

of opposites, the significance of levels of organization, the importance of community, and the irreducible character of awareness. All these features give his organicism a particular relevance to the deep ecology movement.

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The Ecological Self

Bill Devall

When sociologists discuss *self* they usually are referring to the social self. When asked "who are you?," most people respond by saying: "I am a Christian" or "I am a male" or "I am a carpenter" or "a mother" or "an American." Sometimes people say, "I am an environmentalist." A person expressing ecological self would say, "I am a forest being."

We identify our social self with our social identity—occupation, gender, religion. And many people evaluate themselves based on perceived criteria concerning what their reference group says is important for their social identity.

While social scientists limit discussion to the social selves, many religious teachers have written about the "oceanic self," the mystical union with the One or with Wholeness or the Godhead. In the Christian tradition, the classic advice of an unknown monk in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the writings of St. John of the Cross, and the more contemporary writings of Thomas Merton explore the process of unveiling the oceanic self through practicing prayer, contemplation, and meditation. While many Christian saints encourage believers to cultivate the oceanic self, St. Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century seemed to encourage Christians to cultivate some aspects of their ecological self, at least to the extent of asserting a kind of deep ecology position (White 1967).

Exploring our ecological self is one aspect of "all around matu-

rity," as Naess says. Naess' conception of maturity could also be called "full maturity" or "many-sided maturity." Humans are many-faceted beings and a person might be quite sophisticated and mature in professional activities but quite immature at social relationships. Or a person could be mature as a member of a family, having broad and deep empathy with spouse, children, and other kin, but not be mature politically. A person can also be mature in social relations but have an adolescent ecological self. Such a person might be very careless or unaware or insensitive to forests or rivers or, generally speaking, to "the land."

In his Keith Roby lecture at Murdoch University in 1986 [reprinted in this anthology], Naess said: "We may be said to be in, of, and for nature from our very beginning. Society and human relations are important, but our self is richer in its constitutive relations. These relations are not only relations we have with other humans and with the human community," they are relations we have with our home bioregion, or with plants and animals which co-inhabit our living space (Naess, "Self-realization," 1986).

The dominant view in modern society is to define what is not me as "the other." When the other is a bioregion, a forest or a redwood tree, then it is a "thing," an object which can be manipulated by and for humans for narrow purposes. But deep ecology understands the "I" in relation to the "other." The human ecologist Paul Shepard, in a famous essay on ecology and humankind, calls the ecological self the "relatedness of self."

Ecological thinking . . . requires a kind of vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self ennobled and extended rather than threatened as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves. (Shepard 1969, 2)

When we find our self only in our narrow ego or with certain attributes of our body which are socially desirable ("I am beautiful," "I am athletic," etc.) then we underestimate our self-potential, that is, our ability to move in a self-realizing way.

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The ego has been defined in various ways by different psychologists but at the minimum it is a collection of memories, fantasies, information, and images about who we are. It is what we think we are, not what we experience as our self. A healthy ego is a sign of mental health in some theories of psychotherapy, but egotistic identity is a transitional stage from pre-egoic (early childhood) to broader existential identity of more mature persons. Clinging to rigid ego identity can be pathological and can include denial, projection, and repression (see Wilbur 1980, 1981).

The ego can be understood as the voice of the self, but when we use the ego to build a barbed wire fence around our feelings, to deny our vulnerability and deny our interconnections with watersheds, forests, and rivers, then the ego becomes a prison guard and not a voice.

From the perspective of transpersonal psychology, we are more richly alive when exploring patterns of relationships and interactions which we can call the self. Drawing upon the work of theorists such as Ken Wilbur, Frances Vaughan, a therapist and author, defines self as "an open living system in an intricate web of mutually conditioned relationships," as does Dreggson (1986).

Vaughan continues,

"This view recognizes both our biological and our psychological dependence on the environment. Although we may feel subjectively separate from nature and each other, we are actually interdependent and interconnected with the whole fabric of reality. We are conditioned by society and the environment at every stage in the evolution of self-concept. Yet we also shape the environment and co-create the social fabric that supports us. The complex web of relationships within which we exist involves a continuous flow of mutually determined interaction for which we can begin to take more responsibility as we understand our part in co-creating it" (Vaughan 1986, 33).

