



## DEEP ECOLOGY FOR THE TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY

*Arne Naess*

THIS IS NOT MY title! Why did my friends insist on this title? Because of many conversations of mine of the following kind:

NN: Are you an optimist or a pessimist?

NAESS: I'm an optimist!

NN: (Astonished) Really?

NAESS: Yes, a convinced optimist—when it comes to the twenty-second century.

NN: You mean, of course, the twenty-first century?

NAESS: No, the twenty-second! The lifetime of the grandchildren of our grandchildren. Aren't you interested in the world of those children?

NN: You mean we can relax because we have a lot of time available to overcome the ecological crisis?

NAESS: Not at all! Every week counts. How terrible and shamefully bad conditions will be in the twenty-first century, or how far down we fall before we start on the way back up, *depends upon what YOU* and others do today and tomorrow. There is not a single day to be lost. We need activism on a high level immediately.

The answer that I am an optimist is a reaction to the so-called doomsday prophets: people who talk *as if* they mean nothing can be done to straighten things out. They are few in number, but they are heavily exploited by people

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Originally published in *The Trumpeter* 9, 2 (1992), and revised in 1993. Reprinted with permission.

in power who speak soothingly that the task ahead is not very formidable, and that government policies *can* turn the tide for the better. A telling example is the cover of the influential *Newsweek* magazine which, just before the Rio conference, used the headline "The End is Not Near." In the newsmagazine article, there was no pep talk, not even an admission that we are in for a great task that will require new thinking. This is just the opposite of slogans used when big corporations are "in the red" which proclaim "New Thinking! Greater Efforts Are Needed! New Leadership!" No slogans were offered like those of Churchill in 1940: "Of course we will win, but there will be many tears and much sweat to be shed."

In short, there is no time for overly pessimistic statements that can be exploited by passivists and those who promote complacency.

The realization of what we call *wide* ecological sustainability of the human enterprise on this unique planet may take a long time, but the more we *increase* unsustainability this year, and in the years to come, the longer it will take. How much is left of nature obviously depends upon what we do today and tomorrow. The appropriate message is of a simple, well-known kind: the recovery from our illness will take time, and for every day that we neglect to *seriously* try to stop the illness from getting worse, the more time it will take. Policies proposed today for attempting to heal the planet are not serious. The Deep Ecology movement is concerned with what can be done *today*, but I foresee no definite victories scarcely before the twenty-second century.

Roughly, I call ecological sustainability *wide* (or "broad") if and only if the change ("development") in life conditions on the planet is such that it ensures the full richness (abundance) and diversity of life-forms on the Earth (to the extent, of course, that humans can insure this). Every key word of this criterion, of course, needs clarification, but "wide" sustainability is obviously different from the "narrow" concept of ecological sustainability that is increasingly accepted politically: that is, the existence of short- and long-range policies that most researchers agree will make ecological *catastrophes* affecting narrow *human* interests unlikely. This kind of narrow sustainability is politically acceptable today as a *goal* for "global development." But broad ecological sustainability is concerned with overall ecological conditions on the Earth, not only with the interests of humanity, and the dangerous concept of development is avoided. By "development" is still meant something like an increase in Gross National Product, not an increase in the quality of life.

So the big open question is: How far down are we going to sink before we start heading back up in the twenty-second century? How far must we fall before there is a clear trend toward *decreasing* regional and global ecological unsustainability? It may be useful, in this connection, to consider some possible scenarios:

1. There is no major change in ecological policies and in the extent of worldwide poverty. Major ecological catastrophes occur as the result of the

steadily accumulating effects of a century of ecological folly. This dramatic situation forces new ecologically strict policies, perhaps through undemocratic, and even brutal, dictatorial military means used by the rich countries.

2. The same development continues except for a major change in the poor countries: there is considerable economic growth of the Western kind. Now there are five times as many people living unsustainably. A breakdown occurs very soon, and harsh measures are taken to fight chaos, and to begin a decrease in unsustainability.

3. and 4. Several similar developments ending in catastrophic and chaotic conditions, and subsequent harsh brutal policies implemented by the most powerful states. A turn towards sustainability, but only after enormous ecological devastation.

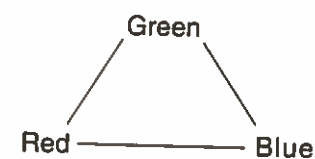
5. Ecological enlightenment, a realistic appreciation of the drastic reduction in the quality of life, increasing influence of the Deep Ecological attitude, and a slow decrease of the sum total of unsustainability. A trend toward decreasing unsustainability discernable by the year 2101.

Our hope: the realization of the rational scenario: one that guarantees the least strenuous path toward sustainability by the year 2101.

