



STATEMENT DE-110

BOOK REVIEW

A SUMMARY CRITIQUE: Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism

by Warwick Fox

In this election year many Americans are hearing for the first time about "Green politics" (also known as New Age politics), as Green Party candidates seek office in numerous local elections. The same phenomenon swept much of Western Europe in the 1980s, and now the Greens are well represented in the national legislatures of several countries, including Germany.

Green politics has a distinctive ecological and spiritual orientation based in an environmental philosophy called "deep ecology." *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* — whose author, Warwick Fox, is a National Research Fellow at the Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania — is the best introduction to deep ecology in print.

In 1962 Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book about the pollution of the environment, launched the modern-day environmental movement. The movement accelerated with the 1972 publication of the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth*. Then, in the mid 1970s, the discipline of environmental philosophy/ethics (or *ecophilosophy*) began to flourish. Even today, however, "ecophilosophy is still very much a marginal rather than a mainstream pursuit in contemporary academic philosophy" (p. 9).

In the early 1970s eminent Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess began classifying ecophilosophers as either "shallow" or "deep." This typology was one of many then used to describe the difference between an anthropocentric (man-centered) and ecocentric (environment-centered) approach to ecology. In the early 1980s it rose to prominence becoming the main way ecophilosophers are classified.

Shallow ecology is environmental protection which does not arise from a new way of thinking about man's relation to the environment. Deep ecologists cite the philosophy of humanism and the animal liberation movement as examples of shallow ecology (66).

Deep ecology differs from mainstream New Age thinking in its rejection of humanism, blaming anthropocentrism for virtually all of our environmental woes.

Anthropocentrism is described by deep ecologists as both chauvinism and imperialism, only — unlike other expressions of these evils — it is rarely noticed. Even when concerns about environmental abuse are raised, arguments are couched in terms of preserving *human* resources rather than preserving nature for its own sake or for its value to *nonhuman* beings. "Thus, even many of those who deal most directly with environmental issues continue

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to perpetuate, however unwittingly, the arrogant assumption that we humans are central to the cosmic drama; that, essentially, the world is made for us. John Seed...writes: "The idea that humans are the crown of creation, the source of all value, the measure of all things is deeply embedded in our culture and consciousness" (11).

What about the biblical view that *God*, not *man*, is the source of all value? "From a nonanthropocentric perspective, personalistic kinds of theocentrism, such as the dominant form of Christianity where humans are made in the image of a god to whom they have a privileged personal relationship, are in any case simply anthropocentric *projections* upon the cosmos" (9).

The anthropocentric and ecocentric approaches have been classified as *instrumental* and *intrinsic* value theories, respectively. According to instrumental value theory, humans "are valuable in and of themselves but...the nonhuman world is valuable only insofar as it is of value *to humans*" (149). Thus, nature's value is *only* as a means or *instrument* to human ends. According to intrinsic value theory, at least some aspects or members of the nonhuman world are valuable in and of themselves.

Fox describes three instrumental value theory approaches: (1) *unrestrained exploitation and expansionism* values transforming nature without concern for depleting resources for future generations; (2) *resource conservation and development* also values transforming the nonhuman world, but recognizes the limitations of resources; (3) *resource preservation* stresses the *instrumental* value of nature to humans if some of it is left untransformed.

The author then details five intrinsic value theory approaches: (1) *ethical sentientism* proposes that intrinsic value belongs to any creature possessing *sentience*: the capacity for sense perception; (2) *life-based ethics* holds that because all living entities (sentient or not) are continually engaged in self-regeneration, they should be considered ends in themselves and not mere means to ends; (3 and 4) *ecosystem ethics* and *ecosphere ethics* maintain that local ecosystems and the planetary ecosphere (sometimes called "Gaia") are in a sense living systems and thus have intrinsic value; (5) *cosmic purpose ethics* finds value in nonhuman entities by virtue of their being expressive of some *cosmic* interest (e.g., evolution or the nature or purposes of God).

Although deep ecology is aligned with the interests of intrinsic value theory approaches, there is much ambiguity and confusion over whether all ecocentric approaches should be classified as deep ecology. This is because the term has been used in three distinct and differing senses.

In his original and *formal* use of *deep* in deep ecology, Naess refers "to the idea that deep ecological views, in contrast to shallow ecological views, are derived from *fundamental* valuations and hypotheses that are arrived at by a process of asking progressively deeper questions" (126). He prefers to reserve the term deep for "primarily the level of questioning, not the content of the answer" (102). Naess, Fox observes, makes the mistake of *assuming* that anyone who develops an ecophilosophy from fundamentals will arrive at an ecocentric view. But Fox demonstrates how a fundamentalist Christian or an evolutionist could derive a logically consistent anthropocentric environmental philosophy from their own fundamentals. Thus, Naess's formal sense of deep ecology cannot really be limited to the philosophical and popular expressions that are associated with that term.