When a person stops defending an old ego identity—an image of oneself which does not correspond to current experiences—and disidentifies with his or her rigid social identity, growth can occur in the transpersonal self. The inner search for self-identity requires

acceptance of our psyche and our physical vulnerability. It does not mean narcissistic self-absorption in our problems.

Exploring the ecological self is part of the transforming process required to heal ourselves in the world. Practicing means breathing the air with renewed awareness of the winds. When we drink water we trace it to its sources—a spring or mountain stream in our bioregion—and contemplate the cycles of energy as part of our body. The “living waters” and “living mountains” enter our body. We are part of the evolutionary journey and contain in our bodies connections with our Pleistocene ancestors. Extending awareness and receptivity with other animals and mountains and rivers encourages identification and engenders respect for and solidarity with the field of identification. This does not mean there will never be conflicts between the vital material needs of different people or between some humans and some other animals in specific situations, but it does mean that a basis for “good actions” or “right livelihood” is not based only on abstract moralism, self-denial, or sacrifice.

When exploring our ecological self openly and with acceptance, no judgment is made, nor is there a pursuit of anything. The self is not an entity or a thing, it is an opening to discovering what some call the Absolute or in Sanskrit, *atman*.

Awakening the self beyond the barbed wire fence the ego has constructed engages us in the world, in the grounding of being-in-the-world. Naess frequently talks of spontaneous joy we experience because we are part of what really is. Other aspects include compassionate understanding, wisdom, receptivity, intuitiveness, creativity, allowing to happen, connectedness, openness, and peacefulness. The expanded, deepened self is not impersonal but transpersonal.

The process of healing, in transpersonal psychology, begins with self-awareness. “We must know ourselves and accept ourselves before attempting to manipulate ourselves for the purpose of changes we think are desirable. To understand all is to forgive all, and forgiving ourselves for being just as we are is the first step to healing” (Vaughan 1986, 56).

As we discover our ecological self we will joyfully defend and interact with that with which we identify; and instead of imposing

environmental ethics on people, we will naturally respect, love, honor, and protect that which is of our self.

We need environmental ethics, but when people feel they unselflessly give up, even sacrifice, their interest in order to show love for nature, this is probably in the long run a treacherous basis for conservation. Through identification they may come to see their own interest served by conservation, through genuine self-love, love of a widened and deepened self. (Naess, “Self-realization,” 1986)

There are many reasons to defend the integrity of a landscape from the invasion of industrial civilization. Supporters of deep ecology especially defend the integrity of native plants and animals living in their own habitat unmolested by humans. We also defend the integrity of certain places (the Grand Canyon comes to mind) because they are awesome, beautiful and unique, or because we use those areas for sport or recreation.

Another strong reason is “if we, after honest reflection, find that we feel threatened in our innermost self. If so we more convincingly defend a vital interest, not only something out there. We are engaged in self-defense and defend fundamental *human* rights of vital self-defense” (Naess, “Self-realization,” 1986). No moral exhortation or dogmatic statement of environmental ethics is necessary to show care for other beings—including rivers or mountains—if our self in this broad and deep sense embraces the other being.

Naess contrasts this view of enlightened self-interest with altruism which, he says, “implies that *ego* sacrifices its interests in favor of the other, the *alter*. The motivation is primarily that of duty: it is said that we ought to love others as strongly as we love ourselves” (Naess, “Self-realization,” 1986). But humans have limited ability to love from mere duty or moral exhortation.

Spokespeople for the reform environmental movement, and some philosophers, offer many statements of environmental ethics and call upon people to sacrifice for future generations, for people in developing nations, etc. Now, according to Naess, “we need the immeasurable variety of sources of joy opened through increased

sensitivity towards the richness and diversity of life."

We need to be reminded of our moral duties occasionally, but we change our behavior more simply with richer ends through encouragement. Deeper perception of reality and deeper and broader perception of self is what I call ecological realism. That is, in philosophical terms, however important environmental ethics are, ontology is the center of ecosophic concerns.

John Seed provides an example of the joy and sense of empowerment that occurs when exploring our ecological self. Seed is a rainforest activist living in northern New South Wales, Australia. He participated in campaigns directed at stopping logging of remaining old-growth, subtropical rainforests in New South Wales in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With his growing awareness of his connection with rainforests, he organized the Rainforest Information Center, an educational organization dedicated to preservation of rainforests around the globe. He writes about his defense of rainforests in terms of his own psyche and his extended self in an essay entitled "Rainforest and Psyche."

