Deep Ecology Lecture #24

Reading: DesJardins: *Environmental Ethics*, Chapter 9
Northcott: Environment and Christian Ethics, Chapter 4, p. 124-129; 161-163

Recap: So far, our survey of ethical theories has moves us from extension ethics to biocentric ethics, and most recently, to ecocentric ethics. One trend has been from a more individualistic and anthropocentric ethics toward a more holistic and ecocentric ethics. Now, Deep Ecology takes us for the first time into an environmental ethic that is comprehensive in its attempt to be "both ecocentric and nonanthropocentric."

Outline:

I. Is Deep Ecology a religion? – Case of MN loggers vs. USFS, SWAN, and Forest Guardians

A. MN Timber companies, facing loss of time and timber revenue, filed suit against SWAN and USFS for collaborating in efforts to limit timbering.

B. Basis: Claim that USFS, instead of continuing its policy of forest conservation that facilitates multiple uses including the logging industry, violated the 1st Amendment by acknowledging Deep Ecology views of trees as "sacred" – therefore, "complicit in the establishment of religion"

II. Definitions and Philosophy

A. Ethical systems are grouped according to the origin and location of intrinsic values:
1. Anthropocentrism – humans understood as being both central and superior to other aspects of reality
2. Theocentrism – God is author of meaning and establishment of value; views of theologians as to how God relates to His creation are quite varied from a God Who is supreme and exercises authority over creation directly and through the dominion/ stewardship mandate to mankind, to a God Who is embodied in nature in a pantheistic sense. See Northcott's review, pages 124-163.
3. Ecocentrism – a nonanthropocentric view of reality in which intrinsic value resides in the nature; humans viewed as part of and partner with nature

B. Meaning of "Deep Ecology"
1. "Shallow Ecology" – basically anthropocentric; attacks symptoms (*e.g.* pollution) rather than values (or ideological structures; "dominant worldview") responsible

2. Deep Ecology – more holistic, nonanthropocentric, ecocentric
a. Emphasis on "worldview and institutions rather than personal and social practices"
b. Roots in romanticist movement (Thoreau, Muir, *etc*.) of 1800's.

C. Deep Ecology Platform – Arne Naess (Norway) and George Sessions
   1. The **flourishing** of human and nonhuman life on Earth **has intrinsic value**; nonhuman life has value independent of instrumental value.
   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. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and trend is worsening.
   5. 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.
   6. Significant change in life conditions for the better requires **change in policies** – economic, technological, and ideological structures.
   7. The **ideological change** is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high 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.

D. Ecology and Ecophilosophy
   1. Ecology as foundation – Understanding function of ecosystems; diagnosis of problems
   2. Two directions of Deep Ecology:
      a. Ecophilosophy – developing the alternative philosophy to the *dominant worldview*
      b. Ecosophy – working out the implications of the deep ecology platform
   3. Values Evidenced
      a. Naess: "because of pervasive ignorance of science...proceed cautiously...one who proposes policy should have burden of proof
      b. Natural ecosystems – good and of "more service (?) to mankind" than disturbed
      c. Ecology (or any science) – avoid uncritical acceptance of ecology (is –> ought)
      d. Ecology (or any) – avoid too heavy reliance on science (distract from underlying philosophical causes of problems); used as tool to derail Deep Ecology agenda

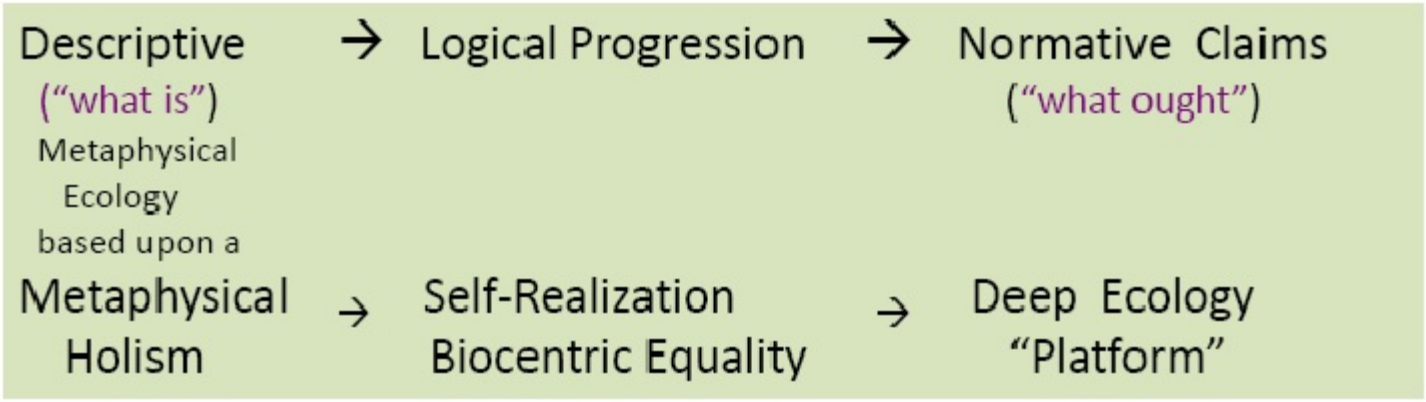
III. Metaphysical Ecology (9.4) As Basis for Normative Prescriptions (9.5)
   A. Deep Ecology's aim to advance a nonanthropocentric view of humans and a holistic view of the natural world raises questions that move us beyond ecology to a *metaphysical ecology* – with metaphysical (especially ontological) questions
      1. Metaphysical questions include:
         a. What is human nature? What is the relation of humans to the rest of nature?
         b. What is the nature of reality?

