

Rethinking the Heidegger-Deep Ecology Relationship

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Recent disclosures regarding the relationship between Heidegger's thought and his own version of National Socialism have led me to rethink my earlier efforts to portray Heidegger as a forerunner of deep ecology. His political problems have provided ammunition for critics, such as Murray Bookchin, who regard deep ecology as a reactionary movement. In this essay, I argue that, despite some similarities, Heidegger's thought and deep ecology are in many ways incompatible, in part because deep ecologists—in spite of their criticism of the ecologically destructive character of technological modernity—generally support a “progressive” idea of human evolution.

I. AFFINITIES BETWEEN DEEP ECOLOGY AND HEIDEGGER'S THOUGHT

Some deep ecologists, influenced in part by my own essays, have included Heidegger as one of their philosophical predecessors.¹ Bill Devall and George Sessions, for example, maintain that Heidegger made three contributions to deep ecology literature: “First, he provided a major critique and indictment of the development of Western philosophy since Plato. He concluded that this anthropocentric development paved the way for the technocratic mentality which espouses domination over Nature.”² Second, he encouraged people to begin “thinking,” an idea far closer to Taoist notions of “letting things be” than to Western analytical thought. Third, “Heidegger called us to dwell authentically on this Earth, parallel to our [Devall and Sessions'] call to dwell in our bioregion and to dwell with alertness to the natural processes.”³

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¹ Michael E. Zimmerman, “Toward a Heideggerian Ethos for Radical Environmentalism,” *Environmental Ethics* 6, no. 2 (1983): 99-131, and “Implications of Heidegger's Thought for Deep Ecology,” *The Modern Schoolman* 54 (November 1986): 19-43. See also Dolores LaChapelle, *Earth Wisdom* (Los Angeles: Guild of Tutors Press, 1978); Laura Westra, “Let It Be: Heidegger and Future Generations,” *Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 4 (1985): 341-50; Bruce V. Foltz, “On Heidegger and the Interpretation of Environmental Crisis,” *Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 4 (1984): 323-38.

² Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Layton, Utah: Peregrine Smith Press, 1985), p. 98.

³ *Ibid.*

Like Heidegger, deep ecologists criticize the metaphysical presuppositions allegedly responsible for ecological destruction, and also contend that a transformed awareness of what humanity and nature “are” would lead spontaneously to a transformation of society. The solution to the environmental crisis, then, would involve an ontological shift: from an anthropocentric, dualistic, and utilitarian understanding of nature to an understanding which “lets things be,” i.e., which discloses things other than merely as raw material for human ends. A nonanthropocentric humanity, having undergone what amounts to a spiritual transformation, would presumably develop attitudes, practices, and institutions that would exhibit respect and care for all beings.

While I continue to appreciate elements both of deep ecology and Heidegger’s thought, the recent controversy about his support for National Socialism has led me to reevaluate my views about the Heidegger-deep ecology relation. To a large extent, this essay is an exercise in *self*-criticism. Because my initial reading of Heidegger as a precursor of deep ecology did not provide an adequate political critique of his thought, I left deep ecology open to the claim that it has a proto-fascist potential because one of its supposed forerunners “applied” his own ideas to National Socialism. Such a claim is based on a problematic logic of contamination: if Heidegger’s thought is somehow compatible both with National Socialism and with deep ecology, then deep ecology must be somehow fascist.⁴ While rejecting such facile reasoning, I believe that the potential political problems involved in the Heidegger-deep ecology connection merit critical review.

In this essay, “deep ecology” will refer to the interrelated body of ideas developed in various ways by Bill Devall, Alan Drengson, Warwick Fox, Arne Naess, and George Sessions, all of whom emphasize that promoting self-realization for all beings is crucial for solving the ecological crisis.⁵ I became attracted to these ideas because they seemed in part consistent with themes that had originally drawn me to Heidegger’s thought. In earlier essays, I sought to influence deep ecology’s conceptual development by inviting it to incorporate some of Heidegger’s insights, many of which I continue to regard as important. In the present essay, I am once again hoping to influence deep ecology, but this time by warning it of the dangers posed not only by Heidegger’s thought, but also by movements that justify politically oppressive policies because they allegedly conform to “nature’s laws.”

In part one of this essay, I examine parallels between Heidegger’s thought and deep ecology. In part two, I explain Heidegger’s relation to National Socialism; next, I inquire about the potential relation between deep ecology and ecofascism;

⁴ I owe this criticism to Warwick Fox.

⁵ On problems associated with the term “deep” ecology, see Warwick Fox’s excellent study, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990).

finally, I show how deep ecologists reply to the idea of such a relation. In part three, I consider whether Heidegger's radical distinction between humans and all other entities makes his thought incompatible with deep ecology's view that humans are integrally related to terrestrial life. I argue that Heidegger's thought, like that of the deep ecologist Arne Naess, involves an ontological phenomenism that has far more in common with Mahayana Buddhism than with the materialistic naturalism, which—in a social Darwinian guise—has been used to justify racism as well as the exploitation of nature. In part four, I argue that deep ecology could probably best be defended from the charge of being proto-fascist if it could be shown to support some version of a “progressive” view of human history. Such a view is foreign both to Heidegger and to National Socialist ideologues, for whom Enlightenment modernity was an unmitigated disaster. By attempting to show that deep ecology *does* hold some version of a progressive view, I hope to mediate the current conflict between deep and social ecology.

AN OUTLINE OF DEEP ECOLOGY

Deep ecology argues that Western culture's anthropocentric, dualistic, and utilitarian attitude toward nature is eradicating wild nature and may be destroying the ecosphere's capacity to sustain complex life forms. This attitude is allegedly so pervasive that it infects much of the environmental “reform” movement that seeks to limit ecological damage primarily because of the threat it poses to human life.⁶ Deep ecology is said to be “deep” because it asks deeper questions than do reformers about the humanity-nature relationship. Given such a broad definition, deep ecology *could* include ecofeminism and social ecology.

Like other critics of modernity, deep ecologists argue that technological “progress” has been purchased at the price of the domination of nature.⁷ Such domination is consistent with those Western philosophical and religious traditions that have privileged “man” in comparison with lowly “nature.” Descartes and other early modern scientists interpreted nature as a lifeless machine, thus removing impediments that otherwise would have slowed the economic “development” of natural resources by the emerging class of capitalists.⁸ The notion that

⁶ For a helpful typology of environmentalisms, see John Rodman, “Four Forms of Ecological Consciousness Reconsidered,” in Donald Scherer and Thomas Attig, ed., *Ethics and the Environment* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 82-92.

⁷ Regarding Greek and Christian contributions to Western dualism and anthropocentrism, see John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974). Eugene C. Hargrove, in *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989), argues that Western philosophy has done little to encourage people to take nature seriously. See also Robin Attfield, “Has the History of Philosophy Ruined the Environment?” *Environmental Ethics* 13, no. 2 (1991): 127-37.

⁸ Consider how mechanistic-materialist metaphysics combined with capitalism to remove reservations about mining, once viewed as the “rape” of Mother Earth. See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

scientific discoveries should be used to harness nature for human ends was a central doctrine of many Enlightenment thinkers, who maintained that just as political reason would emancipate people from the constraints imposed by ignorance and superstition, scientific reason would also free people from poverty by creating the means for greatly increasing material wealth.⁹

Anticipating deep ecology, Romantic poets claimed that the technological domination of nature led to the repression of the human spirit as well. More than a century later, Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the domination of outer nature inevitably leads to the domination of inner nature.¹⁰ Similarly, Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse maintained that in the technological era all things, including humans, reveal themselves one-dimensionally: as raw material for enhancing the technological system, which has become an end in itself.¹¹ Following this tradition, the deep ecologist George Sessions sees “the diminishment of man and the diminishment of the planet and its nonhuman inhabitants as essentially one and the same problem.”¹²

Deep ecologists maintain that in the long run (if there *is* a long run) humanity must move to a new understanding of what humanity and nature *are*, an understanding that is ecocentric, nonanthropocentric, and non-dualistic. Emphasizing the need for an ontological shift differentiates deep ecologists from ethicists who seek to extend “moral considerability” to nonhuman beings.¹³ Deep ecologists argue that a change in ontology must proceed a change in ethical attitudes. A non-dualistic, ecocentric understanding of what things are would lead us to treat nonhuman beings with compassion and care. Such an understanding would enable us to appreciate the *differences* among the various constituents of life, instead of treating everything as interchangeable raw material. Deep ecology’s non-dualism, in other words, is *not* equatable with an undifferentiated monism.

Deep ecologists sometimes suggest that such a nondualistic mode of understanding may be emerging from “postmodern” science, which conceives of nature as a self-differentiating, self-organizing, novelty-seeking, evolutionary process capable of generating self-conscious forms of life.¹⁴ Contemporary ecologists describe terrestrial life as a complex web of internal relationships; likewise, physicists describe the universe as an extraordinary cosmic dance, the constitu-

⁹ Not all early scientists were dualists; some promoted a materialistic monism. I owe this reminder to Henry J. Folse.

¹⁰ See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972).