I believe that contact with rainforest energies enlivens a realization of our actual, our biological self. They awaken in us the realization that it was 'I' that came to life when a bolt of lightning fertilized the chemical soup of 4.5 billion years ago; that 'I' crawled out of Devonian seas and colonized the land; that, more recently, 'I' advanced and retreated before four ages of ice.

... our psyche is itself a product of the rainforests. We evolved for hundreds of millions of years within this moist green womb before emerging a scant five million years ago, blinking, into the light.

If we enter the rainforest and allow our energies to merge with the energies that we find there, then the rainforest may be a place where our roots are able to penetrate through the soft soil reaching beyond the sad 16,000-year history and into the reality of our billions-of-years-of-carbon journey through the universe. Various truths which had been heretofore merely 'scientific' become authentic, personal, and yes, spiritual. We may now penetrate to a truly deep ecology. (Seed, "Rainforest," 1985)

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In his essay on anthropocentrism, Seed makes a more general statement. "When humans investigate and see through their layers of anthropocentric self-cherishing, a most profound change in consciousness begins to take place." People stop identifying exclusively with their humanness and begin a process of transforming their relationships with other beings and commitments to them." Seed says, "I am protecting the rainforest' develops to 'I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking.' "This is enlightened self-interest. Seed concludes, "... there is an identification with all life" (Seed, in Devall 1985, 243).

Self-realization has no artificial boundary. Some people say they identify with Mother Earth or with the biosphere. Naess, however, prefers to use the term *ecosphere* because this term implies a broader definition of living beings.

A community with appropriate rituals, social mentors, languages, art forms and methods of education can facilitate exploration of the ecological self. When we use the phrase "deep, long-range ecology movement" we already have become self-conscious, and have defined a need which is not fulfilled in dominant institutions. Ecological-spiritual cultures will emerge, of necessity, as more and more people together engage the healing process of exploring ecological self.

The search for personal growth is found in the New Age movement as well as the deep ecology movement. New Age ideology, to many of its critics, remains human-centered. According to some theorists in the New Age movement, the next phase in development of human consciousness is the development of planetary consciousness. Humans will become the "eyes and ears" of Gaia—the Earth organism.

Gaia consciousness may transcend ego and even transcend narrow sectarian loyalties to ethnic group or to nationality. But such consciousness can also remain anthropocentric. The environment, in the writings of some admired New Age thinkers such as Teilhard de Chardin, is still an environment of which humans are stewards. The narrow needs of some humans are still served before the vital needs of other species of plants and animals.

This kind of New Age ideology uses some symbols of nature and uses ecology as a slogan; but this ideology continues to insist that the best civilization is a technocratic (euphemistically called high-tech) civilization, and that space programs, human domination of evolutionary processes through genetic engineering, and complex computer systems, including massive computer modeling of ecosystems, is the most joyful future for humans on this Earth.

Besides the emphasis on technocratic manipulation of living processes, some New Age thinkers seem to emphasize a synthetic integration of different spiritual traditions, such as Native American spirituality and various group therapy processes, into a false sense of self-awareness. This New Age spiritual consciousness is comparable to the "false consciousness" which Marxists assert arises in late capitalist societies due to the incessant propaganda of the ruling class.

Ecological self is not a forced or static ideology but rather the search for an opening to nature (Tao) in authentic ways. If a person can sincerely say after careful self-evaluation and prayer that "this Earth is part of my body," then that person would naturally work for global disarmament and preservation of the atmosphere of the Earth. If a person can sincerely say, "If this place is destroyed then something in me is destroyed," then that person has an intense feeling of belonging to the place.

Sometimes resignation prevails when a person feels hurt by the destruction of primeval redwood groves or by destruction of rainforests in South America. People have some desire to help the rainforest as part of their extended self but say, "I can't do anything," or "That's progress." They feel guilty or depressed.

When our joyful sense-of-place includes the whole Earth we may also feel overwhelmed at the enormous task of defense, but this is a passing feeling. Gary Snyder in an article titled "Saving the Little Waterhole We Sing By" explains it thus: "We must know that we've been jumped, and fight like a raccoon in a pack of hounds, for our own and all other lives."

