

Letter to the Editor from George Sessions: “David Rothenberg, Pragmatism,
and the Crowley/Deep Ecology Controversy” by George Sessions

Thomas Crowley’s report on Arne Naess and Norwegian deep ecology (*ISEE Newsletter*, Fall (2006)) provides a fresh opportunity to reassess the deep ecology movement. The deep ecology movement, with its long-standing radical critique of Western anthropocentrism and the corporate/consumer unlimited-growth society, has been criticized for every conceivable reason (and from every ideological perspective) since the mid-1980s (see my “Wildness, Cyborgs and Our Ecological Future,” *The Trumpeter* 22, 2 (2006) online). But reality, as they say, has a way of intruding. As biologist Paul Ehrlich pointed out (*Healing the Planet* (1991)), any realistic solution to the ecological crisis will require a “reduction in the scale of the human enterprise”—there is now a consensus among biologists that humanity has significantly overshot the Earth’s carrying capacity (see Ehrlich, *One With Nineveh* (2004)). Underscoring this point is Jared Diamond’s claim that there are now twelve major ecological problems, each of which is capable of bringing about the global collapse of civilization (*Collapse* (2005) chp. 16). And now NASA scientist James Hansen claimed at a scientific meeting last December that we have exceeded the upper limit for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere—350 ppm is the safe upper limit and we are now at 387 ppm (Bill McKibben, “350 or Less ...” *Sacramento Bee* (12-30-2007)).

In *The Green Revolution*, (1993), Kirkpatrick Sale points to the 1990 PBS television series *Race to Save the Planet* where the guiding question was “Can we change the way we live in order to save the planet from destruction?” Sale points out that this question “goes to the very heart of the American, indeed the industrial system, its values, its assumptions, its configurations fashioned by five centuries of modern Western civilization” (p. 106). But academic environmental ethicists rarely discuss these broader “big picture” social/ecological issues. Does their professional commitment to the conceptual analysis of specialized problems result in a trained incapacity to take wider views and connect the big dots?

I. Deep Ecology and the Neo-Pragmatist Counterrevolution

And now American pragmatism has been resurrected and is all the rage in the field of environmental ethics. Eric Katz claims that we need to adopt the “methodology of pragmatism—the search for concrete solutions that work.” He promotes the pragmatism of Bryan Norton, Anthony Weston, and Mark Sagoff (*Environmental Ethics* 29 (Fall 2007)). But what side would

the pragmatists have taken, for example, in the Rachel Carson/Silent Spring controversy? DDT pragmatically “worked”—at least for a while, just as the large scale burning of fossil fuels “worked”—for a while! The vague criterion of “what works” can be useless and even dangerous unless spelled out in specific ecological contexts, coupled with a strong dose of the precautionary principle.

American pragmatism was critiqued in 1911 by Harvard philosopher George Santayana, and later by Bertrand Russell, for its anthropocentrism and uncritical support for the American industrial unlimited-growth society (see my “Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour,” in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*). Mark Sagoff has promoted the unlimited technological optimism of Julian Simon (in opposition to Ehrlich), which provoked a rebuke from scientists of the AAAS in *Scientific American* a few years back. And Bryan Norton has been incensed for decades with the anthropocentric critique of Western culture and Naess’ shallow/deep ecology distinction. He has reinterpreted Aldo Leopold as a pragmatist, claimed that the quarrel between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot was a quarrel between anthropocentrists, and attributed the critique of anthropocentrism “originally” to historian Lynn White (see Nina Witozek and Andrew Brennan, *Philosophical Dialogues* (1999), pp. 394-401). But all these claims are historically and philosophically inaccurate (see my “Ecocentrism ...”—mentioned above—as well as my introduction to the section on “Wilderness and Wildness” in *DE21stC*). Harold Glasser has concentrated on the policy applications of Naess’ position and, in his “Naess’s Deep Ecology Approach and Environmental Policy” (in Nina Witozek and Andrew Brennan, *Philosophical Dialogues* (1999)) he critiques the policy approaches of both Bryan Norton and Al Gore. There are important critiques of neo-pragmatism by Robyn Eckersley and Baird Callicott in Ben Minteer and Bob Taylor’s anthology on neo-pragmatism (*Democracy and the Claims of Nature* (2002)). Among other things, Eckersley points out that by refusing to examine the underlying assumptions of modern society, pragmatism results in a socially conservative position. And so, in failing to acknowledge and deal with the deeper causes of the ecological crisis, just how realistic and ultimately effective are the rather narrow local solutions neo-pragmatists propose (such as small-scale community restoration projects that may or may not be ecological)? Or are they actually diverting attention from the more global and radical social change that needs to occur? Norton now promotes what he calls “adaptive management.” There is presently a bill in Congress based on “adaptive management” that calls for opening up

protected old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest to logging, to which biologists are adamantly opposed. So much for Norton's "convergence hypothesis"! Despite Norton's protests, the neo-pragmatist position provides a paradigm case of what Naess calls shallow environmentalism.