¹¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), and *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

¹² George Sessions, “Ecological Consciousness and Paradigm Change,” in *Deep Ecology*, ed. Michael Tobias (San Diego: Avant Books, 1985), p. 28.

¹³ On this topic, cf. my essay, “The Critique of Natural Rights and the Search for a nonanthropocentric Basis for Moral Behavior,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 19 (1985): 43-53.

¹⁴ See *The Reenchantment of Science*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988).

ents of which are interrelated energy events.¹⁵ Such views undermine the metaphysical basis for Locke and Hobbes's social atomism, while promoting a view that resembles in some ways Hegel and Marx's metaphysics of internal relations.¹⁶

While emphasizing scientific claims about the interrelatedness of all things, deep ecologists insist that intellectual conclusions alone are not sufficient to bring about a basic shift in one's attitude toward nature. Such a shift requires a change of consciousness, an intuitive sense of identification with all things.¹⁷ Arne Naess argues that such intuition leads us to reject the idea that we are "in" the environment, as if we were surrounded by something basically different from us. An intuitive sense of wider identification enables us to cultivate

the relational, total-field image. Organisms [including humans] as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things.¹⁸

The Australian deep ecologist, Warwick Fox, argues that the "central intuition" of deep ecology is that

there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence. In other words, the world simply is not divided up into independently existing subjects and objects, nor is there any bifurcation in reality between the human and nonhuman realms. Rather all entities are constituted by their relationships. To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of a deep ecological consciousness.¹⁹

The doctrine of internal relationships undergirds two of deep ecology's primary norms: self-realization and ecocentric egalitarianism. According to Naess, a

¹⁵ On the implications of the new physics for environmental ethics, see J. Baird Callicott, "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 3 (1985): 257-25, and Michael E. Zimmerman, "Quantum Theory, Intrinsic Value, and Panentheism," *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 1 (1988): 3-30. For criticism of efforts to derive a holistic metaphysics from ecological science, see Andrew Brennan, *Thinking About Nature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988). But see also Frederick Ferré, "Obstacles on the Path to Organismic Ethics: Some Second Thoughts," *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 3 (1989): 231-41.

¹⁶ On this topic, see Freya Matthews' insightful book, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1991). I read this book too late to integrate its argument fully into this essay.

¹⁷ On the difficulties involved in making this transition to nondualism, cf. Kelly Bulkley, "The Quest for Transformation Experience," *Environmental Ethics* 13, no. 2 (1991): 151-64. Paul Ehrlich, in "The Loss of Diversity: Causes and Consequences," in *Biodiversity*, ed. E. O. Wilson, (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1988), pp. 21-27, recently argued that "scientific analysis points toward the need for a quasi-religious transformation of contemporary cultures."

¹⁸ Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary," *Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1973), 95-100; citation from p. 95.

¹⁹ Warwick Fox, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?" *The Ecologist* 14, no. 5/6 (1984): 194-200; citation from p. 196.

student of Spinoza, the *nisus* toward self-realization is at work in all beings. Affirmation of life, cheerfulness, activity, and joy are indications of self-realization in humans. Nevertheless, insofar as humans are *internally* related to the rest of life on Earth, human self-realization can be achieved only if all other things also achieve self-realization. Hence, it is in *our* interest to promote the well-being of all other entities. The greater my capacity for *identification* with others, the deeper my understanding that “self-realization” is a *communal*, not merely a personal event. According to Naess, the “self” being “realized” is not the isolated atomistic ego, but rather the greater Self (*Atman*), which is in the process of manifesting itself in all beings. According to the norm of ecocentric egalitarianism, because all things are manifestations of this greater Self, whenever possible they must be allowed to pursue their own self-realization.

THE PROXIMITY OF HEIDEGGER’S THOUGHT TO DEEP ECOLOGY

As noted earlier, Heidegger can be viewed as a forerunner of deep ecology because he called for a “higher humanism” that would (1) lead beyond the anthropocentric, dualistic humanism associated with dominating nature and (2) make possible authentic ways of “dwelling” compatible with “letting things be.”²⁰ His central idea concerns the “ontological difference” between being and entities. The being of an entity amounts to the event of its presencing, self-manifesting, or appearing. Thus, “being” does not name a mysterious “substance” that grounds a thing’s predicates; nor does it name a supreme entity which creates all other entities. Rather, “being” names the manifesting of an entity within the historical-temporal clearing constituted through human existence, *Dasein*. Without human existence, entities could not “be,” because there would be no clearing in which they could reveal themselves. Although in his later writings Heidegger insisted that humanity does not “possess” this clearing, but is instead appropriated as the site for the self-manifesting of entities, he always insisted that human existence is necessary for this event of manifesting.

For Heidegger, Western history constitutes the gradual forgetting of the ontological difference, which has now reached such a point that we cannot make basic differentiations: everything now manifests itself as interchangeable raw material. Supposedly, the early Greeks had a primordial encounter with being, “presencing” (*Anwesen*), or *physis* (usually translated as “nature”). *Physis* appropriated Greek humanity as the site for entities to present themselves in delimited ways. Although the pre-Socratic Greeks were somehow attuned to being as an *event* of self-manifesting, Plato interpreted being as a superior kind of *entity*, the eternally present *eidos*, which serves as the metaphysical model for producing

²⁰ In “Between *Techne* and Technology: The Ambiguous Place of Technology in Being and Time,” ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, *Tulane Studies in Philosophy* 23 (1984): 23-36, Hubert L. Dreyfus argues that early Heidegger had an instrumentalist attitude toward nature.

spatio-temporal entities. By conceiving of being as permanent presence, Plato initiated the metaphysical tradition, which became increasingly blind to the ontological difference. The Romans interpreted Plato and Aristotle's "productionist" metaphysics in causal-material terms: "to be" meant to be actualized by an agent. For medieval humanity, "to be" meant to be a creature of the Creator, the Supreme Being. For Enlightenment humanity, "to be" meant to be an object of the rational, self-certain, self-grounding human subject. Modern science compelled entities to show themselves in accord with the expectations of the rational subject, which defined itself as a "clever animal," struggling to survive by dominating everything else. In the technological age, all of nature and even the human subject itself begin to be disclosed as nothing but raw material for the planetary production-consumption process.

Governed by productionist metaphysics, Heidegger argued, humanity has become blind to two facts: (1) that there is an ontologically disclosive dimension that is *prior to* the causal-material dimension; and (2) that human existence is not the master of entities, but rather is in the service of the self-manifesting of entities. Although he decentered the modern subject, which conceives itself as the ground for all meaning, purpose, and value, he nevertheless emphasized the uniqueness of human existence. Yet, he criticized anthropocentrism because he regarded human existence as authentic only when serving a disclosive process that transcends it. For him, then, as for deep ecologists, the environmental crisis is a symptom of a still deeper crisis: a humanity made arrogant by its blindness to what it means to be human. While he claimed that this blindness has been growing since Plato's time, deep ecologists, going farther, suggest that it has been growing since the dawn of agriculture. Both Heidegger and deep ecologists call for a "higher humanism," i.e., for authentic self-realization that would make it possible for humanity to dwell in harmony with other entities on the planet.

Deep ecologists are sometimes suspicious of Heidegger's claims about the uniqueness of humanity's capacity for understanding being, for Western society has always justified its domination of nature by portraying it as inferior to what is "uniquely" human: soul, rationality, spirit, language. Such suspicions are fueled by Heidegger's claim that there is something worse than the destruction of all life on Earth by nuclear war.²¹ Supposedly worse would be material "happiness" (associated with Nietzsche's "last man"), which stems from a one-dimensional, technological disclosure of things.²² Presumably, in such a constricted world, entities could show so little of themselves that they would virtually not "be" at all.²³ Contented survival is worse than nuclear annihilation because in the former

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959), pp. 24-25; *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 55-56.

²² Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 52; *Gelassenheit*, p. 20.

²³ Murray Bookchin offers a rather more reasonable alternative to Heidegger's view: "The greatest danger we face apart from nuclear immolation is the homogenization of the world by a

condition humanity has lost its relation to being. Here, one may recall the biblical teaching that it is better to forfeit the world than to lose one's soul. Preserving openness for being is more important than preserving entities, for the latter can only manifest themselves or "be" within that openness. Early Heidegger once remarked:

Over against the duration of the starry world of the cosmos in general, human existence and its history are certainly only the most fleeting, only a 'moment'—but this fleetingness [if authentic] is nevertheless the highest mode of being. . . .²⁴

Conceived as a tiny lump of matter in the universe, we are told, humanity is insignificant; but conceived as the clearing through which the cosmos in all its beauty and worth can *manifest* itself, human existence has immeasurable significance. Deep ecologists generally argue, however, that the worth of things holds independently of whether they happen to be apprehended by humans. Moreover, the view that things can "be" only insofar as they manifest themselves through human existence, would seem difficult to reconcile with the view of some deep ecologists that humans are Leopoldian "plain citizens" of the land.²⁵ Yet, Arne Naess has remarked that in some ways he agrees with the view that human existence allows things to manifest themselves, at least in a way not otherwise possible. He cites approvingly the following remarks made by T. L. S. Sprigge, who thinks "in the spirit of Heidegger." Sprigge encourages us

to think of the point of our consciousness as being that it supplies a home in which objects can enter into actuality, so that we as consciousness are to be thought of as existing for the sake of the objects which need us in order to exist rather than its being the objects which exist for our sake.²⁶

This quotation should not be read as implying that either Naess or Heidegger are subjective idealists. Early Heidegger did say that nature "is" only within a human world, but he later tried to take into account the extra-historical dimension of nature by distinguishing "earth" from "world."²⁷ The latter refers primarily to the historical clearing in which entities can show themselves, while the former refers

market society and its objectification of all human relationships and experiences." Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1990), p. 130.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, ed. Klaus Held, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 26 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), pp. 21-22.