Cultivating ecological self does not mean learning how to use the joy stick in "spaceship earth" but how to joyfully blend with the

watershed in which we live. In other words, it encourages modesty instead of hubris.

Naess comments, however, "Modesty is of little value if it is not a natural consequence of much deeper feelings. . . . The smaller we come to feel ourselves compared to the mountain, the nearer we come to participating in its greatness. I do not know why this is so" (Naess, "Modesty," 1979).

Examples of persons who explored their ecological self include John Muir who tramped the Sierra Nevada in the nineteenth century, Aldo Leopold in the wilderness of the American Southwest in the 1930s, poet Robinson Jeffers on the Big Sur coastline of California, and Gary Snyder dwelling in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Jeffers carries the process of self-identification into the realm of the oceanic self when he writes of "falling in love outward." He searches for the "tower beyond tragedy"—the tragedy of human civilization destroying rainforests and Jews and homosexuals and prairies and even whole cities in the twentieth century.

Total identification with "organic wholeness" is possible only after identification with some living being more immediate and tangible. Jeffers himself describes this process in one of his poems evoking a walk in the mountains of Big Sur:

I entered the life of the brown forest,
And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone,
I felt the changes in the veins
In the throat of the mountain, and, I was the stream
Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking; and I was
the stars,
Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord of his own
summit;
and I was the darkness
Outside the stars, I included them. They were a part of me.
I was mankind also, a moving lichen
On the cheek of the round stone . . . they have not made words for
it, to go behind things, beyond hours and ages,
And be all things in all time, in their returns and passages in the
motionless and timeless center,

ELABORATION

In the white of the fire . . . how can I express the excellence I have
found, that has no color but clearness;
No honey but ecstasy; neither wrought nor remembers; no
undertone nor silver second murmur
That rings in love's voice . . .

Robinson Jeffers, *Not Man Apart*,
Lines from Robinson Jeffers (1965)

We identify with intermediate landscapes more readily than with remote or abstract ones. The more we know a specific place intimately—know its moods, seasons, changes, aspects, native creatures—the more we know our ecological selves.

It is characteristic of most primal (not primitive as some call these cultures in a pejorative pseudo-evolutionary mode of talking) peoples to consider spirit and matter as interwoven. The Koyukon of Alaska, for example, live in a world that watches. "The surroundings are aware, sensate, personified. They feel. They can be offended. And they must, at every movement, be treated with respect" (Nelson 1983). The central assumption of the Koyukon worldview is that the natural and supernatural world are inseparable; each is intrinsically a part of the other. Human and nonhuman entities are in constant spiritual interchange.

Contemporary ecophilosophers recall Native Americans as examples of maturity, of having broader and deeper relations with *place*. Listen, for example, to this statement by Chief Standing Bear of the Oglala Sioux:

Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them and so close did some of the Lakota come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common language.

The old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart away from nature becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too. So he kept his youth close to its softening influence. (McLuhan 1971, 6)

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When the Native American says: "What a man does to the earth, he does to himself," we understand that the self he is speaking about is not the minimal self but the *Great Self* (see Hughes 1983).

The Minimal Self

The great nihilistic process of modern civilization, as Max Weber succinctly put it nearly a century ago, has been "the disenchantment of the world," and the rise of bureaucratic domination, mostly in the great urban centers of modernism. When a person says, "I am a New Yorker" or "I am a Californian" or when a person says, "I am a bureaucrat with Z agency" (CIA, FBI, IRS, FAA, USPS, USFS) they have allowed their broad self to be diminished by a bureaucratic identity.

Under the influence of philosophical assumptions of modern science, experts on nature—biologists, zoologists, soil scientists, wildlife managers, foresters, mammalogists—treat nature only as abstracted, objectified data. They kill their positive feelings of identification in order to be detached and neutral (see Merchant 1980; Berman 1981).

At the College of Natural Resources at my own university, professors argue endlessly about various models for codifying ecosystems, forest types, soil types, etc. They develop elaborate models using the fastest computers available to describe forests and oceans. But the forests remain "out there." Students are never encouraged to find a part of some forest and learn from it through emotional as well as intellectual experience. Students are taught to be objectively neutral to the forest. To be otherwise is to be labeled a sentimentalist or, worse still, an environmentalist. Students in natural resources sciences and management, therefore, are much like the guards in Nazi death camps. Their neutrality toward forests or wildlife or fish kills any natural feelings of empathy or sympathy they might have. If emotional responses to place and spiritual awareness are killed, and if all nature is just "dead matter," then the bureaucracy can work its will on the land without having to meet the expectations of the will-of-the-land.