We can all agree with a search for solutions—the deep ecology movement has been calling for radical social solutions to the ecological crisis for decades. In the early 1990s, the world's scientific organizations began issuing increasingly dire warnings and promoting radical social change as the only realistic solution to the global ecological crisis. The world's religious leaders are now supporting the scientists' warnings and solutions (see my "Wildness and Cyborgs," pp. 130-33). There has been no suggestion by the deep ecology movement, the world's scientists, or the world's religious leaders, that these solutions be achieved by any other than democratic means, facilitated by a massive effort to educate the public to the need for this change (see the excellent paper by Robert Paehlke in the Minter/Taylor anthology). As the ecological state of the Earth has continued to worsen exponentially decade by decade, with global warming now all but out of control, environmental ethics theorizing (and now the pragmatists, as well as the major reform environmental organizations) have, at the same time, become increasingly more philosophically, politically, and socially conservative, and narrowly focused. [The conservative French deep ecology critic, Luc Ferry, essentially laid out the direction for neo-pragmatism in *The New Ecological Order* (1992) chpt. 7.] How is this anomaly to be explained?

II. David Rothenberg's Misrepresentation of Naess and the Deep Ecology Movement

In his reply to my comments (*ISEE Newsletter* (Fall 2007)) Thomas Crowley says that I do not directly counter his claims. Crowley seems to miss the whole point of my reply. And, while Naess is an unusually fascinating person, the focus should be on his ecophilosophical approach to dealing with the ecological crisis, not turning the issue into a personality cult. And now David Rothenberg has jumped into the fray by condescendingly insulting deep ecology theorists when we replied to Crowley. Does Rothenberg feel we have no right to correct misrepresentations, or is his attitude part of a long-standing pattern with him?

Rothenberg undercuts Naess by saying that while he a nice great-grandfatherly figure for ecophilosophy, the Naess-inspired deep ecology position can't be taken seriously, for

analytically-oriented ecophilosophers think it is too imprecise and poorly argued. But this, of course, begs the question. As I pointed out in my reply to Crowley (*ISEE Newsletter* (Winter 2006-07)) Naess challenged 20th century academic philosophy to go beyond specialized conceptual analysis and return to a “maximal perspective” worldview approach. Rothenberg dismissively asks why the *ISEE Newsletter* should waste so many pages discussing Naess and deep ecology. Witoszek and Brennen (the editors of *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (1999)), on the other hand, claim the debate over deep ecology is “one of the more genuine and seminal intellectual dialogues of the latter part of the twentieth century ... (about) the fate of the planet ... an astonishing moment in the history of western philosophy ... [deep ecology is] a genuinely subversive philosophy” (pp. xiii, xv). Perhaps it’s long overdue that we look at Rothenberg’s relationship with deep ecology. While Crowley can be excused somewhat for his youthful inexperience, Rothenberg seems to have made a career out of misrepresenting Naess’s ecosophy and the deep ecology movement.

Rothenberg tells us he had heard about deep ecology while a graduate student and wrote Naess. Naess graciously invited him over, and he showed up in Norway about 1985 and stayed for a couple of years. Rothenberg began collaborating with Naess to bring out a revised English edition of Naess’s main work *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (first published in Norwegian in the early 1970s). Rothenberg soon teamed up with another young philosopher Peter Reed, and they both rejected Naess’s approach to ecophilosophy and headed in other directions. They were convinced that deep ecology was a distinctively Norwegian enterprise and soon published an anthology (*Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology* (1987)) to inform Norwegians, to their astonishment, that deep ecological ideas had shaped their culture (an American edition appeared in 1993). Thomas Crowley seems to have been influenced by Rothenberg for he also thinks deep ecology is essentially a Norwegian phenomenon. This, of course, is historically false. Environmentalism, of both the shallow and deep varieties, developed in several waves in the United States and then spread to the rest of the world. Rachel Carson, as Naess points out, is the founder of the modern international deep ecology movement. In fact, the first (non-poetic) comprehensive statement of a deep ecology position seems to be California Pulitzer Prize poet Gary Snyder’s “Four Changes” written in 1969—three years before Naess wrote his original paper on the shallow/deep ecology distinction (see my paper in J. Halper, *Gary Snyder* (1991) for a paper that traces the American, and specifically Californian, influences on

the rise of deep ecology; see the Czech researcher Petr Kropecky's "Nature Writing in American Literature," *The Trumpeter* 22, 2 (2006) online). While Norway, like other countries, has a distinctive Nature tradition that clearly influenced Naess, the main inspiration for his description of the deep ecology movement came from Carson, and his most significant philosophical insights (such as nondualism) came from the Dutch philosopher Spinoza, and from India's Gandhi.