²⁵ For instance, George Sessions asks: "What about all those species still unknown to humans? What is their status? What about tiny creatures at the bottom of the ocean? Are we going to have to get humans situated in all these places so that all these creatures have a chance for 'being'?" Personal communication.

²⁶ T. L. S. Sprigge, "Nonhuman Rights: An Idealist Perspective," *Inquiry* 20 (1984): 439-61; quotation from p. 455. Naess cites this passage on p. 426 of his essay, "The World of Concrete Contents," *Inquiry* 28 (1985): 417-28. Cf. also Arne Naess, "A Defence of the Deep Ecology Movement," *Environmental Ethics* 6, no. 3 (1984): 265-70.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

primarily to the transhistorical, self-concealing dimension of entities. World and earth contend with, but also need each other; world wants to compel earth to become completely present within the historical domain, but earth resists becoming totally disclosed and present for manipulation. Without the earth, “nature” as overflowing fullness and richness of things, nothing would be disclosed in a historical world. Regarding the “intrinsic worth” of things, one might argue in the following way: the beauty and worth of entities obtain *in potentia*, as it were, independently of their being apprehended within a world, but they become more fully actualized in the event of such apprehension.

Pragmatists would probably say that the issue of intrinsic worth is not only undecidable, but in this case makes no practical difference anyway, since—despite their disagreement about the ontological status of entities or their intrinsic worth—Heidegger and deep ecologists both call on humanity to “let beings be.” For Heidegger, this phrase has at least three meanings. First, it means to open up the ontological clearing in which things can disclose themselves and thus “be.” Second, it means to allow things to show themselves without undue human interference. Third, it means to interact with things in respectful ways to bring forth not only the goods needed for human life, but also new creations, including works of art. “Letting things be,” then, is not to be understood merely passively, as a disinterested “bearing witness” to things, but also actively, as working with things to bring forth new possibilities. Such authentic producing is to be distinguished from technological producing at the end of the history of productionist metaphysics. Technological production forces entities to reveal themselves inappropriately, e.g., animals as mere machines. While deep ecologists emphasize the second of these three meanings of “letting things be,” they also acknowledge the importance of creative activity for human self-realization. Nevertheless, their concern about the ecological consequences of modernity’s “productionist” mentality leads them to support that kind of creativity which does not unduly interfere with the self-realization of nonhuman beings.

II: POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN THE HEIDEGGER-DEEP ECOLOGY RELATION

HEIDEGGER AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM

In assessing the suitability of calling Heidegger a forerunner of their movement, deep ecologists should recall that he used his own philosophy to support National Socialism, and in a manner that was more enduring and profound than his self-justifying postwar statements would suggest. Indeed, he continued to speak well of that movement more than twenty years after World War II.²⁸ His affiliation with

²⁸ “National Socialism, to be sure, moved in this direction [namely, of establishing an adequate relation between humanity and the essence of modern technology]. But those people were far too

Nazism cannot be explained as a personal failure, for he believed that the movement's "inner truth and greatness" was consistent with his own critical view of modernity. He regarded democracy, capitalism, socialism, scientific rationalism, consumerism, and "progressive" views of history in general as the culmination of Europe's long decline from its glorious beginning in ancient Greece. For him, National Socialism was an effort to counter modern progress, which he viewed as a degenerate, nihilistic process that was devastating the Earth and darkening the world.²⁹ To restore the rank, order, and distinctions obliterated by industrial modernity, a radical revolution was needed, a "second beginning" equal in power to the beginning initiated by the ancient Greeks. Jettisoning ethical standards consistent with the Jewish, Christian, socialist, and liberal democratic traditions, he had no moral basis for challenging the decisions made by those who portrayed themselves as the gods' forerunners. Unfortunately, those people later turned out to be mass murderers. By the late 1930s, he concluded that the historical form taken by National Socialism, including its crude naturalistic, biological, and racist views, was another expression of technological modernity, but he never abandoned his conviction that there was a great potential at the core of the movement.

In terms of Nazism's twisted version of naturalism, some human races were superior to others. Racial "mongrelization" polluted and enervated the blood of superior races, thereby threatening their survival and undermining their chance for achieving greatness. In the same breath, Nazi ideologues celebrated the beauty and the merciless character of nature, the *Volk's* "rootedness" in the soil, and the necessity of racial purity. All this was couched in claims that the evils of urban-industrial modernity, including capitalism and communism, stemmed from Jews who lacked any roots in the soil. In view of all this, one can understand why so many postwar leftists were suspicious of environmentalism: they feared that it was somehow linked with racist, reactionary politics, which justified oppressive power arrangements on the basis of their "natural" character.³⁰

limited in their thinking to acquire an explicit relationship to what is really happening today and has been underway for three centuries." From "'Only a God Can Save Us Now': *Der Spiegel's* Interview with Martin Heidegger on September 23, 1966," trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, *Philosophy Today* 20 (1976), pp. 267-84; quotation from p. 280.

²⁹ See Michael E. Zimmerman, "The Thorn in Heidegger's Side: The Question of National Socialism," *Philosophical Forum* 20 (1989): 326-65; and Michael E. Zimmerman, "Philosophy and Politics: The Case of Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* 23, no. 2 (1989): 3-20.

³⁰ Concern about National Socialism's demented "naturalism" led the German Greens in a leftist direction, despite their critique of Marxism. At first, however, they also sought alliances with conservative ecology groups. See Kim R. Holmes, "The Origins, Development, and Composition of the Green Movement," in Robert L. Pfaltgraff, Jr. et al., *The Greens of West Germany* (Cambridge, Mass. and Washington, D.C.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1983), p. 30. See also Robert C. Paehlke, *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

DEEP ECOLOGY AND ECOFASCISM: ANY CONNECTION?

The fact that Heidegger, who supported National Socialism, has been labeled a forerunner of deep ecology has provided grist for the mill for critics who argue that it risks becoming aligned with reactionary political forces calling for an organicist, hierarchical, authoritarian social system. Devall and Sessions claim that "Certain outlooks on politics and public policy flow naturally from this [deep ecological] consciousness."³¹ Murray Bookchin, however, would maintain that their favorable reference to Malthus' problematic views on population and "carrying capacity" indicated just what sorts of policies might "flow" from deep ecology.³² Some Earth First!ers, who are supposedly motivated by deep ecological ideals, proposed Draconian birth control measures, spoke approvingly of AIDS as a self-protective reaction of Gaia against an over-populating humanity, used social Darwinist metaphors, and displayed apparent racist attitudes. Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman even stated that humans "are a cancer on nature."³³ It was because of outrage at such remarks that Bookchin first penned his scathing indictments of Earth First! and deep ecology. Unfortunately, this critique sometimes included pointless invective. Moreover, in an important concession, Bookchin has admitted that statements made by Earth First! activists are not to be confused with those made by deep ecology theorists.³⁴

Critics, who call on deep ecologists to become better informed about the murderous precedents set by reactionary movements demanding that society be reorganized according to "nature's laws," note that National Socialism developed a perverted version both of romanticism's nature reverence and of its critique of analytic rationality. According to George Mosse, an irrationalist, nature-centered *völkisch* movement presaged the rise of National Socialism. In this movement,

Man was seen not as a vanquisher of nature, nor was he credited with the ability to penetrate the meaning of nature by applying the tools of reason; instead he was glorified as living in accordance with nature, at one with its mystical forces. In this way, instead of being encouraged to confront the problems cast up by urbanization and industrialization, man was enticed to retreat into a rural nostalgia. Not within the city, but in the landscape, the countryside native to him, was man fated to merge with and become rooted in nature and the Volk.³⁵

³¹ Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 65.

³² See Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus 'Deep Ecology'," *Green Perspectives*, nos. 4 & 5 (1987): 1-23; "The Crisis in the Ecology Movement," *Green Perspectives*, no. 6 (1988): 1-6; "Yes!—Whither Earth First?," *Green Perspectives*, no. 10 (1988): 1-7. For an insightful criticism of the neo-Malthusianism of certain strains of deep ecology, see George Bradford, *How Deep Is Deep Ecology?* (Ojai, Calif.: Times Change Press, 1989).

³³ Dave Foreman, in a group interview titled "Beyond the Wilderness," *Harper's Magazine* 280, no. 1679 (April 1990), p. 48.

³⁴ Murray Bookchin, *The Progressive*, December 1991, pp. 18-21.

³⁵ George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), p. 15.

