

**References Cited:**

- Foote, Kenneth E., Peter J. Hugill, Kent Mathewson, and Johnathon M. Smith, ed.  
1994. *Re-Reading Cultural Geography*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Philo, Chris.  
2000. "More Words, More Worlds," in *Cultural Turns/ Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geography*. Edited by Ian Cook, David Crouch, Simon Naylor, and James R. Ryan. Toronto: Prentice Hall.
- Wagner, Philip L. and Marvin Mikesell, ed.  
1962. *Reading in Cultural Geography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology. Edited by Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg. Cambridge, MA & London, UK: The MIT Press (2000), viii, 328 pp.**

**Reviewed by J. Stan Rowe, emeritus Professor (Ecology), University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.**

Ecology is the "skin-out" study of what envelops and influences things, as compared to physiology with its focus on "skin-in" functions--which leads to the thought that the appropriate title for those primarily concerned with their inner soul/selves is "Deep Physiologists." In contrast, the name Deep Ecology (DE) suggests exploration of human ecology to its outer limits, asking what is the reality of people's relationship to the world that envelops them, and what ethical actions flow from that relationship? Over the last quarter century Arne Naess has been the most influential voice of eco/philosophy and eco/sophy (ecological wisdom) in the Western world.

Naess's thoughts and actions have been motivated by what he sees as the appalling deterioration of planet Earth, overpopulated and under attack by a consumer society. From this came his founding of the Deep Ecology Movement (DEM) for social-political change, centered on a Platform of eight Principles (composed with George Sessions) that, in summary, calls for valuing and respecting all forms of life, for an attitude of non-interference with natural processes and systems, for de-emphasizing the primary significance of people and their institutions, for restructuring society in harmony with natural processes, and for a reexamination of the ends of human life, replacing the pursuit of material abundance with a heightened quality of life experience.

The introductory chapter of *Beneath the Surface* states that the book's primary goal is "to examine the philosophy of DE," a difficult task without a philosophical interpretation of the DEM Platform. The editors propose six points as essential to the philosophy of DE. In abbreviated form they are: (1) Rejection of strong anthropocentrism, (2) Replacing anthropocentrism with ecocentrism (the ecosphere and ecological systems central), (3) Identification with all forms of life, (4) The sense that caring for the environment is part of individual human self-realization, (5) A critique of instrumental rationality and an emphasis on alternative modes of thinking, (6) Personal development of a total worldview prior to social action.

Naess values the diversity of philosophical/cultural faiths and is willing to recognize many as underpinnings of the DEM. He conceived it as four linked levels, illustrated with the "Apron Diagram" so-called because it flares out generously above and below the Platform-Principles "waist." Level 1, the bust of the apron, encompasses a broad spectrum of religions and philosophies willing to subscribe to Level 2, where the "Platform Principles" cinch all together. Level 3 and Level 4 comprise the hips and hem of the garment, the former expressing general consequences (such as choice of lifestyle) in harmony with the Platform, and the latter specifying concrete situations and practical decisions of a political nature. In Naess's words, "The DEM thus can manifest both plurality and unity: unity at Level 2, and plurality at the other levels."

Midway through the book editor/essayist Andrew Light examines ethicist Callicott's arguments for a singular foundational ecophilosophy based on Aldo Leopold's concept of people's duties to the larger biotic communities of which they are members. Light concludes that environmental philosophy is too young to settle on one right path, and

## Reviews

so he too endorses a pluralism of ecophilosophies at Level 1.

Obviously Naess does not consider his personal philosophy, "Ecosophy T," as the only valid one, but the editors justify particular attention to his thinking not only because he is the founding father but also because many of the essays that the book comprises were initially slated for publication in the journal *Inquiry* as a special issue titled, "Arne Naess's Environmental Thought." Thus many of the essays are understandable in the light of Naess's Ecosophy T, which shows the influence of Eastern philosophies. In my view his three outstanding ideas are:

(1) Self-realization for all Beings. This is the belief that the route to an ecological worldview begins with individuals surmounting their little egos by sympathetically extending the boundaries of their identities, wider and wider, through the intuition and ecological knowledge that each is embedded in and supported by a network of relationships--to the human community, to animals and plants, to the world. The enlarged consciousness that experiences identity with Nature and desires the same happiness for all beings is described as "the Self" (also known as "ecological self" or "universal self") as opposed to the little egoistic skin-bounded "self."

