

# American Transcendentalism and Deep Ecology in the History of Ideas

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical examination of the continuity of thought between American Transcendentalism and the Deep Ecology Movement. Of primary concern are the critiques of Modernity that Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss have expressed. In particular, it asks to what extent each of these figures has proposed ecocentrism as a reaction to anthropocentrism. In many ways Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir have inspired particular elements in the rich plurality which characterizes the global, long-range, grassroots, Deep Ecology Movement as articulated by Arne Næss.

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*Because being here means everything, and everything here  
seems to need us, this fleeting world, which in some faint way  
endlessly calls to us. Us, the most fleeting of all. Once for each thing,  
just once. Just once and never again. And each of us, too,  
just once. And never again. But to have been here, even if  
just once, completely:  
to have been completely with the earth will never be undone.*

. . .

*O Earth! is this not what you want: to arise  
in us, invisible? Is it not your dream  
to be invisible someday? O Earth! invisible!  
What, if not transformation, is your urgent appeal?  
Earth, my dear, I will. O believe me, you no longer  
need springtimes to win me over – once,  
just once, is already too much for my blood.*

- Rilke, from *Duino Elegies*

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# Prolegomenon

*Because being here means everything, and everything here seems to need us, this fleeting world, which in some faint way endlessly calls to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.*

§1.1 *Introduction*

This thesis is a critical examination of the continuity of thought between American Transcendentalism and the Deep Ecology Movement. It is a history of ideas which focuses on the main exponents of these two movements; Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) are considered the leading figures of American Transcendentalism while Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (b. 1912) is typically seen as the central representative for ‘Deep Ecology.’ The wilderness preservation advocated by John Muir (1838-1914) at the turn of the twentieth century will be treated as a transitional element between American Transcendentalism and the modern Deep Ecology Movement. Emerson, and to a much larger extent Thoreau, Muir, and Næss, have all been influential figures for the modern environmental movement. If we take the hallmark of modern environmentalism to be a call for a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, to what extent, then, have the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss been interpreted as promoting ecocentrism? Of primary concern will be the critiques of Modernity, especially anthropocentrism, that each of these figures has expressed.

The modern environmental movement responds to a sense of crisis in Western culture. It registers a deep discontent with the prevailing attitudes, values and behaviours which have brought so much devastation to forests and watersheds, land and soils, local communities and whole human cultures, not to mention mass

extinctions of other living species. There is a serious problem with the way that we in the West relate to the Earth and each other. Yet current green activism is only the latest insurrection in a long history of rebellions against Modernity. In North America one of the very first clarion calls for humanity to reexamine its attitudes toward the natural world came from New England on September 9, 1836, when Ralph Waldo Emerson published his first book *Nature*. Henry David Thoreau and John Muir are among the most celebrated of Emerson's contemporaries who answered the plea, and their writings as well as their lives have been a seemingly endless source of inspiration for environmentalists. Ever since Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss coined the phrase 'deep ecology' in 1972 the deep ecology movement has steadily gained prominence around the globe, and Næss currently enjoys a distinguished position among ecophilosophers, especially in North America, Scandinavia, and Australia. Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss – each has, in his own way, criticized the 'business as usual' attitude which has prevailed in our culture since the industrial revolution began toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In short they have all questioned the philosophical underpinnings of Modernity and perhaps no tenet as incisively as the assumption that nature is a storehouse for exclusive human use. The latter three especially – Thoreau, Muir, and Næss – have been referred to as sources of considerable authority regarding ecological philosophy. But, to fully appreciate their insights, and hence to evaluate

their contributions to the modern environmental movement we need to understand their motivations for exploring alternatives to Modernity.

### *§1.2 The Modern worldview*

This thesis is motivated by my own deep convictions that not only does the dominant way of life in modern Western culture embody impoverished ideas of nature and humanity, but that there are viable alternatives to this way of life. Some of the more serious results of the urban-industrial imperative include ozone depletion, global decline of biodiversity, accumulation of toxic chemicals in soil and fresh water supplies, and massive soil erosion. These problems betray a specific underlying sense of reality, a cosmology, one that emerged with the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century and eventually established itself as “a cultural paradigm so powerful and pervasive that it yet rules the West.”<sup>1</sup> Currently, we enjoy unprecedented material prosperity yet there is progressive degradation of biophysical systems as well as what many would call a ‘spiritual poverty.’<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the moral implications of the current ethos are particularly disturbing. Emphasis on individualism frequently results in narcissism which recognizes few, if any, concerns that transcend the ego. These might possibly include political, ecological, historical, or religious issues.<sup>3</sup>

A revolution in human consciousness began some five hundred years ago with the Renaissance marking the beginning of the so-called Modern age.<sup>4</sup> The next few centuries saw the gradual acceptance of a new sense of reality “based on the scientific mode of experiment, quantification, and technical mastery.”<sup>5</sup> Many scholars consider Isaac Newton’s *Philosophia Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) as the defining moment for this emerging new vision of reality.<sup>6</sup> Richard Tarnas, author of *The Passion of the Western Mind*, explains the impact of the *Principia*:

Newton’s achievement in effect established both the modern understanding of the physical universe – as mechanistic, mathematically ordered, concretely material, devoid of human or spiritual properties, and not especially Christian in structure – and the modern understanding of man, whose rational intelligence had comprehended the world’s natural order, and who was thus a noble being not by virtue of being the central focus of a divine plan as revealed in Scripture, but because by his own reason he had grasped nature’s underlying logic and thereby achieved dominion over its forces.<sup>7</sup>

Newton’s *Principia* was the culminating moment of the Scientific Revolution and established the philosophical framework for what became known as the Enlightenment (c. 1687–1800), or the Age of Reason. Proponents of Enlightenment thinking rode a wave of almost unbounded optimism that science and reason could be used to improve living conditions and secure material comforts for all of humanity. Voltaire (1694-1778), one of the Enlightenment’s leading figures,

proclaimed Newton to be the greatest man who ever lived, and that it was undeniable that science was the key to human progress.<sup>8</sup>

What began in the Renaissance and culminated in the Enlightenment took place against a backdrop of “massive cultural decay, violence, and death”<sup>9</sup> and was largely a rebellion against the prejudice, superstition, and religious dogma which characterized much of the late Medieval worldview. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Modernity diverged sharply from its predecessor on several accounts: i) it replaced a geocentric universe with a heliocentric one; ii) it admired human reason over the authority of Church/God; iii) it promoted liberal values of equality, freedom, and democracy; iv) it pursued earthly happiness rather than heavenly salvation; v) it expunged nature of all animating principles and/or spiritual significance.

We have carried forward from the Enlightenment an unyielding confidence in scientific understanding and technological mastery which only underscores our “exalted view that humans [have] unlimited powers, potential, and freedom.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the entire Modern way of life in Western industrial nations is wholeheartedly married to a scientific understanding of nature and reality.<sup>11</sup> Theodore Roszak, professor of history and Director of the Ecopsychology Institute at California State University, reminds us that “the mindscape to which our culture has been shaping itself for the past three centuries – and with ever more decisive urgency since the advent of industrialism – is the creation of modern

science... [It] is the prime expression of the west's cultural uniqueness."<sup>12</sup> In this thesis 'Modernity' will be used to identify this 'cultural uniqueness' – the urban, industrial way of life that rests on a specifically Western sense of reality, one that distinguishes our culture from others, past and present.<sup>13</sup> Figure 1.1 summarizes some of the main characteristics of the dominant conception of nature and the human relationship to the environment.

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### Some Characteristics of Modernity

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*nature*

- nature is atomistic; parts are independent and externally related
- nature functions much like a machine, and the best way to understand it is to analyze the constituent parts
- matter alone accounts for all reality without remainder

*humanity*

- humans are separate from nature
- humans have an unqualified right to exploit nature
- the superior political system is embodied in democratic nation states

*knowledge*

- human reason is the pinnacle of epistemological achievement
- problems are solved by analysis
- only what can be demonstrated as repeatable and verifiable is true

*progress*

- the economy can, and must, grow *ad infinitum*
- material possessions are a measure of success
- science and technology will eventually solve all problems

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Figure 1.1<sup>14</sup>

Increasing secularization has been one of the dominant features of Modernity over the past few centuries. It has helped to thrust the self-determining individual human onto centre stage of the moral theatre, thereby defining “the anthropocentrism that has been so definitive a hallmark of the modern era.”<sup>15</sup>

**Anthropocentrism:** the basic conviction that only humans have intrinsic value, everything else has instrumental value. All of nature is seen as a resource for human control and use. There is a corollary belief that humans have the right to use nature for whatever purposes they choose.<sup>16</sup>

The most acute expression of anthropocentrism is egocentrism (individualism). Newtonian science had reduced a material universe to its constituent parts, i.e. atoms, and in the nineteenth century the idea was imposed onto the human sphere. By insisting that “free commercial competition was the predestined spearhead of the whole evolutionary process”<sup>17</sup> social Darwinists extended material atomism into social atomism.<sup>18</sup>

Anthropocentrism is underwritten by the assumption of a subject-object dualism.

**Subject/Object Dualism:** the basic conviction that there is a complete incommensurability between passive, inert objects (comprised of aggregates of matter) and the active human subject (mind, psyche, soul...). The subject, being absolutely separate from whatever is being studied, does not influence in any way the properties of the object. Human beings alone have ‘interiority,’ therefore have one quality that separates them from rest of the universe.<sup>19</sup>

René Descartes (1596-1650) is regarded as a major champion of subject/object dualism. By claiming personal self-awareness as absolutely primary, and assuming

incommensurability between mind (*res cogitans*) and matter (*res extensa*) Descartes “articulated the epochal defining statement of the modern self.”<sup>20</sup> The human mind was utterly distinct from the rest of the world, detached and disengaged, objectively surveying reality. Concurrently, men such as Bacon (1561-1626) and Galileo (1564-1642) expressed sharp distinctions between primary and secondary qualities, and facts and values – distinctions which have continued through to the current day. Science can only tell us *how* to do something; it cannot tell us whether we should do it, nor does it provide any *techne* (‘art,’ ‘skill’) for making moral decisions.

The Oxford geneticist Richard Dawkins recently claimed that “science is the only way we know to understand the real world.”<sup>21</sup> This might appear especially audacious to someone like Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

It is often forgotten that the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century is itself based upon a particular philosophical position. It is not *the* science of nature but *a* science of nature making certain assumptions as to the nature of reality, time, space, matter, etc. But once these assumptions were made and a science came into being based upon them, they have been comfortably forgotten and the results of this science made to be the determining factor as to the true nature of reality.<sup>22</sup>

Nasr’s crucial insight is that our collective amnesia regarding Modernity’s philosophical framework has resulted in an understanding of reality that appears free of any bias, values, or assumptions. As such, it does not occur to us that Modernity has any particular perspective; rather it appears that its findings are *the*

*truth.* Further, we simply assume that there is only one way of discovering that truth, “and that is by the correct use of reason, deductively as in the mathematical sciences, [and] inductively as in the sciences of nature.”<sup>23</sup>

Isaiah Berlin has characterized the modern outlook as a kind of ‘philosophical monism.’

**Philosophical Monism:** the basic conviction that all reality, and branches of our knowledge of it, form a rational, harmonious whole, and that there is ultimate unity or harmony between human ends.<sup>24</sup>

After the monumental success of Newton’s *Principia* hopes ran high that positive methods for obtaining knowledge had been established. In the eighteenth century a fairly wide consensus among the literati held that the methods used to produce such triumphant results in physics would equally apply to other areas such as art, ethics, and politics. Proceeding upon the assumption that humanity would eventually discover solutions to all problems through the correct use of reason and application of scientific methods, progress toward social harmony and dominion over nature appeared inevitable.<sup>25</sup>

The entry fee for the Modern era has proven costly. “The world we have lost was organic,”<sup>26</sup> writes historian Carolyn Merchant, referring to a timeless sense of the cosmos that humans have lived with since the dawn of our species. Only in the last few hundred years, since the Scientific Revolution, has Western culture

embraced a mechanistic universe, attempting to explain all natural phenomena simply as matter in motion. Acceptance of the ‘nature-as-machine’ metaphor has led to a progressive ‘disenchantment of the world.’<sup>27</sup> During the countless millennia of human history before the Scientific Revolution *Homo sapiens* have engaged the world with a deep sense of cosmological involvement.<sup>28</sup> This mode of awareness – what Morris Berman calls a ‘participatory consciousness’ – “involved merger, or identification, with one’s surroundings, and bespeaks a psychic wholeness”<sup>29</sup> where human beings saw themselves as members of the community of life on Earth. However, in a universe that is seen simply as a collection of atoms and molecules obeying strict mechanical laws the human psyche can only feel alienated, disengaged, and separated from the rest of reality. The cosmos, once felt as *home*, has turned into a wasteland utterly bereft of meaning.

Newtonian science had indeed set epistemological and ontological benchmarks and by the nineteenth century other disciplines such as psychology, history, and politics vied for legitimacy by adopting the same impersonal, reductive, mechanistic, and atomistic methods.<sup>30</sup> Mary Midgley, one of Britain’s foremost moral philosophers, points out that the assumed ‘omnicompetence’ of science has resulted in a kind of imperialism – the deliberate extension of reductive methods into unsuitable territory.<sup>31</sup> Yet, scientific imperialism has not gone unquestioned. Critical responses to Modernity have accompanied its development every step of the way. Indeed, Tarnas observes in the Renaissance (c. 1450–1600) an emergence

of “two distinct streams of culture, two temperaments or general approaches to human existence characteristic of the Western mind.”<sup>32</sup> By the eighteenth century these two streams had distinguished themselves into what Berlin refers to as the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment. While men in France like Diderot (1713–84), d’Alembert (1717–83) and Holbach (1723–89) enthusiastically promoted the Enlightenment agenda a Counter-Enlightenment was launched in Germany by such thinkers as Hamann (1730–88) and Herder (1744–1803) which opposed the mechanization and rationalization of both humans and nature. The main issue of contention focused on the efficacy of Newtonian science, for the Counter-Enlightenment considered it simply inadequate for dealing with the rich complexities that make up the inner life of human beings. Aspects of experience such as meaning, introspection, morality, beauty, spirituality, quality, and values demanded reprieve from the incursions of an all-embracing system deemed too mechanistic, too disengaged, too abstract.

### §1.3 *‘Romantic ecology’ and contemporary ecocentrism*

Critiques of the Enlightenment continued and by the nineteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–88) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) helped inspire the Romantic movement in Europe, Britain, and North America. Led by men such as Blake (1757-1827), Wordsworth (1770-1850), and Coleridge (1772-1834) the Romantics reacted to the reductive tendencies of the scientific thinkers

and tended to express “just those aspects of human experience suppressed by the Enlightenment’s overriding spirit of rationalism.”<sup>33</sup> To the Romantic mind “the universe seemed bigger, richer, more varied and exciting, and more of [an organic] unity than the thinkers of the Age of Reason had allowed.”<sup>34</sup> Roszak commends Romanticism for its “struggle to save the reality of experience from evaporating into theoretical abstraction or disintegrating into the chaos of bare, empirical facts.”<sup>35</sup> Above all else the Romantics were committed to an organic sense of reality; indeed, their revolt may be seen as largely devoted to resisting the Newtonian idea of nature-as-machine.<sup>36</sup> As such, it offers a crucial counterpoint to the one-sided and reductive temperament of Newtonian science.

Modern environmentalism draws upon many sources for inspiration, both ancient and contemporary, including Taoism, Buddhism, and quantum physics. But perhaps it shares the most affinity with nineteenth century Romanticism. Among the many reactions to Modernity what is definitive of modern environmentalism is its emphasis on the need for a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism.

**Ecocentrism:** a value system and attitude that understands humans as only part of larger ecological processes and systems. Therefore, natural and human communities are folded together. There is a basic conviction that the earth and its bounty are not the sole preserve of a single species, *Homo sapiens*, and that the key ecological insight of the interconnectedness of life should inform conceptions of what is ‘good behaviour.’<sup>37</sup>

Figure 1.2 summarizes some of the main characteristics of ecocentrism.

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## Some Characteristics of Ecocentrism

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*nature*

- nature is an organic whole; its parts are completely interdependent
- ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’
- living beings have intrinsic value

*humanity*

- humans are part of nature
- we are bound by ecological laws (e.g., carrying capacity)
- the preferred political arrangement is embodied in decentralized local communities

*knowledge*

- emotions and intuition are just as valid as intellect
- environmental and social problems must be understood in context and solutions require a whole systems approach

*progress*

- economic growth *ad infinitum* is pathological
- focus on inner life (e.g., voluntary simplicity and spiritual values)
- science and technology may cause more problems than they solve

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Figure 1.2<sup>38</sup>

Some scholars have claimed that Romanticism was already a fully ecocentric perspective. For example, James McKusick says that “the English Romantics [i.e., Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge] were the first full-fledged ecological writers in the Western literary tradition.”<sup>39</sup> Renowned historian Donald Worster explains: “At the very core of [the] Romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is, a search for holistic or

integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore [humankind] to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth.”<sup>40</sup> Although there are, admittedly, inescapable continuities between nineteenth century Romanticism and contemporary ecocentrism, I am hesitant to equate the two. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the vision of ecocentrism which Arne Næss articulates adds the political and moral dimensions of pluralism to the Romantic ‘holistic web of life’; such pluralism is often missing from Romantic politics. Whatever the comparisons are, however, by promoting an organic worldview the Romantics struck at the cardinal metaphor of the Modern worldview – nature-as-machine – and in effect began mapping what had hitherto been the *terra incognita* beyond anthropocentrism.

‘Romantic ecology,’ as it is sometimes called, begins in North America with the Transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau, and reaches its ‘apex’ with John Muir.<sup>41</sup> The common currency between modern ecocentrism and Romantic ecology is what Peter Hay, author of *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, calls an ‘ecological impulse.’ In short, an ecological impulse is a concern for the well-being of lifeforms besides oneself.<sup>42</sup>

**Ecological impulse:** an instinctual, spontaneous, and deeply felt consternation at the ongoing destruction directed at the increasingly embattled lifeforms with which we share the planet, all in the name of human progress.<sup>43</sup>

This definition demands a radical reconsideration of egocentrism for it is motivated by sensibilities which are tuned in an entirely different key from that of the

individualism found in Modern urban-industrial societies. The wellspring of this impulse is neither theoretical nor intellectual; it is deep feeling. As such, ecocentrism is characterized by “the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care.”<sup>44</sup> The ecological impulse as sketched by Hay continues to show up across an increasing number of individuals including Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), Rachel Carson (1907-1964), David Brower (1912-2000), Alan Drengson (b. 1934), John Livingston (b. 1923), and E. O. Wilson (b. 1929), to name but a few.<sup>45</sup>

An ecological impulse is the primary animating force of modern environmentalism. It can be seen as roughly synonymous with empathy (Gk. *empathia* < *em* ‘in, into’ + *pathos* ‘feeling’) and sympathy (Gk. *sumpathia* < *sum*, ‘with’ + *pathos* ‘feeling’) to the extent that one’s feelings are affected by another living being’s distress, particularly non-human. This phenomenon, which is not uncommon, can be seen as a catalyst for questioning the conventional subject/object dualism.

The challenge to orthodox thinking issued by Romanticism has not ceased to be a potent force in Western consciousness, yet its full meaning and importance have yet to be appreciated.<sup>46</sup> Though Berlin honours the great advances of science and technology he nevertheless considers the Romantic movement to be of far greater consequence to our present lives than any scientific breakthrough (e.g., theories of evolution or quantum physics) that has occurred in its wake.

The importance of Romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world. It seems to me to be the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred, and all the other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear... in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it.<sup>47</sup>

While it is true that as a whole the Romantics exaggerated the nonrational aspects of the human psyche, at times being guilty of “puerile histrionics,”<sup>48</sup> the same cannot be said of its leading figures such as William Blake (1757-1827), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), and John Keats (1795–1821). What these great Romantics objected to, Mary Midgley tells us, was Newton’s *single vision* – “the inability to look at things from any angle other than the scientific one.”<sup>49</sup> Roszak explains that the leading figures of Romanticism “accepted Reason as properly part of the full spectrum of mind. But *only* a part. One colour among many.”<sup>50</sup> If the Romantics failed to fully integrate the different aspects of the human psyche, it was because they lacked “a principle or synthesis that would make peace between the warring factions of the personality [i.e., reason and emotions]... What was needed was... a mature and comprehensive study of [the human psyche] in all its keys and registers.”<sup>51</sup> As Berlin has noted, the Romantic great achievement has been twofold: i) it shifted the focus from the outer world of a ‘mechanistic’ universe to the complex and often mysterious inner life of human beings; ii) it celebrated diversity as opposed to homogeneity. As such

Romanticism opened the channels into which many of the current debates over objectivism, relativism and pluralism have flowed, debates which I hope to show, have a direct influence on facilitating a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism.

Before we move on, I would like to mention a peculiarity of ecocentrism that will be central to our study of particularly Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir. After Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) there has been an identifiable trend in environmentalism. It places humankind within a global ecological network of relationships, treating *Homo sapiens* as just another species among the countless millions of others. "The point of such a perspective has emphatically *not* been the cultivation of a heightened, *less* worldly, individual sensibility. It has rather been to reassert the *corporeality* of life; to celebrate its earthliness rather than ethereality."<sup>52</sup> This trend might best be called the 'web of life' perspective.

Emphasis on the web of life can make for uneasy relations with another identifiable trend in environmentalism, what might be called 'green spirituality.'<sup>53</sup> Green spirituality focuses on the relationship between nature, humanity and the Divine, and has met with a range of reactions from skepticism to outright disdain from proponents of the web of life perspective. The major issues are sketched out in Figure 1.3

Two Trends in Ecocentrism	
<i>web of life</i>	<i>green spirituality</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ scientific ecology</li> <li>◦ ecosystems</li> <li>◦ inter-relatedness of life</li> <li>◦ natural history</li> <li>◦ particulars, diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ manifestation of divine</li> <li>◦ <i>Homo sapiens</i> can evolve spiritually</li> <li>◦ meditation/contemplation</li> <li>◦ universals, unity</li> </ul>

Figure 1.3

In its most contrasting form we have two opposing poles. The web of life perspective tends to imply that rational (scientific) knowledge of the interrelatedness of life and of ecosystem functioning is sufficient to incite a change of attitude in people towards ecologically viable practices. On the other hand, some forms of spirituality can be anti-scientific and/or anti-rational. The difference in approach between web of life and green spirituality might best be summed up as the difference between knowledge and wisdom.<sup>54</sup> The web of life perspective draws upon natural history and science for its vision (e.g., Darwin, Haeckel, conservation biology), generally an objective perspective. Green spirituality, on the other hand, draws upon wisdom traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christian mysticism, generally inner, personal perspectives.

Both perspectives agree that all life is interrelated but there is a marked ontological divide between the two camps. Web of life focuses on this world – time, space, ecological processes. Green spirituality adds a dimension of the Divine which acts as that which unifies all particulars. It is a question of ontological priority; is Spirit primary or is nature (matter)? This question has been answered differently by Emerson, Thoreau, Muir and Næss.

This tension between the two perspectives is glossed over or ignored by most scholars. Worster characterizes ecocentrism as a search for holistic perception, but what are the details of “an intense desire to restore [humankind] to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth”?<sup>55</sup> We shall explore some of details in chapter 4. Historian of religions Huston Smith claims that some form of religion has been practiced for around three million years.<sup>56</sup> It is highly unlikely it will simply be replaced by science. Furthermore, science may be said to pursue knowledge whereas religion pursues wisdom. Ecological wisdom, then – if Western culture can indeed cultivate it – will surely draw inspiration from perennial ideas such as the insight that there is a grand unity of life and the cosmos. This idea will be a recurring theme throughout the thesis.