The Hopi have a term, *Koyannisgasti*, which can be translated

roughly, "life out of balance." The Hopi, a tribe dwelling in the southwestern region of North America, worked diligently over hundreds of years to keep right relations with earth, sky, gods, and their own community of mortal humans. Hopi cosmology is a form of ecology and represents great ecological sensitivity and artistic expression of the embeddedness of humans in deep nature.

We contrast Hopi cosmology with modern lifestyles and the emphasis on narrow ego. When city dwellers are asked to locate their self, many point to their head or larynx. We talk much, listen very little. If we identify our self with our body, we worry about our body image and work diligently with weights or other exercises to build up our bodies to make them more appealing to other people.

The social critic Christopher Lasch calls this self-centered contemporary self-obsession with ego-gratification, social status, and the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures the "minimal self" (Lasch 1984, 16). The minimal self has contracted to a defensive core concerned primarily with psychic survival and making a good impression on certain significant people—bosses, clients, potential sexual partners. Seeing the problems of living in modern times—crime, increasing air and water pollution, terrorism, long-term economic decline, nuclear arms race, cynicism in major institutions in society—the minimal self prepares for the siege, retreats to private pleasure domes and withdraws from community service or any form of commitment to the peace movement or environmental movement.

Rootless, alienated from human community and from wild nature, from the will-of-the-land, besieged with propaganda from scientists and natural resources corporations insisting that humans can manage forests or rivers to improve productivity and that nature should be controlled by human technology, the goal of the minimal self is survival, not personal growth.

This constriction into the minimal self in many people has been linked to complex and interrelated changes in European societies during the past 2,000 years, to the rise of bureaucratic domination and to dominant Judaeo-Christian traditions, especially since the Protestant reformation. The geographer Tuan, in his book *Segmented Worlds and Self*, asserts that St. Augustine in the fourth century A.D.

was one of the first truly modern men because he was self-conscious, he wrote an intimate autobiography of his self-questioning, and he publicly confessed his most intimate tensions (Tuan 1982, 157).

But only with the close of the Dark Ages and the coming of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, says Tuan, did the individual, isolated in a relatively small area or region, strive for segregation. Tuan traces the development of closed and segregated living spaces—separate rooms for toilet, sleeping, eating, holding formal parties, recreation—and suggests a correlation between segmented living spaces and segmented aspects of self-identity.

Intellectuals began to see themselves as detached observers rather than active and involved participants in all aspects of community life, and the distinction between public life and private affairs—love affairs, fantasies, dreams—became more distinct.

European intellectuals, the Catholic church, as well as economic systems, helped desacralize nature and thus opened the fields, forests, and mountains to almost unlimited economic use by humans, use restrained only by technological ingenuity and limited capital for investment. Land stewardship was turned into land management for maximum crop production (see Polanyi 1944).

For Tuan, the hallmark of modern mentality is subjectivism, the discovery of intellectual perspectives or opinions. Instead of finding a basis for group consensus by a process of discussion, intellectuals, especially, found a particular opinion to defend and upon which to discourse. Reputations were made or lost on the basis of wit and intellectual banter rather than on authentic spiritual questing.

The social self became a series of presentations. Social psychologist Irving Goffman uses the imagery of the theater to express how individuals become players on a team. Presentations are staged for the benefit of an audience which evaluates the performance. Work places, restaurants, offices, and so forth are divided into front regions where the players perform, and back regions where they prepare for their presentations (Goffman 1959).

The minimal self, with its desperate defenses against any feelings of respect or love or any values other than materialism and success as measured by expensive automobiles, houses, computers,

or whatever is a status symbol, is a very unhappy self. Many people who are successful in careers in their 30s and 40s become extremely unhappy. Satisfaction from material rewards diminishes with age, and without any of the traditional bonds of community and lacking a sense of extended self-identity, the minimal self is entrapped and rebellious.