In a recent study, Robert Pois has described National Socialism as a “religion of nature.” As chief priest of this religion, Hitler denounced the evils of modernity (including liberal democracy, capitalism, and communism), proclaimed the need to renew contact with the elemental, primitive, organic, natural forces, and stressed the importance of restoring ancient folk customs, traditions, and attitudes.³⁶ These ideas appealed not only to the alienated bourgeoisie of Germany, but to people in the rest of Europe of as well. According to Pois,

the National Socialist call for the establishment of a utopian community, the *Volksgemeinschaft*, rooted in a perceived natural order . . . , reflected a certain extremely attractive dream historically very prominent in several forms of bourgeois ideology. The overcoming of alienation, not through some hideous form of class war, but rather through a revolution of consciousness, the result of which would be a new sense of rootedness and belonging. . . .³⁷

Hitler sought to replace the degenerate, otherworldly, transcendental belief systems of Judaism and Christianity with an immanent, this-worldly, scientifically grounded, nature-revering religion. In a phrase uncomfortably similar to some deep ecology literature, the Nazi ideologue Ernst Krieck attacked man’s “hubris and guilt” for trying to “master” nature, for such an attempt could only destroy the “natural foundations” of life.³⁸ In *Mein Kampf* Hitler proclaimed that

this planet once moved through the ether for millions of years without human beings and it can do so again some day if men forget they owe their higher existence, not to the ideas of a few crazy ideologues, but to the knowledge and ruthless application of Nature’s stern and rigid laws.³⁹

National Socialist ideologues rejected anthropocentrism, for it ignorantly assumed that nature was made for humanity. One author, emphasizing the scientific dimension of National Socialism, argued that “According to our conception of nature, man is a link in the chain of living nature just as any other organism.”⁴⁰ In 1939, Alfred Baeumler praised the view that man “must be understood as a part of Nature.”⁴¹ If the *Volk* hoped to survive, it had to follow nature’s law, including the law that superior races had to protect themselves from being sapped of their potency by mingling with racially inferior and degenerate races. We know what measures were taken to follow this “law” of nature. Nazi naturalism justified an organicist form of totalitarianism, which successfully

³⁶ Robert A. Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm Publishers, 1986).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30; emphasis added.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

appealed to people made anxious by the social atomism of liberal capitalism. Many people, alienated from the rational modern *Gesellschaft* were attracted to Hitler's vision of a tribalistic, "blood and soil" *Gemeinschaft*, to which they were required to sacrifice their own "selfish" interests.

Deep ecologists have at times lauded hunter-gatherer peoples for presumably living "closer" to nature. As Pois suggests, the hope that a total, extra-political, "paradigm change" can bring about a "future primitive" humanity living in a "reenchanted" nature is undeniably appealing to many people, when faced with "the rape of planet Earth that has occurred as the most significant result of predatory capitalism."⁴² This extra-political attitude is discernible in the slogan of the German Greens: "Neither left, nor right, but out in front." Tim Lukes points out the dangers involved if this yearning for tribalism in a reenchanted nature takes a wrong turn:

A reenchantment of Nature in Nordic myth and new Aryan ritual produced V-2s, Auschwitz, Me-262s, and nuclear fission, while covering itself in fables of Teutonic warriors true to tribal *Blut und Boden*. Ideologists of industrial fascism openly proclaimed it to be *anti-modern* and *future primitive*. Nazism also condemned industrialism and the overpopulation of most other societies as it propounded a very peculiar vision of reinhabiting its self-proclaimed and historically denied *Lebensraum*. One should not assume that deep ecology will lead necessarily to a fascist outcome; yet, the deep ecologists must demonstrate why their philosophy would not conclude in a similarly deformed fusion of modernity with premodernity.⁴³

Recently, Anna Bramwell has argued that National Socialism's espousal of elements of a "green" program should not lead us to conclude that concern about the welfare of nature and attempts to discover an appropriate humanity-nature relationship are intrinsically fascist. Indeed, according to Bramwell, because of its appeal to scientific findings about the interrelationship of all life, the ecology movement is (or at least was at one time) primarily a progressive, not a conservative movement.

The role of nature in German vitalist philosophy and philosophical anthropology between 1890 and 1933 has been associated with the growth of National Socialism, while irrationalist and 'cranky' movements have claimed a special relationship with Nature and Mother Earth. Conservative and reactionary movements have often looked to the peasant-landowners relationship as a source of national strength. However, the essential characteristic of ecology, while it does not fit happily into any one ideological category, is that it draws many of its conclusions from scientific ways of thinking, and is not conservative.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p. 151. On the idea of a "future primitive" humanity, see Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁴³ Tim Lukes, "The Dreams of Deep Ecology," *Telos*, no. 76 (1988): 65-92; citation from p. 78.

⁴⁴ Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 7; emphasis added.

In her concluding chapters, however, Bramwell depicts contemporary “ecologism” (presumably including deep ecology) as a reactionary, salvation-oriented movement which makes the entire Western tradition the scapegoat for ecological crisis. She accuses radical ecologists of harboring half-baked totalizing schemes that would unite scientific-ecological overlords with pro-peasant anarchists. Sounding like a Thatcherite, Bramwell maintains that

What after all today’s ecological movement is advocating is a return to primitivism, and the abandonment of treasure and knowledge to tribes and nations in foreign lands who pose no threat to us. Consciously or otherwise, this is a death-wish.⁴⁵

Self-identified deep ecologist, Christopher Manes, might be the kind of radical ecologist Bramwell has in mind. Manes, who used to write highly controversial essays for the *Earth First!* journal under the revealing pseudonym of “Miss Ann Thropy,” says that calling deep ecologists “deeply primitive activists opposed to industrial civilization” is “an essentially correct description of how most radical environmentalists feel toward industrialization.”⁴⁶ According to Manes, many radical ecologists see themselves as “future primitives,” “as part of a tribe rather than a political movement, as a resurgence of the primal culture that has been quiescent since the Neolithic.”⁴⁷ From Manes’ biocentric perspective, modern technology is only an expression of the *real* problem: civilization itself.

It is this conviction that prompts [Dave] Foreman to say that “we haven’t had any progress on this planet in sixteen thousand years. The only good invention since the atlat [a spear-throwing device considered to be the first compound tool] is the monkeywrench.”⁴⁸

This simultaneous condemnation of civilization and celebration of primitive tribalism is disturbing. Modern social atomism may be dispiriting, but modern tribalism is even worse, especially since it rejects the view that universal “rights” accrue to every person, just by virtue of being human. One need only witness the ethnic violence now occurring in Eastern Europe to see what can follow from totally repudiating such universalism, and from reviving old racial and ethnic hatreds.⁴⁹ Certainly we have something to learn from contemporary tribal peoples,

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 248.

⁴⁶ Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), p. 226.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 237. Oelschlaeger’s *The Idea of Wilderness* offers a far more nuanced analysis than does Manes of the difficulties facing the “postmodern primitive.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴⁹ For a critique of the idea that discarding universal conceptions of humanity will lead to the peaceful coexistence of fragmented ethnic and racial groups, see Thomas McCarthy, “The Politics

but we must not romanticize them. Some people think that by studying contemporary tribal people we will gain insight into what people believed many thousand of years ago, as if these contemporary people were “primitive throwbacks,” frozen in time while the rest of humanity continued to evolve culturally. Such an attitude, which may involve unintentional racism, needs critical scrutiny. Further, those who assume that prehistoric tribes must have existed in some blissful harmony with nature must reckon with the fact that, thousands of years ago, members of such tribes apparently hunted to extinction many large mammals in North America.

Even Manes admits that his utopian vision of a future-primitive humanity, living simply in multiple bioregions, is “unrealistic.”⁵⁰ Apparently more realistic is the view that the Earth can be saved only by radical political change. In connection with the claim that technological elites might use ecological problems as an excuse for consolidating their power, Manes cites the following passage from Heilbroner’s *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*:

[Ecological] exigencies of the future . . . point to the conclusion that only an authoritarian, or possibly only a revolutionary, regime will be capable of mounting the immense task of social reorganization needed to escape catastrophe.⁵¹

In view of approaching “ecological scarcity,” however, Manes apparently concludes that eco-activists should put authoritarian measures of their own into effect, before the technological elites do so. If he is right,

the individualistic basis of society, the concept of inalienable rights, the purely self-defining pursuit of happiness, liberty as maximum freedom of action, and laissez-faire itself all require abandonment if we wish to avoid inexorable environmental degradation and perhaps extinction as a civilization.⁵²

Given Manes’ earlier condemnation of modern civilization and his preference for hunter-gatherer lifestyle, one is puzzled by the fact that he now considers it worth saving. Far more disturbing than this apparent contradiction is his idea that “inalienable rights” must be “abandoned” to save civilization. To make such a statement without a trace of irony is to exhibit a lack of understanding of what has made our century so tragic. Heidegger also favored abandoning individual rights. Speaking in favor of the Nazi “revolution” that would save Western civilization from extinction, he proclaimed that “The individual by himself counts for

of the Ineffable: Derrida’s Deconstructionism,” *Philosophical Forum* 21, nos. 1-2 (Fall-Winter 1989-90): 146-68.