III. A Digression—Environmental Ethics and the History of the Environmental Movement

Doing environmental ethics and ecophilosophy in an historical vacuum—without a solid foundation in the history of environmentalism—seems rather like trying to do philosophy of science without an understanding of the history of science. Most environmental ethicists seem to have only a nodding acquaintance with the development of environmentalism out of which their environmental ethics theorizing has arisen. Among other things, this allows theorists like Bryan Norton to get away with doing "revisionist history" by making erroneous statements about Muir, Leopold, and Lynn White. Unfortunately, a comprehensive history of environmentalism and the rise of nonanthropocentric thinking in the West has yet to be written (for a summary, see my "Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour," cited above). The most insightful historical overview is Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Green Revolution* (1993). Sale discusses Rachel Carson, David Brower, and Paul Ehrlich during the 1960s which led to Earth Day I, 1970. Sale then characterizes the 1970s as the "Doomsday Decade" and the 1980s as the "Reagan Reaction." Many insightful details of this history throughout the 1970s and 1980s have been filled in by Frederick Buell's brilliant *From Apocalypse to Way of Life* (2004). Environmental ethicists who have entered the field since the Reagan Reaction of the 1980s, and are only minimally conversant with the history of environmentalism, may not be aware that we have been living with a wounded and shallow environmental movement since the 1980s that has largely been able to play only defense (as a result of the decisive shift from "limits to growth" to "sustainable development" during the 1980s).

The earlier period of conservation/environmental history is well covered in Stephen Fox's *John Muir and his Legacy: The American Conservation Movement* (1981). Michael Cohen's *The History of the Sierra Club* (1988) supplements Fox's history. Environmental historian Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* appeared in 1967 (4th ed. 2001) and now deserves another look (as well as the first four chapters of Nash's *The Rights of Nature*

(1989)). Nash's historical scholarship is solid, and his book was extremely influential during the rise of environmentalism in the 1960s. Nash documents how early American westward expansion was continually justified on the basis of anthropocentric Biblical passages. John Muir was reacting against this, in part, when he criticized the anthropocentrism of "Lord Man." Nash also introduced Aldo Leopold to a much wider audience than the then-small conservationist movement that was inspired by him. The chapter on Leopold shows how he was understood by conservationists and biologists of the 1950s and 1960s, before environmental ethics theorists started interpreting him. The fact that Leopold was regarded as the leading proponent for protecting wilderness areas, from the 1920s until his death in 1948, should give Baird Callicott pause. Leopold's primary concern was clearly to promote a non-anthropocentric worldview and an ecological understanding of reality (see also Max Oelschlaeger's discussion of Leopold in *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991)). Leopold had been influenced by P.D. Ouspensky's Gaia-like view of the Earth as a living organism. Nash also refers to the influence of Albert Schweitzer on Leopold (Schweitzer was also a major influence on Rachel Carson—there is an excellent discussion of Carson's ecocentrism in Nash's *The Rights of Nature*). As a precursor to the rise of the deep ecology movement in the 1960s, the influence of Schweitzer's widely read critiques of Western religious and philosophical anthropocentrism (together with his "Reverence for Life" principle) throughout the first half of the 20th century has been greatly underestimated [see David Goodin, "Schweitzer Reconsidered," *Environmental Ethics* 29 (2007)]. The "Doomsday Decade" of the 1970s, which developed out of the analyses of Paul Ehrlich and other ecologists of the 1960s (and the Ehrlich/Holdren I=PAT equation), was dominated by "limits to growth" thinking. As Sale points out, the Club of Rome commissioned the very influential 1972 *The Limits to Growth* MIT computer study, led by Donella Meadows, that argued if humanity didn't rapidly embrace limits to growth, humanity was facing eventual doomsday [Meadows published a new computer study, *Beyond the Limits*, in 1992]. About the same time as the Club of Rome report, the British journal *The Ecologist* published *A Blueprint for Survival* which critiqued the industrial way of life as unsustainable and argued that limits to growth and "radical change is both necessary and inevitable" to avoid ecological collapse. This also was a remarkable document, supported by more than 200 leading scientists, and endorsed by the board of directors of the Sierra Club in May, 1972. Needless to say, the Club has significantly backed away from the radical ecological

stance it took beginning in the 1960s under David Brower's leadership—the best it can come up with these days is “smart growth.”