(2) Ontology before ethics. Naess insists that ethics or right action flows from prior beliefs about the fundamental nature of things, about what is real and valuable. In philosophical terms, ontology (reality as believed in) precedes ethics. Hence the most important task is to understand one's ecological relationships to the world for then ethical choices and "beautiful actions" will be obvious and spontaneous. Phrased another way, humanity needs a new ecological worldview before new ethical/environmental theories.

(3) Spontaneous Experience. Naess is suspicious of reason as the unassisted guide toward the dual realization of the ecological worldview and the extended Self. He places his faith in apprehending Nature by direct experiences whose holistic "gestalt" patterns reveal the reality obscured by culture's abstract language and social constructions. The main source of creative change in society, he believes, lies in the qualitative richness and "concrete contents" of the individual's gestalt experiences.

According to editor/essayist Eric Katz, the pillars of Ecosophy T (which he lists as Identification with Nature, Self-realization, and Ontology as the basis of normative values) suffer from the fault of anthropocentrism (homocentrism). Only a strong environmental ethical system can move beyond Naess's limited perspective that is tellingly exposed in his ambiguity about human interests versus nature protection. Katz approves the Deep Green Theory of Richard Sylvan who, disagreeing with Naess's idea of "Self," argued for an ethic based on eco-impartiality. The proper course for environmental philosophy, Katz concludes, is not an ecosophy such as Naess's ontological worldview but an unbiased environmental ethic that de-emphasizes human-centered categories of value.

Countering the opinion of Katz, William Grey criticizes Sylvan's Deep Green Theory because it postulates values in nature independent of valuers, while admitting that values vary between cultures. Grey points to other inconsistencies, exemplified by the wording of the Deep Green "obligation principles," such as "Do not jeopardize the well-being of natural objects or systems without good reason." Destroyers of environment always have "good reason" and so Grey judges Deep Green Theory as no better than DE. Whether Katz, Grey, and several other contributors draw a distinction between homo/morphic and homo/centric is unclear. All human thoughts and actions are homo/morphic (shaped by humans) but they are not necessarily homo/centric (centered on humans), and insofar as Naess and Sylvan center their values on other-than-human things, they should not be accused of homocentrism.

Naess's foundational ideas draw the fire of Mathew Humphrey for privileging the intuitive over the rational. To be human is to reason, he argues, and therefore the rational-moral should be privileged over the beautiful. The only defensible basis for action is provided by reasoned ethical codes, not from the intuitive realization of Self-identity through gestalt experiences. The Humphrey/Naess difference echoes the old Plato/Sophist controversy, unresolved after 2500 years. The question is, which of "truth" and "beauty" should be trusted to guide the other? Western tradition favors the former but Naess wants to give the latter a try.

Humphrey is targeted in turn by ecofeminist Ariel Salleh who is suspicious of current ethical systems. Everyone, not just Naess, acts from a sense of self-identity, she argues. Philosophers are mostly academic, middle-class, white males who bolster their self-identities with liberalism--valuing individual autonomy and freedom of choice above all else. But liberalism is a discredited source of ethics because it is anthropocentric, Eurocentric, class-based, and gendered. It is a failed political formula, socially unjust and environmentally destructive. DE is on the right track but it needs to embrace a theory of labor, of embodied materialism, working (as do women in production and reproduction) at the interface of Humanity and Nature.

Like Humphrey, ethicist Val Plumwood is critical of Naess's "ontology before ethics" and of his thesis that treats "ethics as unnecessary" (a fairer assessment might be that Naess treats ethics as derivative). She sides with Katz in skepticism of Naess's stress on consciousness change and on "Self-realization" through unity (identity) with nature. What is needed, she believes, is an ethic of solidarity, enabling strong connections to human liberation movements as well as to nature. The DEM should not neglect institutional change, and a good start would be reforming the institution of property/land which, in the Lockean formula, is valueless until "developed" by human

## Reviews

labor. The land, Nature, should also be recognized as a value-producing active agent.