The modern environmental movement embodies an ongoing critique of Modernity. Indeed, Duncan M. Taylor considers one of the great strengths of environmentalism to be its “ability to act as a forum from which to engage in a

sustained critique of the dominant values and assumptions underlying modern Western society.”<sup>57</sup> The global domination of the ‘Expansionist Worldview’ (XWV) is the latest instance of Modernity, characterized by “the concept of continuous growth which is extrapolated optimistically into a seemingly boundless future.”<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, much of modern environmentalism questions the underlying values and assumptions of the XWV. In doing so, it is “closely aligned with the organicist tradition of Leibniz [1646-1716], Hegel [1770-1831], and Whitehead [1861-1947], as well as with much of the Counter-Enlightenment and Romantic thought of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.”<sup>59</sup> “We are children of both worlds,”<sup>60</sup> says Berlin, even if the historical roots of the debate are not always obvious.

Surveys of environmentalism in North America almost unanimously begin with Thoreau, and are punctuated by such figures as John Muir and Leopold before marking the birth of ‘modern’ environmentalism with Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* in 1962.<sup>61</sup> Næss has gained recognition as “one of the boldest and most provocative thinkers of the twentieth century”<sup>62</sup> due not least to an extraordinarily comprehensive vision of humanity in social and ecological harmony. By examining the historical relation of ideas between American Transcendentalism and Deep Ecology one could claim to be comparing the very beginnings of environmentalism with the culmination of current ecological thought. Certainly Emerson, Thoreau,

Muir and Næss have all been critics of Modernity. However, to what extent, if any, have their critiques been one-sided and incomplete?

§1.4 *History and Truth: a note on methodology*

Næss observes that controversies naturally arise from a diversity of viewpoints and opinions on a particular author or text, and thereby afford us the opportunity to appreciate them from different angles.<sup>63</sup> We are given a chance to ‘think outside the box.’ Thus, we may come to imagine a great variety of ways in which to frame debates. As we shall see in Chapter 4, complex issues involving a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism benefit from a plurality of voices and perspectives. Indeed, ecocentrism is characterized by a diverse body of thought, ideas, values, and practices.

I agree with Alfred North Whitehead’s assertion that at the heart of the history of ideas is a search for meaning. In *The Aims of Education* (1917) he wrote: “The only use of knowledge of the past is to equip us for the present... The present contains all that there is. It is holy ground; for it is the past, and it is the future.”<sup>64</sup> However, moments of genius from past generations must not be passively imported into our own culture. If the ideas of, say Thoreau, are “merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations”<sup>65</sup> they become ‘inert.’ Received wisdom must be shaped by one’s

*present* experiences, must be made personal, otherwise it is meaningless, or, as Whitehead believed, even harmful.

Like Whitehead, Næss sees constant reevaluation of ideas (often in the form of deeper questioning) as both a sign of alert and energetic minds as well as necessary for any kind of healthy philosophical progress.

The greatness of a philosophical text consists largely in its capacity to elicit and lead the creativity of generation after generation... Philosophers may look for the best interpretation of a text, but in metaphilosophical hermeneutics and also in the history of ideas, variety is considered a cultural asset. A trend towards a uniform, not to say monolithic, way of conceiving reality, may be an ominous sign of stagnation of the total human enterprise on this planet, a sign of cultural conformity.<sup>66</sup>

This is a particularly insightful passage for the student of the history of ideas.

Næss reveals four important points:

- 1) ideas (particularly philosophical) should inspire contemplation leading to creative interpretations;
- 2) there can be no one best interpretation of a text;
- 3) a spectrum of differing interpretations is healthy and viable (and perhaps necessary for the survival of our species given the challenges of the impending ecological crisis); and
- 4) it is in the nature of human beings to conceive reality in a plurality of ways.

There are those like Whitehead and Næss who encourage the individual to actively engage new ideas, thoughts, and impressions which spark particular interest. Surely there is a sense of accomplishment in cultivating one's own interpretation of, say, the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. But, at what point does hermeneutic generosity slip into an extreme form of relativism where *any* interpretation of a text is considered 'just as valid' as any other? What does this say about the meaning of any particular text? About knowledge, or truth? Do standards simply evaporate? These are some of the most important questions that will occupy reflective human beings in the immediate future.

Consider the following example. On any spring day in Concord, Massachusetts, 1853, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson could usually be found engaged in one of their regular discussions. However, the two men related those events quite differently in their respective journals. Emerson:

Henry is militant. He seems stubborn and implacable; always manly and wise but rarely sweet. One would say that, as Webster could never speak without an antagonist, so Henry does not feel himself except in opposition. He wants a fallacy to expose, a blunder to pillory, requires a little sense of victory, a roll of the drum, to call his powers into full exercise;<sup>67</sup>

and Thoreau:

Talked, or tried to talk, to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Lost my time – nay, almost my identity. He, assuming a false opposition where there was no difference of opinion, talked to the wind – told me what I know – and I lost my time trying to imagine myself somebody else to oppose him.<sup>68</sup>

This simple example demonstrates quite clearly why we require not history, but rather, *histories*.<sup>69</sup> One of the great strengths of postmodernism in the twentieth century has been its undermining of the ideal of pure objectivity thereby forcing the reconsideration of claims to universal truths. Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) dominated nineteenth century history in both Europe and the United States with his claim that the task of historians was *blos zeigen wie es eigentlich gewesen*, “simply to show how it actually was.”<sup>70</sup> Adopting a scientific stance historians convinced themselves that they were operating as omniscient narrators calmly and dispassionately surveying the records of the past and recording the truth of what actually happened.<sup>71</sup> By the mid twentieth century, however, E. H. Carr noted that such a practice was “preposterously fallacious.”<sup>72</sup> Historical research, he wrote, “consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question what view we take of the society in which we live.”<sup>73</sup> Yet, relativism did not simply replace objectivism altogether (nor should it). Carr believed that it was impossible to assign primacy to either one, as did R. G. Collingwood when he suggested the need for the two “in their mutual relations.”<sup>74</sup>

The current debate between objectivism and relativism has become, in Richard Bernstein’s opinion, “the central cultural opposition of our time.”<sup>75</sup>

**Objectivism:** the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or

rightness. Objectivism is closely related to foundationalism and the search for an Archimedean point.

**Relativism:** the basic conviction that concepts such as rationality, truth, reality, right, the good must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society or culture. There is no substantive, overarching framework or single metalanguage by which we can rationally adjudicate or univocally evaluate competing claims or alternative paradigms.<sup>76</sup>

Far too often one succumbs to a “grand and seductive Either/Or”<sup>77</sup> whereby one thinks one is in the unfortunate position of having only two mutually exclusive options available, *either* certainty *or* nihilism – i.e., *either* finding some fixed Archimedean point of knowledge that is secure and eternal, something to which we ultimately appeal, *or* having nothing upon which to base a life, knowledge, actions, or meaning. Bernstein writes that the Either/Or dilemma is itself simply a construct which is “misleading and distortive,”<sup>78</sup> observing that these conventional categorical boundaries are being called into question. Of primary importance for our purposes here will be the extent to which anthropocentrism and ecocentrism have been understood as mutually exclusive.

By feeling compelled to choose between any two alternatives (e.g., objectivism or relativism, arts or science, reason or feelings, anthropocentrism or ecocentrism) we already begin to mark out the field of acceptable discourse. However dramatically the contrasts between objectivism and relativism have been portrayed “there is a growing sense that something is wrong with the ways in which the relevant issues

and options are posed – a sense that something is happening that is changing the categorical structure and patterns within which we think and act – a sense that we have an urgent need to move beyond objectivism and relativism.”<sup>79</sup> There is a deeper significance to the Either/Or conflict, one that moves well beyond the affairs of academics to pervade virtually every aspect of human life. “At issue are some of the most perplexing questions concerning human beings: what we are, what we can know, what norms ought to bind us, what are the grounds for hope.”<sup>80</sup> What exactly the contours of human thought will look like if we can indeed move beyond such limiting dichotomies remains to be seen. It certainly suggests, if not overtly demands, a rearranging of the categorical structures and patterns within which we think and act. Perhaps, in the restructured architecture of human thought what had previously been considered as incommensurable polar opposites may look more like the difference between a kitchen and a living room; they have different furnishings for different functions, but they still belong in the same house. Can anthropocentrism and ecocentrism be brought under the same roof?

In response to the Either/Or dilemma, scholars such as Isaiah Berlin and Arne Næss adopt pluralism.

**Pluralism:** the basic conviction that there is an irreducibility among the (sometimes extremely) different ways in which human beings view themselves and their place in the universe. There can be no one comprehensive framework which will accommodate all ideas and values into one coherent whole.<sup>81</sup>

Pluralism as I will use the term is not relativism. We will return to a more detailed analysis of pluralism in Chapter 4. As we shall see, pluralism engages the community in ways that neither objectivism nor relativism does. If environmentalism defines itself merely as a critique of Modernity then there is the risk of having two “fundamentally antithetical world views, each with its own set of assumptions about knowledge and values including its own vision of the proper human-environment relationship.”<sup>82</sup> It becomes vital for ecocentrism to accommodate a wide diversity of ideas, practices, and values that respond to the monism of Modernity without falling into its own form of monism.

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# Emerson, Thoreau, Muir

## *Roots of Ecocentrism*

*But to have been here, even if  
just once, completely:  
to have been completely with the earth will never be undone.*

### *§2.1 Historical Context*

New England in the first half of the nineteenth century saw unprecedented change. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau lived in Concord, Massachusetts, during a pivotal period in their country's history. After the momentous events of 1776 the United States was faced with forging its own identity. Well known environmental historian Roderick Nash explains: "It was widely assumed that America's primary task was the justification of its newly won freedom. This entailed more than building a flourishing economy or even a stable government. Creation of a distinctive culture was thought to be the mark of true nationhood."<sup>1</sup> Although there was widespread agreement that the United States had a promising future, even a belief in a 'manifest destiny', opinions varied on what exactly that future looked like.

The Puritans that stepped off the Mayflower in 1620 began a long tradition of wilderness antipathy which has continued well into the current day.<sup>2</sup> By the nineteenth century, however, as the United States gained confidence as a nation, many nationalists (mainly from urban centres such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia) began promoting nature as a cultural asset. Believing that "wilderness had no counterpart in the Old World"<sup>3</sup> they boasted of unsurpassed scenery, the tallest trees, the highest mountains, the clearest lakes and rivers. Although urban nationalists and those on the frontier held opposing ideas of

nature, still “indifference and hostility towards wilderness remained generally dominant.”<sup>4</sup> Even nationalists appreciated nature only for political gain. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century saw the flowering of ‘Romantic ecology,’ a reaction to ‘imperial ecology’ which sought to establish dominion and control over nature.<sup>5</sup> Many leading scholars today find in Thoreau the most acute expression during the first half of the nineteenth century of Romantic ecology.<sup>6</sup> Hence, Thoreau provides a key connection with our own ideas about ecocentrism.

Although the idea of nature played a prominent role in their outlook, American Transcendentalism was mainly a philosophical, spiritual, political, and literary movement that flourished in New England during the middle third of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> At the time the industrializing North adopted progressive ideals such as democracy, suffrage, and the abolition of slavery, the West and the South tended to side with the parochial dogmatisms of Calvinism and deterministic theology, feudalism, and aristocratic values. The social transformations brought on by industrialization were extraordinarily complex, and, as such, various aspects appealed to those of different temperaments and characters.<sup>8</sup> For example, the middle-class seized the opportunity to establish an economic, political, and practical bent to the emerging social order. The Transcendentalists, however, were among the first to recognize that in these aspects the New World had simply imported what they considered Philistine

values from Europe. An industrialized way of life offered its own kinds of oppressions, such as routine labour and other monotonous tasks. Emerson and Thoreau, perhaps more than any of their day, sought to humanize this aspect of their culture, “to awaken it to a nobler faith.”<sup>9</sup> The real issues for Emerson and Thoreau “were the philosophy and psychology – *the entire structure of thought* about [humanity’s] nature and relation to the universe”<sup>10</sup> that underlay their culture at the time.

Surely the late historian Perry Miller was correct when he wrote that the Transcendental movement “remains a significant episode in the American experience.”<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Richardson, Jr., however, believes that “the humble society” that gathered in and around Concord eventually came “to symbolize the best of the national culture” during the mid nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> In their writings and in their lives Emerson, Thoreau, and those in their circle<sup>13</sup> protested against the secularizing tendencies of their culture. For the Transcendentalists human potential was realized only when the intimate relation between God, humanity and nature was acknowledged. The Transcendentalists became “searching critics of their generation. They were impatient of any falling short of the ideal, and their lives in consequence became an open indictment of a Yankee world given over to materialism.”<sup>14</sup> They held meetings, wrote books, delivered public lectures, and published a journal, *The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion*.

These different forums were all used to protest against what they considered sterile rationalism, bourgeois ethics, and the cult of social conformity. They registered considerable disapproval of virtually everything that their society

had assumed was the crowning triumph of progress and enlightenment... It was an assertion that men [and women] in New England, and so in the New World, [would] refuse to live by sobriety and decorum alone, that there [were] requirements of the soul which demand[ed] satisfaction even though respectability must be defied and shocked... [It was] nothing less than the first of a succession of revolts by the youth of America against American Philistinism.<sup>15</sup>

In short, they anticipated by well over one hundred years much of the sense of crisis in current Western culture, including, as we shall see in this chapter, the shortcomings of anthropocentrism.

American Transcendentalism was certainly *inspired* by Old-world thought such as English Romanticism, German Idealism, neoplatonic thought and Eastern mysticism. But it did not, however, simply import these ideas wholesale. Rather, the Transcendentalists wove together an eclectic assortment of threads to form a rich new tapestry which they felt to be appropriate to their lived experience in the New World.<sup>16</sup> One historian claimed that their thinking was “as native to New England soil as the birch tree.”<sup>17</sup> Because of this complex weave American Transcendentalism defies any simple definition. Compounding the challenge is the variety of different angles from which Transcendentalism has been viewed. For example, Perry Miller wrote in 1950 “the Transcendental movement is most

accurately to be defined as a religious demonstration” against Unitarianism.<sup>18</sup> Another (pre-*Silent Spring*) observer described its social and moral dimensions as “the extreme expression of the new conscience... the apotheosis of ethical radicalism.”<sup>19</sup> Leslie Perrin Wilson, writing in 2002 (i.e., post-*Silent Spring*) explains “above all the Transcendentalists believed in the importance of a direct relationship with God and with nature.”<sup>20</sup> And Stanley Cavell, Professor Emeritus at Harvard, adds yet another dimension to Transcendentalism by identifying Emerson and Thoreau as “the founders of American thinking,” yet (sadly) finds them “philosophically repressed in the culture they founded.”<sup>21</sup>

### Kant and American Transcendentalism

The entry for ‘Transcendentalism’ in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* begins: “a religious-philosophical viewpoint held by a group of New England intellectuals, of whom Emerson, Thoreau, and Theodore Parker were the most important.”<sup>22</sup> The term was introduced to the Transcendentalists through the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which, as one commentator wrote, ‘perverted’ the original sense with which it was used by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) “for the purpose of bolstering up opinions originally derived from a wholly different source.”<sup>23</sup> As the epistemology of Emerson and Thoreau (but not Kant) is understood the term signifies a “distinction between the understanding and reason, the former providing uncertain knowledge of

appearances, the latter *a priori* knowledge of necessary truths gained through the intuition.<sup>24</sup> Transcendental knowledge, as the name implies, is considered a higher form of knowing. It is knowledge of universal truths such as the laws of nature which were believed to be, ultimately, divine. Coleridge's thought is essentially a kind of Idealism inspired by Plato and Kant.<sup>25</sup> This is the Coleridge that made such an impression upon Emerson when he read *Aids to Reflection* (with James Marsh's "Preliminary Essay") at the age of 26.<sup>26</sup> Coleridge, he said,

was of that class of philosophers called Platonists, that is, of the most Universal school; of that class that take the most enlarged and reverent views of man's nature. His eye was fixed upon Man's Reason as the faculty in which the very Godhead manifested itself or the Word was anew made flesh. His reverence for the Divine Reason was truly philosophical and made him regard every man as the most sacred object in the Universe, the Temple of Deity... He has made admirable definitions, and drawn indelible lines of distinction between things heretofore confounded... He has enriched the English language and the English mind with an explanation of the object of Philosophy; of the all important distinction between Reason and Understanding.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, *Aids to Reflection* has been considered "of the greatest single importance"<sup>28</sup> in the early formation of American Transcendentalism. This is especially true of Emerson, for he maintained a life-long habit of distinguishing between 'Reason' and 'Understanding.' A few months after meeting Coleridge in England, Emerson elaborates on his own use of the terms:

The *first* Philosophy, that of mind, is the science of what *is*, in distinction from what *appears*... Our compound nature differences us from God, but our Reason is not to be distinguished from the divine Essence. We have yet devised no words to designate the attributes of God which can adequately stand for the

universality and perfection of our own intuitions. To call the Reason ‘ours’ or ‘Human’ seems an impertinence, so absolute and unconfined it is.<sup>29</sup>

Six months later Emerson was still excited about his new discovery, writing to his brother Edward:

[L]et me ask you do you draw the distinction of Milton Coleridge & the Germans [i.e. Kant, Fichte, and Schelling,] between Reason & Understanding. I think it a philosophy itself. & like all truth very practical... Reason is the highest faculty of the soul – what we mean often by the soul itself; it never *reasons*, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision. The Understanding toils all the time, compares, contrives, adds, argues, near sighted but strong sighted, dwelling in the present the expedient the customary. Beasts have some understanding but no Reason. Reason is potentially perfect in every man – Understanding in very different degrees of strength.<sup>30</sup>

It is worth citing Emerson at length for the epistemological and ontological insights gained from these passages will bear much fruit in the next section. Along with an epistemological distinction between Reason and Understanding Emerson also makes an ontological distinction between ‘what *is*’ and ‘what *appears*.’ “Heaven is the projection of the Ideas of Reason on the plane of Understanding.”<sup>31</sup> As we shall see, Emerson’s neoplatonic view places him in a perennial tradition which distinguishes between a ‘lower’ world of space, time and sense experience, and a ‘higher’ atemporal world accessed by contemplation.

By endorsing Transcendentalism Emerson was reacting strongly against the empiricism of John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) which promoted an epistemology, immensely influential at the time, that considered

knowledge to be derived only from sense experience. (In Emerson's view knowledge was derived exclusively from the Understanding.) Kant himself replied to the British empiricists, most notably Hume, some 50 years before Emerson in his landmark work *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In a self-styled 'Copernican revolution' he reversed the role that the mind played; rather than being a passive recipient of sense impressions Kant, on this point taking his cue from Hume, maintained that the mind actively participates in forming and organizing coherent experiences of the world. However, he distinguished between the *form* of experience and the *content* of experience. The mind, according to Kant, contains *a priori* forms (ideas, concepts, or categories) that shape and order sense experience.<sup>32</sup> Kant gave no ontological priority to the forms themselves. The term 'transcendental idealism' was his best attempt to label his theory.<sup>33</sup> 'Transcendental,' Kant explained, refers "only to the *faculty of cognition*,"<sup>34</sup> i.e., the activity of reason whereby it grasps the necessary existence of the *a priori* forms themselves, which are not *conditioned by* material reality. 'Idealism' means "only the sensory representations of things,"<sup>35</sup> for things in themselves could never be known, only an 'ideal' representation of them as they appear after being conditioned, shaped and sculpted by the transcendental faculties of cognition. Additionally, we should add, for Kant, rational beings are incapable of *knowing* anything about the Divine because the mind could never experience anything unconditioned by the forms of sensibility and the pure concepts of the

understanding. Any ultimate claims to knowledge made by, to use Emerson's term, 'Reason' were merely metaphysical speculation. Effectively, Kant drew the limits of knowledge at the limits of sense experience and science.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, Emerson, following Coleridge, it was humanity's birthright to have direct experience of the Divine above and beyond mere physical impressions. The term 'transcendental' could not have been used in more disparate senses.

Clearly, then, the meaning of the term 'transcendental' underwent modification as it passed from Kant, and subsequently Fichte and Schelling, in Germany to Coleridge in England and finally to the Transcendentalists in the United States. Rather than denouncing the Transcendentalists for adopting Coleridge's misreading of Kant we might consider this an instance in the history of ideas where we have the good fortune to be able to trace the modifications very closely. Emerson, writing in 1842 and having had time to reflect on the movement, describes the importance of Kant as having shown

that there was a very important class of ideas, or imperative forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired; that these were intuitions of the mind itself; and he denominated them *Transcendental* forms. The extraordinary profoundness and precision of that man's thinking have given vogue to his nomenclature, in Europe and America, to that extent, that whatever belongs to the class of intuitive thought, is popularly called at the present day *Transcendental*.<sup>37</sup>

Both Kant and Emerson seem particularly engaged with the 'imperative forms' that are in the mind *a priori*. However, Emerson parts company with Kant by

observing a “tendency to respect the intuitions and to give them, at least in our creed [i.e. Transcendentalism], all authority over our experience.”<sup>38</sup> It should be noted here that, as with the term ‘transcendental,’ Emerson and Kant used ‘intuition’ in diametrically opposed senses as well. For Emerson ‘intuition’ was the highest faculty of knowing capable of grasping Divine truths. It was used synonymously with ‘Reason.’ In Kant’s vocabulary ‘intuition’ is the English word traditionally used to translate the German *Anschauung*. One commentator noted that “both [words] have the etymological sense of ‘looking at’ or ‘looking upon.’”<sup>39</sup> *Anschauung* describes concrete, unmediated sense experience, having nothing to do with either Emerson’s use of ‘intuition, or our contemporary use of the term.

Yet, for all their rebellion against Locke and Hume, the Transcendentalists (as well as Kant) never retreat into pure Idealism, and maintain some sympathies with the empiricists. Emerson found that “nature in the woods is very companionable. There, my Reason & my Understanding are sufficient company for each other.”<sup>40</sup> And Thoreau wrote “we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us.”<sup>41</sup> Kant, on the one hand, draws the limits of knowledge at the limits of sense experience; on the other hand, the Transcendentalists appear to use experience, especially of nature, to stimulate what they considered the higher faculties of intuition.

§2.2 *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

A brief biography

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was born in Boston in 1803, the fourth of eight children. The father, William Emerson, died when Waldo was 11, and the family faced constant financial challenges. Yet Emerson attended Harvard College, graduating in 1821, and returned to Harvard Divinity School to prepare for a career in the ministry. By 1829 Emerson enjoyed success both as an esteemed Unitarian minister at the Second Church in Boston, and in marriage to Ellen Louise Tucker. Understandably, after Ellen succumbed to tuberculosis (ubiquitous in those days) on February 8, 1831, Emerson was completely devastated; he considered it to be the “complete wreck of earthly good.”<sup>42</sup> This marks a major turning point in Emerson’s life, for after Ellen’s death he spent over a year in grief and confusion, distancing himself more and more from the church and its ideals. After a solitary retreat in the mountains of New Hampshire for several weeks during the summer of 1832, he returned to Boston, resigned as a minister, and planned to travel Europe, setting sail on Christmas Day. He was 29 years old.

