

There is No Point of No Return

Arne Naess

GREEN IDEAS 18



*There is No Point
of No Return*

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The Deep Ecology Movement

What Is Deep Ecology?

One should not expect much from definitions of movements – think of terms such as *conservatism*, *liberalism*, and *feminism*. Moreover, it is not necessary that supporters adhere to exactly the same definition. In what follows, a set of principles, or key terms and phrases, agreed upon by George Sessions and myself, are tentatively proposed as basic to deep ecology.*

* I cannot here do justice to the many authors who have contributed to the understanding of the emerging deep ecology movement. Only three will be mentioned. The newsletters written by George Sessions, Department of Philosophy, Sierra College, Rocklin, CA, are indispensable. There are six letters, April 1976, May 1979, April 1981, May 1982, May 1983, and May 1984, about 140 pages in all. The significant contributions by poets and artists are fully recognized. Most of these materials are summarized in Sessions, 1981. Bill Devall provides a short survey, in part historical, in his potent article 'The deep ecology movement' (1980). See also Devall and Sessions, 1985. Finally, *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy* was started in 1983 by

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

Alan Drengson. It was published as a print journal for fourteen years and is now an online journal.

The Deep Ecology Movement

7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes. It is this principle that highlights the importance of *deep questioning* as the process by which to follow/develop/enact the other principles.

Basic Principle 1

Formulation 1 refers to the biosphere or, more accurately, to the ecosphere as a whole. This includes individuals, species, populations, and habitats, as well as human and nonhuman cultures. From our current knowledge of all-pervasive intimate relationships, this implies a fundamental deep concern and respect. Ecological processes on the planet should, on the whole, remain intact. ‘The world environment should remain ‘natural’ (Gary Snyder). The term *life* is used here in a comprehensive, nontechnical way to refer

also to what biologists classify as 'nonliving': rivers (watersheds), landscapes, ecosystems. For supporters of deep ecology, slogans such as 'Let the river live' illustrate this broader usage so common in most cultures. Inherent value, as used in formulation 1, is common in deep ecology literature. 'The presence of inherent value in a natural object is independent of any awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by any conscious being.'^{*}

Basic Principle 2

More technically, formulation 2 concerns diversity and complexity. From an ecological standpoint, complexity and symbiosis are conditions for maximizing diversity. So-called simple, lower, or primitive species of plants and animals contribute essentially to richness and diversity of life. They have value in themselves and are not merely steps toward the so-called higher or rational life-forms. The second principle presupposes that life itself, as a process over evolutionary time, implies an increase of diversity and richness. The refusal to acknowledge that some life-forms have

^{*} Regan, T. (1981). The nature and possibility of an environmental ethics. *Environmental Ethics*, 3, p. 30.