When Ronald Reagan and the neo-conservatives came into power in 1980 (the “Reagan Reaction”) Reagan appointed the evangelical/apocalyptic Christian James Watt as Secretary of the Interior, while enlisting Herman Kahn and Julian Simon to refute the limits to growth inspired Global 2000 Report to the President (see Buhl, p. 187). Simon also took aim at Paul Ehrlich, as well as providing the inspiration for the right-wing Republican “counter science” movement which has continued to the present (see chpt. 1 “The Politics of Denial,” in Buell's *From Apocalypse to Way of Life*). This Republican anti-ecological ideology has been continuous from Reagan and Bush I, through the Republican-controlled Congress under Newt Gingrich (which, among other things tried to eviscerate the Endangered Species Act), to the unparalleled anti-environmentalism of the George W. Bush administration (see Robert Kennedy, Jr. *Crimes Against Nature* (2003)). As a result, the American environmental movement, as well as the United Nations, were increasingly intimidated by these and other political pressures, and moved away from “limits to growth” to the less radical “ecological modernization” and “sustainable development” positions (see Buell, chp. 6, and part VI of my *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*). It is of some interest that Buhl discusses Charles Rubin (the summarizing author of the Minter/Taylor neo-pragmatism anthology) as a member of the right-wing “counter science” movement (pp. 20-21). It makes one wonder just how many neo-conservative anti-ecological right-wing Republicans there are who fit comfortably under the umbrella of the neo-pragmatist counterrevolution.

IV. Back to Rothenberg

Rothenberg's colleague Peter Reed soon critiqued Naess's Self-Realization position and developed a position based on Norwegian existentialism in which humans are “apart” from Nature (see my “Wildness and Cyborgs,” footnote 90). In Rothenberg's case, he rejected Naess's philosophical/scientific approach to deep ecology and started promoting the view that deep ecology and Naess's position should be expressed in literary and poetic form.

A key to understanding Rothenberg's orientation is his claim that deep ecology is too radical and “alienating” (*Wisdom in the Open Air*, footnotes 2 and 3) as expressed in the 1984 Naess/Sessions Eight Point platform, and in Devall/Sessions Deep Ecology (1985). As a result,

he developed a greatly simplified alternative to the Eight Point platform in which the points concerning human overpopulation, overconsumption, and the excessive interference of humans in the non-human world, were dropped (Rothenberg, "A Platform of Deep Ecology," *The Environmentalist* 7 (1987)). Rothenberg not only comes up short on the history of environmentalism, he could also profit from a course in Environmental Science IA. And, in his introduction to *The World and the Wild* (2001), Rothenberg promotes the protection of wilderness primarily on esthetic grounds and lauds Jack Turner's *The Abstract Wild* as the best recent book on wildness. But, in Rothenberg's *Always the Mountains* (2002), he turns around and effectively rejects Turner's characterization of wildness. Rothenberg sides with the relativism of the postmodernists and their deconstruction of wildness and wilderness, which results in his rejection of a culturally-neutral concept of wildness (I have defended wildness as characterized by Thoreau, Snyder, and Turner in my "Wildness and Cyborgs"). Are the world's scientists deluded, and global warming, the loss of wild ecosystems, and the 6th Mass Species Extinction Event, merely social constructions? Or is the postmodern deconstruction of wildness, wilderness, and Nature merely a sophisticated intellectual form of ecological crisis denial (the academic Left's version of right-wing "counter science")?

Back in Norway, Rothenberg set about taping interviews with Naess which became his *Is It Painful to Think?: Conversations with Arne Naess* (published in English in 1993). This describes many aspects of Naess's life, but when they begin discussing Naess's philosophy and ecology the tone changes significantly. Overall Rothenberg seems to be conveying the message that Naess can't formulate his position clearly and consistently, and how clever Rothenberg is in confounding the old master philosopher. When I stayed with Kit Fai and Arne Naess in Oslo during September 1992, they said they didn't like Rothenberg's introduction to *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* and Arne had to rewrite portions of the main text that Rothenberg had "creatively" rewritten. The Norwegian edition of *Is It Painful to Think?* had just come out and had sold many copies. Arne said he had participated in the interviews in a casual way, and was upset that Rothenberg had not allowed him to correct various misleading formulations (Rothenberg admits in the book that he refused to allow Arne to make revisions).

The anthology by Witozek and Brennan is especially valuable in that Naess is allowed to respond to critics. But when Rothenberg teamed up with Eric Katz and Andrew Light to put together their critique of deep ecology philosophy (*Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the*

Philosophy of Deep Ecology (2000)) Rothenberg (and the others) didn't provide Naess the opportunity to respond to critics. Were the intentions of Rothenberg (and the neo-pragmatists, Light and Katz) to provide readers with a fair and accurate assessment of the deep ecology position, or does the book represent, to a significant extent, a continuation of Rothenberg's longstanding hostility to, and misrepresentation of, Naess's ecophilosophy?

V. Critiquing Naess's Self-Realization Norm as Anthropocentric

In his paper in *Beneath the Surface*, Andrew Light argues that Naess's position is a very sophisticated version of moral and cultural pluralism (an overriding concern of the neopragmatists). But the overall tone of the book comes out in the introduction. In a panel discussion of the book with Rothenberg and Katz at an APA meeting in December 2000, Andrew McLaughlin pointed out that their characterization of deep ecology philosophy is a distorted caricature. Further, they tell us (p. x) that ecophilosophy and environmental ethics should be thought of as a small sub-branch of "applied" or "practical" philosophy (or in the case of the neo-pragmatists, as a branch of applied democratic political theory?).