His travels through the Old World were momentous. Among the many intellectuals he met were J.S. Mill (1806-1873), Wordsworth (1770-1850), Coleridge (1772-1834), and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) with whom he maintained a life-long correspondence. Perhaps more important, though, was an epiphany which he

had while visiting the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. While inspecting the many cabinets of specimens there he was struck by the complete organic unity of life:

The Universe is a more amazing puzzle than ever as you glance along this bewildering series of animated forms, – the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, snakes, – & the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient in the very rock aping organized forms. Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in the observer, – an occult relation between the very scorpions and man. I feel the centipede in me – cayman, carp, eagle, & fox. I am moved by strange sympathies, I say continually, “I will be a naturalist.”<sup>43</sup>

On his return voyage in September and October, 1833, he was outlining a book he intended to write on a subject that was increasingly demanding his attention: the connection between the human mind and nature.<sup>44</sup>

Emerson finally settled in the village of Concord, Massachusetts, after marrying Lydia Jackson. He made a career of writing essays and giving lectures, becoming increasingly in demand. As his popularity soared he was invited to travel across the United States as well as to Britain and Europe to give lectures, eventually becoming “a fixture of American public life.”<sup>45</sup> Emerson gave up much of his precious solitude in his writing chamber to engage in political affairs speaking out against both slavery and the civil war. His most effective years ranged from 1836 to the early 1870’s when, in a cruel irony, he began showing signs of aphasia. His mental powers slowly declined, and Emerson died of pneumonia on April 27, 1882.

## Emerson and ecocentrism

Although far more popular than Thoreau during his lifetime, today Emerson's reputation has largely been eclipsed by the younger thinker's.<sup>46</sup> Most historians trace the beginnings of environmentalism in North America to Thoreau,<sup>47</sup> whom we will turn to in §2.3.

Currently, Emerson's vision of the human-nature relationship receives contrasting interpretations which reflect the ongoing trends in ecocentrism. Its emphasis on spiritual transcendence has not been compelling to web of life ecocentrism. Max Oelschlaeger is particularly dismissive of Emerson, interpreting him as "conventionally anthropocentric and androcentric, enframed in a Baconian-Cartesian perspective."<sup>48</sup> And these often quoted passages from the end of *Nature* have caused exasperation for more than one scholar: "Know then that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect... As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions... The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation – a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God – he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to sight."<sup>49</sup> By placing mind at the centre of the cosmos Emerson does demonstrate some continuity with the Age of Reason. Nothing could more devastate Emerson's chances at inspiring

contemporary ecocentrism than aligning him with Bacon, Descartes, and the Enlightenment.

On the other hand, those such as Ken Wilber, a leading theorist in transpersonal psychology, hold Emerson up as the consummate environmentalist. For Wilber, Emerson's profound 'nature mysticism' differentiates nature and Spirit, but neither dissociates nature from, nor equates nature with, Spirit.<sup>50</sup> Emerson makes it quite clear that the unity of the world is in its Transcendental realm (what Wilber calls 'interiority'):

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.<sup>51</sup>

Wilber sums up Emerson's ontology thus: "All of nature is in Spirit but not all of Spirit is to be found in nature. Rather, Spirit permeates nature through and through, itself remaining behind nature, beyond nature, not confined to nature and not identified with nature."<sup>52</sup> Spirit is given ontological priority for Spirit can exist without nature, but nature cannot exist without Spirit. This insight, according to Wilber, is the key to Emerson's environmentalism, for egocentrism, anthropocentrism, and ecocentrism are all concentric *within* theocentrism.

However, Wilber insists that we interpret Emerson as promoting a *holarchy* where Spirit ‘transcends and includes’ matter and nature rather than as a hierarchy where Spirit is absolutely prior, as Oelschlaeger appears to insist<sup>53</sup> (see Fig. 2.1). Humanity, because of its exclusive capacity for self-reflexive consciousness, can cultivate awareness of the dual nature of reality – Spiritual and material.

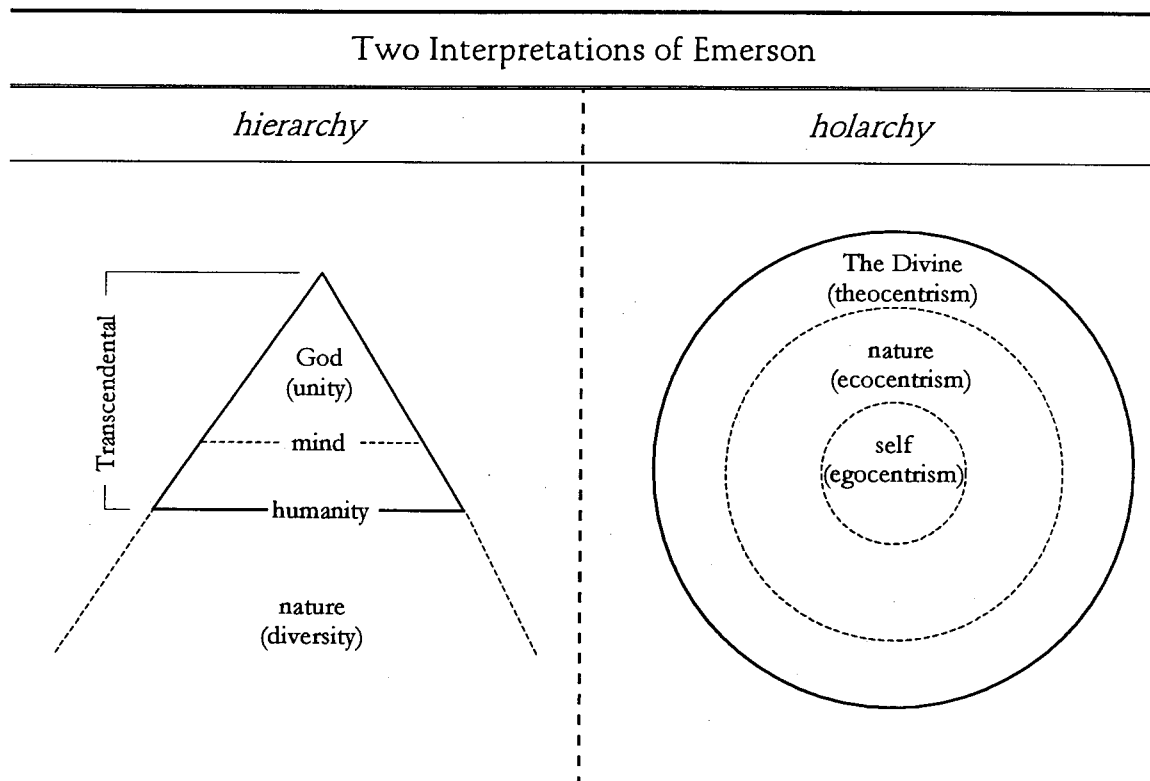


Figure 2.1

In Emerson’s view everything has both physical properties and Transcendental properties. The soul of a person is ultimately Divine, joined with ‘the eternal One.’

As Emerson states the subject/object dualism is overcome when the 'subject' identifies with the Divine. But how? Emerson suggests that it is a matter of perspective: "What is life but the angle of vision? A man is measured by the angle at which he looks at objects."<sup>54</sup> Everything that appears separate or fragmented in the Understanding is united when seen with the eye of Reason.

Until this higher agency intervened, the animal eye sees, with wonderful accuracy, sharp outlines and coloured surfaces. When the eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added, grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinctness of objects. If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, any shortcomings exist entirely within ourselves.

The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty, is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist, until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit. Love is as much its demand, as perception. Indeed, neither can be perfect without the other.<sup>56</sup>

Emerson reacts to not only the atomistic perspective of the Newtonian worldview, but to the assumption that empiricism and 'Understanding' produce sufficient knowledge. Like the Romantics, he believed that the faculty of Intuition ('the eye of Reason') perceived higher truths than the Understanding, moments referred to as 'delicious awakenings.' Commonly, Emerson's musings are criticized as dry

*theories* of nature.<sup>57</sup> However, the ‘ideas’ that Emerson treats so highly are not mere abstractions and disembodied essences, but rather, more like Hegelian ‘concrete universals,’ and therefore are more substantial than nature.<sup>58</sup> Spirit, though primary, manifests a structure which is accessible to the mind through intuitive contact. The ‘Understanding’ alone cannot grasp these elements of the universe. Richard Geldard, author of *The Esoteric Emerson*, believes that “what makes Emerson so seminal in American letters and significant in world literature and thought is his constant concern for the state of our perceptions.”<sup>59</sup> It was the dry theorizing of Newton, et, al. that Emerson was reacting to and was very aware not to simply expound more theories. Emerson was much more interested in our unmediated contact with the Divine, and the insights that come immediately and intuitively without the intervention of *any* authority (e.g., the church). Emerson “tells us again and again that we can know through an intuition found in wakefulness (the state of reflection and the consciousness of presence), that there are laws which frame the universe and human life and that those laws can be not only known but followed.”<sup>60</sup> The most effective way to discover those laws, Emerson believed, was through direct experience with nature.

Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures... [h]e shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, ‘Know thyself,’ and the modern precept, ‘Study nature,’ become at last one maxim.<sup>61</sup>

Nature and the soul (the Divine) are the complete reality. If one uses Understanding only there is less comprehension according to Emerson. When one's "inward and outward senses are... truly adjusted to each other"<sup>62</sup> then one begins to know in a profoundly concrete sense the inescapable unity of self, nature, and the Divine. After the Scientific Revolution the dominant epistemology produced a world which 'lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps.' Emerson obviously opposed this when he wrote "To the instructed eye the universe is transparent."<sup>63</sup> As Emerson noted, the soul demands love is as much as it demands perception. The 'instructed eye,' then, is a metaphor for the perfect integration of the inner life with the outer world of nature and with God. (A fruitful endeavour may be to consider similarities with Spinoza's third, or 'highest,' kind of knowledge, *amor Dei intellectualis*.) It was vital for the well being of any person to have this conviction of unity and belonging to creation, and Emerson saw his role as helping to instruct his fellow human beings.

There seem to be two major concerns expressed by web of life ecocentrists. The first regards the ontological status of nature. From an ecocentric perspective nature appears 'degraded' in relation to the Divine. A typical complaint is that Emerson "tended to devalue the material world except insofar as it could be put to higher spiritual uses by the human mind."<sup>64</sup> If ecocentrism advocates valuing nature for itself (seeing intrinsic or inherent value in nature), Emerson's idealism

has, to a large extent, been interpreted as *replacing* ecocentric values with theocentric ones. “The organic world, full of sights and sounds and smells was [to Emerson] mere appearance, a visible promontory obscuring something more real than the phenomenal face of nature – namely, mind itself, and ultimately God, who unifies all seeming diversity into One.”<sup>65</sup> The reaction, it seems, is that a theocentric perspective can only be held *at the expense of* an ecocentric perspective. However, must one choose *either* theocentrism *or* ecocentrism? Emerson anticipated this problem to some extent when he described the Transcendentalist as one who “does not deny the sensuous fact: by no means; but he will not see that alone. He does not deny the presence of this table, this chair, and the walls of this room, but he looks at these things as the reverse side of the tapestry, as the *other end*, each being a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact which nearly concerns him.”<sup>66</sup> For Emerson the Divine is intimately involved in matter; the ‘problem’ of having to choose *either* theocentrism *or* ecocentrism doesn’t exist for ecocentrism is simply theocentrism seen from a different angle.

The second concern expressed by some environmentalists is over the place Emerson affords humanity in a wide cosmological sense. Humanity is unique in that we alone have a “compound nature,” i.e., our physical bodies ground us to nature and the earth, yet Reason allows us to become aware that we are grounded in the Divine as well. Emerson is interpreted as undermining ecocentrism’s emphasis on

human beings as ‘just another organism’ by transgressing the organic unity and placing humanity ‘above’ the natural order. Since anti-hierarchical thinking is characteristic of modern environmentalism the concern is understandable. The issue seems to revolve around the idea that if humans are unique by possessing Reason then we are somehow elevated in value. Further, it is this elevation in value which concerns proponents of web of life ecocentrism.

As Emerson matured he tempered his younger fascination with Idealism. “On questions of politics, social action, and metaphysics there is a new note of this-worldliness and practicality that grew on him in the months after the death of Waldo [his son, in 1842,].”<sup>67</sup> He was curt with a friend who was overzealous about ‘the other world’ of Transcendentalism: “Other world? There is no other world; here or nowhere is the whole fact.”<sup>68</sup> The same year Emerson wrote this surprising comment in his journal: “This new molecular philosophy goes to show that there are astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom; that the world is all outside; it has no inside.”<sup>69</sup>

One also finds in Emerson’s writings a recurring theme of skepticism. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), it must be noted, was one of Emerson’s *Representative Men* along side Plato. Keenly aware that his own writings might be used dogmatically he cautioned his readers:

But lest I should mislead any when I have my own head and obey my whims, let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back.<sup>70</sup>

*No portrayal is complete without this consideration, yet Emerson's skepticism is completely underrepresented in the scholarship. This makes it a challenge for anyone – Oelschlaeger and Wilber included – to claim to have Emerson 'figured out.'*

What seems close to certain, however, is that Emerson held an overriding sense of a *grand unity to reality*. There is an unmistakable emphasis throughout his writings on this unity, which goes by many names – God, Over-Soul, Spirit, the One, Mind. “In all my lectures,” Emerson wrote, “I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man.”<sup>71</sup> In human beings, indeed all nature, lies the Divine which unites all the world. Of course, Emerson was sometimes poignantly aware of the radical multiplicity of the world: “A believer in Unity, a seer of Unity, I yet behold two. Whilst I feel myself in sympathy with Nature & rejoice with greatly beating heart in the course of Justice & Benevolence overpowering me, I yet find little access to this Me of Me [i.e. God].”<sup>72</sup> Still, the conviction that the Divine is everywhere, that there is nothing which is not Divine, remained with him his entire life: “I behold with awe & delight many illustrations of the One Universal Mind. I see my being imbedded in it. As a plant in the earth so I grow in God. I

am only a form of him. He is the soul of Me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, *I am God.*"<sup>73</sup>

The tension in current ecocentrism reflects the age old problem of unity and diversity – ‘the One and the many.’ Emerson’s cosmos, ultimately, has no divisions and he clearly favours ‘the One.’ “Without identity at base, chaos must forever be.”<sup>74</sup> Web of life ecocentrism can agree with Emerson that nature and humanity are unified. However, there is reluctance to extend the ontological priority to the unity; diversity (e.g., biodiversity) is given at least as much commitment in the web of life. Emerson seems to have a distinct ontological category for the unity (i.e., God), whereas proponents of the web of life tend to make no such claims.

Presently, however, it is Thoreau who holds more currency than Emerson in the modern environmental movement. Noted historians such as Nash and Worster have placed Thoreau (at Emerson’s expense) at the very beginnings of environmentalism in North America.<sup>75</sup> Lawrence Buell, professor of English at Harvard, sums up the current attitude: “Thoreau is today considered the first American environmental saint.”<sup>76</sup> This phenomenon alone suggests a desire for alternatives to Emerson’s view, and Thoreau has indeed provided at least one counterpoint.

### §2.3 *Henry David Thoreau*

#### A brief biography

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) lived his entire life in the village of Concord, Massachusetts. Only various trips to Canada, Cape Cod and Maine interrupted his mostly quiet life in the village. Thoreau was fourteen years Emerson's junior, and the two met in Concord in the autumn of 1837, the year Thoreau graduated from Harvard, and as American Transcendentalism was attracting attention throughout New England. He was warmly welcomed by Emerson into his circle of friends and associates. Emerson saw much potential in his young friend, opening his personal library for Thoreau's use and encouraging him to pursue writing and to keep a journal (a habit he would continue with an almost religious zeal for the rest of his life). Thoreau never married, never settled into permanent employment, but instead chose to live life on his terms – a life of selective solitude, walking in nature, thinking and writing. He earned just enough money to finance his immediate needs through odd jobs such as surveying, but he also helped with the family business of manufacturing pencils. Thoreau finally succumbed to tuberculosis on May 6, 1862.

Thoreau was not fully appreciated in his own time, and was considered largely “as a satellite orbiting an Emersonian centre of gravity.”<sup>77</sup> Octavius Frothingham's *Transcendentalism in New England* (1876) was the first account of the movement

as a whole, yet it ignores Thoreau completely.<sup>78</sup> Since his death in 1862, though, popular opinion has slowly tipped the balance in favour of the younger writer. Standard environmental histories today emphasize the Thoreau-Muir-Leopold-Carson continuity virtually ignoring Emerson.

Thoreau is perhaps best known for his book *Walden*, an account of his time spent in a small cabin on the shores of Walden Pond, widely considered a classic of the English language. He is also famous for inspiring modern civil rights activists such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. with his essay “On Resistance to Civil Government” (a.k.a. “Civil Disobedience”). Currently, Thoreau is hailed in North America as one of the very first environmentalists. His later writings, especially the journals after 1854 (post *Walden*) and the natural history essays such as “Walking,” have received favourable reappraisal from many scholars searching for the roots of ecocentrism.

#### Thoreau and ecocentrism

Frequently Thoreau is *contrasted* with Emerson, “often thought of as Emerson’s earthy opposite.”<sup>79</sup> It has only been in the past forty years – since *Silent Spring* – that Thoreau has been seen as an important thinker in his own right. Joel Porte’s study *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict* (1965) is one of the first efforts to question the inherited assumption that Thoreau’s philosophy is “almost identical with Emerson’s.”<sup>80</sup> Most scholars now agree that Thoreau was

initially attracted to Emerson's ideas. But, as he matured he distanced himself from the Transcendentalism of his friend and mentor. "A day-to-day physical intimacy with nature was the foundation for Thoreau of a new, more intense empiricism."<sup>81</sup>

Thoreau was not quite 28 years old when he began the famous 'living experiment' after obtaining permission from Emerson to use a parcel of his land on the shores of Walden Pond. For two years, two months, and two days beginning July 4, 1845, Thoreau lived there, "a mile from any neighbour,"<sup>82</sup> in a one-room cabin he built himself. His journal entry for July 6, 1845 – two days after he officially took up residence by the pond – reveals much:

I wish to meet the facts of life – the vital facts, which are the phenomena or actuality the gods meant to show us – face to face, and so I came down here. Life! who knows what it is, what it does? If I am not quite right here, I am less wrong than before; and now let us see what they will have.<sup>83</sup>

This entry is important for it marks a clear assertion of his primary interests; his starting point is not in the Transcendental realm, but rather in the physical world, that which is immediately present. Consider Thoreau's choice of words: "vital facts," "phenomena" "actuality."<sup>84</sup> These are not the first choice for someone investigating Transcendental universals. Thoreau, writes Worster, demanded that facts "become experiences for the whole [person], not mere abstractions in a disembodied mind."<sup>85</sup>

It is true that Thoreau's own ideas were arrived at more through "a lifetime of primary experience or firsthand meetings with nature"<sup>86</sup> and less in the pages of Plato. Yet Thoreau does not completely reject Transcendentalism altogether. "Man cannot afford to be a naturalist to look at Nature directly... He must look through and beyond her."<sup>87</sup> A Transcendental dimension still found a place in Thoreau's universe. After discovering several cocoons of the Promethea moth (*Callosamia promethea*) one winter afternoon he wrote:

Though the particular twigs on which you find some cocoons may never or very rarely retain any leaves – the maple, for instance – there are enough leaves left on other shrubs and trees to warrant their adopting this disguise. Yet it is startling to think that the inference has in this case been drawn by some mind that, as most other plants retain some leaves, the walker will suspect these also too. Each and all such disguises and other resources remind us that not some poor worm's instinct merely, as we call it, but the mind of the universe rather, which we share, has been intended upon each particular object. All the wit in the world was brought to bear on each case to secure its end. It was long ago, in a full senate of all intellects, determined how cocoons had best be suspended, – kindred mind with mine that admires and approves decided it so.<sup>88</sup>

However we compare the two, Thoreau certainly questions modern humanity's relationship with physical nature in a much more sustained and penetrating manner than Emerson. Furthermore, the ontological uniqueness of humans that Emerson promotes is virtually ignored at times: "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?"<sup>89</sup> This side of Thoreau appeals widely to web of life ecocentrism.

But Thoreau is much more sophisticated than many scholars portray. Alfred Tauber, Professor of Philosophy, Professor of Medicine, and Director of the Centre for Philosophy and History of Science at Boston University, reads Thoreau as engaged with the key philosophical issue of his time: Descartes' subject/object dualism. "Thoreau hoped to demonstrate that there was, in fact, no final divide between [humankind] and nature, and that mind and nature might be integrated."<sup>90</sup> Whereas Descartes found certainty in his famous maxim *Cogito ergo sum*, Thoreau was less convinced. "Let me forever go in search of myself – Never for a moment think that I have found myself. Be as a stranger to myself never a familiar-seeking acquaintance still."<sup>91</sup> This journal entry has overtones of ideas from the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (fl. c. 500 BCE): "I searched out myself"; "You would not find out the boundaries of the soul, even by travelling every path: so deep a measure does it have."<sup>92</sup> At times Thoreau's interest in the self borders on obsession, and ultimately led him to acknowledge epistemological limits across which the human mind could not extend towards wild nature.

Thoreau was undoubtedly one of the preeminent naturalists of the nineteenth century. However, his keen self-awareness was, according to Tauber, always at work in his observations of the world.

There was always a bidirectional movement in Thoreau's work: he would not only develop, even create, his personal identity in the context of nature, he would also engage and *know* nature in his particular fashion and thereby uniquely identify his world. Despite his commitment to empiricism and public

discourse, Thoreau understood that *what* he saw and *how* he processed that experience were characteristic of his personal vision and ultimately shaped by it.<sup>93</sup>

Thoreau is a Kantian in the sense that he allows the mind to play a dynamic role in shaping the picture of reality, yet he is not limited to the ‘unalterable cognitive patterns’<sup>94</sup> that Kant and Emerson assume. Like many Romantics, Thoreau reveals postKantian sensibilities by admitting “the possibility that the patterns are mutable,” and therefore Transcendentalism “becomes a perhaps endless search for the potentialities of mind.”<sup>95</sup> Thoreau was finely tuned to the dialectic interplay between his sense of self and nature. However, rather than simply say, as Oelschlaeger does, that “Thoreau, not Emerson, is the American heir to Kant’s critical philosophy”<sup>96</sup> I propose a more liberal reading. Each man seems to be testing certain elements from the great German thinker’s writings, putting those elements into fresh combinations with others based upon their own experiences in New England. Emerson interpreted the concepts and categories as the structure of the Divine mind. Thoreau took Kant’s insight and fostered a deep moral concern, for it brought up issues of responsibility for ‘constructing’ both the outer world and the inner self.<sup>97</sup>

Thoreau shares postmodernity’s conviction that an objective, Archimedean point from which to view and understand the universe is unattainable. “There is no such thing as pure *objective* observation,” he wrote in his journal. “Your observation, to

be interesting, i.e. be significant, must be *subjective*.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, the subject must be involved in the observation in order for the world to have meaning. Presumably Thoreau meant that emotional involvement (among other things) was required: “It is impossible for the same person to see things from the poet’s point of view and that of the man of science.”<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, one must acknowledge that he or she is playing a role in the observation, that the most important aspect of observation is the relationship between ‘subjects’ and ‘objects.’

I think that the man of science makes this mistake, and the mass of mankind along with him: that you should coolly give your chief attention to the phenomenon which excites you as something independent of you, and not as it is related to you. The important fact is its effect on me. [The man of science] thinks that I have no business to see anything else but just what he defines the rainbow to be, but I care not whether my vision of truth is a waking thought or dream remembered, whether it is seen in the light or in the dark. It is the subject of the vision, the truth alone, that concerns me. The philosopher for whom rainbows, etc., can be explained away never saw them. With regard to such objects, I find that it is not they in themselves (with which men of science deal) that concern me; the point of interest is somewhere between me and them (i.e. the objects).<sup>100</sup>

Thoreau explicitly rejects the disengaged rationality that exemplifies the scientific ideal. In its place he offers a subjective intimately involved in nature and the cosmos. An explanation is not sufficient to account for his experiences for it does not account for the relationship between himself and the phenomena (e.g. rainbows). The effect of the experiences on him are deemed to be ‘the truth’ and therefore full of meaning.