If children are taught to be only "New Yorkers" or "San Franciscans" they identify primarily with a human-built environment. Biological diversity is greatly diminished in cities. When children see wild animals only in a zoo, they see imprisoned animals, not animals in their natural habitat with predator and prey dancing their dance. The "organic community" described by sociologists and historians is replaced by the "mechanical community." The ultimate of this process is the cruise through the computerized swamp at amusement parks with plastic alligators and other creatures which attack and retreat on cue.

The real, organic community is simple in material goods but rich in individuation, communalism, awareness of the way things are, in affectional and spiritual connections with a specific landscape.

Is it possible to explore our ecological self while imprisoned in the concrete streets of a modern metropolis?

Martin Krieger suggests that the urban landscape of the future might be one of plastic trees and flowers. "Why not plastic trees?" Krieger asks. They require less maintenance than real trees. They are always green but don't need water. They can seem like real trees (Krieger 1973). Although not including plastic trees, some futurists suggest that we can create an ecosystem in a space station complete with plants and animals if we wish. And some visionary engineers suggest that by putting huge plastic bubbles over our cities, we can create rainforests. Such proposals are logical extensions of the dominant way of thinking in our present culture and they demonstrate that a radical shift in self-awareness is imperative.

Let there be no mistake about our situation. The enormity of human population requires that most people live in big cities, but sound ecological policies could make cities *somewhat* more livable for the all-around well-being of humans and all other living beings.

Even in the concrete depths of the largest city, a person can explore the bedrock upon which the city is built and trace the watersheds of streams and rivers channeled in concrete pipes. A person can feel the suffering of city-dominated watersheds and work for reconciliation.

We can also experience one aspect of nature which is a lesson in humility, if not modesty, in large cities. We can experience great storms which newscasters like to call natural disasters—wind storms, hurricanes, heavy snow storms, typhoons, cyclones. Humans sometimes die in these storms; travel is disrupted and property is destroyed, but frequently only because humans did not read the land appropriately and they built their houses or other structures too near an ocean or river. Building towns on barrier islands of the southeast coast of North America, for example, is an invitation to disaster for humans because these towns lie in the path of hurricanes.

When we have empathy and solidarity with beings who don't reciprocate in our own terms, we gain in richness of experience. We know when a baby reciprocates our affection or negative feelings even though we don't talk with the baby except by cooing, singing, etc. We even know when certain mammals have a relationship with us. Paul Shepard in his book *Thinking Animals* argues that we have a need to form such relationships. Our relationships with domesticated dogs and cats are extremely important to many people, but they are pale and one-dimensional in comparison to the rich relationships our ancestors had with many kinds of animals in the wild. If we treat our domesticated animals as subservient then we only identify with them as masters, using them to give us satisfaction (see Shepard 1978).

Exploring ecological self can be partly described as discovering a sense-of-place or an ecological consciousness. Thus the more we know a place intimately, the more we can increase our identification with it. The more we know a mountain or a watershed, for example, and feel it as our *self*, the more we can feel its suffering. Some people tell me they feel the whole planet suffering during the present era. They tell me that if some of the vital organs of the planet are suffering, they want to sit with the planet just as volunteers for Hospice sit with a dying person, empathizing with that person. This

is not an attempt to anthropomorphize natural entities or the planet, but an acceptance that "living beings" has a broader meaning than we usually ascribe to that term. We cannot know intimately all the suffering of a dying person and we do not know intimately all the connotations of "living being" when we use that term to describe the planet or a rainforest, for example. But without sentimentality or romanticism we can appreciate the possibility that living beings suffer and thus have empathy with them.

The positive message of [Naess' support for] deep ecology is maximal Self-realization of all beings, not just human beings and not just a narrow sense of personal growth. "Self-realization," says Naess, "in its absolute maximum is . . . the mature experience of oneness in diversity. . . . The minimum is the self-realization by more or less consistent egotism—by the narrowest experience of what constitutes one's self and a maximum of alienation. As empirical beings we dwell somewhere in between, but increased maturity involves increase of the wideness of the self" (Naess, "Identification," 1985, 261).



Beyond Borders: Experiencing Bioregion

"In a life span, a man now—as in the past—can establish profound roots only in a small corner of the world." (Tuan, *Topophilia*)

Ecological self seems most accessible to us not by focusing on human-built places or on the organic whole or Gaia initially, but on our own bioregion.



