions', submitted to *The Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy*, 3/95, 3.
- vii. See: Glasser, *Ibid.*, 7, where the deep ecology approach is described as comprising six concatenated elements:
 - * the notion of unifying total views
 - * the use of a normative-derivational system
 - * the practice of "deep questioning"
 - * the practice of "loose derivation"
 - * the adoption of ultimate premises that incorporate "wide identification"
 - * the eight points of the deep ecology platform

See also: Glasser, Harold, 'Naess's Deep Ecology Approach and Environmental Policy', submitted to *Inquiry*, 2/95. 5-17.

- viii. This focus is in part a consequence of the limitation of scope imposed upon me and the exclusion of a fuller discussion of the deep ecology platform and, in particular its relationship with the deep ecological approach is an acknowledged weakness. It seems to me that there is a tension in the deep ecological approach between the deliberate "vagueness" of Naess's ecological philosophy (see, for example: Naess and Rothenberg, *Ecology Community and Lifestyle*, Ibid., 42-43; and Glasser, *Deep Ecology Unravelled*, Ibid., 5-6) and the inevitable limitations of the deep ecology platform. Whilst the former provides a philosophic basis for addressing particular problems (such as planning and land-use), the focus of the latter, deliberately designed for a "movement", seems to be both vague and selective (see: Glasser, Ibid., 9-12 and Glasser, *Naess's Deep Ecology Approach and Environmental Policy*, Ibid., 16-17). I am left with thought that this may not matter but the development of such a proposal requires more space than is permitted in this paper.

The notion of "identification" is very important, particularly in arriving at "ultimate norms" but, again, space does not permit it to be explored here.

- ix. Op cit., Glasser, Harold, *Deep Ecology Unravelled*, 11-12.
- x. Naess, Arne, 'The Deep Ecology Movement', in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, (ed.) G. Sessions, Shambhala, 1995, 64-84.

See also: Naess, Arne, 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', *Philosophical Inquiry*, 1986, Vol VIII No.1-2, 23-25.

- xi. Naess, Arne, *Notes on the Methodology of Normative Systems Science*, 10, (1997), 75.
- xii. Naess, Arne, 'The Deep Ecology Movement', in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Ibid., 68.
- xiii. Op cit., Glasser, Harold, *Deep Ecology Unravelled*, 7-12.

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- xiv. Op cit., Naess, Arne, 'Notes on the Methodology of Normative Systems, p.67.
- xv. Ibid., 73-4.
- xvi. Naess, Arne, 'The World of Concrete Contents', *Inquiry*, 28, 1985, 424.
- xvii. See for example:

Naess, Arne, 'Sustainable Development and the Deep Long-Range Ecology Movement', *Trumpeter* 5, (1988), 138-42.

Naess, Arne, 'Sustainable Development and Deep Ecology Movement', *Ethics of Environment and Development: Global Challenge, International Response*, (ed.) R.J. Engel and J.G. Engel, 87-96, Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1990.

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- xviii. These include general matters such as: whether there is a tension between the deep ecological approach and the deep ecology platform (see above); and whether, at the most complete state of identification, intrinsic values and instrumental values converge. An attempt to look at some of the issues of an ecological approach to planning is set out in my own summary of a colloquium held at Sharpham House, Devon in Spring 1996 and entitled *Sharpham and the Gentle Art of Planning*(unpublished).
- xix. Op cit., Naess and Rothenberg, *Ecology Community and Lifestyle*, 29.