Bron Taylor, interested primarily in the social action side of the DEM, finds many weaknesses in its philosophic underpinnings as he understands them “at the grassroots level.” The problem is a set of dualisms--inherited from such thinkers as Paul Shepard, Gary Snyder, George Sessions, and Bill Devall--that he identifies as “the main conceptual tendencies found in North America’s deep ecology movements.” He lists a number of “good/bad” twosomes, for example:

Foraging societies (good)	Agricultural societies (bad)
Animistic religions	Sky-God religions
Biocentrism	Anthropocentrism
Intuition	Reason
Regional self sufficiency	Globalization

etc., to which he might have added:

Deep Ecology	Reform environmentalism
--------------	-------------------------

Taylor argues that such dualistic thinking is simplistic and counterproductive when the goal is to marshal resistance to environmental deterioration from every culture in the world. Emphasizing his empirical research, he reports the unsurprising discovery that people are motivated to action by immediate threats to their well-being, not by bioregional ideology or calls for consciousness transformation. He plumps for a new Green social philosophy, something like the Earth Charter that sets out principles of reverence for Earth acceptable to all religious faiths. Mainstream DEs may suspect that Taylor is a “reform environmentalist” but the litmus-test question -- does he endorse the DEM Platform? -- is not answered. Had all contributors opened with a “yea” or a “nay” on this question, their orientations would have been clarified for the benefit of readers.

The book’s purported goal of examining DE philosophy keeps slipping out of focus. John Clark’s “How Wide is Deep Ecology?” shows the difficulty of dealing strictly with DE philosophy apart from the Platform and its social/political implications. Clark would prefer a more specific Platform to welcome in social ecologists and ecofeminists by giving practical content to the DEM’s call for sweeping social change. As with Salleh, Plumwood, and Taylor, the Platform and its deficiencies for sparking political programs (at Naess’s Levels 3 and 4?) are the center of attention.

Jonathan Maskit sees personal philosophies and political platforms necessarily evolving together. Changes in the individual and in culture/politics go hand in hand, and either alone is a no-go. Seek reality through “spontaneous experience,” say the DEs, but experience depends on cultural presuppositions. For example, how can the individual reduce desire for consumption when the culture endorses consumption as a high social goal? In Kantian terms the role of the State is to make people act as they would voluntarily if they really were rational beings, curbing desires by reasonable laws. The new sympathetic worldview that the DEM urges on its members necessitates co-evolution of the cultural-ideational medium in which all are immersed.

On the supportive side, editor/essayist David Rothenberg explains Naess’s relational thinking as “phenomenology minus the subject,” meaning that Naess’s aim is to apprehend directly nature’s qualities or “concrete contents,” not as (minus) an observer but merging the subjective and objective, the human and the natural, in spontaneous experience. Through Rothenberg’s eyes, DE is viewed as an entirely new philosophy, a new horizon, a direction for progress in ontology, a poetic way of being in the world.

Arran Gare is also sympathetic to the DEM, which he believes is marginalized through lack of a Grand Narrative. DE needs a persuasive cultural myth that saves what is good in modernism (the emancipatory agenda for the disadvantaged) and extends it to the world of nature so that living creatures and ecosystems as well as cultural diversity may flourish. In effect he repeats Maskit’s theme that the development of “self,” in whatever form, is shaped by the stories by which each culture defines itself--and the appearance of a compelling ecological saga is overdue. Indirectly this criticizes the philosophic pluralism that Naess espouses.

Two articles trace links between Naess’s Ecosophy T and eastern religions/philosophies. Knut Jacobson points out Naess’s debt to Gandhi who believed that the way to self-realization was not only through knowledge and meditation but also through political action. He notes ironically that DE reverses the Hindu aim of freeing the self from bondage to the material world, seeking instead to integrate humans into the natural Earth cycles of birth, growth, and death.

Dean Curtin explains Naess’s ties to Buddhism through the philosophy of Dogen, whose thought goes beyond DE from Self-realization to Cosmic Co-realization. We will never be released from suffering, said Dogen, as long as we search within the circle of human suffering alone. Thus the advice to Naess to advance beyond

## Reviews

biocentrism with its focus on living things, and be released into the “coming and going of all things.” This appears to be a call for ecocentrism as Earth-centeredness. Paradoxically, the sympathetic glue that “binds together all things,” amoebas and crystals, humans and mountains, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, is their impermanency.