Thoreau knew that there was no escaping the constraints of his individual perspective, and that he was “committed to processing information through some interpretive (i.e. subjective) schema. Such an observer cannot adhere to a rigid identification of ‘facts’ based on an idealized separation of the knower and the known.”<sup>101</sup> (However, it would be erroneous to conclude that the whole external world was suspect. Thoreau did indeed believe in an independent physical nature – he was not a solipsist – but what he did question was the absolute authority of so-called ‘objectivity.’) “Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.”<sup>102</sup> The abstracted separation of subject and object, it is suggested, is only as real as a dream. As we shall see in the next chapter, Thoreau anticipates the relationalism of Arne Næss when addressing the phenomenon of an unknown (infinite?) number of perspectives from which to view the universe, each lifeform presumably being its own subjective centre of knowing.

“The stars are the apexes of what wonderful triangles! What distant and different beings in the various mansions of the universe are contemplating the same one at the same moment! Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?”<sup>103</sup>

There is a clear break from the empiricism of Locke and Hume. But it may also be an oblique criticism of Emerson's impression that "nature is so pervaded with human life that there is something of humanity in all and in every particular."<sup>104</sup> Thoreau may have played out the subject/object dualism in a different key than Emerson, and with less resolve than that which Emerson displayed, he was, however, highly suspect of the inherited Cartesian dualism, and obviously sensitive to the need for viable alternatives.

At times Emerson saw the physical world of nature as an "inferior incarnation of God,"<sup>105</sup> yet afforded humanity alone the redeeming quality of Reason. Thoreau, however, was less confident about humankind's place in the order of things.

It appears to me that, to one standing on the heights of philosophy, mankind and the works of man have sunk out of sight altogether; that man is altogether too much insisted on. The poet says the proper study of mankind is man. I say, study to forget all that; take wider views of the universe. That is the egotism of the race.... I do not value any view of the universe into which man and the institutions of man enter very largely and absorb much of the attention. Man is but the place where I stand, and the prospect hence is infinite. It is not a chamber of mirrors which reflect me. When I reflect, I find that there is other than me. Man is a past phenomenon to philosophy. The universe is larger than enough for man's abode.<sup>106</sup>

By the time Thoreau had sent "Walking" (first delivered as a lecture in 1851) to be published in *The Atlantic Monthly* just before his death in 1862, his epistemology was of a very different calibre than Emerson's.

The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise on a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called Knowledge before – a discovery that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. Man cannot KNOW in any higher sense than this.<sup>107</sup>

The preeminence of the human mind, so dominant a feature in Emerson's writings, finds little sympathy with Thoreau. Web of life ecocentrism surely appreciates this side of Thoreau, the side which constantly questions the relationship between humanity, nature, and consciousness.<sup>108</sup> If nature cannot ultimately be appropriated by human consciousness it cannot be controlled. Thoreau seems close to Kant in concluding that since the mind always plays a role in forming our perceptions of nature, and that we cannot 'KNOW' a pure nature unconditioned by the human mind – we can only have 'Sympathy with Intelligence.' All claims to knowledge, it seems, must be qualified by an acknowledgement of the mind's filtering processes. Thoreau admits that "with regard to Nature I live a sort of border life, on the confines of a world into which I make occasional and transient forays only."<sup>109</sup> Unlike Kant, however, Thoreau is not *completely* cut off from Nature (Kant's *noumena*). But the resulting consciousness of these 'occasional forays' into Nature is altogether impersonal, sounding similar in timbre to the ecstatic moments Emerson described as 'delicious awakenings.' "Above all," Thoreau wrote, "we cannot afford not to live in the present," where one transcends

the separate ego self and escapes into “a pure morning joy.”<sup>110</sup> These mystical moments<sup>111</sup> result in a state of being similar to what the Greeks had called *ataraxia*, ‘equanimity’ or ‘tranquility.’<sup>112</sup> (As with Emerson’s ‘eye of Reason’ a fruitful endeavour may be to consider similarities with Spinoza’s highest form of knowledge, *amor Dei intellectualis*.)

Unlike Emerson, who believed that nature was “a mirror of the soul,”<sup>113</sup> Thoreau saw nature as mysterious and inexplicable. “The mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Thoreau too beheld with awe and delight what Emerson referred to as nature’s ‘many illustrations,’ but emphasized much less than Emerson a Transcendental unity. He seems to revel in the inability to know ‘the Creator’ directly. “It is not when I am going to meet him, but when I am just turning away and leaving him alone, that I discover that God is. I say, God. I am not sure that is the name. You will know whom I mean.”<sup>115</sup> The organic world of seasonal cycles, sun and moon, birch trees and loons, was seen as a kind of perfection. “Here or nowhere is our heaven”<sup>116</sup> Thoreau wrote in his first book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, and expressed a similar sentiment in *Walden*: “God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us.”<sup>117</sup> Even when speaking of absolutes (God) Thoreau

includes the necessity of ordinary everyday reality. The mundane is as ontologically important as the Divine. Clearly, this aspect of Thoreau is much more aligned with the current of web of life sensibilities. The anthropocentric assumptions which have dominated the Modern mindscape were questioned and rejected by Thoreau, and continue to be problematic today. Thoreau may be said to be ecocentric to the extent that he questions humanity's assumed position of privilege among other lifeforms.

Contrary to popular interpretations of Thoreau as an ecocentric naturalist, Tauber concedes the other side of Thoreau's "Janus-like vision."<sup>118</sup> In his preoccupation with searching for himself

Thoreau is radically *egocentric*, his narcissism dominating all other concerns... Never complacent that he has found himself, Thoreau seems embarked on an endless search for his own identity, seemingly to the exclusion of serious attempts to integrate himself in the larger community. Rather than seek his place in the [outer] world he would search for his true person within.<sup>119</sup>

Although he did have moments of what might be called 'unity consciousness,' it was because of his obsession with self-awareness that Buell, rightly, cautions against idealizing Thoreau as the patron saint of ecocentrism.<sup>120</sup>

It is precisely because of his acute self-awareness that Thoreau presents a challenge for proponents of web of life ecocentrism such as Worster. Anyone who has read the famous 'melting sandbank'<sup>121</sup> passage in *Walden* would certainly have

sympathies with Oelschlaeger's claim that "Thoreau had the brilliance to recognize, before Darwin published his theory of evolution, an organic connection between *Homo sapiens* and nature – a natural world from which the species had come and to which it was bound."<sup>122</sup> Indeed, many have identified with his search for holism, reading him as being more intent than any naturalist on "merging the self with nature."<sup>123</sup> Yet, if ecocentrism requires extending one's sphere of concern beyond the immediate ego self, to what extent does self-awareness defeat the ecological impulse? Or, put another way, to what extent does ecocentrism diminish as self-awareness increases? Of course, the two terms need not be mutually exclusive, as we shall see in the next chapter in our discussion of Arne Næss's 'ecological Self.'

However self absorbed Thoreau was, he was still intensely interested in the particulars of the natural world. Especially after 1850 he "increasingly took an empirical and 'scientific' approach to nature."<sup>124</sup> Nature was interesting for its own sake, and much of his writing displays "a desire to make the ordinary seem poetic."<sup>125</sup> The leaf, for example, became "the archetypal organic form, a kind of ur-phenomenon expressive of creative life."<sup>126</sup> Even Emerson recognized this difference: "In reading Henry Thoreau's journal... I find the same thought, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generality."<sup>127</sup> Laura Dassow

Walls, who wrote companion books on the role of science in Emerson and Thoreau, makes a useful distinction by seeing Emerson's transcendence as going 'beyond' objects whereas Thoreau sought transcendence 'within' objects.<sup>128</sup>

It is well established that both Emerson and Thoreau had a profound impact on John Muir.<sup>129</sup> Their ideas were received warmly by Muir, and inspired many of his writings. (For example, Muir nearly plagiarized Thoreau's famous aphorism "In Wildness is the preservation of the World" when he wrote "in God's wildness lies the hope of the world."<sup>130</sup>) "Though the Transcendental tradition flowed from Emerson to Thoreau and Muir, neither of the younger men were strict followers of Emerson."<sup>131</sup> As we shall see in the next section, Muir was his own man with his own ideas; he "created his own rich metaphysical imagery from his unique mind's eye."<sup>132</sup>

#### §2.4 *John Muir*

##### A brief biography

In February of 1849 Emerson had returned home from his second trip to England and Europe and was revising and delivering the "Natural History of Intellect" lecture series; Thoreau was living in the attic of his parents' house that he had converted into a study writing, among other works, what would be his masterpiece *Walden*. John Muir, a boy of ten, was sailing to the New World leaving

his home village of Dunbar, Scotland. He was especially taken with the descriptions of the New World that filtered back home, and as he crossed the Atlantic he imagined he was traveling to a place of “boundless woods full of mysterious good things,” where the trees were full of sugar and grew “in a ground full of gold.”<sup>133</sup> For the excited young Muir, America was a land of fantasy and mystery.

Muir spent his adolescence on a farm in Wisconsin located “on the edges of a rapidly advancing civilization, one that... was tearing into the landscape and transforming it into a recognizable, functioning part of an increasingly industrialized republic.”<sup>134</sup> His father, Daniel Muir, was a religious zealot (a member of the Disciples of Christ), often giving the children ‘outrageously severe’ beatings and forcing them to memorize long passages from the Bible.<sup>135</sup> After years of monotonous labour Muir entered the University of Wisconsin in February 1861, just a few months before the Civil War broke out. Although he left two years later – far short of a degree – the time he spent there was formative. It was through geology, for example, that “Muir learned to look at the land with a new awareness of order and pattern.”<sup>136</sup> Botany further supported his emerging perspective of wholeness in nature. But it was the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, introduced to him by Jeanne Carr, which proved to be of invaluable importance for they “removed the last of Muir’s doubts concerning the conflicts of religion and the

study of the natural world”<sup>137</sup> and provided the intellectual grounding for his love of nature. In his own words, he was “only leaving one university for another, the Wisconsin University for the University of the Wilderness.”<sup>138</sup>

He traveled to Canada in the spring of 1864, botanising along the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Ontario, finally settling into work in Meaford, Ontario. After a fire burned down the broom factory where he was employed in February, 1866, Muir headed back to the United States. He quickly found work in a machine shop in Indianapolis, believing he could earn a living and spend his spare time in the surrounding woods.<sup>139</sup> In March, 1867, Muir suffered an unfortunate accident in which almost lost his eyesight. The several weeks he spent in recovery forced him into a period of introspection, and during this time Muir resolved no longer to live the life of a “nameless casualty of this age of the machines,” but rather to venture forth and experience the fullness of God’s natural world.<sup>140</sup> By September of that year, at the age of twenty-nine, he had set out on his most ambitious venture yet: a walk to South America.

Muir’s trip was cut short by illness (malaria) and after he recovered in Havana, Cuba, eventually secured passage westward to San Francisco, landing in California on March 28, 1868. Thus he began a new era in his life among the Sierra Nevada mountains which inspired his most powerful writings on nature and wilderness preservation.<sup>141</sup> In May of 1871 Emerson travelled to California for a vacation and

met Muir. Emerson was so taken with Muir that he invited him to live in Concord and edit a proposed collected works of Thoreau who had died only a few years before. Muir graciously declined but the two corresponded until Emerson's death eleven years later. When he was forty years old Muir married Louie Wanda Strentzel, and in April, 1880, the couple took over Louie's parents' home in Martinez, California, along with its fruit ranch. They had two daughters, Anna Wanda and Helen. Muir became widely known for his nature and travel articles in such publications as *The Century Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. John Muir died of pneumonia in a hospital in Los Angeles, Christmas Eve, 1914.

### The Battle for Hetch Hetchy

Arguably, Muir produced his most important work in the last two decades of his life. In May, 1892, Muir helped form the Sierra Club which became an influential political vehicle for wilderness preservation during a decisive turning point in American culture, 'the closing of the frontier.' American historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued in an 1893 paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," that until the official closing of westward expansion in 1890, the United States was engaged "in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life."<sup>142</sup> Furthermore,

Turner believed that the American character was defined by its attitude of continuous expansion and belief in seemingly endless new opportunities.

As early as 1832 (before Emerson published *Nature* and before Thoreau attended college) George Catlin, a painter, proposed a national park “containing man and beast, in all the wild[ness] and freshness of nature’s beauty!”<sup>143</sup> However, it was not until 1864 that Yosemite Valley in California became a state park. 1872 saw the creation of Yellowstone National Park which was “the world’s first instance of large-scale wilderness preservation.”<sup>144</sup> However, as Nash notes, in the latter half of the nineteenth century wilderness was prized for its exceptional beauty or promised utilitarian values. For example, Yellowstone was created for public recreation and “to prevent private acquisition and exploitation of geysers, hot springs, waterfalls, and similar curiosities,” and the Adirondacks Forest Preserve was created in 1885 – the same year Canada created its first national park in Banff, Alberta – to secure an adequate water supply for city dwellers.<sup>145</sup>

Because of this anthropocentric bias, ‘conservation’ rather than ‘preservation’ became the catch phrase. Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester of the United States from 1898-1910, set forth the ideals of ‘wise use management’ after importing European values and practices of sustained yield forestry.<sup>146</sup> In 1897 Pinchot contributed to the National Forest Commission’s report which insisted that “[our forests] must be made to perform their part of the economy of the Nation. Unless the reserved

lands of the public domain are made to contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the country, they should be thrown open to settlement and the whole system of reserved lands abandoned.”<sup>147</sup> Pinchot could not have been more clear than when he defined conservation as “the development and use of the earth and all its resources for the enduring good of men.”<sup>148</sup>

Muir, on the other hand, saw wilderness as “useful not only as forests of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”<sup>149</sup> Pinchot met Muir in 1893 and the two initially concurred in their ideas about the well being of people as well as the wastefulness which characterized human use of nature at the time. But each had a distinct vision of the human-nature relationship (see Figure 2.2) and soon their respective outlooks came to characterize a clash of values that still operates today: anthropocentrism (conservation) versus ecocentrism (preservation).

Clash of Values	
<i>Pinchot (anthropocentric)</i>	<i>Muir (ecocentric)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ nature is a resource to be used by humanity</li> <li>◦ nature’s primary value is its use to modern society</li> <li>◦ human beings are categorically distinct from the rest of the ecosphere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ the biotic community and its processes must be protected</li> <li>◦ nature has value in itself</li> <li>◦ human beings are inextricably part of the entire ecosphere</li> </ul>

Figure 2.2<sup>150</sup>

By 1900, the circumstances for one of the most famous battles for wilderness were set. The city of San Francisco wanted to dam the Hetch Hetchy valley, which was part of Yosemite National Park. After an earthquake and fire in the city in 1906, Secretary of the Interior James R. Garfield overturned the original ruling for protection, stating “domestic use is the highest use to which water and available storage basins... can be put.”<sup>151</sup> Legal battles ensued, and Muir was at the forefront in raising public awareness of the issue through numerous articles in national magazines.<sup>152</sup> After a protracted battle of almost fourteen years, Hetch Hetchy was approved for damming on December 19, 1913. Exhausted and disheartened Muir had one year left to live.

It is not an understatement to say that “John Muir affected the direction and quality of American life.”<sup>153</sup> Although the Hetch Hetchy valley was lost, Muir had succeeded in making wilderness preservation “a national movement... Moreover, the defenders of wilderness discovered their political muscles and how to flex them by arousing an expression of public opinion.”<sup>154</sup> His legacy lives on not only through international wilderness preservation movements but has also “helped prepare the ground for the later growth of ecological consciousness through his inspired nature writings, and in his public work he made the protection of wild nature a feasible matter in practical politics.”<sup>155</sup> Indeed, an ecological impulse

motivated Muir to speak out against what he perceived to be the exploitation of nature.

Clearly, the socio-political climate was very different in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Emerson and Thoreau were most active, than it was during the closing decades when Muir ‘carried the torch’ so to speak. For example, in 1810 western expansion had barely reached the Mississippi River, and what is now considered the southwest was occupied by Spain. By 1860, though California and Oregon had officially joined the union, the majority of the country’s interior still remained ‘unconquered.’ With the closing of the American frontier so too was the whole notion of expansion. It brought new issues to the fore of the American psyche, such as how much land should come under human control? It was during this time that nature protection and preservation became viable for people like John Muir, even though he was going against the expansionist sentiment.

### Muir and ecocentrism

According to Peter Hay,

the *purest* political expression of the [ecological] impulse... is to be found in the battle to preserve ‘wilderness’ areas within [Western] countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia; a battle that has more recently been extended to the rapidly disappearing rainforests in countries of the tropics. In

these [Western] societies the preservation of wilderness is demonstrably the point of inspiration for modern environmentalism, and the impulse to defend the existence rights of the species contained therein is the main psychological urge behind an environmental commitment. To defend wilderness, in these countries, is the environmental movement's first-order goal.<sup>156</sup>

If the 'purest' expression of the ecological impulse culminates in wilderness preservation (which itself is taken as the central point of environmentalism) then Muir becomes a pivotal figure in the search for the roots of ecocentrism.

Like Emerson and Thoreau, Muir concluded that "there is a mystic, Transcendental unity in nature which is somehow revealing of the nature of God."<sup>157</sup> The study of nature, then, was paramount for Muir. Commenting after a botany lesson at the University of Wisconsin he wrote: "Like everybody else I was always fond of flowers, attracted by their external beauty and purity. Now my eyes were opened to their inner beauty, all alike revealing the glorious traces of the thoughts of God, and leading on and on into the infinite cosmos."<sup>158</sup> However, Oelschlaeger claims that Muir's philosophy matured into a "wilderness theology – a profoundly insightful evolutionary pantheism"<sup>159</sup> which sets him closer to Thoreau than Emerson. For example, when Muir asked in a journal entry for 1873 "What is 'higher,' what is 'lower' in Nature?"<sup>160</sup> he questioned the inherited assumption that humankind was somehow special in being God's chosen creation.<sup>161</sup> If Muir echoed Emerson's sentiments with the view that "all of these varied forms, high and low,

are simply portions of God radiated from Him as a sun,"<sup>162</sup> his web of life sensibilities seem to put the two men at odds.

It may be useful to compare Muir's 'wilderness theology' with other more formal religious ideas such as pantheism and panentheism. As *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes, "pantheism is not easy to define precisely."<sup>163</sup>

However, there is some general agreement among scholars.

**Pantheism:** the basic conviction that all things are parts of, appearances of, or identical with some one Divine (or ultimate, or perfect) being (God). Everything there is constitutes a Divine unity (God=universe), thus denying any radical distinction between God and nature. Etymologically, pantheism is the view that Divinity and Cosmos are identical. Theologically, it embraces Divine immanence while rejecting Divine transcendence. Yet, pantheism need not be a variety of materialism, and if it is materialistic it includes a high view of the worth of matter.<sup>164</sup>

Pantheism contrasts with deism (a God, perfect in every way, created the world in such a way that it exists and operates on its own), theism (a God, perfect in every way, created the world and remains distinct from, yet is actively involved in, creation), and polytheism (there are many gods).<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, "the line between pantheism and panentheism is narrow."<sup>166</sup>

**Panentheism:** seeks a middle ground between monotheism and pantheism by accommodating the central aspects of both; God is transcendent, and therefore independent of nature, *as well as* immanent and intimately involved with nature. The Divine, then, essentially has two aspects, one eternal and immutable, the other temporal and contingent. Panentheism may be understood as a difference of degree, but not of kind, from theism since God is allowed both a separate and

an immanent existence. Nature, then, is ontologically secondary, a temporal and finite manifestation of an underlying eternal and infinite Divinity.<sup>167</sup>

Oelschlaeger is convinced that Muir is best understood as a pantheist, for Muir understood the world to be “a living and sacred community in which all creatures have purpose in their own right and no species enjoys special privilege.”<sup>168</sup> Unlike the Transcendental Over-Soul of Emerson, Muir believed in “a God incarnate and in process.”<sup>169</sup> However, Muir could be evasive when it came to abstract theological issues, and one wonders whether he would have cared about the fine line between pantheism and panentheism. For example, Michael P. Cohen, author of *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness*, wrote:

Late in life [Muir] spoke of evolution in an interview, criticizing the theory if it meant that the harmonious processes of Nature were understood as only “the blind product of an unthinking abstraction.” “No, somewhere before evolution was, was an Intelligence,” he insisted. “You may call that intelligence what you please; I cannot see why so many people object to call it God.” He would not involve himself in a debate about ideas abstracted from Nature; when they were abstracted, they were dead. In the same interview he asserted that creation was not an act, but a process, a process [humankind] needed to witness. No amount of theorizing would change the basic issue: [people] who abstracted themselves from Nature could not reason about [it] or enjoy [its] beauty.<sup>170</sup>

As with Emerson and Thoreau, the spiritual and corporeal nature, ‘inner’ and ‘outer,’ were intimately connected for Muir. Although this passage sounds more panentheist than pantheist – ‘Intelligence’ maintains ontological priority – it seems as though Muir “was more interested in working through theological questions about creation and the origin of the human species than scholarly philosophical

issues.”<sup>171</sup> But he worked through them out in the wilderness. “I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”<sup>172</sup> As with Emerson and Thoreau, Muir felt closest to the Divine when in wild nature, often referring to forests as ‘temples.’

Michael Cohen writes: “The ecologist who follows the philosophical consequences of his discipline begins with the study of the interrelatedness of things in the world, as Muir did, but ends, if he follows the implications of his perceptions, with a philosophical, religious, and radical attitude toward human culture.”<sup>173</sup> However we label Muir’s thought it certainly resulted in a relentless critique of anthropocentrism, especially that inherited from orthodox Judeo-Christianity.<sup>174</sup>

The world, we are told, was made especially for man – a presumption not supported by all the facts. A numerous class of men are painfully astonished whenever they find anything, living or dead, in all God’s universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way what they call useful to themselves. They have precise dogmatic insight of the intentions of the Creator, and it is hardly possible to be guilty of irreverence in speaking of *their* God any more than of the heathen idols....

Now, it never seems to occur to these far-seeing teachers that Nature’s object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit – the cosmos? the universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.

From the dust of the earth, from the common elementary fund, the Creator has made *Homo sapiens*. From the same material he has made every creature, however noxious and insignificant to us. They are earth-born companions and our fellow mortals...

This star, our own good earth, made many a successful journey around the heavens ere man was made, and whole kingdoms appeared to claim them. After human beings have also played their part in Creation's plan, they too may disappear without any general burning or extraordinary commotion whatever.<sup>175</sup>

Muir was, as many now recognize, at the forefront of ecological thinking.<sup>176</sup> He presents a curious mixture of elements from both Emerson and Thoreau: the certainties of Emerson's divinity, and a Thoreavian idea that humanity is not God's chosen creature. There are moments when Muir sounds like a panentheist: 'From the dust of the earth, from the common elementary fund, the Creator has made *Homo sapiens*. From the same material he has made every creature...'. But, there are also times when Muir sounds like a pantheist:

When a portion of Spirit clothes itself with a sheet of lichen tissue, colored simply red or yellow, or gray or black, we say that is a low form of life. yet is it more or less radically Divine than another portion of Spirit that has gathered garments of leaf and fairy flower and adorned them with all the colors of Light, although we say that the latter creature is of a higher form of life? All of these varied forms, high and low, are simply portions of God, radiated from Him as a sun, and made terrestrial by the clothes they wear, and by the modifications of a corresponding kind in the God essence itself.<sup>177</sup>

However one reads Muir both pantheism and panentheism share the conviction that nature is revealing of the Divine (yet only panentheism saddles nature with being ontologically dependent on God.) It is not necessary to pin Muir down to

either pantheism or panentheism to appreciate his place in the history or environmentalism. As we have seen Næss advocates for a variety of interpretations of texts, and Muir ought to be no exception.