⁵⁰ Manes, *Green Rage*, p. 239.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37. See Heilbroner, *In Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), p. 26.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

nothing.”⁵³ Hence, he was silent while thousands of German socialists, communists, liberals, and other “un-German” types were rounded up into concentration camps near Freiburg. After the war, moreover, he refused to comment on the Nazi’s murder of millions of Jews and other “vermin.” During difficult times, he apparently concluded, difficult things have to be done. If Manes’ radical views prevail during a time of “ecological scarcity,” what would happen to selfish, ecologically unenlightened people who refused to “abandon” their inalienable rights? Would they be rounded up and possibly eliminated so that the Earth could recover from the effects of the “human cancer” now afflicting it?

DEEP ECOLOGY REPLIES TO ITS CRITICS

The yearning of deep ecologists for a reconciliation between humanity and nature does not necessarily entail fascism, any more than did the similar yearning of most German romantics, who had broad republican leanings, who did not want to regress to a more primitive era, and who were *not* irrationalists.⁵⁴ Some of the statements made by Manes and by other Earth First!/deep ecology activists are very disturbing, but the major deep ecology *theorists* have dissociated themselves from misanthropic, proto-fascist, and racist views. Given their primary norm of self-realization, their insistence on the intrinsic worth of individual members as well as systemic aspects of the ecosphere, their emphasis on pluralism and diversity, and their endorsement of Gandhi’s non-violent approach to social change, deep ecology theorists can hardly be mistaken for ecofascists. Although influenced by Eastern traditions and Spinoza, American deep ecology may be even more influenced by the indigenous American view that human salvation is somehow dependent on wilderness experience. This view, initially developed by the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards, was later voiced by Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, and even Edward Abbey.⁵⁵ This salvific conception of wilderness is so bound up with American ideals about personal liberty that it cannot readily be reconciled with European “ecofascism,” although some Earth First! radicals seem to flirt with this possibility.

The leader of the European branch of deep ecology, Arne Naess, is well aware of the dangers of ecofascism. As a young man, he played a role in the Norwegian resistance against Nazi occupation. Hence, his efforts to encourage a wider identification with nonhuman beings reflects awareness of the dangers posed by

⁵³ Cited in Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1988), p. 231.

⁵⁴ On this topic, see Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott: Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), and *Gott im Exil* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).

⁵⁵ While insightful, Oelschlaeger’s account of Thoreau, Muir, and Jeffers in *The Idea of Wilderness* does not acknowledge how much they were influenced by Puritan views about wilderness. See David R. Williams’ excellent book, *Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American Mind* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1987).

a naive revitalizing of “primitive” attitudes. Since they are aware that attempts are often made to discredit radical views by labeling them as proto-fascist or neo-Marxist, deep ecologists might ask: whose interests would be benefited if deep ecology, strongly critical of rapacious industrialism, were to be dismissed as an incipient ecofascism?

While questioning the motives of some of their critics, deep ecologists have, nevertheless, used the criticism as an opportunity to clarify and to reflect upon their own views. For example, in connection with explaining the need for a reduction in human population to insure the survival of other species, George Sessions has remarked:

There are a lot of fears being raised [about deep ecology]; some social ecologists raise the specter of genetic engineering, racism, Nazi attempts to liquidate people, social justice issues, and so on, and these are very real concerns. Of course, deep ecologists are not suggesting any of those things.⁵⁶

Although maintaining that changes are needed so that humanity exists within limits compatible with the flourishing both of the human species and with many other species as well, deep ecologists say such change must be *voluntary*, brought about by education and by the evolution of attitudes consistent with self-realization. Moreover, reducing the Earth’s population to an ecologically sustainable size, one compatible with the flourishing of millions of other species, might take up to a thousand years, assuming this reduction takes place gradually and voluntarily as envisioned by deep ecologists.

Regarding deep ecology, Warwick Fox warns critics not to commit the fallacy of “misplaced misanthropy.” That is, just because deep ecology criticizes an arrogant anthropocentrism, this fact does *not* mean that deep ecology is misanthropic.⁵⁷ Like Fox, Naess maintains that such anthropocentrism is problematic not least because it undermines genuine *human* interests.⁵⁸ An overemphasis on human concerns, at the expense of and to the neglect of other life forms, will ultimately backfire because human well-being is bound up with the well-being of the rest of life on Earth. In reply to Bramwell, deep ecologists could say that if there is a “death wish” at work anywhere, it is anthropocentric socioeconomic institutions that destroy the ecosphere for the sake of “progress.” Social ecologists argue that such destruction stems not from some vague “anthropocentrism,” but rather from specific hierarchical power structures which let *some* humans dominate *other* humans and nature as well, as evidenced by the predatory practices of multinational corporations that have led to population “problems” in Third World

⁵⁶ This remark is from the unedited version of an interview with Sessions, “Wilderness: Back to Basics.” The edited version was published in *Creation* 5, no. 2 (May/June 1989): 17-19, 33.

⁵⁷ Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁸ Arne Naess, “The Arrogance of Anti-Humanism?” *Ecophilosophy* 6 (1984): 9.

countries.⁵⁹ Deep ecologists reply that, since the exploiting groups generally use anthropocentric arguments (“Our goal is to promote human progress”) to justify their own rapacious practices, challenging anthropocentrism is a form of ideological unmasking. Moreover, in 1973, Naess emphasized deep ecology’s “anti-class posture,” its conviction that oppressive elites exploit other humans and nature as well. He thus appears to agree with the basic claim of social ecology: social hierarchy is central to the domination of humanity *and* nature.

Deep ecologists resent the charge that they are calling for fascist measures to sacrifice individuals to the larger cosmic whole. Fox emphasizes that from an ecocentric viewpoint, all autopoietic (self-organizing) systems, both individual and systemic, deserve respect. Hence, “individual biological organisms should be free to follow their diverse individual and evolutionary paths to the extent that this does not involve seriously damaging the autopoietic (i.e., the self-regenerating) functioning of their ecosystem or the ecosphere.”⁶⁰ Even if one accepts this position, however, questions remain: who will decide what counts as “serious” damage, who will assign blame for causing it, and who will determine what changes must take place to correct it? Deep ecologists need to address such questions in close cooperation with other environmental groups.

Despite their adherence to an ecocentric orientation, deep ecologists argue that their respect for persons, individual organisms, and systemic processes prevents them from promoting a holistic ecofascism. Indeed, they would argue that National Socialism, far from being biocentric, was in fact an anthropocentrism totalitarianism, involving a curious conflation of reactionary mythic attitudes, on the one hand, and a commitment to technological modernity, on the other.⁶¹ The use to which they put their technological skills indicates that National Socialist appeals to “natural laws” were ideological statements justifying their domination of nature and of supposedly inferior humans.

Deep ecologists also reject the charge that their interest in tribal cultures is proto-fascist. Nazi “tribalism,” an instance of mass-cultural totalitarianism, was not consistent with the individualistic and anarchistic tendencies discernible in many Native American tribal peoples, including the Iroquois, who played an important role in shaping the American constitution.⁶² Nevertheless, Gary Snyder acknowledges that attempts to form small, bioregional cultures can promote cultural orthodoxy or regional parochialism:

⁵⁹ On this topic, see Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins’ excellent book, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* (New York: Grove Press, 1986).

⁶⁰ Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, pp. 178-79.

⁶¹ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁶² See *Indian Roots of American Democracy*, ed. Jose Barreiro, Special Constitution Bicentennial Edition issue of *Northeast Indian*, 4, no. 4 (Winter 1987) and 5, no. 1 (Spring 1988).

It's this side of cultural regeneration, and bioregionalism, that makes sharp urban leftist socialists leery of it. Is this going to be move toward rebuilding some new kind of Third Reich mentality? . . . Hitler used a lot of archetypes of cultural regeneration very successfully, and really turned many Germans on to a visionary sense of their own past and a phony destiny. We're steering in very subtle water here, and you have to be psychologically, historically, and anthropologically precise about what you're doing.⁶³

In its effort to regenerate culture, deep ecology promotes a rebirth of the sacred. This attempt does *not* mean, however, that it favors either a fascist nature religion, or clerical authoritarianism, dogmatism, and superstition, all of which were rightly criticized by Enlightenment *philosophes*. Deep ecologists are hardly alone in arguing that Enlightenment secularism went so far in disenchanting the world that eventually even humanity came to be treated like industrialism treated the rest of nature: as raw material. I want to emphasize that while the fact that some National Socialists promoted a perverted "religion of nature" must be taken into account today, that fact should not be allowed to discredit all contemporary attempts—ranging from creation-centered to goddess spirituality—to recover a sense of the sacred dimension of the cosmos.

II. IS HEIDEGGER'S THOUGHT INCOMPATIBLE WITH DEEP ECOLOGY?

HEIDEGGER'S ANTI-NATURALISTIC VIEW OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Although the apparent connection between Heidegger's thought and deep ecology is not the *only* reason that some suspect it of proto-fascist leanings, those suspicions might be alleviated if his thought could be shown to be *incompatible* with deep ecology. One important difference between the two is that while deep ecologists maintain that humanity is a part of life on Earth, Heidegger, like many other anti-Darwinian conservatives, held that *humans are not animals*.⁶⁴ In fact, he argued that the modernity's "naturalistic humanism" was the final, nihilistic stage of Aristotle's definition of humans as rational animals. Because of this attitude, his former student, Karl Löwith, accused him of perpetuating the anthropocentrism and dualism so characteristic of the metaphysical and theological traditions which he purported to overcome!⁶⁵ How can someone who

⁶³ Gary Snyder, "Regenerate Culture!" an interview in *Turtle Talk*, ed. Christopher Plant and Judith Plant (Philadelphia, Santa Cruz, Lillooet: New Society Publishers, 1990), p. 16.

