

The Fundamental Weakness of Deep Ecology: A Philosophical Study

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Introduction

The global environmental crisis arises from various reasons. Although there are many reasons for the environmental crisis, human-centred dualism is identified as a key factor. This philosophy is one that has divided humans from nature and also considers humans superior to nature, thus enabling humans to exploit nature for their advantage. Arne Naess (1973) introduced the concept of deep ecology to solve the anthropocentric problem. It is based on the theoretical framework of the ecological Self, which seeks to undermine the dichotomy of humans and nature and transform human worldviews. Whereas deep ecology has a highly theoretical influence on environmental philosophy, there is a fundamental weakness in it: it is a highly rationalist philosophy of abstraction, and it does not offer a practical system for people to live daily with objectivity; the one practice it does offer, *friluftsliv*, is geographically and socioeconomically elitist and inaccessible for most global populations. While the available literature provides only isolated critiques without systematically positioning the purely theoretical nature of deep ecology as its fundamental weakness. Based on that, this study addresses the research question: What is the practical weakness of deep ecology? This paper aims to compensate for this research gap by engaging in a purely philosophical analysis to shed light on the practical ‘space’ of deep ecology.

Objectives

This research paper studies the rationalist root limitations of Deep Ecology, critically examines the elitist aspect of *friluftsliv*, and demonstrates that the practical way of Deep Ecology is basically weak because it is abstract. It also discusses the gap between theory and practice in ecology.

Methodology

This study is based on the qualitative research method and its content analysis method. It focuses on a detailed examination of Arne Naess's original Deep Ecology writings and pertinent critical writings.

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Result

This philosophical analysis will show few key results that reveal the basic structural flaws in Naess' Deep Ecology. Firstly, Although Naess named his personal ecophilosophy as Ecosophy T from his own experiential immersion in the wilderness at Tvergastein, critics argue that it is mainly based on abstract logical reasoning, metaphysical argumentation, and intellectual cognition. This places a chasm between the theoretical statements of Deep Ecology and actual human behavioral change. Secondly, the results show that the only possible way Deep Ecology suggests to achieve *friluftsliv* is exclusionary and non-universal. But it is limited to the proposed area. Geographical and socioeconomic barriers prevent access for urban residents. Therefore, *friluftsliv* is not a practical option that can be applied on a global scale for the purposes of realizing the Ecological Self for all humanity.

Thirdly, the reason for all secondary weaknesses of Deep Ecology stems from its leading practical vacuum. The lack of standardized practices in the theory's everyday application is not a flaw in itself, but rather an issue that leads to such problems as unclear definitions of intrinsic environmental value and a weak ethical regulatory capacity. If embodied routines are not provided to help people internalize biocentric values, then abstract anti-anthropocentric arguments remain in academic discussions and difficult to drive the consistent conduct of people in everyday life regarding ecology.

Discussion

In terms of environmental philosophy, Deep Ecology can be identified as a new trend. The findings show that Deep Ecology is rationalist-confined, elitist in its praxis, and has cascading secondary flaws, which are examined and explained and have implications for current ecosophical research. This study supports the fundamental criticism of Bookchin (1987). The key epistemological problem with Deep Ecology is its implicit faith in Western Enlightenment rationalism. Naess made the concept of Ecosophy T based on his own forest-living experience. However, his individual lifestyle cannot be standardised or universalised for ordinary people and daily life, making Deep Ecology a personally practicable but globally inapplicable theory.

Naess's theoretical model is based on the premise that a rational, conscious understanding of interdependence between humans and nature will be enough to change anthropocentric worldviews and ecological practices. This idea, however, is psychologically and philosophically problematic, according to the argument of this discussion, which indicates that human environmental behaviour is largely determined by habit and lived practice or affective connection, rather than by mere intellectual understanding.

The exclusionary sides of *friluftsliv* work as a critical amplification of this epistemological mistake. Because it is an embodied pathway, intended to manifest the Ecological Self, it entails systemic barriers to accessibility due to its dependence on Nordic wilderness environments, free leisure time and economic privilege. The needed conditions are not available to inner-city populations, low-income groups, individuals with mobility restrictions and societies in the Global South; thus, the core transformative mechanism of the theory is only available to a small privileged group. This explains why the practical vacuum was identified: Deep Ecology structurally prevents the majority of the global population from experiencing the Ecological Self firsthand and thus makes it impossible to achieve the universal biocentric mission of Deep Ecology.

Furthermore, Deep Ecology carries several secondary limits that bring meaningful academic implications. Its vague definitions of nature's intrinsic worth and its shaky ethical framework are not separate, minor errors in the theory. Instead, these weaknesses emerge naturally because Deep Ecology fails to offer practical, globally applicable lifestyle practices that ordinary people can adopt in their daily lives. When people do not regularly experience and practice nature-centred values in daily routines, the abstract moral principles of Deep Ecology become detached from real human decision-making and behaviour.

It is important to note that this analysis does not negate Deep Ecology's significant historical contributions to environmental thought. The theory successfully challenged traditional human-centric environmental outlooks and helped break down the rigid philosophical divide that separates humans from the natural world. Even so, this analysis clearly explains a forward research direction for future environmental philosophy. Rather than relying only on abstract, logic-based theories, scholars should focus on developing practical ecological approaches that are low-cost and adaptable to local contexts. New practical frameworks of this kind can bridge the long-standing gap between environmental theory and real-world action. Ultimately, they will enable nature-centred ecological principles to be applied broadly, fairly, and effectively across the globe.

Conclusion

This philosophical study explored in a systematic manner the basic fragility of Arne Naess's Deep Ecology, focusing on the dichotomy between abstract theory and practical application. The research revealed that the problem with Deep Ecology is not that it is ambiguous in minor respects and biased in culture but that it is based on Western, rationalist epistemology. Its central concept, the Ecological Self, is mostly based on logical thinking, and its pathways are

not universal pathways that are embodied by normal people in their day-to-day life. Naess's Friluftsliv is a practical solution to Deep Ecology and, as such, is geographically, culturally, and socioeconomically elitist, inapplicable on a global scale, and unable to address the practical void of the theory. This is one cause why, even in theory, Deep Ecology has grown far in environmental philosophy, but has produced only small-scale behavioural changes in ecology. In the final analysis, future environmental philosophy needs to transcend rationalist theorising and become a practice that is more inclusive, accessible, and embodied, to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and achieve real, globally viable ecological change. That is the solution that can be used for the general application of Deep Ecology.

Keywords - Deep Ecology, Ecological Self, Friluftsliv, Practical, Rationalism

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