As Naess applied his formal definition by developing his own personal deep ecology, the *philosophical* sense of the term was born. For Naess, the fundamental value is "Self-realization." Naess's greatest philosophical inspirations have been the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, the Indian political reformer Mahatma Gandhi, and Buddhist psychology. From the pantheist (i.e., believing God is all) Spinoza, Naess derived the idea that the driving force of creation is Self-realization or identification of the finite part with the infinite Whole (i.e., God). From Gandhi he concluded that this goal is best achieved through service of the world rather than abandonment of it. And from Buddhism he adopted a view of the self as process rather than substantial entity. Fox summarizes Naess's philosophical sense of deep ecology as follows: "Naess's fundamental...norm of 'Self-realization!' refers to the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things -in-the-world are

conceived as processes" (113-14). Thus, serving the needs of the physical world (environmental action) can facilitate one's personal growth.

Naess's *popular* sense of deep ecology refers to the ecological views shared by those who (in his view) engage in deep (questioning) ecology. Naess and deep ecologist George Sessions developed an eight-point platform characterizing the basic principles of the movement. These stress the intrinsic value of all life on earth; the value of humans preserving the richness and diversity of life forms (the only exception would be in serving *vital* human needs); the environmental importance of decreasing human population; the need for radical change in policies affecting economic, ideological, and technological structures; and the importance of valuing life quality over increasingly higher standards of living.

To correct the ambiguity brought by these conflicting uses of deep ecology, Fox prefers the term *ecocentric ecology movement* for Naess's popular sense of deep ecology. People who hold these principles are not actually limited to Naess's movement but include all who take a nonanthropocentric approach to ecological issues. He also proposes a change of name for that sense of the term which he considers most significant — the philosophical: "Since this approach is one that involves the realization of a sense of self that extends beyond (or that is *trans-*) one's egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self, the clearest, most accurate, and most informative term for this sense of deep ecology is, in my view, *transpersonal ecology*" (197).

Those familiar with recent trends in psychology will recognize that Fox has employed a term used to describe a pantheistic or panentheistic (all is in God) offshoot of humanistic psychology: *transpersonal psychology*. Fox affirms that the above manner of defining *transpersonal* (i.e., "beyond" one's personal sense of self) is exactly the meaning the originators of transpersonal psychology (Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Graf, and Anthony Sutich) had in mind. He observes: "The fact that the term *transpersonal* derives from recent work in psychology is appropriate since Naess's philosophical sense of deep ecology obviously refers to a psychologically based approach to the question of our relationship with the rest of nature as opposed to an axiologically based (i.e., a value theory based) approach" (196).

Fox hinges his argument for a psychological, rather than value theory-based, approach to ecophilosophy on an acceptance of the tripartite model of the human self found in many schools of psychology (e.g., the *id*, *superego*, and *ego* in Freudian analysis). The author himself prefers the terms *desiring-impulsive self* (i.e., *id*), *normative-judgmental self* (i.e., *superego*), and *rationalizing-deciding self* (i.e., *ego*).

According to this model, the will of each individual is represented by the *rationalizing-deciding self*, who must continually arbitrate between the competing demands of the self-centered, irresponsible, unrealistic *desiring-impulsive self* and the idealistic, self-judging, at times also unrealistic *normative-judgmental self*. He argues that each of these selves fits one or more of the value theories described above: the *desiring-impulsive self* corresponds to the unrestrained exploitation and expansionism approach. The *rationalizing-deciding self* is expressed in the resource conservation and development and resource preservation approaches (i.e., they are seeking to find a compromise between ideals and desires). And the *normative-judgmental self* is found in all intrinsic value approaches.

The "bottom line" of Fox's analogy is this: despite their laudable goals, intrinsic value theory approaches are unrealistic. No one is all *normative-judgmental self*. The *desiring-impulsive self* will make its demands, the *rationalizing-deciding self* will find compromises between the two, and the environment will suffer as a result. In a word, human nature is too *selfish* to live consistently with intrinsic value theories.

What hope is there then for the environment? This is where deep ecologists believe they have the answer. Fox argues that "transpersonal ecology emphasizes a fundamentally different kind of self to those... in the... tripartite model of the psyche. This is because, whatever their qualitative differences, the desiring-impulsive self, the rationalizing-deciding self, and the normative-judgmental self all refer to a narrow, atomistic, or particle-like conception of self whereas the transpersonal self refers to a wide, expansive, or field-like conception of self" (215).

Transpersonal ecology, suggests Fox, transcends this basic human dilemma caused by selfish desires competing with the demands of conscience. Moral demands, he tells us,

are directed to and thereby reinforce the primary reality of the narrow, atomistic, or particle-like sense of self. In contrast...the transpersonal ecology conception of self is a wide, expansive, or field-like conception from the outset. This has the highly interesting, even startling, consequence that ethics (conceived as being concerned with moral "oughts") is rendered superfluous! The reason for this is that if one has a wide, expansive, or field-like sense of self then...one will naturally (i.e., spontaneously) protect the natural (spontaneous) unfolding of this expansive self (the ecosphere, the cosmos) in all its aspects. (217)

He then quotes Naess: "Just as we need no morals to make us breathe...[so] if your 'self' in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral exhortation to show care..." (*Ibid.*). Elsewhere Naess comments: "Maturity in humans can be measured along a scale from selfishness to Selfishness, that is, broadening and deepening the self, rather than measures of dutiful altruism" (220-21).