Eric Katz is one of the few neo-pragmatists who holds that we need to develop a nonanthropocentric "metaphysics and a philosophy of nature that are not biased in favor of a human worldview." His is the key paper in the collection in providing a "grand refutation" of deep ecology by arguing that deep ecology philosophy (especially Naess's Self-Realization position) is actually anthropocentric. Katz attempts to anchor his argument with a quote from Rothenberg's *Is it Painful to Think?* where Naess makes the apparently anthropocentric statement that we need to protect nonhuman species in order to identify with them and thereby increase our own individual self-realization, as opposed to protecting them for their own sake (pp. 37-8). This is surely a passage that Naess would have modified if Rothenberg hadn't refused to let him do so. It's not either/or, but both! Katz considers this possibility but rejects it, since it doesn't fit with his anthropocentric critique. The key to understanding Naess is his nondualism (Fred Bender provides a clear characterization of nondualism: see my "Wildness and Cyborgs," pp. 149-51). The whole debate hinges on what Naess means by "Self" (with a capital "S").

As an editor, one would expect Katz to be familiar with the other papers in the collection. For instance, John Clark, in his paper, quotes Naess as saying that Self-Realization "includes personal and community self-realization, but is conceived also to refer to an unfolding of reality

as a totality” (p. 13). Katz “cherry-picks” some of Naess’s key papers (“The Deep Ecology Movement,” “Self-Realization,” “Ecosophy and Gestalt Ontology,” and “Equality, Sameness, and Rights”) in my *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century* (1995) for statements that seem to support his anthropocentric interpretation while ignoring those that don’t. For instance, Naess changed his earlier “biocentric equality” stance into the claim that “the right to live is one and the same for all individuals, whatever the species...” To avoid inevitable misunderstanding of the norm “Maximize Self-Realization!” Naess suggests substituting the norm “Live and let live!” which refers “to all of the life forms and natural processes on the planet.” He also says that what he calls the Self is what the Chinese call the Tao (for an entry into Naess’s nondualistic understanding of “individuals-in-relationship,” see Karyn Lai, “Conceptual Foundations for Environmental Ethics: A Daoist Perspective,” *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003)). Katz also refers to Richard (Routley) Sylvan’s critique of Self-Realization in which Sylvan claims that its roots lie in the West’s humanistic enlightenment tradition and thus has an anthropocentric history and pedigree (p. 35). But that’s not the source of Naess’s concept of Self-Realization. Katz should also have paid more attention to the papers in the collection by Knut Jacobsen and Deane Curtin which trace the influence of Eastern thought on Naess. Jacobsen shows that Naess’s concept of Self-Realization comes from Gandhi’s Hinduism, not Western enlightenment thinking.

Warwick Fox basically explained it all correctly a decade earlier with his discussion of the Hindu origins of Self-Realization; how early Hindu transcendent views were increasingly naturalized by Gandhi; Gandhi’s influence on Naess; Naess’s understanding of the nonduality of Zen Buddhism; and how Naess modified Eastern nondualism to apply to Spinoza’s system (*Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (1990) pp. 103-14). But somehow Fox ultimately fails to thoroughly understand nonduality, and goes astray in the rest of the book by attempting to turn deep ecology and Self-Realization into a form of anthropocentric humanistic psychology. [Compare this with Fred Bender’s account of nondualism mentioned above; for an overall critique of Fox see my “Wildness and Cyborgs,” p. 152; Harold Glasser, “On Warwick Fox’s Assessment of Deep Ecology,” *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997).] I queried Fox about his anthropocentric understanding of Self-Realization, since he actually documents in a number of places in his book that Naess asserts that nonhuman beings have value for their own sake. Fox agreed with my point but somehow didn’t see the relevance of it (Warwick Fox, “On the Interpretation of Naess’s Central Term “Self-Realization,” *The Trumpeter* 7 (1990).

In his paper in *Beneath the Surface*, Deane Curtin mentions the UC Santa Barbara philosopher Paul Wienpaul, who spent time in a Zen monastery in Japan, and then came back to interpret Spinoza as a nondualist. Curtin also discusses Naess's understanding of Zen Buddhism, but then faults Naess's interpretation of Self-Realization (unlike Dogen's refinement of Zen—the "corealization of all beings") for stopping short at living beings, thereby not including the inanimate in the corealization process. Warwick Fox correctly points out that Naess reformulates Spinoza's central claim that "all beings strive to persevere in their existence" into the statement that "all beings strive to increase their individual self-realization (as parts of the whole-or the Self). And it is this basic sense of all living beings "striving for their individual self-realization" with which we "identify." This "striving for self-realization" makes literal sense, for Naess, only for living beings. And this doesn't require that they necessarily be similar to humans in any other way (thus avoiding another basis that Katz uses for claiming that Self- Realization is anthropocentric).

