Deep Ecololgy Essay, Research Paper

Deep Ecology/Ecosophy

The ideas behind deep ecology have major implications today. They allow people to think more profoundly about the environment and possibly come to a better understanding of their own meaning. People are intensely concerned about the world?s technological adolescence, massive consumerism, and overpopulation. A man named Arne Naess, former head of the philosophy department at the University of Oslo founded an idea that can direct people?s anxiety away from their “shallow” notion of the problem to one that is much “deeper.” “Deep ecology goes beyond the limited piecemeal shallow approach to environmental problems and attempts to articulate a comprehensive religious and philosophical worldview.” (EE p.145) In its most basic form, deep ecology is a wisdom, an ecosophy, which requires humans to see themselves as part of the bigger picture. Naess, Devall, and Sessions outline basic principles of deep ecology in their writing. Furthermore, they address the roles that scientific ecology plays as well as the concept of self-realization. Aside from these ideas, ecosabotage needs to be discussed in terms of how it fits with the practice of deep ecology.

The basic principles of deep ecology as characterized by the authors mentioned, show us what is supposedly wrong with the world and also give us a framework by which we can make a change. In fact, Naess and Sessions went camping in Death Valley, California in order to gain a different perspective. They condensed fifteen years their thought on the topic of deep ecology in an effort to make it appeal to people from all kinds of backgrounds. They also emphasize that these principles must all be considered together.

The first principle states that the value of life, human or non-human, is intrinsic. This means that everything about it is valuable, including individuals, species, populations, habitat, and culture. When considering non-human life, it important to remember that deep ecology likes to include that which can be classified as non-living such as bodies of water and landscapes. Essentially, “the presence of inherent value in a natural object is independent of any awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by a conscious being.” (EE p.147)

Another principle states that the diversity of life forms contributes to our appreciation of their value, but again, they also have values in and of themselves. The ecological field worker (persons with first hand experience with life forms) is highly aware of this. “To the ecological field worker, the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Unfortunately, most humans limit this care for humans only, which is a terrible ?anthropocentrism.? Modern society has done much to prevent us from relationships with non-human life and thus contributed to our own loss. Diversity improves chances of survival by means of creating new ways to live in many different forms. Deep ecology likes to reevaluate the concept of survival of the fittest to one that preaches harmonious coexistence instead killing and domination. Again, this idea is included in the context of human culture and economy. ” ?Live and let live? is a more powerful ecological principle than ?Either you or me? ” (EE p.135)

Sessions and Naess make it another principle that humans have no right to reduce richness and diversity of life, except to fulfill vital needs. First-world nations are not going to reduce their negative effects on the non-human world in record breaking time. Strategies need to be adopted to bring about change to get rid of human delusion and laziness on these issues. Time is of great importance, considering the longer we wait the greater the problem will become. Richness and diversity face major losses given the extinction rate in our time is exponentially greater than in the past.

A significant decrease in human population would be beneficial for both human and nom-human life. Undoubtedly, the world?s population is growing faster than at any time before due to such a large base despite declining growth rates. Governments need to make even greater efforts and more drastic goals for the future. One key point they argue is that most effort should go into lowering population growth in developed industrial societies. Obviously, these people?s lifestyles have far more negative influence on the environment.

This ties into the principle that human interference with the non-human world is out of control and getting worse. Naess and Sessions concede humans do and can modify ecosystems, just as other species do the same. Just how far we go with that ability remains the concern. Preservation, is the key, specifically ?large wilderness? areas because they allow and promote speciation of plants and animals. It is important to note that these deep ecologists do not specifically address pollution problems. They do this because they feel it falls in the context of shallow ecology. They think that worrying about pollution face value is really just a Band-Aid solution. Naess gives an example that show how anti-pollution implements could increase “evils of the other kinds,” (EE p.135) by somehow increasing the price of vital needs, resulting in greater class differences. This is somewhat abstract, but it allows for new and interesting perspective.