2. Answers – based on metaphysical holism; humans are formed by their relationships; there is no ontological divide between humans and nature.
    a. Processes that function throughout the biosphere are more real than the individual.
    b. Each living thing dissipates unless it can continually receive energy (like a vortex)
    c. "Individual" may be an organism, community, or molecule. "World does not come already broken down into categories.

B. Metaphysics to Ethics (9.5):
    1. Challenge: Deep Ecology presents an alternative view of reality (metaphysical holism) and its ecophilosophy tries to provide a philosophical account of this view through...
        a. Metaphysics -- asking...
            i. What things exist? [What is real?]
            ii. What kinds of things exist?" – *ontological* (categories of being), relationships, etc.
        b. Epistemology – asking...How do we come to know (reason) what we know?
        c. Ethics– asking...What is correct reasoning between descriptive and normative claims?
    2. Challenge for epistemology: How do we know what is real (*e.g.* nature)?
        a. Objective world:
            i. Reality independent of humans and their understanding
            ii. Objective descriptions of nature can be measured, tested, verified by science
            iii. Primary qualities – those which can be described objectively by science (17^{th} cent.)
            iii. Example: factual claims (what *is*) – *e.g.* leaves reflect green light wavelengths
        b. Subjective world:
            i. Reality as understood, perceived, valued by humans (as subjects)
            ii. Subjective descriptions of nature are arbitrary, biased, unverifiable by science
            iii. Secondary qualities – result from object's interaction w. observer (*e.g.* leaf color)
            iii. Example: ethical claims (what *ought*) – *e.g.* leaves appear green in color
    3. Deep Ecology's Claim:
        a. Because we are "one with nature", the *real world* is not "out there" but just as real in perception (subjective) as through scientific judgements (objective)
        b. "Gestalt ontology" (Naess)- an ontology that sees all reality as "interrelated whole"
            i. Gestalt – an interrelated whole; context necessary to judge reality
            ii. Result – an ontology that replaces "me-it" with "being in (at one with) nature"
            iii. Example: Forest: a "standing carbon sink" is just as much an "gestalt"
        c. Application:
            i. Deep Ecology gestalt – reality as one whole –> different from scientific gestalt
            ii. Therefore, ethical conflicts are rooted I^{o} in ontological differences, not ethical...
            iii. Concern: Naess must distinguish emotional (e.g. anger) from rational objections
            iv. In Conflict: Preservationist and developer each has logical rationale; "neither can claim a privileged status" from his/her worldview
            v. Naess – nonviolent dialog; creative expression vs. straightforward, "life witness"

IV. Self-Realization and Biocentric Equality – Two "Ultimate Norms" (9.6)

Deep Ecology Ethical Reasoning Model:



A. Self-Realization – process of coming to understand the interconnectedness, oneness w. nature
   1. "Know thyself" – as from Socrates' "the unexamined life is not worth living"
   2. Separation of "trivial, superficial temporary" from significant and lasting interests
   3. Process of distinguishing...
      a. Needs – elements essential for survival (food, shelter, relationships)
      b. Interests – matter of what is good for a person (friendship, good health); <u>not chosen</u>
      c. Wants – immediate desires, goals (related to individual experience; advertising)
   4. Self-realization goal:
      a. Separating wants (of "surface self") from interests (of "underlying self")
      b. "Underlying self" is the one that is at one with nature (as in metaphysical holism)
      c. Contrast:
         i. Western "self-realization" –> individual realization –> self (individual)
         ii. Deep Ecology "self-realiz." –> Self realization —> Self at one with nature

B. Biocentric Equality – recognizing all organisms are equally members of integrated whole and therefore have equal intrinsic value
   1. Taylor's Biocentrism (Ch. 6) also recognizes intrinsic value, but is "individualistic"
      a. Greater lengths to resolve conflicts with human interests; more accommodating
      b. Hierarchical approach in which humans tend to land on top
   2. Deep Ecology bases intrinsic value on metaphysical holism; democratic resolution of conflicts based on whether or not "vital needs" are in jeopardy with goal of
      a. Promoting lifestyle that "treads lightly on Earth" – lowtech, self-reliant, decentralized
      b. Communities organized in "bioregional" concept vs. traditional political organizations
      c. Harmonious, self-regulating relationships with nature – "ecotopia"

C. Criticisms – difficult to mount because Deep Ecology represents a diverse assortment in both claims, approach to issues, and sources of inspiration (e.g. Buddhist, Native American, etc.)

1. Reasons for Criticisms:
   a. Ambiguity in response or dialog with opposition – like a "moving target"
   b. Fascist charge – holism denies reality of individuals; may convey misanthropic view
      i. Rebuttal: We don't despise humans, but anthropocentrism; see equal value in all
      ii. Problem: As with Callicott, what do we do when individual and whole conflict?
   c. Overgeneralizes in criticism of "dominant worldview" – not all humans equally at fault
      i. Ramachandra Guha – "Deep Ecology is modern version of American wilderness preservation movement; would have disastrous results if applied to the poor in developing nations who depend on natural landscapes"
      ii. Guha – form of "Western imperialism;" or, at best, "irrelevant" to needs of the poor

2. Criticism from other movements – Social Ecology and Ecofeminism
   a. Deep Eco. is too abstract in its focus – should focus on social, economic, and patriarchal structures rather than broad opposition to anthropocentrism that ignores important groups of oppressed humans..
      i. Social Ecology – social and economic elites oppress the poor out of consumerism resulting in environmental destruction
      ii. Ecofeminism– environmental destruction and oppression of women are related
   b. Objection – holding all humans equally at fault (cost of rejecting anthropocentrism) ignores oppressed people – poor (urban / undeveloped nations), oppressed, and women