More so than Thoreau, Muir advanced what has been called a 'biocentric' or 'deep ecological' position.<sup>178</sup> Ecocentrism and biocentrism tend to be used interchangeably by a number of scholars when employed as a foil against anthropocentrism ('biocentrism' referring only to that which has life, 'ecocentrism' referring to the earth as a whole and its living systems as well as to living creatures). Many times Muir stated that all living creatures had value in themselves, or as he liked to say were "good for themselves."<sup>179</sup> It followed for Muir, then, that 'man' could not "value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation."<sup>180</sup>

The ecological impulse is a natural reaction when one sees the world from this perspective. Muir described an event in which he was humbled by a pika (*Ochotona princeps*):

I caught sight, for the first time, of the curious pika, or little chief hare, that cuts large quantities of lupines and other plants and lays them out to dry in the sun for hay, which it stores in underground barns to last through the long, snowy winters. Coming upon these plants freshly cut and lying in handfuls here and there on the rocks has a startling effect of busy life on the lonely mountain-top. These little haymakers, endowed with brain stuff something like our own, – God

up here to look after them, – what lessons they teach, how they widen our sympathy.<sup>181</sup>

With a widening of sympathy Muir was able to identify with the pika. Recall Emerson's 'angle of vision' and how, when seen from the right perspective, differences appear similar. Emotions play a key role here, as Muir comments on their importance: "Most people are on the world, not in it – having no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them – undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching but separate."<sup>182</sup> The ability to identify with other living beings, along with emotional sympathy or empathy, is according to Arne Næss, "a universal human trait."<sup>183</sup> Anyone familiar with Muir's writings will know that his pages are filled with accounts where he was incredibly moved by many living beings – bears, snakes, crocodiles – and whole landscapes as well. His love of nature was not limited to other living beings (biocentric), but extended to include the whole of nature (ecocentric). This emotional bond with nature plays an important role in the philosophy of Arne Næss, whom we discuss in the next chapter.

As noted earlier, Muir was never interested in academic philosophical debates. He seems content to describe phenomena such as the identification with the pika rather than attempt an explanation. Although never clearly systematizing his thoughts on the subject/object dualism, Muir certainly appears to have had many experiences where the division was overcome. In one of his more memorable

passages, he described his deeply felt continuity with all life: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. One fancies a heart like our own must be beating in every crystal and cell, and we feel like stopping to speak to the plants and animals as friendly fellow mountaineers.”<sup>184</sup> One may charge Muir with anthropomorphizing other creatures, except that Muir does not assume *Homo sapiens* to be the standard by which other living beings are measured. “Plants are credited with but dim and uncertain sensation, and minerals with positively none at all. But why not even a mineral arrangement of matter be endowed with sensation of a kind that we in our blind exclusive perfection can have no manner of communication with?”<sup>185</sup> Human beings play such a minor role in Muir’s cosmos that it may have shocked Emerson:

This star, our own good earth, made many a successful journey around the heavens ere man was made, and whole kingdoms of creatures enjoyed existence and returned to dust ere man appeared to claim them. After human beings have also played their part in Creation’s plan, they too may disappear without any general burning or extraordinary commotion whatever.

One of the motivating elements in Muir’s ecocentrism was religious. Indeed, as the progress of humankind increasingly encroached upon pristine natural areas, Muir felt the need to save the ‘temples of God’ for future generations. “I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature’s loveliness.”<sup>186</sup> (As with Emerson and Thoreau, beauty was commonly associated with the Divine.) But for Muir, experiencing ‘Nature’s loveliness’ was the first step towards what some have

referred to as a 'mystical experience,' similar to the experience of *satori* in Japanese Zen.<sup>187</sup> His rhetoric may have been Christian, "but his message was universal."<sup>188</sup> Admittedly, there was tremendous spiritual value in nature for Muir, and he wished others could experience that. But to use nature for the purpose of elevating human consciousness defeats the ecological impulse because nature's value is based solely on the opportunity it provides human beings. It is too simple, then, to claim that nature's spiritual value "became the underlying motivation for Muir's preservationist activity."<sup>189</sup>

Another element was at work in Muir's psyche, namely his deep emotional involvement, his sympathy, with nature. It is this element that was perhaps the overriding factor in Muir's urge towards wilderness preservation. The destruction of nature meant the suffering of many sentient creatures, and Muir was as concerned with their well being as with humanity's. When Muir recognized that wilderness and wild things have their own ends he moved from the conventional anthropocentric perspective to the holistic ecocentric perspective.<sup>190</sup> Clearly Muir was already aware of the interconnectedness of whole ecological communities even though Aldo Leopold became "heir to the kind of thinking Muir established in the 1870's"<sup>191</sup> by giving an explicit statement of ecocentrism.

Muir, of course, was reacting to the dominant anthropocentric view which believed that the highest use to which nature could be put is its domestic use.

Although sensitive to the inescapable conclusion that humans must use nature, Muir believed that nature's 'highest use' was for itself. His lengthy stays in some of the world's most pristine wilderness areas such as Alaska and the High Sierras of California led him to a tremendous love and respect for it. As noted in Chapter 1, the wellspring of the ecological impulse is deep feeling, and is characterized by the virtues of responsibility and care. It was only natural for Muir to respond the way he did. "Conservation [and preservation] strategies are more eagerly implemented by people who love what they are conserving [or protecting], and who are convinced that what they love is intrinsically lovable... They possess a genuine ethics of conservation, not merely a tactically useful instrument for human survival."<sup>192</sup> Such response would not occur in, say, a psychopath, who is emotionally disengaged from the world. We will return to this idea in chapter 4.

George Sessions has claimed that the philosophical roots of the Deep Ecology Movement can be traced to, among others, the ecocentrism of Thoreau and Muir.<sup>193</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, the supporters of the Deep Ecology Movement, particularly Næss, share similar concerns with Thoreau and Muir about inherited assumptions regarding humanity's place in the world. Indeed, Næss has noticed that one of the hallmarks of the Deep Ecology Movement has been its unremitting questioning of anthropocentric values, policies, assumptions and behaviour.

3

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# Deep Ecology

*Once for each thing.  
just once. Just once and never again. And each of us, too.  
just once. And never again.*

§3.1 *Arne Næss and the Global, Long-range, Grassroots, Deep Ecology Movement*

Arne Næss

During graduation ceremonies at the University of Øslo in 1969 many students marked a rite of passage by receiving a degree. Distinguished professor Arne Næss celebrated his own rite of passage by delivering his farewell address to colleagues and students. After thirty years as chair of philosophy at the university, and at the height of his career, Næss took early retirement at the age of fifty-seven, explaining that he wished to *live* rather than merely function. The speech was simply titled “Joy.”<sup>1</sup>

A few years later, in 1972 – ten years after *Silent Spring* – Næss delivered a paper at the Third World Futures Research Conference in Bucharest and published it as “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary” in the journal *Inquiry* the following year. It has secured for Næss a place in the history of Western environmental philosophy, and brought the term ‘deep ecology’ into usage among many educated Westerners. The “Shallow and the Deep” paper has been reprinted many times, and has been considered “probably the most influential [short] article of the last half century.”<sup>2</sup>

Arne Næss has lived an extraordinary life. He was born in 1912 and lived most of his life in Norway. Although he is now recognized as one of the pre-eminent

scholars of the twentieth century<sup>3</sup> he is also famous for many mountain climbing expeditions, including several in the Himalayas, as well for helping lead resistance to Nazi occupation of Norway during WWII. After receiving his PhD at the age of twenty-four, he travelled to the United States for post-doctoral research at the University of California, Berkeley. A few years later Næss was offered the position of chair of philosophy at the University of Øslo, which he accepted, and held, until his retirement in 1969. Among his numerous international awards are the Sonning Prize for contributions to European Culture (1977), the Mahatma Gandhi Peace Prize (1994), and the Nordic Council Nature and Environment Prize (2002).

Since 'retirement' Næss has dedicated his life to environmental and social issues. During the last three decades Næss has combined much of his past research in the philosophy of science, empirical semantics, Pyrrhonian skepticism, gestalt perception and ontology, and the writings of Spinoza and Gandhi into his own personal philosophy, 'Ecosophy T.' He currently lives with his wife, Kit-Fai, in Øslo, Norway.

### The global, long-range, grassroots, Deep Ecology Movement

In 1962 the great Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book which is now considered a cornerstone of modern environmentalism for it inspired people worldwide to reexamine their attitudes toward the natural world. "The 'control of

nature,” Carson wrote, “is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born in the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man.”<sup>4</sup> However, the degree to which nature was valued varied, and by 1972 Næss was able to distinguish between two fundamentally different approaches to environmentalism: a shallow and a deep. The terms ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ simply characterized what Næss observed as two existing types of attitudes and values that people held regarding the environment, and their introduction in no way marks the ‘beginning’ of deep ecology as many commentators have reported.<sup>5</sup> This distinction between shallow and deep attitudes is perhaps even more relevant today than it was thirty years ago<sup>6</sup> for it describes a clash of values – essentially, between anthropocentrism (shallow) and ecocentrism (deep). Shallow ecology is aligned with the dominant values and attitudes of Modernity, for it treats environmental issues largely as problems to be solved by professionals, relying on, e.g., technological innovation and scientific resource management. The motivating factors are the perceived effects of a degraded environment on people. “The essential features of the shallow ecology movement are its mild reformist character and its anthropocentric bias that the nonhuman world has only instrumental value. The shallow ecology movement is essentially oriented towards the health and well-being of peoples of the advanced industrial nations.”<sup>7</sup> Obviously there is no ‘ecological impulse.’

The Deep Ecology Movement (DEM) is a grassroots phenomenon that has occurred spontaneously around the globe in the years after *Silent Spring*. Events such as the Vietnam war (1964-1973), the Apollo lunar landings (1969-1972), the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (1972), and the OPEC oil crisis (1973- 1974) paralleled the development of the DEM. Supporters of the DEM tend to see human beings as "in, of, and for Nature."<sup>8</sup> There is a primary concern with the long-range viability not just of humans but all members of the community of life on Earth. "The deep ecology movement emphasizes, in principle, biospheric egalitarianism and the intrinsic value of all life. It aims for the creation of systems that are diverse, symbiotic, and compatible with natural systems."<sup>9</sup> Næss never meant the terms 'shallow' and 'deep' to be mutually exclusive; he intended only to draw attention to their respective values, and to express concern that a shallow approach to environmental problems is in itself inadequate.<sup>10</sup> Deeper issues such as the results of maintaining continuous economic growth and current consumer lifestyle choices must be confronted for they affect the entire community of life on Earth. Indeed, 'environmentalism' for purely human interests contradicts the very spirit of ecocentrism.

In a global cross-cultural comparison Næss and a colleague George Sessions, Professor of Philosophy at Sierra College in California, formulated some of the common characteristics articulated by supporters of the DEM in the "Eight

Platform Principles” (see Fig. 3.1). Although eight are listed, Næss has cautioned that they are not intended to act as the ‘gospel of deep ecology.’ “The formulation of the ‘8 points’ is, for me, tentative... [and] implies that we keep searching for a better, alternative formulation.”<sup>11</sup> For example, elsewhere Næss has formulated twenty six “tendencies and attitudes” which he considers to be “ecological consciousness revealed in action.”<sup>12</sup> This illustrates Næss’s sensitivity and commitment to an ongoing dynamic between theory and practice. A ‘complete’ formulation might be seen as presumptuous, authoritarian, and an impediment to alternative creative expressions.

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### Eight Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement

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- 1) The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth; intrinsic value; inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman 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) Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly 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) Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological 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 worth) 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 participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

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Figure 3.1<sup>13</sup>

The first three points may be seen as variations on the theme of ecocentrism. However, the normative strains that can be heard in the following five points add a dimension to ecocentrism that, as it has been characterized so far, is lacking. It is crucial to political engagement that values and proposed actions be stated clearly

and concisely. Articulation of the Platform Principles helps give shape to what people tend to tacitly agree upon as evidenced by their behaviour. Global movements for peace, social justice and deep ecology have their principles emerge spontaneously, from individual peoples' conscience and from the bottom up,<sup>14</sup> not top-down from one single authority. Declaration of principles for any movement helps to focus awareness by bringing to light general similarities that may otherwise remain unnoticed. Næss states that the Platform Principles "are meant to express important points which the great majority of supporters [of the DEM] accept, implicitly or explicitly, at a high level of generality... [Some] may well accept a different set of points which, to me, has roughly the same meaning, in which case I shall call them supporters of the deep ecology movement."<sup>15</sup>

### North American 'deep ecology'

Popular interpretations of Næss's work on this side of the Atlantic Ocean typically respond to particular ideas in his writings (e.g., 'Self-realization') with little sensitivity to his outlook as a whole. The main problem, as Alan Drengson has pointed out, has been a tendency to conflate 'deep ecology' and Næss's personal philosophy 'Ecosophy T.'<sup>16</sup> "North American deep ecology"<sup>17</sup> has distinguished itself from Næss's global vision in two ways. First, especially in the United States, 'deep ecology' is seen as a particular expression of what has been called 'radical ecology'.<sup>18</sup> According to Michael Zimmerman, professor of philosophy at Tulane

University, radical ecology emerged as part of the countercultural movement of the 1960's and currently articulates at least three identifiable strands: ecofeminism, social ecology, and 'deep ecology' (see Fig. 3.2). Radical ecology responds to the 'reform' or anthropocentric environmentalism which dominates the mind-set of governments, businesses and industry.

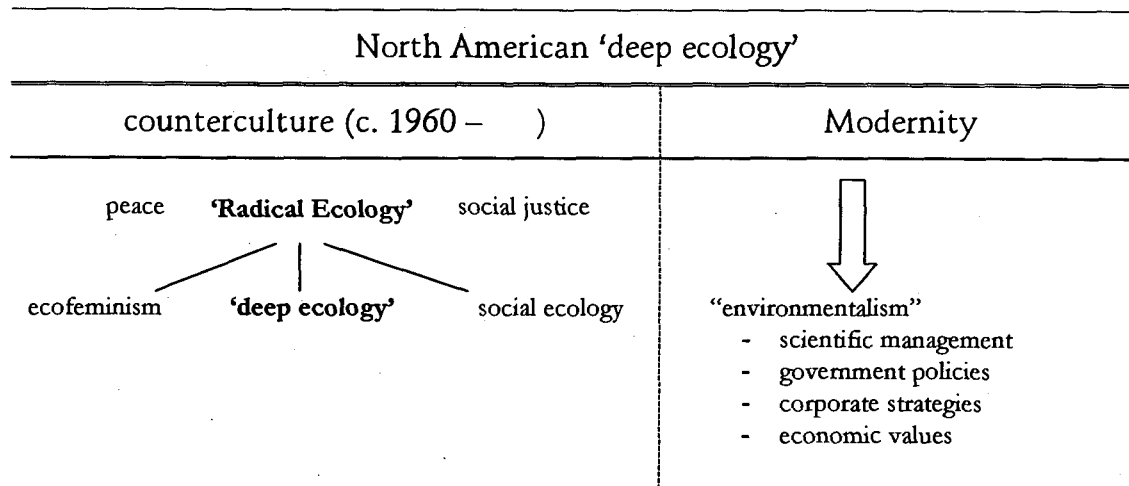


Fig. 3.2

As much as all three strands of Radical Ecology share in opposing Modernity scholars have tended to focus on the differences, resulting in conflict and, at times, degenerating into polemics. Murray Bookchin, for example, is virtually legendary for his histrionic critiques of deep ecology, claiming it to be "free for all 'Eco-la-la,'" nothing more than "a 'black hole' of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, there has been much critique of deep ecology from ecofeminist writers.<sup>20</sup> Critique is healthy and promotes progress, but the divisive attitude which characterizes much of Western academic culture seriously

undermines the vision Næss has for a global, long-range, grassroots, community approach to the ecological crisis. The familiar refrain of ecocentrism runs through each of the individual elements of Radical Ecology inviting those from widely different cultural backgrounds, academic interests, personal preferences, and different genders to participate together in bringing peace, justice, and joy to all living beings.

Næss's vision differs from that prevalent on this continent also in the fact that "American deep ecologists regard their movement primarily as a spiritual revival"<sup>21</sup> which is seen as preliminary to the required secular reforms in political, social or gender areas. 'Deep ecology' is thereby reduced to two principles, namely 'self-realization' and 'biocentric equality' which "are arrived at by the deep questioning process and reveal the importance of moving to the philosophical and religious level of wisdom."<sup>22</sup> Næss has claimed only that "the essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions" and emphasizes the need for "a shift from science to wisdom."<sup>23</sup> Describing deep ecology as a "more spiritual approach to Nature"<sup>24</sup> may be interpreted as neglecting rationality altogether, as well as opposing science and technology outright. Furthermore, if the main insights are already announced as 'self-realization' and 'biocentric equality' why should anyone else ask deeper questions? It is rather presumptuous to assume that the sincere pursuit of ecological wisdom must inevitably arrive at these two insights. Compared to

Næss's cross-cultural global ecophilosophical approach, the scholarship in North America tends to have a rather provincial outlook.

As well, popular versions of 'deep ecology' seem to stand "in sharp contrast with the dominant worldview of technocratic-industrial societies."<sup>25</sup> One commentator went so far as to call 'deep ecology' "a new cosmology."<sup>26</sup> As we shall see in §3.2 'deep ecology' is perhaps more accurately considered as being *derived from* a plurality of different cosmologies, rather than as attempting to establish a new one. It does not appear that a shift to ecocentrism requires any new cosmologies. Næss has cautioned that "one must avoid looking for one definite philosophy or religion among supporters of the deep ecology movement."<sup>27</sup> Having a rich plurality of philosophies allows for a much richer matrix of derivational options from which to develop deep ecological principles which in turn cultivates a maximum number of vernacular practices. Peter C. van Wyck, a PhD candidate from McGill University at the time, observed that Næss "intentionally avoids imparting theoretical closure on deep ecology as he sees it. He seems intent on creating a space in which the work of articulating deep ecology can take place; that is, deep ecology remains theoretically underdetermined"<sup>28</sup> because there is a continuous dialectic between *theoria* and *praxis*. The attempt to establish deep ecology as 'a new, better cosmology' may restrict the space within which possible

articulations of deep ecology may take place. Moreover, it is probably unrealistic to expect all humans in all cultures to subscribe to one cosmology.

### §3.2 *Total Views*

A 'total view' is Næss's way of speaking about cultures and worldviews. A working definition might run: an implicit comprehensive conceptual framework composed of a set of "mutually supporting arguments, beliefs and attitudes" about the nature of reality.<sup>29</sup> There are similarities to a definition of 'paradigm' popularized by Fritjof Capra: "a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions, and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself"<sup>30</sup> However, Næss is careful to add that "either a view is explicit but fragmentary, or it is total, but implicit."<sup>31</sup> One's outlook can never be fully articulated, Næss claims, for this would mean that one's total view had been made an object of investigation by isolating it from itself. One would then be in that paradoxical position of transcending all viewpoints whatsoever – standing at the Archimedean point outside of everything including one's view. As Thomas Nagel, Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University, has pointed out, "the world just isn't the world as it appears to one highly abstracted point of view... Reality is not just objective reality, and any objective conception, in order not to be false, must include an acknowledgment of its own incompleteness."<sup>32</sup>

Examples of total views include world religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as the many Indigenous peoples' spiritualities. Philosophical systems such as those articulated by Spinoza (1632- 1677) and Hegel (1770-1831) are also considered total views. Perhaps the most ambitious total view in recent times is Ken Wilber's 'All-level All-quadrant' model (AQAL), his self-styled 'theory of everything.'<sup>33</sup> As Alan Drengson has pointed out, in a cross cultural comparison there is considerable diversity at this level of ultimate philosophies or religions (i.e., total views).<sup>34</sup> Regardless of their differences they all share at least one quality: they each "claim to know something that is true of the whole world, or of whatever is most fundamental within a certain area of it."<sup>35</sup> For example, Buddhists may hold a doctrine of *anatman* (no permanent self) while Christians may believe that the soul spends an eternal afterlife in heaven. It is important to note that at the level of ultimate philosophies and religions most articulations "are not precise enough even to make comparisons or to search for inconsistencies. Mists do not collide."<sup>36</sup> Total views *do not have to be* seen as mutually exclusive. There is tremendous semantic elasticity in words such as 'God,' or 'nature.'

According to Næss the complete articulation of one's total view is "out of the question: the complexity and flexibility of such a *living structure* make that impossible, perhaps even meaningless."<sup>37</sup> However, one can model parts of it, "isolating certain patterns and aspects of it for close scrutiny, implicitly pretending

that the rest somehow exists in the realm of pure thought.”<sup>38</sup> It follows, then, that it is also impossible to formulate a universal total view whose conceptual framework is wide enough to accommodate all other total views. Furthermore, if somehow one could articulate a conceptual framework wide enough to accommodate all other total views, then “we are in a sense back to monism, since a universal conceptual framework would be the only ultimate or basic one.”<sup>39</sup> The result is an irreducible plurality of total views. Næss shares postmodernity’s concern with the potential totalizing agenda of metanarratives, not with metanarratives themselves. From this perspective any proclaimed ‘theory of everything’ is rather pretentious for it amounts to a single person formulating a complete account of all reality.

As we have seen the differences between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism reflect deeper differences in value priorities. Næss considers a ‘mature, integrated human being’ to be one who attempts to act on the basis of total view. “The limitation of the shallow movement is not due to weak or unethical philosophy, but due to a lack of explicit concern with ultimate aims, goals, and norms.”<sup>40</sup> Næss encourages those who incline towards anthropocentrism to investigate their actions in relation to ultimate premisses and norms in a sustained and consistent manner. There appears to be something intuitively obvious to Næss: all humans share a basic, inviolable four billion year heritage with the whole of life on Earth. There is “a

deep human need” to have a “superbly rich planet,” i.e., one with as many possible lifeforms as conditions allow, each one *perseverare in suo esse*, ‘preserving [its] own way of being.’<sup>41</sup> As we shall see in §3.4, Næss believes that a human life is much more meaningful, rich, diverse and multifaceted when experienced in a wide, ecological sense. The science of ecology, through its emphasis on the interrelatedness of life, can help cultivate deeper sensibilities and our affinities with the community of life on Earth. The sphere of concern (what Charles Taylor, professor of philosophy at McGill University, calls the ‘horizon of significance’<sup>42</sup>) fostered by Modernity is extremely small when compared with the wider and deeper approach favoured by Næss.

The platform principles of the DEM, Næss observes, are “grounded in religion or philosophy,”<sup>43</sup> i.e., they are grounded in a rich plurality of total views. Næss believes that “it is one of the central tasks of environmental philosophers to study the different [total views], but not to try to reduce the ultimate differences.”<sup>44</sup> It is suggested, then, that existing total views are adequate to allow humanity to behave in ecologically viable ways. From a metaphilosophical perspective we see that similar principles of ecological harmony, such as those of the Eight Platform Principles, may be derived – indeed *have been derived* – from a broad diversity of ultimate beliefs. “What is more pressing than debating ultimate norms is to work out consequences for priorities of certain kinds of action.”<sup>45</sup> For example, it is a

more pressing issue to discuss the consequences of expanding a Western consumer ethos across the globe rather than articulate a set of norms that constitute ‘living a good life.’ It is not central in environmental debates to convince others to adopt a specific ontology, e.g., pantheism; rather, the more pressing issue is to determine what follows from the adoption of particular norms that are taken as ‘the highest’, or left unquestioned.