Fox describes three ways of achieving this sense of identification: *personal* (brought about through involvement with the entities with which one identifies); *ontological* (brought about through mystical realization of the *fact* of existence); and *cosmological* (brought about through a deep-seated realization that all entities are aspects of a single, unfolding reality).

A book could be written in reply to the issues Fox raises for evangelical Christians. Here, I can only address a few key points.

We must ask where Christians belong in the anthropocentric/ecocentric and instrumental value/intrinsic value debates. Although many Christians have thought of nature merely in instrumental terms, Scripture actually provides a firm basis for its intrinsic value. In Genesis 1 we find that when God completed various aspects of His creative work He "saw that [they were] good," *even before man was there to enjoy them* (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Since He pronounced all of His creation "very good" (v. 31), all of nature has intrinsic value. We must avoid an either-or mentality, for there is *both* instrumental *and* intrinsic value in all of nature. God had man in mind when He created the world (Gen. 2), but ultimately He created it for Himself (Col. 1:16).

Biblically the answer lies neither with an anthropocentric nor an ecocentric approach. What is needed is a *theocentric* view that allows for value in all things created by God *because* they were created by God, yet also allows for special value in man because he is created in the image of God, who is the Ultimate Value (*see, e.g.,* Matt. 10:29, 31, where the sparrow has intrinsic value, but man has greater value).

In dismissing the claim that man is created in the image of God as a mere anthropocentric projection on the universe, deep ecologists are making a critical mistake: they are failing to seriously investigate the possibility that this doctrine is rather the result of divine revelation. For had they carefully considered the evidence for biblical claims, they would have to acknowledge that such a position is at least tenable.

The deep ecologists' critique of anthropocentrism must be evaluated carefully. There are aspects of it that a Christian can applaud. Certainly, the humanistic *overvaluing* of man that says we are "the source of all value, the measure of all things" (11) is the antithesis of the biblical view. On the other hand, the biblical world view protects against a dangerous *undervaluing* of man. For it is only "arrogance" to say humans are "central to the cosmic drama" and "the crown of creation" if in fact we are not so.

Fox equates the belief that humans are morally superior to other animals with "the relentless exploitation of the nonhuman world by humans" (22). But this does not follow *if* man's "dominion" over the world is to be one of benign stewardship, not relentless exploitation (on this, *see* my book, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement* [Baker Book House, 1989], 85-86).

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While Fox makes clear the consequences for the *environment* of an anthropocentric approach, he does not adequately consider the consequences for *humanity* of a strictly ecocentric approach. Is it wrong, for example, to inject chimpanzees with the AIDS virus in the hopes of finding a cure for the epidemic? To be consistent, an ecocentric philosopher would have to say *yes*. But his (or her) answer might very well change if he or someone he loves contracts the disease. And this is not just a matter of one species being true to its own kind. We instinctively know (at least when we are forced to choose between humans and nonhumans) that a human life is of greater worth than other kinds of animal life.

The Bible provides both a basis for utter humility and a basis for extraordinary worth to human beings. It provides a basis for man's using creation's resources, but also for setting healthy limits to that use. Both are essential if we are to forge and maintain a humane world in the twenty-first century.

Finally, we must consider Fox's proposal of a psychological approach to environmental concern rather than a value-based approach. It must first be acknowledged that there is value in cultivating awareness of how the individual participates in wider natural processes. But, though such identification can promote environmental sensitivity, *it cannot relieve the need for ethics*.

Fox would eliminate the whole issue of moral responsibility by expanding the boundaries of self, but human selfishness cannot be expanded until it becomes unselfishness. This is just the wishful thinking of pantheists. It is impossible to define morality away: man always lives with "oughts"; it is part of his constitution.

For example, deep ecologist John Livingston first states that "ethics and morals are unknown in nature," that they are "prosthetic devices" invented by our species, that "the notion of rights as applied to interspecies affairs is probably a blind alley," and that what we need instead is an "extended consciousness which transcends mere self." But he immediately goes on to say: "I see this extended sense of belonging as a fundamental biological (and thus human) imperative. I think the thwarting of such an imperative is in some absolute sense wrong" (228, emphasis added).

It must be conceded that if the pantheistic world view were true, identification would be superior to morality. But the very fact that identification cannot be practiced consistently in place of morality is a proof that the pantheistic world view is *not* true.

Morality is a factor that gives *meaning* and *dignity* to man's existence. It must be faced squarely and its demands met. To define it out of existence is to *depersonalize* (not "transpersonalize") man — to reduce him to something less than he actually is. Replacing morality with identification is simply cosmic narcissism in which true, other-oriented love (the highest attainment possible to man, modeled and taught by Christ [John 13:34-35; 15:13]) becomes a lost possibility. What is really needed in environmental ethics, then, as in all spheres of ethics, is the dynamic power of truly selfless love for God and all His "good" works — a power made available (as such saints as Francis of Assisi have demonstrated) through a vital Christian faith.

— Reviewed by Elliot Miller