⁶⁴ For examples of Heidegger's critique of naturalism and his rejection of the "animality" of humankind, see his "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi with J. Glenn Gray, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

⁶⁵ See Karl Löwith, *Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1960); "Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage: Die Natur des Menschen und die Welt der

denied that humans are intelligent animals be regarded as a forerunner of deep ecology?

In addressing this question, we should first recall that Heidegger attacked a particular kind of naturalism, one consistent with reductive materialism, social Darwinism, and positivism. He argued that naturalistic explanations are possible only because natural entities are *first* disclosed through human existence. In his view, this capacity for disclosure cannot be explained by a science made possible by that capacity. Calling on early Greek thought and on Hölderlin's poetry, he developed an alternative account of human existence and nature. In his view, nature may be understood as *physis*: presencing, or being. Such presencing cannot be explained by causal processes; rather, natural things can be interpreted causally only because they first *present* or *manifest* themselves. Nature, then, is not a totality of causally related material particles, but instead a self-gathering event of manifesting.

Critics have noted that, because National Socialism and Heidegger were both opponents of Marxism, they refused to explain historical events solely in terms of socioeconomic "causes," but rather in terms of something more primal. For National Socialism, however, this "primal" was non-transcendental and naturalistic: the Will to Power. For Heidegger, the primal was transcendental and non-naturalistic: the being of entities. Of course, insofar as nature (*physis*) appropriates human existence as the opening for the self-manifesting of entities, Heidegger conceded that human existence is a part of "nature." But his idea of nature, and of humanity as "caring" openness which "lets things be," are radically opposed to the crude naturalism of National Socialism.

HEIDEGGER, BUDDHISM, AND DEEP ECOLOGY

Heidegger's views are similar to the idea of emptiness found in Christian mysticism and Buddhism.⁶⁶ Buddhist and Christian mysticism maintain that dualism is an illusion associated with identifying either with the ego or with the body in which the ego is "housed." So long as one thinks that one *is* either ego or body, one will spontaneously struggle to defend them against threats posed by the "external" world. Moving beyond this defensive view of self requires that one experience oneself not as a "thing" at all, but rather as the emptiness or opening in which all things appear, including the internal relations that constitute things.

Natur," in *Aufsätze und Vorträge. 1930-1970* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1971). Another former student, Hans Jonas, in *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), charged early Heidegger with holding a Gnostic view of humanity as being alien to the natural world.

⁶⁶ See Joanna Macy, "Deep Ecology and the Council of All Beings," *ReVision* 9, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 1987): 53-56, and Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

Once it is revealed that to be human means to be the openness in which things can manifest themselves and thus “be,” it becomes possible to identify with and to care about all things, not just the ego body. Paradoxically, when one becomes “nothing” (the openness), one simultaneously becomes “everything,” in the sense that one no longer identifies with and defends a particular phenomenon—the ego body—but rather can identify with all things and “let them be.” Mystics argue that their path is not a flight into otherworldly abstraction, but instead the most concrete way of encountering things. Spinoza, for example, maintained that at the most realized level of awareness one discerns that each particular thing *is* God. Presumably, such ontological realization would elicit major changes in one’s everyday treatment of things!⁶⁷

Many deep ecologists shy away from the term *mysticism*, preferring instead to speak of profound *intuition*. Whatever term is used for this nondualist sense of connectedness, it may pose some problems for deep ecology. For one thing, the intuition that all things are interrelated manifestations of God (or, as Naess sometimes says, *Atman*) may support the ideal of “radical ecocentric egalitarianism,” but what then is the decision procedure to be followed in the face of dilemmas, e.g., the alternative saving either a child or a deer? Naess maintains that our primary obligation is to our “nearest and dearest,” including members of our own species. He also argues, nevertheless, that adjudication of conflicts between the needs of humans and nonhumans would be very different if we realized that we have a relationship with and obligation to not only humans but all forms of life. While appealing, however, such an idea does not address what is to be done with the many “life forms” that are so deadly to human beings, including viruses and bacteria.

The nondualist traditions point out that one must pass through and consolidate the stage of egoic individuation, in what Hegel would call a moment of *Aufhebung*, before one moves to a higher level of awareness. In this higher stage, the ego is not destroyed, but surpassed. As the saying goes: “You must be somebody before you can become nobody.” Otherwise, one risks regressing to a pre-individualistic stage of awareness.⁶⁸ Aware that regression and recollectivization were probably involved in fascist and communist totalitarianism, Naess concedes that the evolution to a higher, more integrated stage of awareness can only take place gradually. He maintains that evolving beyond exclusive concern with oneself and even with one’s own species, toward a wider sense of identification, is the central idea of self-realization:

⁶⁷ Concerning the importance of Spinoza’s mysticism for deep ecology, see George Sessions, “Spinoza and Jeffers on Man in Nature,” *Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1977): 481-528; Arne Naess, *Freedom, Emotion and Self-Subsistence: The Structure of a Central Part of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Oslo: University of Oslo Press, 1975); Naess, “Spinoza and Ecology,” *Philosophia* 7 (1977): 45-54.

⁶⁸ On this topic, see Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton/Bollingen, 1971) and Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden* (Boston: Shambhala, 1981).

It may sound paradoxical, but with a more lofty image of maturity in humans, the appeal to serve deep, specifically *human* interests is in full harmony with the norms of deep ecology. But this is evident only if we are careful to make our terminology clear. This terminology is today far from common but it may have an illuminating impact. It proclaims that essentially there is at present a sorry underestimation of the potentialities of the human species. Our species is not destined to be the scourge of the Earth. If it is bound to be anything, perhaps it is to be the conscious joyful appreciator of this planet as an even greater whole of its immense richness. This may be its 'evolutionary potential' or an ineradicable part of it.⁶⁹

Naess has remarked that his nonanthropocentric, nondualistic humanism resembles Mahayana Buddhism in calling for self-realization and self-determination not only for humans, but also for all beings. With the emergence of deep ecological sensibility, people would apparently no longer be obsessed by *having* an ever-expanding amount of material goods, but instead would find satisfaction in *being* human authentically, i.e., as the open awareness through which entities may display themselves. Buddhism also provides a mediating link which may help to reconcile the apparent conflict between Heidegger's anti-naturalism and deep ecology's naturalism.⁷⁰ Naess argues that the ordinary scientific conception of "nature" as a totality of causally related material events is often used to support a materialist and dualistic metaphysics.⁷¹ While appealing to the findings of the science of ecology concerning the interrelatedness of all things, Naess looks to Mahayana Buddhism for an alternative account of such interrelatedness. Mahayana Buddhism is a kind of phenomenism: hence, "to be" means to appear, to be manifest. Subject and object, perceiver and thing perceived: all *are* event phenomena. "Things" have no essence, no self-identity, but rather are profoundly interrelated, temporary constellations of concrete perceptions. Phenomena are not "caused" by material objects stimulating sensory organs; rather, the very notion of "material object" is itself a function of an intellectual abstraction, one that conceals the primal level of manifesting or appearing that constitutes the concrete contents of "experience."

There are affinities between such phenomenism and Heidegger's notion that for things to be means for them to be manifest. According to Buddhism and Heidegger, if we suspend the interpretive categories which we usually project upon ourselves and the world, we encounter the sheer "manifesting" of things without the addition of causal explanation or interpretation. For Heidegger, this manifesting has no "content": no color, shape, location. Instead, manifesting names the condition necessary for the possibility of encountering phenomena as phenomena. For Buddhism, manifesting is also not a thing, but is the revelation

⁶⁹ Arne Naess, "The Arrogance of Antihumanism?" *Ecophilosophy* 6 (1984): 8.

⁷⁰ Michael E. Zimmerman, "Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁷¹ Arne Naess, "The World of Concrete Contents," *Inquiry* 28 (1985): 417-28.

of concrete contents prior to any judgment or evaluation of them. Any such judgments, of course, would themselves be instances of concrete contents.

For Heidegger, a meditative “step back” enables us to encounter everyday things in a profoundly new way: as the constituent elements of the self-gathering “fourfold” of earth and sky, gods and mortals. The fourfold constitutes the ringing dance in which all phenomena arise, manifest themselves, and move in harmonious internal relationships. Heidegger used the Chinese term *Tao* to describe the “way” of this cosmic dance.⁷² For Buddhism, the meditative “step back” reveals not only the insubstantiality of the ego and of all other things, but the absolute nothingness (*sunyata*) within which all concrete perceptual contents arise. For Heidegger and Buddhism, human awareness occurs *within* and *belongs to* this larger openness/nothingness. Human awareness makes it possible for things to manifest themselves in a particularly focused way, but other sentient beings make other ways of manifesting possible as well.