Bioregion is a term combining *life* (bio) and *territory* (region or area understanding). The origin of the term is unknown, but the Canadian poet Allen Van Newkirk used the term in 1974 seeking to link the study of cultural and biotic regions. He also referred to bioregion as a point of view. Van Newkirk spoke of "bioregional strategies" for restoration of the Earth's natural plant and animal diversity within a "regional framework" and of cultural adaptation to specific bioregions. Ecology, language studies, poetry, myth, and cultural

history are tools to be used in bioregional studies (Van Newkirk, 1975; Parsons 1985).

The central question for bioregional studies is what information do I need to know in order to live rightly and appropriately in this place?



Jim Dodge, a northern California rancher and writer, points to the intersection between bioregion and self-identification in a perceptive essay on bioregional theory and practice:

To understand natural systems is to begin an understanding of the self, its common and particular essences—literal self-interest in its barest terms. "As above, so below," according to the old traditional alchemists; natural systems as models of consciousness. When we destroy a river, we increase our thirst, ruin the beauty of free-flowing water, forsake the meat and spirit of the salmon, and lose a little bit of our own souls. (Dodge 1981, 7)

Bioregion is discovered by each person through physical encounters with rivers or with whole watersheds of the region, the "veins of the landscape" as some call them. Cultural history may give some clues of appropriate relationship for contemporary citizens of a bioregion.



Four criteria for exploring a bioregion have been suggested by Dodge. The first is based on *biotic shift*, or the percentage change in plant and animal species from one region to another. If there is a 15–25 percent change in plant and animal communities then a biotic shift has occurred. With a shift in biotic communities there is likely to be a shift in land form, climate, and soils. There is much debate among scientists over the percentage of change which constitutes a biotic shift. Personal discoveries, however, are more important in exploring our "terrain of consciousness" than definitions given by scientists.

A second possible basis for bioregion is *watershed*. Indeed, some

watersheds define basic hydrological units. By following our watershed we can trace the water we drink to its source. Of course, certain very large rivers, such as the Mississippi or Amazon, may lose their bioregional character, but intradrainage distinctions can be made. . . .

A third possible criterion for bioregional consciousness is our awareness of the *spirit-of-place*, or sense-of-place. Rediscovering sacred places in a bioregion might arise out of the common agreement within a culture, perhaps inspired by a religious leader. Although the origins of the designation of sacred place remain secret or hidden, the place is special within the human community.

Sacred places are the sites for ceremony and ritual healing, contemplation, and rites of passage. They are honored in song and dance, through myth, symbol, and metaphor and become a catalyzing force for the celebration of nature and life itself. . . . In many cultures, such sacred places were seen and are seen today as the very cornerstone for cultural renewal. (Swan 1983, 33). . . .

A fourth criterion for bioregion is *cultural distinctiveness*. Rituals, art forms, distinctive ways of living and specialized terminology referring to land forms or weather or relationships with the landscape may indicate a biogeographical culture. . . .

Bioregional movements are political and social expressions of our vital need to be part of, not apart from, the place wherein we dwell. The North American Bioregional Congresses brought together people from many bioregions to discuss philosophy and practical skills for making a home in their own bioregions. The following statement from the preamble to the first North American Bioregional Congress in 1984 presents statements which are consistent with the deep ecology movement. . . .

A growing number of people are recognizing that in order to secure the clean air, water and food that we need to healthfully survive, we have to become stewards of the places where we live. People are discovering that the best way to take care of ourselves, and to get to know our neighbors, is to protect and restore where we live.

The Ecological Self

Bioregionalism recognizes, nurtures, sustains, and celebrates our local connections with land; plants and animals; river, lakes and oceans; air; families, friends and neighbors; community; native traditions; and systems of production and trade.

It is taking the time to learn the possibilities of place.

It is a mindfulness of local environment, history, and community aspirations that can lead to a future of safe and sustainable life. It is reliance on well-understood and widely used sources of food, power, and waste disposal.

It is secure employment based on supplying a rich diversity of services within the community and prudent surpluses to other regions.

Bioregionalism is working to satisfy basic needs through local control in schools, health centers, and governments.

The bioregional movement seeks to recreate a widely shared sense of regional identity founded upon a renewed critical awareness of and respect for the integrity of our natural ecological communities.