This failure to look clearly and conscientiously at the results of favouring certain norms over others is one of the main causes of the ecological crisis. “In general people do not question deeply enough to explicate or make clear a total view. If they did, most would agree with saving the planet from the destruction that’s in progress.”<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of Westerners are not interested in investigating deeper issues. “By and large,” observes Næss, “it is painful to think.”<sup>47</sup>

### Pluralism

Recall from Chapter 1 that Isaiah Berlin wrote: “The enemy of pluralism is monism,” and the definition we used there:

**Pluralism:** The basic conviction that there is an irreducibility among the (at times extremely) different ways in which human beings view themselves and their place in the universe. There can be no one comprehensive framework which will accommodate all ideas and values into one coherent whole.

Næss is a confirmed pluralist. As we have seen he values the irreducibly rich diversity of total views in itself. It might not be too much to identify pluralism as

the root note of the major chord in which Næss expresses his philosophy. When asked how he wished his role in environmentalism would be understood, without hesitation Næss responded “As a pluralist!”<sup>48</sup> A completely comprehensive total view by which all other total views are subsumed does not exist. One cannot make universal claims, then, as to the extent of validity among a range of conceptual frameworks.

We will return to this discussion in §4.3, however, it may be helpful to note that Næss does not consider *all* total views to be equally valid (relativism). “What is asked for is not ‘tremendous tolerance and liberalism,’ but rather abstinence from totalitarian, sectarian, and conformist attitudes, and willingness to take part in teamwork involving serious research across ideological boundaries.”<sup>49</sup> The acceptance or rejection of any particular total view appears to be a community effort. For example, the world generally agrees that a perspective similar to Nazi Germany’s is not appropriate.

### §3.3 *Gestalt Ontology*

While admitting that his own ontology is, “as every other ontology, deeply problematic,” Næss feels that it is vitally important to offer alternatives to the “near monopoly of the so-called scientific world-view.”<sup>50</sup> The phenomenological approach – emphasis on personal spontaneous experience of the world – is of

utmost importance to Næss. “What we experience” in those moments of prereflective experience “is more or less comprehensive and complex.”<sup>51</sup> In short, we experience wholes – gestalts.

Gestalt thinking was introduced in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> It differs in its very nature from atomistic and mechanistic thinking by asserting that living organisms (not just humans) “perceive things not in terms of isolated elements, but as integrated perceptual patterns – *meaningful* organized wholes, which exhibit qualities that are absent in their parts.”<sup>53</sup> The essential difference is that gestalt thinking focuses first on the embodiment of pattern (which is the result of the *internal relations* of the parts). An example regularly employed is a musical melody that retains its exact structure, and thereby its meaning, even though the individual notes (the parts) change with respect to each new key it is played in.

Being himself a pianist it is understandable that Næss is fond of commenting on experiences with Beethoven’s *Sonate Pathétique*.<sup>54</sup> The whole piece is comprised of three movements, Allegro, Adagio, Allegro (the second of which is quite popular and is probably recognized by many people). The second movement is comprehensible in itself, and so is considered a genuine whole. But, Næss claims,

the experience will be different if people get to know the whole sonata. The movements are subordinate wholes, subordinate gestalts as part of musical

reality. Within the movement there may be sets of tones forming contrasting wholes. We have therefore a complex realm of gestalts, gestalts in a vast hierarchy. We can then speak of lower- and higher-order gestalts. This terminology is more useful than speaking about wholes and holism, because it induces people to think more strenuously about the relations between wholes and parts. It facilitates the emancipation from strong atomistic or mechanistic trends in analytical thought.<sup>55</sup>

Gestalts might be considered as instances of the totality of reality, i.e., they have relative, identifiable integrity but not absolute and independent existence.

By emphasizing the essential interconnectedness of the totality of reality gestalt ontology contrasts strongly with the dominant scientific view of reducing the world, especially living organisms, to a collection of isolatable ‘things,’ e.g., atoms and molecules. (This is the basic premise behind genetically modified organisms.) It “undermine[s] the belief in organisms or persons as something which can be isolated from their milieu [i.e. environment]. Speaking of interaction between organisms and the milieu gives rise to the wrong associations, as an *organism is interaction.*”<sup>56</sup> Instead of the long standing perception of organism-in-environment Næss favours ‘the relational, total-field image.’<sup>57</sup> An individual organism, then, is conceived as a particular set of relations – junctions, or knots – in the total field of intrinsic relations.<sup>58</sup> Relationships are considered intrinsic because they form the basic constitution of ‘things,’ so that by altering the set of relationships, the fundamental essence of the thing comprised of those relationships changes. The

sharp difference conventionally drawn between ‘living’ and ‘non-living’ is blurred in gestalt ontology. .

There is a similar notion, as Næss points out, in Buddhism: *sarvam dharmam nihsvabhavam*, “every element is without ‘self-existence.’”<sup>59</sup> Atomistic ‘entities’ or ‘things’ cannot exist in isolation due to complete interdependence on the total relational field. These ‘things,’ “individually or collectively, are not things or entities in themselves, in spite of the existence of words and phrases suggesting the possibility of isolating them. The relations between [‘things’] are internal.”<sup>60</sup>

“Essential to ecological thinking... is the insistence that things cannot be separated from what surrounds them without smaller or greater arbitrariness.”<sup>61</sup> Distinctions – the obvious experience of separateness – may be considered ‘a convenience’ in that such distinctions are always parts of larger gestalts, or larger constellations of relations. As I understand gestalt ontology (as articulated by Næss) one always experiences the same world in its totality, but from differing particular perspectives in which gestalts of varying degrees of wholeness are experienced (or, perhaps attended to). Næss stresses the *twofold* significance of gestalt ontology. ‘The whole is greater than the sum of the parts’ is only half of the story; it overemphasizes the whole. Analytic thinking, on the other hand, completely ignores the whole in favour of only parts. Gestalts are wholes and parts *at the same time*. Compare this with Heraclitus’ insight: “Things taken together are

wholes and not wholes, something which is being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity comes all things.”<sup>62</sup>

One question we will return to in the conclusions, Chapter 4, is whether ecocentrism tends to emphasize ‘holism’ at the expense of individuality. Perhaps mechanistic/analytic thinking can yield useful results, and ought not to be abandoned altogether. Næss’s concern is with the universalizing of any one way of thinking, not necessarily with the way of thinking itself. “Ecology,” for example, “may comprise a great deal, but it should never be considered a universal science. When concentrating on the relations between things, of course many aspects of their limited separateness are ignored. Ecologism is excessive universalization or generalization of ecological concepts and theories.”<sup>63</sup> Currently our culture suffers from the universalization of mechanistic/atomistic thinking, but the problem may be only with the way our culture treats its epistemology as superior.

In gestalt ontology there is no such thing as *Dinge an sich*, ‘things in themselves.’ Næss makes no distinction, as Kant did, between the way things appear and how they are independently of their cognitive relations to the human mind. Refusing to tread down the well-worn path of differentiating between so-called ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ qualities in nature, Næss explores the fresh new vistas of relational properties. It was common in the seventeenth century for mechanistic thinkers

such as Galileo and Descartes to distinguish between ‘primary’ (objective) and ‘secondary’ (subjective) qualities. It is John Locke, however, whose name is perhaps most frequently associated with the distinction. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) he wrote that primary qualities (e.g. size, shape) are “utterly inseparable” from objects, whereas secondary qualities (e.g. colour, taste) “in truth are nothing in... objects themselves but [rather] powers to produce various sensations in us.”<sup>64</sup> There is still a dominant tendency to believe that only the attributes that are amenable to measurement (i.e. objective) are real. However, from the phenomenological perspective our spontaneous experience of the world *is* concrete reality. The separation of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ qualities is artificial in gestalt ontology. “It is unwarranted to believe that how we feel Nature to be is not how Nature really is.”<sup>65</sup> Næss draws upon Whitehead’s ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’:

The paradoxical assumption that nature is actually without colours, tones, or odours exists because we have confused our abstractions with concrete realities. That *so blatant* a substitution is possible in our century is perhaps a consequence of the increasing power that abstractions wield over us in our highly technological time – perhaps as many as 99% of all ‘experts’ are educated to believe that all which is beautiful and lovable (or ugly and ‘hateable’) is created by humanity, with nature as nothing in itself.<sup>66</sup>

Whitehead famously mocked those who believed nature was ‘in reality’ “a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly,

meaninglessly.”<sup>67</sup> Rather, Whitehead, and like him, Næss, experience a nature which is much closer to that which Wordsworth celebrates:

To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,  
Their thoughts I cannot measure –  
But the least motion which they made,  
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,  
To catch the breezy air;  
And I must think, do all I can,  
That there was pleasure there.<sup>68</sup>

For Næss experience is relational, and the phenomenological approach has profound implications for environmental debate. Næss encourages us to trust that what we actually perceive and feel is concretely real. There is no need to appeal to special instruments or experts to explain what you are experiencing. The charge that feelings are ‘merely’ subjective and somehow ‘projected’ onto reality is inappropriate. “A joyful experiencing of nature is partially dependent upon a conscious or unconscious development of a sensitivity for qualities.”<sup>69</sup> It is tremendously important, then, for individuals to pay attention to their

experiences. If Næss is correct in claiming that “the spontaneous experiences we have are the concrete contents”<sup>70</sup> of reality, then philosophical legitimacy is given to a very common claim among environmentalists: the feeling of being at one with a tree, a forest, the earth, etc. This may in turn provide a very effective catalyst for breaking out of the anthropocentric mindset.

In light of his writings on gestalt ontology as well as his unmistakable admiration for Spinoza a term which might best describe Næss’s view of nature is ‘pantheism’ or perhaps ‘panpsychism.’<sup>71</sup>

**Panpsychism:** The basic conviction that each spatio-temporal thing has a mental or ‘inner’ aspect. Rather than characterizing for example sticks and stones as having minds panpsychism allows for varying degrees in which things have inner subjective or quasi-conscious aspects, some very unlike what humans experience as consciousness.

Panpsychism is distinguished from pantheism and panentheism by the fact that although panpsychism holds that the universe is unified in its mental or inner aspects, this unity need not be Divine.<sup>72</sup>

One way to concisely sum up Næss’s view might be thus: “The value dualism spirit/matter, soul/body does not hold... [There are] two aspects of Nature, those of extension and thought (better: non-extension)..., both [of which are] complete aspects of one single reality, and *perfection characterizes both*.”<sup>73</sup> The structure of the world is revealed from two different perspectives, extension and non-extension, in a similar way to that in which one sees either a vase or two faces in the famous gestalt figure (see Fig. 3.3).

Gestalt figures (vase/faces)



Fig. 3.3

Pluralism opens the way for both experiences to be whole and complete, yet maintains that neither is reducible to the other. As I read Næss ‘mind’ and ‘matter’ are not separate ontological categories as they are in Emerson’s view. For Næss, neither mind nor matter has ontological priority, one is not the ‘cause’ of the other.

The Ecological Self

A relational field model underscores the intimate connection between phenomenology and gestalt ontology: “Gestalts bind the I and the not-I together in a whole” of which the I, the not-I, and the qualities therein are “interdependent, non-isolatable fragments.”<sup>74</sup> Characteristically, Næss completely revises humanity’s place in the ecosphere. “One of the first things to do might be to get rid of the belief that [a person] is something *placed in* an environment!”<sup>75</sup>

It is clear that Næss has serious reservations with the traditional subject/object dualism that has dominated Western culture since at least the eighteenth century.

“We underestimate ourselves” if we limit our sense of self to the ego.<sup>76</sup> Unlike the isolated ego of Modernity, in gestalt ontology the self is relational. Næss uses the term ‘ecological Self’ (capital ‘s’) to describe what he understands as the self in its widest sense.

Næss offers “one single sentence resembling a definition of the ecological self. The ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies.”<sup>77</sup> The statement is consciously general and inconclusive so that it “shifts the burden of clarification from the term ‘self’ to that of identification, or rather process of identification.”<sup>78</sup> The self is “a strange and wonderful phenomenon we are dealing with,” and it is worth noting that “a couple thousand years of philosophical, psychological and social-psychological thinking has not brought us to any stable conception of the I, ego, or self.”<sup>79</sup> Næss’s insights are close to William James’s (1842-1910) who called the self “a fluctuating material” and observed that it is difficult to draw a line around “what a [person] calls *me*.”<sup>80</sup> The self, in Næss’s estimation, is very dynamic. “I have no very clear idea what are the limits of the self; perhaps it flows out and expands, or contracts within. It is never the same. It seems more like a flow than anything solid.”<sup>81</sup> One is tempted to add to expand the statement ‘the ecological self is that with which a person identifies’ by adding *at any particular moment*.

It is understandable, then, that Næss finds it more fruitful to concentrate on the phenomenon of the process of identification. “Identification is a spontaneous, non-rational, but not irrational, process through which *the interest or interests of another being are reacted to as our own interest or interests.*”<sup>82</sup> Feelings, or emotions, play a vital role in the process of identification; they become a ‘bridge’ to what is ‘other.’ Identification elicits (often intense) empathy or sympathy.<sup>83</sup> ‘You see yourself in the other’ Næss is fond of saying. One intuitively sees, or spontaneously experiences, *something* in the other that resembles oneself. This suggests to me that some kind of ontological continuity exists between self and ‘other’ (as revealed in the etymology of the word ‘identify’ > Lat. *identificare*, > *identias*, “sameness,” + *facere*, “to make”).

The process of identification as Næss describes it happens spontaneously. One might say that it happens to you. “When one is absorbed in contemplation of a concrete, natural thing there is no experience of a subject-object relation... There is no epistemological ego reaching out to see and understand a tree.”<sup>84</sup> J. Krishnamurti (1895-1985), the great sage from India who preached that ‘truth is a pathless land,’ conveyed a similar experience:

I do not know if you have ever noticed that when you give total attention there is complete silence. And in that attention there is no frontier, there is no centre, as the ‘me’ who is aware or attentive. That attraction, that silence, is a state of meditation.<sup>85</sup>

The conventional subject/object dualism dissolves and all that remains is experience (awareness). To ask who or what is having the experience is to adopt the conventional subject/object framework which Næss is calling into question.

The Buddha attempted the same exercise some 2500 years ago:

Suffering alone exists, none who suffer;  
The deed there is, but no doer thereof;  
Nirvana is, but no one seeking it;  
The path there is, but none who travel it.<sup>86</sup>

A more contemporary example is found in the poetry of Pulitzer Prize winning writer Mary Oliver:

The tree was a tree  
with happy leaves,  
and I was myself,  
  
and there were stars in the sky  
that were also themselves  
at the moment,  
at which moment  
  
my right hand  
was holding my left hand  
which was holding the tree  
which was filled with stars.<sup>87</sup>

Rather than debate whether his experiences of nature are either objective or subjective Næss believes “that it is more correct to say that the contrast between me and what is not me changes. I become more a part of the surroundings, and the surroundings become more a part of me. What remains is a network of more

or less intimate relations. I call this relationalism.”<sup>88</sup> The self is a set of relations, i.e., a gestalt. It has relative, identifiable integrity. But the identifiable set of relations does not have to exclude other sets of relations, nor must one’s sense of self remain static. The ‘contrast’ between self and world (the totality of reality) is fluid and dynamic. The spontaneous process of identification is a completely different experience than simply passively observing the world. It becomes paramount that individuals attend to their own experiences, for this phenomenon is available only if one becomes, to use Næss’s phrase, ‘a receptive being.’<sup>89</sup> It seems to imply that these experiences are at least potentially always available to us, one only has to shift attention away from rigid self-consciousness to what may be termed more meditative or contemplative states.

All humans have the ability to identify with life and the entire ecosphere.<sup>90</sup> The self is felt to be not only larger but also “richer in its constitutive relations.”<sup>91</sup> One’s understanding of self/world becomes deeper and more comprehensive. This is the foundation for what Næss refers to as ‘Self-realization.’ When one realizes the infinite extent of relations that make up the Self we become a more mature being. The ecological Self, with a capital ‘S,’ denotes a larger Self when compared to the small ego self. “Joy of life and meaning of life is increased through self-realization.”<sup>92</sup> Something that is seriously lacking in Modernity is a clear articulation of what is joyful and meaningful.

To interpret the ecological Self as simply an ‘expanded ego’ would be to miss the central claim Næss is making.<sup>93</sup> “To identify self-realization with the ego-trip manifests a vast underestimation of the human self.”<sup>94</sup> One example that does not make this underestimation comes from India. For thousands of years Hinduism has made a distinction between the *jiva* – narrow self – and the *atman* – universal Self. Through the principle of *advaita* (non-duality) the *jiva* is the *atman*, two different ways of conceiving the same self.

Admittedly, there may be a mystical quality to this larger sense of Self. However, William James noted that “this overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness.”<sup>95</sup> James treats these mystical experiences as a genuine aspect of human experience. My own suspicion is that these kinds of mystical experiences have been happening for thousands of years to perhaps countless millions of human beings. Furthermore, it is probably something that is perfectly normal, but in our Western conceit is dismissed as irrational, erroneous, or illusory.

Næss cautions, however, that a ‘philosophy of oneness’ may be misleading if it gives the impression that there is nothing distinct. However, Val Plumwood’s claim that “deep ecology proposes the obliteration of all distinction”<sup>96</sup> is perhaps better directed at non-Næssian versions of deep ecology. For example, Australian

philosopher Warwick Fox writes: “To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness.”<sup>97</sup> To have a sense of the unity of life does not annihilate particulars. “At any level of realization of potentials, the individual egos remain separate. They do not dissolve like individual drops in the ocean. Our care continues ultimately to concern the individuals, not any collectivity. But the individual is not, and will not be isolatable.”<sup>98</sup> Whatever exists has a gestalt character, claims Næss. That is, we can perceive distinctness and similarity at the same time. Unity in diversity. Therefore, anyone who claims, with Warwick Fox, that “to perceive boundaries is to fall short of deep ecological consciousness” may be slightly out of step with Næss.

Although Michael Zimmerman claims that “nondualism is central to... Ecosophy T”<sup>99</sup> it is important to note that Næss himself does not use the term ‘nondual’ when articulating his ecosophy. Spinoza, for example, wrote: “The more we understand particular things [i.e., diversity], the more we understand God [i.e., unity].”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps Næss anticipates the possibility of nonduality becoming an abstract concept set against one’s concrete experience of diversity. Furthermore, it may be considered as the ‘correct’ ontology where the world is ‘in reality’ unified.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to claim that Næss’s notion of the great Self (the ecological self) may certainly be interpreted as aligned with a nondual tradition, but nonduality isn’t given ontological priority as it is in the Perennial

Philosophy as interpreted by Zimmerman, Wilber, and Fox for example. A description of one's sense of self is not an explanation.

The process of identification is not an abstract exercise. One may *think about* the process of identification, yet it is stressed that the process of identification (and the cultivation of maturity which can follow) is a concrete experience. Næss finds it “unlikely that *any* change in the abstract *conception* of the world and the ego can permanently change [a] person.”<sup>101</sup> Identification with other beings is not an abstract intellectual exercise. Feelings are required, one must be emotionally involved.

Awareness means not only intellectual grasp but also emotional involvement. Both either first came into being or at least first became a conspicuous part of a living creature's existence a very long time ago... And from the human standpoint emotional involvement is quite as important as intellectual grasp. Even the animals with which we live most intimately, the dog and the cat, bewilder us when we try to understand their minds... Often we wonder whether in our sense they can think at all, and a great gulf opens between us. But it is clear enough that they share our emotions even though they cannot share our thoughts. And it is not merely that they are glad or sad. We see them also jealous, hurt, sometimes ashamed. And here again the touch of nature which makes us kin is not intellectual but emotional.<sup>102</sup>

There is something absolutely fundamental to emotions, not only for human beings but for perhaps a large portion of life on Earth. It is part of what makes us human, part of what makes us living, breathing, embodied beings. “There must be identification in order for there to be compassion.”<sup>103</sup> Compassion is the primary

impulse behind what Næss calls the ‘three great movements’ of the twentieth century: peace, social justice, and deep ecology.<sup>104</sup> It is natural to want other living beings (humans and nonhumans) to live and grow and flourish, and it is also natural to feel sadness or pain when they are denied those opportunities, especially if violence is the cause. If E. O. Wilson is correct this ‘biophilia’ is written in our very genetic make-up.<sup>105</sup> Wilson notwithstanding, such deep feelings can extend, and have been extended, to landscapes, ecosystems and Gaia. There are some profoundly disturbing implications for the ultra individualistic lifestyle that is promoted in North America. For example, those who have a high regard for making a lot of money at whatever expense are considered quite immature from a deep ecological perspective.

Næss does not give any definitive answer – a method, a yoga, a way – for how to do this, but rather simply describes a spontaneous experience. What does one do with these experiences? Næss presents possibilities which compel any reflective person to ask questions. One conclusion we might draw is that we ought to pay attention to our experiences. It puts responsibility on the individual to experience for oneself what Næss has been writing about in a fairly abstract manner. It is quite reasonable to say contemplative or meditative states of mind (or states of self) can play a role, as Krishnamurti has shown. Næss has described these meditative experiences as “whole, self-contained and self-sufficient.”<sup>106</sup> It will only

be problematic to the extent that one feels it needs to be *explained*. Another conclusion to draw may be that an epistemology dominated by subject-object distinctions paints a distorted picture of nature and reduces epistemological and ontological possibilities.

### Næss and ecocentrism

Næss can be seen as having continuities with both kinds of ecocentrism – web of life and green spirituality. Næss has maintained that support for “the deep ecology movement is grounded in religion or philosophy.”<sup>107</sup> Since one’s actions are based upon deep, fundamental philosophical and/or religious ideas and intuitions it is important that they be verbalized. Emerson does this *par excellence*. His skepticism aside, Emerson is much more systematic than either Thoreau or Muir, and more forthcoming about ultimate premises, i.e., God. All four men – Emerson, Thoreau, Muir and Næss appear to share similar ontological views if we don’t draw too fine a distinction between panpsychism and panentheism. However, it is unlikely that Næss is willing to give ontological priority to God as Emerson does. The ‘holarchic’ ecocentrism that Wilber promotes differs from Næss’s view in that Næss sees nature as the extended aspect of Spirit rather than being completely embraced by Spirit. Whereas Emerson (and at times Muir) saw nature as ontologically dependent on God, Næss seems more comfortable with Spinoza’s

phrase '*Deus sive Natura.*' Therefore, as Næss interprets Spinoza, "Nature or God is *nothing apart* from its manifestations."<sup>108</sup>

Næss has continuities as well with web of life ecocentrism. "One of the things I most deplore is the predominance of the utilitarian attitude toward nature. This attitude... promotes alienation from the nonhuman."<sup>109</sup> Emerson was most interested in turning people toward unity and identification with the Divine, whereas Thoreau provided a more 'down to earth' counterpoint by focusing on the everyday miracles of the physical world and what humanity's role ought to be. Muir might best be understood as promoting both programs. Næss finds a home here as well. "We need types of societies and communities in which... being together with other living beings is more important than exploiting or killing them."<sup>110</sup> Næss is extremely egalitarian – at least in principle – and his Ecosophy T gives the deep impression that Næss thinks "life is fundamentally one."<sup>111</sup> As with Thoreau and Muir, Næss too questions viewing humans through a framework which sets them above or apart from nature. "It *feels absurd* for me to think: 'You are mere mice, I have higher inherent value because:

- a) I am much more intelligent,
- b) I am much more complex,
- c) I am much higher on the evolutionary ladder,
- d) I am capable of profound sorts of spiritual suffering,
- e) I am self-reflecting, you don't even know yourself, and
- f) ... "<sup>112</sup>

However, Næss addresses the uniqueness of humans in a way which Thoreau and Muir may not have been in a position to. Research in geology, palaeontology, and evolutionary theories have all combined to reveal a fascinating point: that *Homo sapiens* is in the unique position of being able to comprehend the unity of life on Earth. “The emergence of human ecological consciousness is a philosophically important idea: a life form has developed on Earth which is capable of understanding and apprehending its relations with all other life forms and to the Earth as a whole.”<sup>113</sup> Rather than interpret this unique capacity of humanity as being a premise for domination and control, Næss uses it “as a premise for a universal care that other species can neither understand nor afford.”<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, “‘Nature mysticism,’ as it is often called, is a genuine aspect of Western culture,” and to have an experience of identity and/or unity with all of life on Earth does not imply a regression to some primitive stage of individual or cultural development.<sup>115</sup>

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# Conclusions

*O Earth! isn't this what you want: to arise  
in us, invisible? Is it not your dream  
to be invisible someday? O Earth! invisible!*

§4.1 *Critiques of Modernity*

The past several centuries of Western culture have witnessed an aggressive attempt at overcoming the perceived physical and psychological limitations of nature by increasingly building up the human environment at the expense of the natural one. Political ideals from the Enlightenment such as democracy, freedom, and equality have yielded unquestionable social progress. We have also witnessed incredible breakthroughs in fields such as medicine, computers, and engineering. And yet, along with all the many indisputable advancements have come “urban overdevelopment and overcrowding, cultural and social rootlessness, numbingly mechanical labour, increasingly disastrous industrial accidents... cancer and heart disease, alcoholism and drug addiction, mind-dulling and culture-impoverishing television, growing levels of crime, violence, and psychopathology.”<sup>1</sup> Faith has swung from religion to science and technology. Our culture seems obsessed with acquiring knowledge, but shows little interest in cultivating the wisdom to use it responsibly.

Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss have each responded to the crises of Modernity in their own way. Perhaps the dominant motif shared by American Transcendentalism and deep ecology has been the questioning of inherited anthropocentric assumptions regarding the human-nature relationship. Emerson began his attack on orthodox thought by calling for each individual to have “an original relation to the universe,”<sup>2</sup> and concluded that nature was the most effective way to the Divine. Thoreau and Muir were Emerson’s

most celebrated contemporaries who took up the call. Whatever their differences, all three men were grappling with new visions of the human-nature relationship, ones that they felt were more appropriate, more whole and integrated than the one which has dominated since the Scientific Revolution. It is not surprising that especially in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century stock in those efforts has appreciated considerably.

There is a demand on many fronts for a ‘paradigm shift.’ If the history of humankind tells us anything it is that a new paradigm will inevitably replace the Newtonian-scientific worldview. The Western urban-industrial outlook is only one among countless possibilities, it need not be seen as the climax of human development or epistemology. Indeed, it is becoming more and more obvious that our culture’s behaviour is pathological: the desire for economic growth *ad infinitum*, the licentious consumption of nonrenewable resources, tolerance for the accumulation of toxins in the very air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. David Orr has observed that environmental destruction “is not the work of ignorant people. Rather, it is largely the result of work by people with BAs, BSs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs.”<sup>3</sup> The current ecological crisis is the (perhaps inevitable) outcome of the entire way we think about nature and our relationship to it. It “emphasizes theories, not values; abstraction rather than consciousness; neat answers instead of questions; and technical efficiency over conscience.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the dominant characteristic that any viable new paradigm must have is the understanding of

humankind as part of, and utterly dependent upon, the living systems of the earth. In short, it must bear the stamp of ecocentrism. It is inescapable.

In the first chapter I alluded to the difference between science and wisdom. Undoubtedly, most of us in the West are aware that we live in a scientific world. But the question which needs to be asked is: What is the place of wisdom in a science-dominated world? Simon Critchley's lament captures the underlying malaise of Modernity: "In the face of the disenchantment of nature brought about by the scientific revolution, we experience a gap between knowledge and wisdom that has the consequence of divesting our lives of meaning."<sup>5</sup> As the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss suggest, the kind of wisdom that is currently, desperately needed is an ecological wisdom. Fritjof Capra believes that deep ecological awareness is ultimately spiritual or religious.<sup>6</sup> Etymologically, religion (Lat. *religio*, 'to bind together') does not imply God. Well known historian of religions Mircea Eliade explains that any religious practice "reflects the experience of the sacred and hence implies the notions of *being*, *meaning*, and of *truth*."<sup>7</sup> It is the outward form that certain elements of one's inner life takes, those elements that embody meaning. Since ecocentrism is motivated by a sense that humanity is inextricably 'bound together' with nature, it may be considered to have a religious element.

Anna Bramwell, too, observes that there is what many call a 'spiritual' dimension to an ecological sense of wholeness. "The extraordinary influence of [the science of ecology] can be attributed, in part, to the quasi-religious appeal."<sup>8</sup> Ecology provides hard evidence and

a scientific basis for a holistic, ecocentric paradigm which places the human individual in the awe-inspiring network of life on Earth, “a god-impregnated nature.”<sup>9</sup> The cross-fertilization of principles from scientific ecology and religion can produce viable hybrids.<sup>10</sup> A growing portion of modern Western environmentalism is aligning itself with certain wisdom traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and neopaganism. For example, in *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (2002) Peter Hay dedicates an entire chapter to “Religion, Spirituality, and the Green Movement”; Mary Evelyn Tucker, professor of religion at Bucknell University, has edited the nine volume series (with two more projected volumes) *Religions of the World and Ecology* for Harvard University Press; ‘deep ecology’ in North America, especially popular interpretations, has become practically synonymous with nature spirituality; and ecospirituality has gained popularity through such figures as Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox. While many believe that science alone can influence us to behave as good members of the web of life, as we have seen, the impulse towards true ecological consciousness goes much deeper than a simple scientific rational response. The one phenomenon goes by many names – religious or spiritual, quasi-religious, web of life. They all convert to a common currency: a deep impulse to transcend a ‘flattened and narrowed’ individualism,<sup>11</sup> and to find identity and meaning against the deep background of nature.

Morris Berman believes that “for more than 99 per cent of human history, the world was enchanted and [humanity] saw [itself] as an integral part of it. A complete reversal of this

perception in a mere four hundred years or so [i.e. since the Scientific Revolution] has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche."<sup>12</sup> From Berman's perspective our epistemology has narrowed considerably and our ontology has become bankrupt. Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss – each has been sensitive to these perils, and each has attempted to reintegrate the human experience – body, mind, and soul – back into a world that is already whole.

#### *§4.2 The Subject/Object Dualism*

Berman observes that there is an intimate relationship between the continuity of experience and the integrity of the human psyche. A leitmotif in the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss is a primary concern for the health and integrity of the human psyche; and nature provides the indispensable context in which to find one's wellbeing. One of the distinctive features of ecocentrism is its persistent criticism of the subject/object dualism that has flourished especially since René Descartes. The ecological impulse could not occur if there were not some kind of sympathetic resonance between 'subject' and 'object.' Lawrence Buell writes: "Human denizens of the modernized world are most likely to move toward ecocentric ways of thinking when the sympathetic bond is activated... But to activate... this affiliative bond some projection of empathy from self to other is necessary. This projection requires reinstating a myth of agency."<sup>13</sup> Buell hits upon an irony to overcoming the subject/object dualism, namely, that the individual must assert a degree of separate identity before 'projecting' empathy. Næss has a more

intriguing alternative: “The world we live in spontaneously cannot be degraded by being characterized as being merely subjective. It is the real world we experience. *Nothing is more real.*”<sup>14</sup> Næss encourages a move away from the ingrained abstraction which portrays an isolated subject ‘projecting’ feelings onto objects. The key question, then, becomes: ‘How does the sympathetic bond become activated?’ When the subject/object dualism becomes permeable empathy becomes a characteristic of the experience.

Some of the most astonishing accounts of overcoming the separation between subject and object come from the ancient traditions of mysticism. William James writes of the definitive characteristic of mysticism: “[The] overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness.”<sup>15</sup> James, like Næss, treats these experiences as a genuine aspect of human experience.

Undoubtedly, Emerson and Thoreau were inspired in part by mystical texts such as *The Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>16</sup> If we consider ‘the Gita’ (an affectionate nickname commonly used) as “one of the finest mystical documents the world has ever seen,”<sup>17</sup> an enquiry into its teachings will shed considerable light on any possible parallels between mysticism and American Transcendentalism. “The very heart of the Gita’s message is to see the [Absolute] in every creature and act accordingly.”<sup>18</sup> For example: “When a person responds to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were his own, he has attained the highest state of spiritual union.”<sup>19</sup> A contemporary interpretation of this passage might

run: When a person responds to the joys and sorrows of any and all other creatures as if they were his or her own, then he or she has attained the (highest?) state of ecological wisdom.

The point is not to decide whether Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss can be considered mystics. The point is only to show that experiences of unity with nature/God are not as unusual as some may suspect. One way, then, to understand Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss is as having experiences consistent with “a large body of individual testimonies and descriptions” which bear the qualities of mysticism.<sup>20</sup> They stand in a very long tradition of those who perceive a fundamental Unity to nature, the universe and reality. It is not a perfectly seamless continuity, however, for even within mysticism there is no consensus on the ontological status of the Divine and nature. Emerson and Muir may be aligned with a Platonic and/or Hindu ontology where the Divine is given ontological primacy; Thoreau and Næss, on the other hand, may be aligned with Aristotle and Zen Buddhism to the extent that they refuse to treat nature as merely ‘accidental,’ i.e., as a secondary ontological category dependent on some ‘higher’ Absolute Being.

The phenomenon of the ecological impulse says something about the way individuals in Western industrial culture function. Indeed, Berman, Roszak, and many others believe that the kind of ‘nonparticipatory’ consciousness which characterizes the Modern mind is desparately problematic. Roszak explains that for the individual to experience the self in a wider context is to give meaning to his or her life.<sup>21</sup> (The wider the context the deeper

the meaning?) When there is a concrete experience (not simply intellectual rationalization) that you are not just related but actually *belong* to nature and the universe, the resulting ‘transcendent experience’ is characterized by a deep sense of wholeness and unity.

A person who functions merely on self-interest, amorality, and deceitfulness is diagnosed, in common parlance, as a psychopath. The clinical term is ‘antisocial personality disorder’<sup>22</sup> and is defined as “an inability to conform to the social norms that ordinarily govern many aspects of people’s adolescent and adult behaviour.”<sup>23</sup> The characteristics of this disorder include “lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another”; “reckless disregard for safety of self and others”; “deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit.”<sup>24</sup> One of the key findings of people with this disorder is “a lack of remorse for their actions; that is, they appear to lack a conscience.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, there are accepted standards which define a healthy, integrated human psyche. The disconnectedness, especially the emotional disengagement, is considered a disorder. Given our current ecological crisis, it may be time to expand those standards to include not just our human context but the natural one. “Most of us are still related to our native fields as the navigator to undiscovered islands in the sea.”<sup>26</sup> Emerson and Thoreau felt remorse for the dehumanizing treatment of African slaves, and Muir advocated for the protection of nature. One way to understand Næss is as a philosopher who recognizes the crucial

importance of the emotions in moral thought. Indeed, not since Spinoza in the 18<sup>th</sup> century has the emotional life of human beings been given such importance in philosophy.

Perhaps antisocial personality disorders are the inevitable result of Newton's 'single vision.' Human consciousness is left alone in a material universe of atoms and molecules flying endlessly, randomly in empty space. The dominant sensibilities of Modern culture force the search for meaning in abstractions and models of reality rather than in direct experience for fear of 'contamination' by subjectivity. Single vision isolates experience from reality, severing the continuity. With clinical precision it cuts away the significance of the inner life, those 'transcendent' dimensions with which we are completely saturated, but seem to be totally unaware. An experience with, for example, Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*, Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Ansel Adam's *Aspens*, or Carr's *Sombreness Sunlit* can offer entrance into those transcendent dimensions. These examples represent a tour de force of human creativity, moments of breakthrough when nature, the universe, reality becomes something different – something unexpected and unimagined. They don't *explain* the world as much as they say "But, if we look at the world like *this...*" At any rate, they force a questioning of the subject/object dualism, as well as a critique of the overriding monism of the scientific worldview.

§4.3 *Pluralism*

“The enemy of pluralism is monism,”<sup>27</sup> Berlin wrote just before his death in 1997. He warned against the potentially grave consequences of philosophical monism: “Those alone who know the answers to some of the great problems of [humankind] must be obeyed, for they alone know how society should be organized, how individual lives should be lived, how culture should be developed.”<sup>28</sup> Technocrats, for example, display a monistic outlook. They may feel perfectly justified in attempting to impose a kind of global scientific despotism at the expense of cultural diversity. To what extent, then, might ecocentrism become a monistic outlook? The ecological crisis is indeed one of the great problems facing humankind. But, could ecocentrists become despots? Should they become despots in the name of preservation of the human race (not to mention the countless other species that face extinction)?

Pluralism is perhaps the most powerful solvent to use against monism. It allows for a diversity of perspectives, ideas, thought patterns, values, and moralities. As such it does not take up any one position (monism) of its own, but rather gives space to a multiplicity of positions to flower in. However, because we allow a diversity of perspectives it does not follow that we must allow *every* perspective. Neither does it follow that there is incommensurability between positions. There may be a good deal of overlap (unity) between many different positions (diversity). It is the duty of the pluralist to be sensitive to the dynamic interplay of both the unity and the diversity at the same time.

Pluralism is not relativism. In the case of relativism, where any interpretation is just as valid as any other, the community is ignored for nothing is to be gained by engaging anyone or anything wider than oneself. Individuals are treated as if they were discrete beings hermetically sealed against the intrusions of others' values, etc. Politics has no value. Politics becomes meaningless.

To accept pluralism is to admit (perhaps tacitly) two mutually compatible points: i) there is at least some degree of irreducibility among differing positions, and ii) there is at least some degree of incompleteness in any one position. In pluralism there is a consensual arrangement by members of the community to engage in dialogue. Where dialogue is *sincerely* pursued hermeneutics becomes a political act. Indeed, the very gesture of engaging the community assumes at least some common ground, otherwise communication could not even take place. Relativism makes no attempt to locate similarities for it sees them as unnecessary. However, Berlin explains the absurdity of relativism:

I do believe that there is a plurality of values which men [and women] can and do seek, and that these values differ. There is not an infinity of them: the number of human values, of values which I can pursue while maintaining my human semblance, my human character, is finite – let us say 74, or perhaps 122, or 26, but finite, whatever it may be. And the difference this makes is that if a man pursues one of these values, I, who do not, am able to understand why he pursues it or what it would be like, in his circumstances, for me to be induced to pursue it. Hence the possibility of human understanding.<sup>29</sup>

Aristotle said “Man is a political animal,”<sup>30</sup> by which he meant people are by nature members of the human community. To ignore that is irresponsible, for, if Aristotle is

right (and I think he is), then we cut ourselves off from something fundamental to our being when we ignore our relations. To acknowledge and honour connections not just to friends, family and acquaintances, but to all of humanity (and to life on Earth) is to enrich one's life, to make the self larger, more complex and diverse, more mature. Berlin's insight is a crucial extension of Aristotle's definition of a human being, for it honours the nearly universal ability of a person to 'enter into' the unique conditions of life of other persons and cultures.<sup>31</sup> It is this ability for sympathetic understanding which allows one to appreciate the character and value of the world as seen from perspectives other than one's own.

At times one may be uncomfortable with of a wide spectrum of perspectives, ideas, thought patterns, values, and moralities, many of which do not appeal to one's own project. For example Oelschlaeger wants to eliminate Emerson's 'moribund Transcendentalism' whereas Wilber exalts his 'profound nature mysticism.' The implications of pluralism are profound, and acutely at odds with the individualism promoted by Western consumer culture – the 'me generation,' sometimes known as 'the culture of narcissism.'<sup>32</sup> But, Charles Taylor asks if we cannot rescue the positive elements of individualism, e.g. the ability to choose one's occupation, where to live, whom one marries, from the trivialized and self-indulgent forms it often takes in which few, if any, concerns that transcend the ego are recognized, e.g., political, ecological, historical, or religious.<sup>33</sup> Key to healthy communities is recognizing, cultivating, and

respecting the consensual attitude among each of the members. The community can play a vital role in tempering what may otherwise be narcissistically motivated ambitions. Is there a way to honour, respect, and accommodate both Oelschlaeger's and Wilber's views on Emerson, for example? To what extent do they each succumb to the 'grand and seductive Either/Or' whereby Emerson's writings must be seen as *either* moribund *or* profound?

Philosophical monism is neat and tidy. There is the basic conviction in pluralism that reality, and our systematizations of it, does not always, and need not ever, form a rational, harmonious whole. Science, as we have seen, is assumed to be 'omnicompetent,' and so we believe that we already have *the* map of reality. Investigators approach new problems using what Mary Midgley calls the 'the jigsaw principle.' Problems from various existing physical sciences such as neurology, quantum mechanics, genetics or the study of evolution become like puzzle-pieces that we believe must eventually fit perfectly into the given map.<sup>34</sup> But the pluralist believes that many problems simply won't fit into the one map because they belong to completely different puzzles. So the deeper challenge becomes deciding which maps are appropriate under which circumstances. Additionally, it may be perfectly justifiable to create a new map for a puzzle-piece that doesn't seem to fit into any existing map. A vital job of the pluralist is to look for relations between maps, "to relate all the patterns in a way which shows why all the various maps are

needed, why they are not just contradicting each other, why they do not just represent different alternative worlds.”<sup>35</sup>

Pluralism can be ‘messy.’ Rather than provide one gigantic map onto which all the other maps fit, pluralism looks for patterns of relations, listens for recurring themes, feels for isomorphisms. There is still only one world, but many, many different ways to look at it (perhaps an inexhaustible number of ways).

Whether one adopts a pluralistic approach or a monistic approach may be the result, ultimately, of one’s character. A. O. Lovejoy believed that out of the many different cosmologies individuals tend to gravitate towards a particular, very general description of the nature of things, a “characterization of the world to which one belongs, in terms which, like the words of a poem, awaken through their associations, and through a sort of empathy which they engender, a congenial mood or tone of feeling on the part of the [individual].”<sup>36</sup> For lack of a better term he called this proclivity ‘metaphysical pathos.’ Næss noted a similar phenomenon when he compared the philosophical systems of Spinoza and Descartes.<sup>37</sup> With respect to monism or pluralism the attraction may depend on the degree of ‘clutter’ one is willing to tolerate.

It may be that the primary difference between pluralism and monism is that pluralism demands relinquishment of *absolute* systematization, and therefore control. It defies authority from any central voice, government, text, or figure(s). It has a ‘living’ structure

not a static one, and hence pluralism may be more like a busy jungle than a heap of maps. It is no mere coincidence that in the past four hundred years we have seen the rise and dominance of industrialization, an obsession with tidy, rational systematizing, and the emergence of the anthropocentric hubris that nature can be controlled for our use. Jan Zwicky notes that especially since the Enlightenment a subsidiary aim of the great philosophical systems in the West “has been to secure the world from loss.”<sup>38</sup> Thoreau may have anticipated this issue when he wrote: “The particular laws are as our points of view, as, to the traveller, a mountain outline varies with every step, and it has an infinite number of profiles, though absolutely but one form. Even when cleft or bored through it is not comprehended in its entirety.”<sup>39</sup> One of the primary characteristics of pluralism, then, is that it allows for connections, patterns, and meaning to form organically and spontaneously, to emerge without the assistance of *egoic* intervention.

As Lovejoy and Næss have suggested, any philosophical system – indeed, perhaps all coherent thought – has some basic ideas which are simply taken for granted; they resonate deeply in one’s psyche, they feel as if they form a fundamental part of one’s inner being. There is no ‘proof’ for these fundamental ideas, they just ‘feel right.’ Berlin explains:

When one considers how many facts – habits, beliefs – we take for granted in thinking or saying anything at all, how many notions, ethical, political, social, personal, go to the making of the outlook of a single person, however simple and unreflective, in any given environment, we begin to realize how very small a part of the total our sciences – not merely natural sciences, which work by generalizing at a high level of abstraction, but the

human ‘impressionistic’ studies, history, biography, sociology, introspective psychology... – are able to take in... The most primitive act of observation or thought requires some fixed habits, a whole framework of things, persons, ideas, beliefs, assumptions, unanalyzed beliefs... There is no Archimedean point outside ourselves where we can stand in order to take up our critical viewpoint, in order to observe and analyze all that we think or believe by simply inspecting it, all that we can be said to take for granted because we behave as though we accepted it – the supposition itself is a self-evident absurdity.<sup>40</sup>

Næss has speculated that “maybe we ‘have’ a kind of preconscious total view’ which by its very nature cannot be made explicit.”<sup>41</sup> However, on the other hand, it is possible to articulate fragments of one’s total view, always with the reservation that articulation is an approximation, and one’s total view is always in process. “There is nothing in ‘ecosphy,’ or in any other more fragmentary work, which I would regard as established. On the contrary, I feel that all I have published has been ‘on the way.’”<sup>42</sup> Zwicky is sensitive to the deeper patterns that emerge when one is able to step back and attend to many approximations.

Methodology: as in a certain style of sketching, one draws a line again and again, layering over previous attempts. No one of the lines alone is either sufficient or accurate.

If one is lucky the shape will emerge from the accumulations of flawed attempts.  
(Although it may not be the shape one had thought it would be, had hoped for.)<sup>43</sup>

These so-called ‘flawed attempts’ pile up. As when one reads the aphorisms of Heraclitus, or the *Tao Te Ching*, the accumulative effect provides context, coherency, meaning, and a sense of wholeness. Constellations emerge from the addition of each new point of light.

Emerson, too, was particularly sensitive to the challenge of articulating an absolute philosophical system. Those who look for systematic arguments in his metaphysics, or moral injunctions, particularly academics, may be frustrated. Emerson is just as literary as he is philosophical; this requires one to engage his writings with other sensibilities than pure rationality. Emerson was not concerned with the explication that a rigorous philosophical treatment of his thought may demand. His essays have been described as “meditations [that] are exploratory rather than defining or definitive.”<sup>44</sup> Emerson sounds more like Montaigne than Descartes when he wrote: “I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me.”<sup>45</sup> Well-known for his anti-dogmatism Emerson himself embodied a clarion call for each individual to live a life of authenticity. “Trust thyself,” he wrote, “every heart vibrates to that iron string.”<sup>46</sup> Yet, Emerson never turned his back on society, content that his system made sense to him alone. He wrote constantly and produced a large number of works most of which came out of his public lectures.

Any particular view is personal and is limited. Emerson was limited, and Thoreau, and Muir, and Næss. Each of their views is particular – but that, it seems, is part of the human condition. Berlin comments:

We inevitably notice and describe only certain characteristics of [the world] – those which are, as it were, public, which attract attention to themselves because of some specific interest which we have in investigating them, because of our practical needs or theoretical interests... What is left out of such investigations is what is too obvious to need mentioning.<sup>47</sup>

The adoption of a rich plurality of perspectives increases the spectrum of opportunities from which to understand reality. As Næss suggests anyone's total view is a kind of monism, yet it is deeply meaningful.<sup>48</sup> To believe *absolutely* in one's total view is to assume one's frame of reference is completely adequate and accommodates all possible interpretations of reality. The point is not to decide once and for all the shape which the optimum paradigm for the human-nature relationship must take; the contours of ecocentrism will likely be under constant modification. However, what is becoming increasingly clear is that Western-industrial culture suffers from a 'crisis of perception.' This crisis "derives from the fact that most of us, and especially our large social institutions [e.g. universities], subscribe to the concepts [and values] of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our... globally interconnected world."<sup>49</sup>

In the history of ideas we see the ongoing process of human beings who, when confronted by the most pressing problems of the *Lebenswelt*, respond with intelligent, purposive solutions.<sup>50</sup> Currently, ecocentrism is perhaps the most intelligent and purposive response to the environmental crisis. Indeed, it seems quite reasonable to protect nature from exploitation by overzealous entrepreneurs. However, if the 'purest' expression of the ecological impulse is in wilderness preservation, whose ideal is to exclude human beings, what does this say about a holistic (ecocentric) perspective? In pluralism, wilderness preservation will not be the defining characteristic of ecocentrism. It may not be a

reasonable response in, say India, as Ramachandra Guha, research fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Studies in New Delhi, has pointed out.<sup>51</sup> Ecocentrism, to be viable, must include the characteristic of pluralism. Carolyn Merchant has pointed out that “some philosophers have argued that the two frameworks [of organic holism and mechanistic analysis] are fundamentally incommensurable.”<sup>52</sup> How does one choose an appropriate framework if there is no degree of commensurability? I’m not sure that a ‘proper’ reaction is to decide once and for all that we must choose between *either* organic holism *or* mechanistic analysis.