But Naess extends the concept of living beings to the inanimate as well—as he says in various places, the term "living" is also broadly used to refer to rivers, mountains, landscapes, ecosystems (for example, to the mountain, Hallingskarvet, where he has lived). And, in his reply to Genevieve Lloyd's "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics" (in Witozek and Brennen, p. 98) he says "all things acquire value in themselves." What we have, as a result, is a comprehensive and consistent non-anthropocentric nondualistic system of "corealization of all beings" with both Dogen's Zen Buddhism and Naess's ecological reinterpretation of Spinoza (see Naess's various papers on Spinoza and ecology). In a recent conversation, Gary Snyder reaffirmed to me that Dogen's version of Zen is a totally naturalistic understanding of the world, and this holds as well for Naess's Spinoza. For Zen Buddhism, enlightenment results in the nondualism of the egoless state in which one has unmediated spontaneous experience of reality. Naess may be more explicitly ecological than Zen in that human self-realization—the "ecological self"—results in experiencing the "concrete contents of reality" in terms of gestalts (whereas, on the other hand, theoretical science describes the "abstract structures of reality"). As Naess points out, "my gestalt ontology is a sort of ontological realism in the sense that we have direct access to the contents of reality in our spontaneous experiences."

In his paper in *Beneath the Surface*, Rothenberg continues to muddy the waters. He correctly points out that Naess rejects continental phenomenology (which includes Heidegger)

because it is too subjective and anthropocentric. But Rothenberg again argues that Naess's "concrete contents of reality" (like all of his ecosophy) should be understood poetically and mythically. But Naess explicitly rejected that when he said "I leave poetry to the artists" (*Is It Painful to Think?* p. 133).

Christian Diehm ("Arne Naess and the Task of Gestalt Ontology," *Environmental Ethics* 28 (2006)) claims that Naess's ontology provides a powerful approach to understanding Nature, but shies away from Self-Realization as a result of the anthropocentric charges raised by Katz and others. Diehm does not have to worry—it should now be clear that these anthropocentric charges are totally unfounded. The critics of Naess's Self-Realization fail to understand his nonduality. And, as we have seen, Self-Realization and the "concrete contents of reality" are inseparably connected. As Naess has often said, deep ecology is in "good conceptual health." It should be reiterated for the nth time that Ecosophy T (with its Self-Realization! top norm) and the deep ecology movement are not the same. Naess claims that Ecosophy T is his personal philosophy, and he believes in a diversity of religious/philosophical worldviews that optimally can be interpreted (as explained by the Apron Diagram) to support the ecological perspective and activism of the Eight Point platform. As Andrew McLaughlin points out in my *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, the deep ecology movement (as it has developed since Rachel Carson) is primarily a philosophical/social activist movement and "our urgent task is social change." These attempts by Rothenberg, Katz, Plumwood, Sylvan, and others, to discredit Self-Realization and the deep ecology movement ultimately represent a rather trivial "tempest in a teapot" by academics with philosophical axes to grind. Meanwhile, there are "real world" ecophilosophical concerns that urgently demand our attention!

VI. Two Opposing Views of the Future of Human Survival: Dark Green or Bright Green?

The ghosts of Buckminster Fuller, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Julian Simon still haunt our future. Their thinking is a modern continuation of the old dream of Western culture, promoted by Bacon and Descartes but extending back to the Old Testament, that humans should be "the masters and possessors of Nature." Just as the Ecological Revolution, with its radically new orientation to Nature and call for protecting the ecological integrity of the Earth, was reaching its peak in the 1960s, Fuller and Teilhard were proposing a New Age global technological utopia in which humans take over biological evolution and the Earth's ecosystems.

Fuller portrays the Earth as a machine (“Spaceship Earth”) with humans as pilots at the controls—technology, he claimed, has given us the power of God. For Teilhard, humanity will take over the Earth and totally envelop it in a new layer he calls the “noosphere. As humans technologically “dominate and transform everything on the earth,” and as “the artificial takes over from the natural,” the Earth’s wild ecosystems and species are expendable. In Simon’s case, there are no physical limits to infinite human growth: the creativity of the human mind has an unlimited capacity to technologically manipulate the Earth. In his influential book, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the 21st Century* (1990), Daniel Botkin also claims that “we have the power to mold nature into what we want it to be” and uses Fuller’s imagery: “we need to instrument the cockpit of the biosphere.” [I contrast the deep ecology movement with the New Age movement of Fuller and Teilhard in my “Deep Ecology and the New Age Movement,”—see also Donald Worster’s critique of Botkin—in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*.]