The concrete contents of experience constitute themselves as temporary ontical constellations, which we encounter as rocks, trees, animals, and people. Pain is a feature of sentient perceptual constellations. In addition to having pain, however, humans suffer. Insight can alleviate suffering, which stems from ignorance about the insubstantiality and mortality of the ego. Insight into one’s own insubstantiality not only releases one from suffering caused by clinging, but also spontaneously gives rise to compassion about the pain and suffering of other sentient beings. For deep ecology, as for Buddhism, humanity’s domineering attitude toward nature arises from the same ignorance that leads people to exploit each other. Hence, since authoritarian social structures reflect the fearful, constricted awareness of individuals, we cannot hope for structural change apart from individual transformation.

While there are differences between Heideggerean and Buddhist phenomenism, both agree that Western conception of progress is problematic. For Heidegger, progress is a metaphysical conception which has justified the domination of the Earth. For Buddhism, progress is an abstract concept projected onto concrete contents in a way that gives rise to anxiety, fear, and restlessness.⁷³ Insofar as Heidegger retains the notion of the history of being, many Buddhists would accuse him of clinging to anthropocentric and ethnocentric abstractions that impede liberation. Both Heidegger and Buddhism would say that scientific conceptions of the interrelatedness of “reality” are useful but misleading. There is no necessary relationship between one interrelationship of matter-energy events in space-time,

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 92; *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1971), p. 198.

⁷³ While it is tempting to suggest that Buddhism offers an alternative to Western domination of nature, Philip Novak argues, in “Tao How? Asian Religions and the Problem of Environmental Degradation,” *ReVision* 9, no. 2 (1987): 33-40, that Asian countries have poor environmental records despite the presence of putatively nature-oriented religions, including Buddhism.

on the one hand, and the interrelationship of all concrete contents as phenomena emerging from Nothingness, on the other. Further, the claim that humans and nature are “totally interconnected,” as understood from either the scientific or the nondualist perspective, needs further clarification.

Efforts by deep ecologists to assimilate Heidegger are complicated by the fact that his view of “nature” seems so foreign to deep ecology’s ecocentrism. Yet Naess’ phenomenism, in many ways consistent both with Buddhism and with Heidegger’s thought, suggests that our ordinary understanding of humans as intelligent animals has only a limited validity. Naess’ nondualism challenges the idea that nature is a totality of matter-energy “existing” independently of perceiving subjects. For phenomenism, being *involves* perceiving, but perception is not an exclusively human capacity. In some sense, the cosmos is an event of constant self-manifesting. Precisely how to reconcile this ontological phenomenism with contemporary ecology, biology, and physics was not all that important for Heidegger, who never claimed to be speaking as an “ecologist,” and who even denied that humans are products of terrestrial evolution. Assuming I have understood Naess’ phenomenism correctly, however, I believe he needs to address in more detail how such a reconciliation is possible. There is a gap between his view of Self as *Atman* or as absolute emptiness, on the one hand, and Devall and Sessions’ view of Self as “organic wholeness.”⁷⁴ The task is challenging, since phenomenal ontology and science operate on altogether different levels. For ontological phenomenism, “causal” explanations fail to understand the uncaused, groundless nature of the moment-by-moment event of appearing. While useful, causal accounts of “reality” are comparable to the stories that people chained in Plato’s cave tell about shadows cast on the wall before them.

IV. THE PROGRESSIVE “EVOLUTION” OF CONSCIOUSNESS?

Why should we expect a transition to a nonanthropocentric, nondualistic mode of awareness? Heidegger and deep ecologists answer this question differently. Heidegger conceived of this transition *not* as the next stage in the progressive actualization of humanity’s potential, but instead as a sudden turning in the “destiny of being,” involving the arrival of new, meaning-restoring gods. In contrast, deep ecologists often suggest that such a transition would involve a new stage in human evolution. At that stage, humanity would recognize that its own self-realization was bound up with the self-realization of the rest of life on Earth. In *The Ecological Self*, Freya Matthews argues that the universe itself is characterized by conatus, the striving for self-realization that leads to ever greater complexity.⁷⁵ Because deep ecology maintains that humanity is actualizing its potential, and because it adheres to its own version of a progressive, evolutionary

⁷⁴ Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 67.

⁷⁵ Matthews, *The Ecological Self*.

view of history, deep ecology parts company with Heidegger, who rejected such views and maintained instead that Western history is the story of humanity's degeneration.

In *The Rights of Nature*, Roderick Nash argues that by holding a progressive view of human self-realization, deep ecology adheres to modernity's emancipatory ideals. While conceding that modernity has led to serious ecological problems, Nash emphasizes the positive side of its struggle for liberty, which deep ecology expands in order to free *nature* from human oppression:

Conceived of as promoting the liberation of exploited and oppressed members of the American ecological community, even the most radical fringe of the contemporary environmental movement can be understood not so much as a revolt against traditional American ideals as an extension and new application of them.⁷⁶

Robyn Eckersley proposes that deep ecology's norm of wider identification involves the ideal of "emancipation writ large."⁷⁷ Moreover, in saying that humans have "no right" to reduce the richness and diversity of life forms, except to satisfy vital human needs, Naess and Sessions employ emancipatory rhetoric that has something in common with moral and political extensionism.⁷⁸ Jim Cheney argues, however, that unlike emancipation movements which focus on freeing the oppressed in specific historical circumstances, deep ecology is a salvation movement with an ahistorical focus.⁷⁹ Yet, Arne Naess would reply that his hero, Gandhi, combined salvational aims with *historically* specific emancipatory aims. Furthermore, while Spinoza did tend to take an ahistorical, neo-Stoic, salvational view, even he explained how his views on freedom pertained to contemporary political problems.

It should be emphasized, moreover, that deep ecology's reading of Spinoza has been influenced by subsequent developments in Western culture, including attempts to link emancipatory political developments with an evolutionary interpretation of human history. Hegel's thought is the most important example of such an attempt. His Absolute Subject realizing its freedom through historical stages may be understood as Spinoza's Substance (God/Nature) transformed by Aristotelian ideas about actualizing potential. Hegel attempted to combine a

⁷⁶ Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 11-12.

⁷⁷ Robyn Eckersley, "Emancipation Writ Large: Toward an Ecocentric Green Political Theory" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tasmania, 1990). Cited in Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, p. 265.

⁷⁸ This statement is from the eight-point deep ecology "platform" devised by Naess and Sessions in 1984. See Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, trans. and ed. David Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 29. Fox and Naess emphasize that they use the term *right* in a rather loose, non-technical way so as to avoid the disputes that have arisen regarding this term in environmental ethics.

⁷⁹ Jim Cheney, "Nature and the Theorizing of Difference," *Contemporary Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (1990): 1-14; citation from p. 4.

(rational, post-religious) salvational view, on the one hand, with a progressive, evolutionary, and historically contextual view, on the other. Deep ecologists, however, criticize Hegel's anthropocentrism and his domineering attitude toward nature.⁸⁰

Earlier, I cited Naess' claim that humanity's evolutionary potential involves contributing to the well-being of all life on the planet. More recently, Sessions has also suggested that humanity is evolving into a more compassionate, life-affirming species. According to this developmental viewpoint, contemporary humanity is in the stage of late adolescence: lusting for control, totally self-centered, denying its own finitude and mortality, and wasteful of resources. Humanity's "maturation" process is not linear, but involves a "loop back" to reintegrate the lost wisdom of primal peoples. Such "reintegration," however, is a far cry from regression to the stage of hunter-gatherers. Sessions comments that

I do think there is cultural development as well as individual development. It is not as if [human history] has been for naught. It will be if we do in the species. . . . There has been progress, now we have this winnowing process we have to do. Paul Shepard asks if we can face that the primal peoples were more human than we are. In some ways they were, but not in all ways.⁸¹

Acknowledging that modern humanity surpasses the self-reflexivity of ancient tribal peoples, Sessions concludes that Thomas Berry may be right in maintaining that

we are the species that can understand the overall outlines of the cosmological and biological evolutionary process. Our theoretical science can be used to appreciate and understand the world and produce ecologically benign technology, or we can erroneously try to dominate the planet with it. Our self-reflexivity has made us aware of the ecological crisis, so that we can correct ourselves. It can help us to take a larger, more objective cosmic and ecological perspective.⁸²

Berry and Brian Swimme have been developing a "new universe story," grounded in part on contemporary cosmological ideas about the self-organizing universe.⁸³ Berry was originally influenced by Teilhard de Chardin's vision that humanity was destined to encircle the planet, so as to form a "noosphere" that would shape subsequent evolution. Eventually concluding that Teilhard's vision was too influenced by the modern control-impulse, Berry, nevertheless, regards human awareness as a dimension of the process by which the universe is becoming

⁸⁰ See Sessions, "Spinoza and Jeffers on Man in Nature." See also Fox's critique of "cosmic purpose ethics" in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, pp. 179-84.

⁸¹ Sessions, "Wilderness: Back to Basics," unedited version.

⁸² Sessions, "Wilderness: Back to Basics," edited version, p. 19.