People can join with neighbors to discuss ways we can work together to 1) Learn what our special local resources are, 2) Plan how to best protect and use those natural and cultural resources, 3) Exchange our time and energy to best meet our daily and long-term needs, and 4) Enrich our children's local and global knowledge.

Bioregionalism begins by acting responsibly at home. Welcome home! . . .

Summary

What will be the upshot if we embark on a voyage of discovery of ecological self? One writer asks if an active political stance is any longer appropriate with a broad ecological self. Will we come to a zenlike acceptance that we, individually, are part of nature—both in all its creative and destructive aspects? Nature survives. Why be a conservationist? Nature destroys as well as creates. It destroys more efficiently than humans with floods, fires, volcanic eruptions, meteor impacts, ice ages, and earthquakes. Humans in their nature certainly have aggressive tendencies as well as loving, caring tendencies. If we accept ourselves in all the fullness of living and if we accept that ultimately nature is indestructible by human agents, then

it no longer matters if we conserve any particular aspect of nature.

Persons with a deep ecological understanding affirm the integrity of nature in the widest sense, yet we talk incessantly about the "death of nature"—of species extinction, rainforest and wetland destruction—due to human interventions. We stress the destructive and aggressive, shortsighted tendencies of some humans. When we emphasize these tendencies in our writing, speeches, and calls for action, we might frighten many ordinary people who will engage in psychological denial as a defense of their minimal self. They literally close their eyes to toxic wastes, deforestation, and other environmental ills.

And what of those people who cling so desperately to their narrow, defensive ego they have constructed in a pathetic attempt to defend themselves from annihilation in mass society? We can carefully demonstrate that identification with the wider circle does not mean we lose our individuation. All identification is relative. We maintain a relative ontological individuation while understanding our functional unity and relationship with the place in which we dwell. When my identity is interconnected with the identity of other beings then my experience and my existence depend on theirs. Their interests are my interests.

Beings are alive, in the widest definition of aliveness, and are ruled by the principle of self-realization, that is, an impulse for self-maintenance, self-preservation, and self-increase or self-perfection, to persist in their own being. Nature in the broadest sense is a self-realizing, internally interconnected cosmos. In the metaphysics of deep ecology [as an ecosophy], then, it has a will-to-live.

If I, as a part of this wider connection, also have individuation and a will-to-live, then I can act, should act, in self-defense when my broader and deeper interests are threatened. Conservation is thus self-defense. When I identify with primeval forests of redwood trees. I want to defend them from logging because they are part of my sense-of-place.

However, my life is only a tiny breath in the cosmos. What does it matter if I do not conserve rainforests or redwood forests? But this begs the question of how should I live. If I express my own will-to-

live then I contribute to the flourishing of aliveness in the cosmos, be it ever so small a flourishing in my own life among many lives. By expanding our will-to-live we contribute to realizing the biosphere more fully.

Since many people live only with a narrow awareness of self due to their cultural conditioning, it is most important in the deep, long-range movement to encourage the deeper ecological self to contribute to the flourishing of self-realization in the whole biosphere.

Humans have a unique, vital place in the natural order, but that place is realized not through technological manipulation but through participation in rituals and emotions, thoughts, prayers, and what Martin Heidegger calls the "round dance of appropriation."

This is not to imply that humans are most important, or even have a central place in cosmic self-realization. Humans can enhance the cosmic will-to-live, self-realization, in a small but vital way. Nature needs us as life-affirming people. Affirmation of our own self-realizing ecological self embraces more and more of the "other" into ourself. The more open, receptive, vulnerable, adventurous we are, the more we affirm the integrity of being-in-the-world.

In order to extend our *self* from the minimal self to more mature, maximum self-realization, we need more self-conscious awareness in our daily lives.

Many of us never take the time to engage in this process of discovery. We let ourselves become colonized by mass media, by expectations in our culture. We are seduced by entertainments and promises of pleasures on city streets. We break away only by becoming self-conscious. Thus we have a paradox, in order to lose our *self* into the larger self, we must become more self-conscious in the midst of techno-scientific civilization. Without cynicism or sentimentalism, we create an opening for discovery. Outside the ordered, bordered, fenced, domesticated, patrolled, controlled areas of our region, our wild self is waiting.

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