The New Age movement has now reconstituted itself under the banner of “Bright Green Environmentalism” (claiming Fuller, Stuart Brand, Simon, and other technotopians as its patron saints) while rejecting traditional “Dark Green Environmentalism.” An extended discussion of this “new environmental paradigm” appears in an obscure journal *What is Enlightenment?* (<http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/>) in a paper by Ross Robertson, “A Brighter Shade of Green” (no. 38 (2007) pp. 42-62). He points out that a central hub of activity for the Bright Greens is a group called Worldchanging (www.worldchanging.com). And much of this technotopian thinking is associated with Silicon Valley (for example, the issue of *Wired* magazine on “Al Gore and the Rise of the Neo-Greens” (May 2006) is thoroughly permeated with Bright Green environmental thinking). The Dark Greens, from this viewpoint, cling to an “old school” worldview, refusing to join the realities of the 21st century. Dark Greens call for society to return to a scaled-down way of life, says Robertson, such as the journalist Bill McKibben with his *Enough* (2003) and *Deep Economy* (2007)—a takeoff on deep ecology. Perhaps the most influential global activist organization now proposing Dark Green solutions to what they call the “Triple Crisis” of global warming, economic crisis as a result of “peak oil,” and the ecological devastation of the biosphere (that they claim all have the same root causes) is the International Forum on Globalization (www.ifg.org). The Forum proposes alternatives to socially and ecologically destructive high-consumption economic globalization. But, for the Bright Greens, it’s full speed ahead toward technotopia by “harnessing the engines of capitalism,

high technology, and human ingenuity to jump-start the manufacture of a dramatically sustainable future.” The cheerleader for economic globalization, Thomas Friedman (*The World is Flat*), has recently “got Green religion” and sounds like the Bright Greens, as he gushes about “pushing the button on freemarket capitalism” to solve global warming.

Bill McKibben’s views have been contrasted with Silicon Valley’s Ray Kurzweil’s *The Singularity is Near* (2005) in which he promotes the fusing of humans and machines into cyborgs (*San Francisco Chronicle* (Oct. 3, 2005)). In *Enough*, McKibben surprisingly wants humans to remain fully human and not turn into cyborg/robot/superconsumers. But we’re rapidly approaching that condition. Silicon Valley certainly deserves a major share of the responsibility for producing a new global younger generation that are clones of the stereotypical whiz kids of Silicon Valley: computer nerds that, as social critics point out, are increasingly illiterate (they don’t read books anymore); socially inept and avoiding face-to-face encounters; spending most of their time living in hyperreality and online in virtual reality and cyberspace, while suffering from what psychologists now refer to as Nature-deficit disorder (see, e.g. the *Frontline* 2008 documentary “Growing Up Online”). But, for the Bright Greens, the philosophical issue of what is happening to the very nature of humans, as a result of the contemporary onslaught of computer technology, is the least of their concerns.

There’s lots of postmodernist talk among Bright Greens about “the Death of Nature.” And so, their concern is with global warming while ignoring the other aspects of the ecological crisis— a technological “moon shot” mentality to produce alternative energy sources and redesign industrial society while all the other destructive social/ecological consequences of high consumption/ industrial growth societies continue to escalate. For example, Michael Schellenberger and Ted Nordhaus (of “The Death of Environmentalism” fame), together with their friend Adam Werbach, largely support the “new paradigm” of Bright Green environmentalism. In their essay, Schellenberger and Nordhaus refer positively to John Muir and his observation about how everything in the universe is hitched to everything else. But the explicitly ecological meaning of Muir’s statement is twisted by them, and they then turn around and refer to the postmodern deconstruction of wilderness and Nature as a rationale for ignoring the overall ecological destruction of Nature. Schellenberger is quoted in *Wired* magazine as saying “[Why worry about] saving the Alaskan wilderness ... its all going to end up underwater from global warming anyway” (May 2006). They are now arguing, like right-wing “counter

science,” that global warming isn’t really that serious. Robert Collier (visiting professor at the Center for Environmental Public Policy at UC Berkeley) reviewed Shellenberger and Nordhaus’s new book (*Break Through* (2007)) and severely chastised them for, among other things, their abusive critique of the traditional environmental movement and its ecological priorities (*San Francisco Chronicle* (Oct. 7, 2007)).