The next principle demands a major change in the policies that effect economic, technological, and ideological norms. They admit that it would be a dramatic shift from the present structure. Economics and ideology today revolve around commodity value, which results in impulsive consumerism and mass waste. Action needs to take place beyond the “think globally act locally” mentality and move around the world. Most Third World countries neglect ecological ideas. There is success among nongovernmental organizations (Greenpeace?) because they are less imposing and not affiliated with anything. Technology needs to be developed to promote the education of these governments. The next principle states that we need to learn to appreciate life quality and get away from an ever-increasing standard of living. This notion is left relatively uncharacterized because they feel quality of life is too hard to quantify. They seem to know however, that something is inherently wrong with our present quality of life. The final principle simply indicates that is you believe in what deep ecology preaches, then you should try to help implement the changes.

Scientific ecology is the not necessarily the basis for deep ecology, in fact it is more of a tool. Ecological information specifically demonstrates just how close our dependency is to the environment. In the last half century, this has been an important tangible development. Ecological knowledge has empowered people to have much more identification with animals, plants, and landscapes because they see their own meaning more readily. It became more scientifically sound to see man as part of nature as opposed to something outside of it. Naess gives the example of when ecologists discovered that DDT was hardening penguin eggs. People immediately felt responsible and wanted to do everything in their power to help, even though they had little interaction with or need for the penguin. This shows how ecology has helped people understand themselves. They were informed on the plight of the penguins and felt that they had as much right to live as we do. Penguins have a high ?cute quotient? and therefor are not the best example. Nevertheless, ecologists have given people solid reason to develop their concern for nature and even start to fight against certain economic ideologies.

In order for deep ecology to be successful there needs to be a better understanding of self-realization. Typically, most people today see themselves and independent egos seeking instant pleasure and material wealth. With these kinds of goals, we are slaves to the social fads and consumerism. As a result, we cannot take time to stop and find ourselves spiritually. In order to mature and grow this way, we need to stop concerning ourselves with our own desires and start to identify with other people. This is just the beginning of self-realization. If we truly want to make huge strides, then we need to start ?meditative deep questioning? of our present culture and wisdom. Personally, I think this means people need to step back and have alternative experiences in order to gain insight. With that accomplished, people will take self-realization beyond those around them. Then they will acknowledge the species, followed by the rest of the word in all its non-human forms. “No one is saved until we are all saved.” This is the main principle behind self-realization and it applies to basically everything on this earth. Once people break away from the current notion of self and find the deeper one, then carrying out the principles of deep ecology will become second nature.

Ecosabotage is the most controversial issue surrounding deep ecology. Whether or not the philosophy behind deep ecology justifies these actions, is another question. Ecologists are indispensable tools in all societies because they can use their knowledge for political benefit. They can choose what companies they want to work for depending on their policies. Excitingly, the more ecologists there are, the more ignorant companies will suffer. Ecosabotage is when these kinds of principles go ?on steroids.? Ecosaboteurs have been known to put spikes on forest trees, vandalize fur clothing, organize violent protests, and even burn down fancy resorts like the recent attack on Vail. They often feel that the only way to make a difference is too become extreme. These stunts do gain plenty of publicity and most probably influence the way many people think. The downside however, is that these attack can anger companies and make them less respectful of the ecologists, resulting in little progress. Furthermore, the philosophy of deep ecology is peaceful and meditative. In order for things to happen quickly however, action needs to be taken. This century promises all kinds of environmental disasters. Maybe ecosabotage and revolutionary measures are the only way to get a good start on prevention.

Deep ecology makes a good deal of sense. Before learning about this, shallow ecology seemed legitimate. Clearly, the principles behind deep ecology could be far more productive than anything practiced today. Some will argue that complete acceptance of deep ecology is absurd. Completely neglecting our anthropocentric perspective means that we have forgotten where we stand in the whole picture. We have been around a short while in comparison with life of the earth. It could easily go through another dramatic climatic shift and we would be history, and probably succeeded by a new form of life. The point is that humans share something valuable. Of course it is anthropocentric and it is worth saving. The other issue that seems debatable is the current state of economics and the market. These writing by Naess and company are somewhat dated and much has changed since then with the advent of the Internet. Is global village really such a bad thing if we use it properly? Deep ecology wants to preserve cultures and independent economies. I do not know which side to join at this point in time. I want to believe in most of what deep ecology holds true, however some issues make me uncertain.