Finally, and farthest off the mark, Michael Zimmerman’s essay -- “Possible Political Problems of Earth-based Religiosity” -- expresses fears that a theology of Earth linked with the DEM might be coopted and used as the Nazis used their nationalistic “blood and soil” motif to justify totalitarian programs of suppression and extermination. In view of the known history of humanity in the West over the last several thousand years, with its frequent “ethnic cleansings” under the aegis of a transcendental male God, the thought that belief in a supra-national divine mother Earth would do worse seems a long shot. Zimmerman devotes much of his article to the philosophy of Ken Wilber, who initially explained humanity’s assault on nature as due to “death anxiety” but now as a second guess locates the fault in “retro-romantics” (including followers of Earth-based religions). Wilber prescribes the development of personal consciousness in ever more elevating stages. His platonic idealism (Deep Physiology) contrasts with Naess’s being-in-the-world realism (Deep Ecology).

Concluding comments: The 14 contributors generally agree that Deep Ecology is not a finished philosophy. It is still finding its roots below and expanding its “greenness” above. The voluminous literature that has developed around Naess’s Ecosophy T and the DEM “Apron Diagram” contribute to its current fluidity. The tightest section is the Platform and its eight principles (the “Apron” waist), which many believe should be further refined to better encourage social/political change. Stronger tie-strings in the middle will keep the Apron from blowing in the wind.

Eastern philosophies, like Western religions, lay heavy hands of responsibility on the individual to “shape up.” This idea is apparent in Naess’s philosophy. But few can bootstrap their own conversion from “self” to “Self” without cultural assistance. On this important point Bowers (1995, see especially p. 169 for note on Naess’s individualism) has criticized Naess for accenting the authority of individual judgment while ignoring culture as the primary source of influence on thought and behavior. The needed “ecological worldview” is unlikely to result from everyone concentrating on developing her/his own ecosophy.

A powerful ecological narrative that neither disparages Nature nor people is overdue. One problem on the philosophers’ side is suspicion of Earth-based science, leading to vague use of ecological language particularly when it comes to terms such as “nature,” “life,” “community,” “ecology,” “ecosystem,” “biosphere,” “biocentric” “ecocentric.” An example is pinning the adjective “ecocentric” indiscriminately on social ecology, ecofeminism, bioregionalism, and deep ecology (e.g., McLaughlin (1995) uses “ecocentrism” broadly and indefinitely for all viewpoints that are not anthropocentric, when a correct usage of the word according to its etymology is “home-centered,” i.e. ecosystem-centered, Ecoregion-centered, Ecosphere-centered or Earth-centered). Ecological terminology, freely used but imperfectly understood, needs to be sorted out and defined in Earthly terms if people are to accept a narrative that identifies humans as dependent Earthlings. Such a compelling story/myth is a necessary counterpart of and support for the experiential ways of knowing championed, for example, by Naess and Rothenberg.

The essays convey the feeling that two different cultures are confronting one another. Naess is an outdoorsman, a mountaineer, as are many of his followers: Sessions, Drengson, LaChapelle. These people, like naturalists of the ilk of Muir and Thoreau, have been “touched” by oceanic nature-experiences, intuitions of unity with Earth. They are impelled to formulate a philosophical rationale for their Wordsworthian epiphanies, borrowing eclectically from the scriptures of Lao Tsu, Protagoras, Dogen, Spinoza, Bergson, Husserl. Facing them somewhat incredulously is a majority of rationalist academics, city-born and bred, who have never been touched by Earth, never climbed mountains, never wandered in a wilderness, never hugged a tree. Ethical rules are their meat, not spontaneous experiences. The mind-sets of two such different groups of people are far apart, and the Ecological Narrative that pulls them together will richly deserve the title “Grand.”

### **References Cited:**

Bowers, C.A.

1995. *Educating for an Ecologically Sustainable Culture: Rethinking Moral Education, Creativity, Intelligence, and Other Modern Orthodoxies.* Albany: SUNY Press.

McLaughlin, Andrew.

1995. “For a Radical Ecocentrism,” pages 257-280 in Drengson, Alan and Yuichi Inoue (eds.), *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology.* Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.