Robertson claims that Michael Zimmerman is the ecophilosopher who most closely supports the Bright Green position, mentioning his upcoming book (coauthored with Sean Esbjorn- Hargens) *Integral Ecology* (2008). In an interview with Robertson, Zimmerman also invokes the spirit of John Muir in connection with his advocacy of an ominously sounding “absolute creative stewardship over the biosphere” that humankind must now assume. Isn’t it rather disingenuous and misleading for Bright Green theorists to link major prophets of Dark Green environmentalism, like Muir, with a technotopian/cyborg vision they would surely find abhorrent, while promoting the elimination of the wild Earth they fought so hard to protect? It seems that Zimmerman’s switch from Heidegger to Ken Wilber was less incongruous than it initially appeared: both Heidegger and Wilber reject Darwinian evolution. For Heidegger, Wilber, and Zimmerman, humans are transcendent beings who are not really an integral part of the Earth’s wild ecological systems. [For an extended critique of Zimmerman’s advocacy of Wilber’s neo-Hegelian transcendent spirituality that he couples with Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, see my “Wildness and Cyborgs” (pp. 153-57).]

Fred Buell provides a very sophisticated and devastating critique of the Bright Greens in what he calls the “culture of hyper-exuberance” (*From Apocalypse to Way of Life*, chp. 7). This hyper-exuberance is characterized by an incredibly unrealistic optimism. For example, Ross Robertson says “I can’t wait to participate myself in the creative unfolding of a future so bright and green it’s currently impossible to imagine.” Ray Kurzweil has said “if anything the future will more wonderful than anything we can imagine today.” The so-called “gloom and doom” of Ehrlich’s generation of ecologists, and now the world scientist’s organizations, is not allowed. Also apparently not allowed is a realistic appraisal of our current ecological situation! This Bright Green hyper-optimism has been fueled by the neo-conservative technotopianism of Julian Simon: *Wired* magazine referred to Julian Simon as the “doomslayer” (see Buhl, p. 218). Overall, the Bright Green vision is one in which humanity has transcended wild Nature in a totally artificial human-constructed technological space colony on Earth. The ecological world–

—the world of wild ecosystems and species—is to be left behind and discarded like a worn out booster rocket. (A beautifully written corrective to all this kind of thinking is the anthropologist Loren Eiseley’s “The Last Magician,” in *The Invisible Pyramid* (1970).) The conclusion seems unavoidable that the Bright Green vision rests on a totally ecologically illiterate understanding of reality. But the technological optimism and vision of the Bright Greens holds considerable appeal to a general public that is also largely ecologically illiterate.

It is now obvious that the ecological “limits to growth” analysis of the 1960s and the “Doomsday Decade” of the 1970s was essentially correct. [In recognition of this, the scientific community recently awarded Paul Ehrlich the first AAAS/Scientific American Prize for Science in the Service of Humanity.] And now, the “limits to growth” analysis has returned with a vengeance. The world scientist’s organizations are warning that we have a decade or less to begin to turn things around. And we have surpassed the safe limit for CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. The conservation biologist/geographer Jared Diamond (*Collapse* (2005) chp. 16) points to twelve ecological problems (including human overpopulation, biodiversity and wild ecosystem loss), each of which could result in the global collapse of civilization, and only one of which is global warming. He also points out that unless society changes the basic assumptions that produced the problems in the first place (such as the beliefs in unlimited growth, and that technology will solve all our problems), its chances for survival are minimal or none. The scientists of the global scientific ecological consensus are fully aware that it is totally unrealistic to think that humanity can live without the world’s wild ecosystems and species, which literally constitute the life support systems of the biosphere. As James Lovelock recently warned, “there must be no more natural habitat destruction anywhere!” And so, the outcome of this “real world” conflict of visions between the Bright Greens and the Dark Greens will undoubtedly be a major determining factor (if not the ultimate determining factor) in the likelihood of the future survival of humanity. Innovative technology will obviously play a major role in dealing with the crisis, but it will be genuinely productive only if it is subsumed under a Dark Green vision and program for the future.

In the *ISEE Newsletter* over the last several years, I have noticed increasing concern over the issue of how ecophilosophy and environmental ethics can make more of a contribution, and be more relevant, to society’s “real world” environmental/ecological problems. A valuable “litmus test” of one’s attitudes toward the philosophical issues raised by the opposing

orientations of the Bright and Dark Greens is the little-known paper by biologist J. Stan Rowe, “The Mechanical and the Organic: Virtual Reality and Nature” (*The Trumpeter* 14, 3 (1997) online). The world’s National Academies of Sciences and the World Council of Churches have taken generally Dark Green positions on solutions to the ecological crisis (see my *Wildness and Cyborgs*,” pp. 128-29, 132). What I am suggesting is that the fields of environmental ethics and ecophilosophy make the Bright/Dark environmental controversy one of its most central concerns. Teaching and textbooks could be structured around this key issue. Ecophilosophy and environmental ethics, properly understood, could at last claim its central role in “the greening of philosophy.” Even stodgy introductory philosophy courses could be structured around the Bright/Dark green issue, thus making philosophy crucially relevant to future of college students. And it might be appropriate that the field of environmental ethics, like the world’s scientific and religious leaders, take an institutional/professional stand on the issue. No philosophical/ecological “real world” issue appears to be more important in determining the fate of humanity and the Earth.

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