⁸³ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1989); Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon* (Santa Fe: Bear and Co., 1985).

self-conscious. Berry and Swimme bring science into dialogue with spiritual, religious, and philosophical narratives, so as to develop a new cosmology, necessary to articulate an appropriate relation between humanity and nature. Deep ecologists find the work of Berry and Swimme attractive because, while celebrating humanity's role in cosmic evolution, they do not portray humanity as the meaning or goal of such evolution. Although also citing positively the work of Fritjof Capra and Theodore Roszak, who have their own ideas about the evolution of consciousness, deep ecologists worry about whether those ideas are too influenced by New Age anthropocentrism.⁸⁴

Murray Bookchin, regarding the anthropocentrism issue as a red herring, supports a neo-Hegelian progressive, developmental view of cosmic and human history, which he calls "dialectical naturalism." While admitting that Hegel was wrong for viewing the evolution of freedom as a *necessary* historical development with a predefined goal, Bookchin insists that there is a "directionality" or *nisus* to evolution: it does produce ever more complex and freer forms of life. In evolution,

a relatively undifferentiated, *implicit* arrangement or potentiality is rendered explicit, or *actual*, by its own self-development. . . . What I call *dialectical naturalism* . . . shakes off Hegel's idealism and Marxist mechanicism in favor of an ecological approach that sees nature in all its forms as self-organizing and self-formative with neither a cosmic subject nor mechanical "forces" to inform a development. Dialectical naturalism retains the entelechial notions of dialectical philosophy, but modifies Hegel's concept of wholeness such that development does not terminate in an Absolute.⁸⁵

While deep ecologists could agree with Bookchin's view that cosmic evolution has in fact led to "greater subjectivity, consciousness, [and] self-reflexivity," they maintain that he draws the following problematic conclusion: because of humanity's greater consciousness, humans are justified in intervening in the evolutionary development of everything less conscious.⁸⁶ Given the fact that Bookchin and Heidegger are both much indebted to Hegel, it is not surprising that Bookchin's evolutionary view that it is "the *responsibility* of the most conscious of life-forms—humanity—to be the 'voice' of a mute nature"⁸⁷ is in some ways consistent with Heidegger's non-evolutionary view that human existence is the clearing through which entities can manifest themselves as entities. This proximity between Bookchin and Heidegger's view on this issue, despite other important

⁸⁴ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); Theodore Roszak, *Unfinished Animal* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975). Wilber's version of the evolution of consciousness, *Up from Eden*, is regarded as too anthropocentric by many deep ecologists.

⁸⁵ Murray Bookchin, "Recovering Evolution: A Reply to Eckersley and Fox," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 253-74; citation from 266-68.

⁸⁶ Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, p. 44.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

differences, is one reason that deep ecologists suspect that Heidegger's thought is anthropocentric, despite *his* protests to the contrary.

While generally agreeing that humanity is in the process of realizing its potential, deep and social ecologists disagree about how to define this potential. Deep ecologists argue that because Bookchin views humanity as having the potential to "act to intelligently to foster organic evolution,"⁸⁸ his views are similar to the anthropocentrism of Teilhard. As Eckersley notes, Bookchin regards humanity as the rational "second nature" capable of furthering "first nature's potentiality to achieve mind and truth."⁸⁹ Humanity thus

has a responsibility to direct rationally the evolutionary process, which in Bookchin's terms means fostering a more diverse, complex, and fecund biosphere. Indeed, we may "create more fecund gardens than Eden itself."⁹⁰

Many deep ecologists fear that Bookchin would support genetic engineering of the kind envisioned by what Jeremy Rifkin has called "algeny," the inventing, patenting, marketing, and exploiting of new forms of life.⁹¹ In his reply to Eckersley, however, Bookchin disavows any interest in "dominating" nature (an idea which he regards as senseless to begin with). Instead, he calls for humans to enter into a *symbiotic* relationship with nature, so that they can contribute to the creativity of Earth's own ongoing evolutionary processes. Bookchin charges that "Deep ecology tends to see nature not as a development but as a scenic view in which human beings—granted certain "unique" traits—are fixtures in a virginal habitat rather than products of a complex evolution."⁹²

In fact, deep ecologists have sometimes spoken as if they favor a do-not-disturb attitude toward nature.⁹³ They suggest that vast wilderness areas should be made largely "off limits" to people, in order to protect wild species and to foster speciation. While conceding that there are apparent contradictions and perhaps insurmountable difficulties involved in working for "wilderness" areas on a planet that is becoming totally domesticated, they argue that experience with wild nature often leads to a sense of "identification" with nonhuman life.⁹⁴ Without the possibility of such experience, people would not be led to question the presuppo-

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Cited by Robyn Eckersley in "Divining Evolution: The Ecological Ethics of Murray Bookchin," *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 2 (1989): 99-116; citation on p. 111.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jeremy Rifkin, in collaboration with Nicanor Perlas, *Algeny* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

⁹² Bookchin, "Recovering Evolution," p. 274.

⁹³ Cf. Jim Cheney, "The Neo-Stoicism of Radical Environmentalism," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 293-325.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Bill Devall and George Sessions, "The Development of Natural Resources and the Integrity of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 6, no. 4 (1984): 293-322. For a more recent statement, see George Sessions, "Ecocentrism, Wilderness, and Global Ecosystem Protection," in

sitions of our culture. Deep ecologists maintain that there is no contradiction between protecting wild nature and affirming that humanity is a creative, self-reflexive species capable both of bearing witness to and participating in the evolution of life. Wary of human arrogance, deep ecologists fear that “participating” will turn into “subjugating.”

Bookchin regards deep ecology as naive and obstructionist for not affirming that humanity’s capacity for intervening in evolution is itself the product of evolution. While highly critical of Marx’s authoritarianism, the anarchist Bookchin agrees with Marx that human self-realization is inextricably related to freely creating, producing, and fostering new possibilities. Bookchin maintains that it is not anthropocentrism, but hierarchical, authoritarian social structures that are responsible for modernity’s destructive treatment of nature. Freed from such social structures, humanity could realize its own productive potential by letting things be, both in the sense of treating them respectfully and in the sense of promoting their evolutionary potential.

Many deep ecologists, however, contend that other species don’t need any help in realizing their potential. Following Heidegger, deep ecologists would argue that Bookchin’s interventionist attitude reflects his attachment to Marx’s anthropocentric, “productionist” metaphysics, according to which something really “is” only insofar as it is an object of human production and consumption. Bookchin seems to subscribe to an ecologically updated, anarchist version of the labor theory of value. Deep ecologists, however, conceive of “letting things be” not so much as *producing* things, but rather as freeing them up to realize their own potential. Humans can be the “voice” of nature only in quite limited ways. The fact is that many nonhuman beings are not “mute,” although an arrogant anthropocentrism prevents us from listening more carefully.⁹⁵

The differences between deep ecology and social ecology are not trivial. Some people in both camps insist that the differences are irreconcilable. Nevertheless, I believe that if those people engaged in a more constructive dialogue, they would at least learn something from one another. A third figure often helps to mediate between conflicting viewpoints. In my own case, Heidegger’s thought has proven helpful in mediating between deep ecology and social ecology. In turn, deep ecologists and social ecologists have both helped me see the limitations of Heidegger’s thought. His desperate yearning for a new “narrative” to save Germany went astray, in part, because he denied to nature and history any progressive or evolutionary dimension. In somewhat different ways, deep ecologists and social ecologists affirm that we need a new cosmology or a new narrative, one that is consistent with contemporary science, and that reveals how human self-

The Wilderness Condition, ed. Max Oelschlaeger (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1992), pp. 96-130.

⁹⁵ See David Abram, “The Perceptual Implications of Gaia,” *ReVision* 9, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 1987): 7-16.

realization is tied up with the self-realization of the universe as a whole.⁹⁶ I would prefer to speak of “narratives,” in the plural, to emphasize that today we must avoid duplicating modernity’s quest for the one true story.⁹⁷

In working on their particular narratives, deep ecologists might benefit from addressing questions like the following. Can narratives of human potential and cosmic evolution simultaneously embrace the positive aspect of the emancipatory impulse of modernity; move beyond its dualism, anthropocentrism, and foundationalism; take into account contemporary scientific thought; encourage cultural diversity and human creativity; and promote new socioeconomic formations that both protect individual freedoms and encourage decentralized, non-authoritarian, communally responsive and environmentally sensitive economic practices? Since it will presumably require centuries for humanity to move beyond its current stage, what steps can be taken in the meantime to avoid wreaking irrevocable damage upon the ecosphere? How can such steps avoid reproducing the repressive social structures responsible for causing such damage? Is religious awe in the face of the beauty of this planet reconcilable with affirmation of humanity’s ability not only to appreciate that planet, but also to intervene in its evolutionary destiny?

⁹⁶ In *The Ecological Self*, Matthews offers a deep ecological version of such a narrative.

⁹⁷ In “The Case Against Moral Pluralism,” *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 99-124, J. Baird Callicott argues that while postmodern theorists are right that we must abandon hope for final “truth,” we must continue searching for a viable new myth, “an intellectual construct that comprehends and systematizes more of our experience and does so more coherently than any other.” For a critique of deep ecology from the perspective of postmodern ecofeminism, see Jim Cheney, “The Neo-Stoicism of Radical Environmentalism,” *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 4 (1989): 293-325.