

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE ONE

INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS EMERGENCE

STUDY EXERCISES

Exercise A

Reading: Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep Long Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', in *Inquiry*, 16, 1, pp. 95-100.

- Can you see any problems that might stem from Naess' belief in 'the equal right to live and blossom'?

Exercise B

Reading: Naess, 'The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in *Philosophical Inquiry*, Vol. VIII, Nos.1-2, 1986, pp.9-31; and Alasdair Cochrane, 'Environmental Ethics', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Apr. 2007, accessible at www.iep.utm.edu/envi-eth.

Naess claims that his deep ecology is based on 'one ultimate norm', that norm being 'Self-realization' (Naess, 1986). Alasdair Cochrane outlines what this involves:

For Naess, this norm involves giving up a narrow egoistic conception of the self in favor of a wider more comprehensive Self (hence the deliberate capital "S"). Moving to this wider Self involves recognizing that as human beings we are not removed from nature, but are interconnected with it. Recognizing our wider Self thus involves identifying ourselves with all other life forms on the planet. The Australian philosopher Warwick Fox has taken up this theme of self-realization in his own eco-philosophy, "transpersonal ecology". Fox does not regard environmental ethics to be predominantly about formulating our moral obligations concerning the environment, but instead views it as about the realization of an "ecological consciousness". For Fox, as with Naess, this consciousness involves our widest possible identification with the non-human world. The usual ethical concern of formulating principles and obligations thus becomes unnecessary, according to Fox, for once the appropriate consciousness is established, one will naturally protect the environment and allow it to flourish, for that will be part and parcel of the protection and flourishing of oneself (Fox, 1990)' (Cochrane, 2007). [Cochrane references Fox, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1990).]

- Outline the main criticisms of Naess' deep ecology and its focus on self-realisation as discussed by Cochrane.

Exercise C

In April 1986 George Sessions and Arne Naess summarised the basic principles of deep ecology. Read through the eight principles put forward by Naess and Sessions (below).

The basic principles of deep ecology

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
 2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
 3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy **vital** needs.
 4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
 5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
 6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
 7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
 8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.
- Think through the consequences of acting from each of these principles. Do the principles provide a sufficient basis for environmentally sound action?

Exercise D

Read chapter one of Benson's *Environmental Ethics: an introduction with readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), then complete the exercise on p.21 (that is, the exercise on human-centred responses to the last man argument).

Exercise E

Thought Experiments

(1) Donald Scherer's Planet Lifeless and Planet Flora

Imagine two planets: Lifeless and Flora. Planet Lifeless is a dead planet. It contains no life. By contrast, planet Flora contains much plant life. No humans exist on either planet. Now imagine that we still exist on earth. We could then ask whether we would be doing any harm if we changed Flora into Lifeless (perhaps by directing a nuclear bomb at Flora).

Discuss: If we did this, would we be destroying anything of value? Give reasons for your answer.

(2) Robin Attfield's hypothetical scenario

Imagine there is one man left on earth. All other life on earth has died due to nuclear fallout, apart from the natural world or natural environment under the Antarctic that still exists. This natural environment contains an abundance of plant and animal life. The last man has the power to needlessly destroy this world and its inhabitants.

Discuss: If the last man did this, would he be destroying anything of value? Would he be doing wrong? If 'yes', *why* would he be doing wrong? If 'no', provide reasons for your response.