Now a few comments on the three great contemporary worldwide movements which call for grass roots activism:

First there is the *peace movement*; the oldest of the three which is, at present, remarkably dormant. But if military expenditures do not rapidly decrease from about 900 billion dollars per year, I expect it will revive. Then there are many movements which I include as part of the *social justice movement*. It includes the feminist movement and part of the social ecology movement. One might refer to the third movement by the use of the vague term *radical environmentalism*, because the use of the specific terminology of Deep Ecology will, sooner or later, elicit boredom and aggression. But a problem with the word "environmentalism" is that it smacks of the old metaphor suggesting humanity *surrounded* by something outside: the so-called environment of humans. But it will take a long time before radicalism ceases to be associated with the political *red-blue axis*:

The Political Triangle



Broad ecological sustainability may be compatible with a variety of social and political structures, provided they all point towards the Green pole. Unfortunately, there is now (1993) a strong belief in Eastern Europe that policies must be Blue (for example, participation in world economic markets, etc.) *before* they point toward the Green pole.

It is not easy to be personally active in more than one of the three grass roots movements, but cooperation among the movements is essential. The ecological threat is not only one of war, but also of the immense military operations, and associated industrial activity, during peacetime. Cooperation between the ecological and the peace movements has been excellent for a long time. It is taking longer to establish close cooperation with all of the social justice movements. But because care, and the capacity to identify with all living beings, is so prominent in the Deep Ecology movement, injustice is taken seriously.

The small minority of supporters of the Deep Ecology movement who write in periodicals, talk in public, and organize conferences, meet people who are sometimes skeptical about their ethical concerns: is it true that they are much fonder of animals than humans? The answer is that, whatever the intensity of their fight for animals (or wilderness), they recognize the very special obligations we have for our fellow-humans. What we propose is not a shift of caring away from humans and towards non-humans, but rather an extension and deepening of overall caring. It is unwarranted to assume that the human potential for caring is constant and finite, and that an increase of caring for some creatures necessarily reduces caring for others. The next century will see a general increase in caring if the ecofeminists are at least partially right.

The societies developing in the twenty-second century, at the earliest I suspect, will not all look like the ideal Green societies envisioned since the sixties. Many will have traits more in common with what we have today. Will there be conspicuous consumption? Of course! But what is conspicuous, and what will secure prestige and wonder in that century, will require only moderate physical energy to achieve. Several tremendously important things will be different: there will be no political support of greed and unecological production. A tolerance of severe social injustice based on differences in levels of consumption will have disappeared.

To fight the *dominance* of something should be clearly distinguished from trying to *eliminate* something. We shall always need people who insist that their main goal in life has not been to amass money, but to create something useful in a world in which money is a measure of success and creative power. In sociology, we often talk about entrepreneurs in the wide important sense of socially highly energetic, creative, influential people. Their work is often

controversial, sometimes clearly destructive, but they are required in any dynamic society.

I envision big, but not dominating, centers of commerce, learning and the arts, and big buildings and vast machinery for continued exploration in physics and cosmology. But in order to do something analogous to driving long distances in a conspicuous luxury car, a family would have to renounce many goods other people could afford. A good deal of the family's "Gaia-gift" would be spent on traveling in their prestigious car.

Rich people who work in the world of business, who are supporters of the Deep Ecology movement, ask in all seriousness whether Green utopian societies *must* look so dreary. Why portray a society which seemingly needs no big entrepreneurs, only organic farmers, modest artists, and mild naturalists? A capitalist society is, in a certain sense, a rather *wild* society! We need some degree of wildness, but not exactly of the capitalist sort. The usual utopian Green societies seem so sober and tame. We shall need enthusiasts of the extravagant, the luxurious, and the big. But they must not dominate.

In short, I do not envisage the *necessity* of any dramatic sudden turnaround in the social-political realm when I envisage things from the limited point of view of *overcoming the still-increasing ecological crisis*. But as mature human beings (I imagine that some of us are mature or on the way to becoming mature) we are also concerned about non-violence and social justice. It is not necessary for me to say anything more definite about these broad social and ethical issues at this point. But I see the value of expressing vague ideas concerning how one's own ideal Green societies might look. A Green society, in my terminology, is one that has, to some extent, solved not only the problem of reaching ecological sustainability, but has also ensured peace and a large measure of social justice. I don't see why so many people find reasons for despair. I am confident that humans have what is demanded to turn things around and achieve Green societies. This is how I, as a supporter of the Deep Ecology movement, feel today: impatient with the doomsday prophets and confident that we have a mission, however modest, in shaping a better future that is *not remote*.