Pluralism is closely related to diversity. Why not keep *both* organic holism *and* mechanistic analysis? Næss has a interesting analogy that may be particularly illuminating here.

Some points of view (like some animals) are clearly vulnerable from some other points of view (or some other animals), but why imagine that one definite point of view (one kind of being) would not be vulnerable from *any* other? What value would there be in having something defeat all others? Philosophical geniuses are normally believed for a short time, but then are gently dethroned and left with the label ‘of considerable historical importance.’<sup>53</sup>

In other words, just as there is a direct relationship between an ecosystem’s biodiversity and its integrity, so too can the diversity of ideas, perspectives, thought patterns, values, and moralities add to the integrity of the human psyche – individually and collectively. Can *both* organic holism *and* mechanistic analysis add to the diversity of perspectives from which we view the world? Of course; and presumably, there are many

unpredictable aspects yet to come to light in the search for a sustainable future for *Homo sapiens* on this planet. As Næss has written: “The richness and diversity of philosophical and religiously ultimate premisses suitable for action in the ecological crisis may be in itself considered part of the richness and diversity of life forms on Earth.”<sup>54</sup> (The two previous quotes from Næss have the timbre of a Spinozistic ontology, especially in light of Spinoza’s claim in the *Ethics* where he states: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”<sup>55</sup>)

This perspective moves away from the Darwinian attitude of ‘survival of the fittest,’ which seems to describe the attitude with which a good deal of scholarship in the West is written. Must there only be one ‘fittest’ idea in any particular circumstance? What would philosophy – indeed, politics – look like if we used ecological, symbiotic, and cooperative sensibilities with ideas, perspectives, thought patterns, values, moralities, and hypotheses? As Duncan M. Taylor has noted, the extent to which the emerging Ecological Worldview defines itself in opposition to the Expansionist Worldview is the extent to which it remains one-sided and incomplete.<sup>56</sup> A truly holistic and integrated perception of the human-nature relationship must be characterized by pluralism.

#### §4.4 *Final remarks: Life is deep*

From my research for this thesis at least these two statements will remain with me probably for the rest of my life: Emerson’s declaration that “True education is the drawing

out of the Soul” and Næss’s belief that “You can learn properly only what engages your feelings.”<sup>57</sup> These two axioms must become touchstones for proper education in the coming decades. Life is deep. It is a tragedy of our modern culture that what passes for ‘education’ in our institutions of higher learning is a sterile examination of the thin veneer of Life. The challenges of the impending ecological crisis will not be met adequately by academics, or scientists, or any other kind of specialist alone. They must be resolved by humanity as a whole, and by whole human beings. Whitehead reminds us that “every intellectual revolution which has ever stirred humanity to greatness has been a passionate protest against inert ideas.”<sup>58</sup> Especially since Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* ecocentrism has certainly registered a very passionate protest against some of the cardinal assumptions of Modernity. It would be irresponsible for our educators – grade school teachers to PhD dissertation advisors – to ignore this cultural phenomenon, an “historical vantage point from which we can at last see where the wasteland [of Modernity] ends and a where a culture of human wholeness and fulfillment begins.”<sup>59</sup> The future of life on Earth, especially humankind, depends on successfully adopting the holistic vision of ecocentrism.

We would do well to remember that the great political movements of the twentieth century “began as ideas in people’s heads: ideas about what relations between [people] have been, are, might be and should be.”<sup>60</sup> Currently we see a revisioning of not only the possible kinds of relations between human beings, but also new thoughts and feelings for the well-being of other sentient beings (e.g., animal rights movements) and the ecosphere

as a whole (e.g., the Gaia hypothesis). David Orr's message has never been more urgent: All education must be environmental education.<sup>61</sup>

The writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss – regardless of their vintage – have a timeless quality to them. Each has written “out of a desire to know and to take part in the long tradition of human inquiry.”<sup>62</sup> They directly address something fundamental to the human condition, the need each one of us has to live an authentic life. And they call each of us to *think and act* in accordance with our deepest principles. A typical undergraduate is not asked to be authentic, to articulate what gives his or her life meaning, to express fearlessly what he or she loves. Should universities produce good corporate citizens or good human beings?

Perhaps the best way to draw out authenticity from students is to encourage contemplation.

It seems to me especially important that while [a student] still lacks sufficient reserves of knowledge and personality to withstand the influence of those who have already reached definite conclusions on fundamental matters, [that student] should be provided with every opportunity for serious [reflection and] philosophizing of all kinds. [One's] own appraisal of the truth or falsity of [fundamental issues] is what matters most, and this is surely something that should be made to depend as little as possible on the accident of the environment.<sup>63</sup>

The current system homogenizes students' minds with facts, information, statistics. It does indeed favour theories over values, abstractions over consciousness, answers instead of questions, efficiency over conscience. What would our universities – indeed our entire

culture – look like if all education was environmental education?<sup>64</sup> “We can now recognize that the fate of the soul is the fate of the social order; that if the spirit within us withers, so too will all the world we build around us.”<sup>65</sup> The human spirit cannot live on abstractions and theories alone. If Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Næss have shown us anything it is that the inner life of the individual must find itself at home in the universe. And that kind of knowledge is only discovered through direct unmediated experience. Indeed, as Thomas Merton (1915-1968), American writer and Trappist monk, wrote: “There is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality, for life is maintained and nourished in us by our vital relation to realities outside and above us.”<sup>66</sup>

There is a lifetime of study in a water-worn stone, the delicate wings of a honeybee, each blazing red maple leaf full of October; how unfathomable, then, the whole of life on Earth. We can never look deeply enough. Where do we go from here? We can only go forward together in dialogue – the scientist and the logger, the banker and the poet, the doctor and the philosopher – as a community of human beings in search of what is good, right, true and beautiful. A ‘drawing out of Souls’ Emerson might say.

## Endnotes

The epigraphs are from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (1923). I offer them not as strict translations, but as my own interpretations of Rilke's originals. They have been influenced by Stephen Mitchell's and Edward Snow's respective translations.

### Chapter 1 – *Prolegomenon*

- <sup>1</sup> Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 95.
- <sup>2</sup> For example, see Sophie Poklewski Koziell, "Whose Dream is it Anyway?" *Resurgence* 217 (2003), p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> See Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*.
- <sup>4</sup> As Stephan Toulmin notes in *Cosmopolis: the hidden agenda of Modernity* different scholars adopt different dates for 'the beginning' of Modernity: 1436, the Gutenberg printing press; 1517, Luther's ninety-five theses; 1543, Copernicus's heliocentric theory; 1687, Newton's *Principia*; 1776, America's declaration of independence; a few even as late as 1895 with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. I am following the outline Richard Tamas uses in *The Passion of the Western Mind*, pp. 220 ff.
- <sup>5</sup> Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, p. 22.
- <sup>6</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, p. 24, Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 6, and Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 525, Berman, *Reenchantment of the World*, p. 41.
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Tamas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, pp. 280-281. The sexist language is intentional, meant to show the bias of the period (see Tamas's Introduction and Epilogue).
- <sup>8</sup> Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, "On Bacon and Newton," *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, pp. 51-52. See also Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, p. 17.
- <sup>9</sup> Tamas, *Passion of the Western Mind*, p. 225.
- <sup>10</sup> George Sessions, "Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour," *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Sessions, ed., p. 161.
- <sup>11</sup> *Reenchantment*, p. 22.
- <sup>12</sup> *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. xxiv.
- <sup>13</sup> Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*, p.201.
- <sup>14</sup> See David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, pp. 11-13, Tamas, *Passion of the Western Mind*, pp. 282-290, Morris Berman, *Reenchantment of the World*, p. 238, Max Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, pp. 121-129.
- <sup>15</sup> Freya Mathews, *For Love of Matter*, p. 172.
- <sup>16</sup> See Alan Drengson, *An Ecophilosopher's Dictionary*, p. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Midgley, *Science and Poetry*, p. 2.
- <sup>18</sup> Social atomism "lies at the heart of individualism," (i.e., egocentrism) and may be defined as "the idea that human beings are essentially separate items who only come together in groups for contingent reasons of convenience" (Mary Midgley, *Science and Poetry*, p. 69). It is closely aligned with social Darwinism, the idea that human individuals or societies compete in a 'survival of the fittest' where the struggle for existence is assumed to be perfectly natural. For example, Nazi Germany during the 1930's and early 1940's felt warranted in attempting to destroy 'inferior' races.

- <sup>19</sup> See Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, p. 69, David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, p. 333, and Freya Mathews, *For Love of Matter*, pp. 163-164.
- <sup>20</sup> Tamas, *Passion of the Western Mind*, p. 275.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Mary Midgley, *Science and Poetry*, p. 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature*, p. 24.
- <sup>23</sup> Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism*, p. 22.
- <sup>24</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "The First and the Last," p. 58, and Roger Hausheer, Introduction, Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current*, p. xvi.
- <sup>25</sup> *Roots of Romanticism*, p. 22. See also Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," *The Proper Study of Mankind*, pp. 1-15.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Death of Nature*, p. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> The phrase *die Entzauberung der Welt* is originally from Max Weber. See Morris Berman, *Reenchantment*, pp. 69 ff.
- <sup>28</sup> Berman, *Reenchantment*, p. 16.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> See Mary Midgley, Introduction, *Science and Poetry*, pp. 1-17, and Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, "The Heroic Model of Science," *Telling the Truth About History*, pp. 15-51.
- <sup>31</sup> *Science and Poetry*, p. 1.
- <sup>32</sup> Tamas, *Passion*, p. 366.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: Kant to Wittgenstein and Sartre*, p. 102.
- <sup>35</sup> Roszak, p. 278.
- <sup>36</sup> Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 98.
- <sup>37</sup> Isaiah See Alan Drengson, *An Ecophilosopher's Dictionary*, p. 12, and Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, p. 18.
- <sup>38</sup> See David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, pp. 11-13, Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, pp. 10-46, Tamas, *Passion of the Western Mind*, pp. 366-394, Morris Berman, *Reenchantment of the World*, p. 238 Max Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, pp. 121-129.
- <sup>39</sup> James McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*, p. 19.
- <sup>40</sup> *Nature's Economy*, p. 82.
- <sup>41</sup> See Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, pp. 7 and 14.
- <sup>42</sup> The ecological impulse as characterized by Hay may very well extend to the whole of nature and planet earth, as evidenced in the Gaia hypothesis popularized by James Lovelock. The Gaia hypothesis understands Earth and all its living systems to function in harmony as if the planet itself was a living organism.
- <sup>43</sup> Hay, *Main Currents*, p. 3.

- <sup>44</sup> Timothy O'Riordan, quoted in Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 425.
- <sup>45</sup> See Hay, *Main Currents*, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>46</sup> See Tarnas, *Passion*, p. 366, and Berlin, *The Sense of Reality*, pp. 169-170.
- <sup>47</sup> Berlin, *Roots*, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>48</sup> See Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 278.
- <sup>49</sup> *Science and Poetry*, p. 55.
- <sup>50</sup> *Wasteland Ends*, p. 281.
- <sup>51</sup> Roszak, *Wasteland Ends*, p. 283.
- <sup>52</sup> Hay, *Main Currents*, p. 10.
- <sup>53</sup> See Hay, *Main Currents*, pp. 94-119.
- <sup>54</sup> I am extending Simon Critchley's account of the difference between British analytic philosophy and Continental phenomenology, where the difference marks a contrast in *Lebenswelten*, "life worlds." Critchley's central concern is that analytic philosophy is married too closely to science and its methodologies, and hence can yield only what he calls knowledge. On the other hand, the Continental philosophy that many Europeans are engaged in attempts to use scientific knowledge and analytic philosophy to help answer some of the larger questions such as 'What is the meaning of life?' or 'What is the right thing to do?'
- <sup>55</sup> *Nature's Economy*, p. 82.
- <sup>56</sup> *The World's Religions*, p. 365.
- <sup>57</sup> Duncan M. Taylor, "Disagreeing on the Basics," p. 32.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28. The inclusion of Leibniz in the organicist tradition is unorthodox, but Taylor maintains others including Carolyn Merchant, (*The Death of Nature*, 1980), and Joseph Needham, ("The Contribution of Chinese Organicism to European Thought," 1956) have also interpreted the famous German mathematician and rationalist in a similar fashion.
- <sup>60</sup> Berlin, *Roots*, p. 141.
- <sup>61</sup> For example see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, Douglas Strong, *Dreamers and Defenders*, Stewart Udall, *The Quiet Crisis*, Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*.
- <sup>62</sup> Harold Glasser, Introduction, *Life's Philosophy*, p. xxiii.
- <sup>63</sup> Næss, Introduction, *Four Modern Philosophers*, p. vi.
- <sup>64</sup> *Alfred North Whitehead: An Anthology*, p. 88.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>66</sup> Arne Næss, "The Encouraging Richness and Diversity of Ultimate Premises in Environmental Philosophy." *The Trumpeter* 9.2 (1992): p. 55. Besides philosophical texts we may also add a good many other types of texts to Næss's example, including historical and literary.
- <sup>67</sup> Emerson, June 14, 1853, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, v. 8, p. 375.

- <sup>68</sup> Thoreau, May 24, 1853, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, v. 5, p. 188.
- <sup>69</sup> See Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, Introduction, *Telling the Truth*, pp. 1-11.
- <sup>70</sup> Leopold von Ranke, cited in E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 3. He is considered 'the father of the objective writing of history.'
- <sup>71</sup> See Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, p. 73.
- <sup>72</sup> *What is History?*, p. 6.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>74</sup> Quoted in Carr, p. 16
- <sup>75</sup> Bernstein, "Beyond Objectivism and Relativism," p. 7.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. 'Foundationalism' is defined in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* as "The theory that knowledge of the world rests on a foundation of indubitable beliefs from which further propositions can be inferred to produce a superstructure of known truths" (p. 289). The 'Archimedean point' refers to a hypothetical viewpoint where one stands completely outside of the world, thereby gaining an independent (objective) and complete view of it. It is named after the Greek Archimedes (c. 287-212 BCE), one of the greatest mathematicians and inventors of all time, who is attributed with the idea that given a fulcrum point outside of the earth and a lever that was long enough, he could move earth.
- <sup>77</sup> Bernstein., "Beyond Objectivism and Relativism," p. 18.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>81</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, "The First and the Last," p. 57, and *The Roots of Romanticism*, pp. 138, 146-147.
- <sup>82</sup> Taylor, "Disagreeing," p. 26.

## Chapter 2 – *American Transcendentalism*

- <sup>1</sup> *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 67.
- <sup>2</sup> See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, pp. 23-43.
- <sup>3</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, p. 67.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>5</sup> *Nature's Economy*, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> See Worster, *Nature's Economy*, especially p. 58, Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, pp. 139-140, and Hay, *Main Currents*, p. 8.
- <sup>7</sup> See Perry Miller, Introduction, *The Transcendentalists*, pp. 3-15, and Parrington, *Romantic Revolution*, pp. 319-320.
- <sup>8</sup> Parrington, *Romantic Revolution*, p. 319.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>10</sup> Sherman Paul, *The Shores of America*, p. 4, my italics.
- <sup>11</sup> Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists*, p. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert D. Richardson, *Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, p. 54. See also Brian M. Barbour, *American Transcendentalism*, p. 1.
- <sup>13</sup> A list of the more notable Transcendentalists includes Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, George and Sophia Ripley, Fredric Henry Hedge, Elizabeth Peabody, Orestes Brownson, A. Bronson Alcott, James Freeman Clarke, Sampson Reed, and Jones Very. See Perry Miller's collection of writings, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology*, for excellent, brief biographies as well as some of their most important contributions to the movement.
- <sup>14</sup> Parrington, pp. 384-385.
- <sup>15</sup> Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists*, p. 8.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 317-320.
- <sup>17</sup> Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists*, p. 8. See also Parrington, *Romantic Revolution*, pp. 317 and 379.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>19</sup> Parrington, p. 342. Contemporary reviewers such as Anne C. Rose (*Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 1981) and Sam McGuire Worley (*Emerson, Thoreau, and the Role of the Cultural Critic*, 2001) also highlight this dimension of Transcendentalism.
- <sup>20</sup> *Thoreau, Emerson, and Transcendentalism*, p. 4. See also Henry David Gray, Introduction, *Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of Its Chief Exponent*, pp. 7-17, for the notoriously difficult task of giving Transcendentalism any one definition. "It is to be noted", he claims, "that [Transcendentalism] is not so much the *sum* of... various things as it is their *product* (p. 11).
- <sup>21</sup> *In Quest of the Ordinary*, p. 181.
- <sup>22</sup> P. 809. Theodore Parker was next in importance only to Emerson in giving Transcendentalism its shape, and earned a living as a Unitarian minister in West Roxbury. A fascinating figure in his own right Parker was a prodigious reader, and by the time he was 26 claimed he had a reading knowledge of twenty languages! He is perhaps most noted for his sermon "A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity" delivered May 19, 1841, at the South Boston Church (later published as an essay). In this piece Parker interpreted the words of Jesus as transient, but the teachings themselves, the insights, he interpreted as permanent and capable of being immediately apprehended by anyone. Parker taught that each one of us is, in potential, Jesus. At the time this view was extremely heretical, and the reaction within the Christian community caused more commotion than Emerson's "Divinity School Address" in 1838.
- <sup>23</sup> C. E. Vaughan, "Coleridge as Philosopher," *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, vol. 11, chapter 6, §13, pars. 43-44, <[www.bartleby.com/cambridge/](http://www.bartleby.com/cambridge/)>. It does not appear that Coleridge actually 'perverted' Kant, at least not in any conscious manner. Coleridge read Schelling (1775-1854) who claimed that in 'absolute reason' one finds a unity of self, nature, and spirit. Schelling was a friend and student of Fichte (1762-1814), who, although greatly influenced by Kant, claimed that the transcendental 'I' or 'ego' actually experienced 'things-in-themselves,' which ultimately emanates from an 'absolute being.' It was Fichte, not Coleridge, who originally advanced an idealism which is virtually opposite of Kant's. See Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 718, and *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, pp. 277-279, 800-801.

- <sup>24</sup> *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 809.
- <sup>25</sup> Kathleen Raine, Introduction, *Coleridge: Poems and Prose*, p. 12.
- <sup>26</sup> See Richardson, *Emerson*, pp. 104-105, and Stephen Whicher and Robert Spiller, Introduction, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. xviii.
- <sup>27</sup> Emerson, "Modern Aspects of Letters," *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, p. 377.
- <sup>28</sup> Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists*, p. 34.
- <sup>29</sup> Emerson, December 19, 1833, *Journals*, vol. 3, pp. 235-236.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, v. 1, pp. 412-413 (May 31, 1834).
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.
- <sup>32</sup> See *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, "Selections from the *Critique of Pure Reason*," A50-52/B74-76 (p. 166)
- <sup>33</sup> In *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, published two years after *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant wished to prevent misinterpretation of his use of the phrase 'transcendental idealism' by "gladly withdrawing this name" and using instead 'critical idealism.' However, Kant's concern was either unknown to Emerson and his friends or ignored.
- <sup>34</sup> *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, §13, n. III, [4:293], p. 45.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> With two reservations: we also have knowledge of the existence of the *a priori* categories and scientific truths, e.g. 'The earth is in orbit around the sun'.
- <sup>37</sup> "The Transcendentalist," *Essential Writings*, p. 86.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Gary Hatfield, Introduction, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p. xxiii.
- <sup>40</sup> *Journals*, December 14, 1834, vol. 3, p. 392.
- <sup>41</sup> *Walden*, p. 92.
- <sup>42</sup> Emerson, quoted in Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 109.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Journals & Misc Notebooks*, July 13, 1833, vol. 4, pp. 199-200.
- <sup>44</sup> Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 153.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 551.
- <sup>46</sup> Oelschlaeger, *Idea*, p. 133.
- <sup>47</sup> See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Worster, *Nature's Economy*, Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, as well as Stuart Udall, *The Quiet Crisis*, Douglas H Strong, *Dreamers and Defenders*.
- <sup>48</sup> *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 135.
- <sup>49</sup> *Nature*, in *Essential Writings*, p. 39.
- <sup>50</sup> See *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, pp. 284-289.

- 51 Emerson, "The Over-Soul," *Essential Writings*, p. 237.
- 52 Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, p. 289.
- 53 See Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 135.
- 54 "The Power and Laws of Thought" *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, p. 147.
- 55 Emerson, *Nature*, in *Essential Writings*, p. 25.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 38. Interestingly the last two sentences – "Love is as much its demand, as perception. Indeed, neither can be perfect without the other." – are rarely included in this quote.
- 57 For example, see Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, pp. 137-138, and Michael P. Cohen, *The Pathless Way*, p. 51.
- 58 Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict*, p. 64.
- 59 Geldard, *Esoteric Emerson*, p. 9.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Essential Writings*, pp. 45-46.
- 62 Emerson, *Nature*, in *Essential Writings*, p. 6.
- 63 Quoted in Geldard, *The Mind on Fire*, p. 155.
- 64 Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 99.
- 65 Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 135.
- 66 "The Transcendentalist," *Essential Writings*, pp. 81-82.
- 67 Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 382.
- 68 June, 1842 (no exact date), *Journals & Misc. Notebooks*, v.8, p. 183.
- 69 May 1, 1842, *Journals & Misc. Notebooks*, v.8, p. 246. The 'new molecular philosophy' to which Emerson refers was the atomic theory initially popularized by the British chemist John Dalton (1766-1844). He believed that the universe was essentially a plenum filled with extremely small, solid, irreducible particles (atoms). However, it was Italian physicist Amadeo Avagadro (1776-1856) who refined the theory, proposing that atoms were actually quite small relative to the huge amounts of empty space between them.
- 70 "Circles," *Essential Writings*, p. 260.
- 71 April 7, 1840, *The Journals & Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, v. 7, p. 342.
- 72 May 26, 1837, *Journals*, v. 4, p. 248.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 74 Emerson, "The Natural Method of Mental Philosophy," *Later Lectures*, v. 2, p. 89.
- 75 Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, and Worster, *Nature's Economy*.
- 76 "Thoreau and the Natural Environment," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, p. 171.
- 77 Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 133.
- 78 New York, Harper & Brothers, 1959. See especially Sydney Ahlstrom, Introduction, p. ix.

- <sup>79</sup> Lawrence Buell, "Thoreau and the Natural Environment," p. 171.
- <sup>80</sup> Mark Van Doren, quoted in Joel Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict*, p. 4.
- <sup>81</sup> Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 78.
- <sup>82</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 3. Although Thoreau is generally perceived to have lived a reclusive life during this period, it was quite common for him to travel into the village of Concord where he would visit with friends and family. Evidently, Thoreau's family went out of their way to make sure Henry's life was as comfortable as possible, for example his sister Sophia often brought food out to the cabin (see Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, p. 190).
- <sup>83</sup> July 6, 1845, *Journal*, v. 1, p. 362.
- <sup>84</sup> Vital < Lat. *vitalis*, < *vitas*, "life"; phenomena < Gk. *phainomenon*, "being seen," "appearance"; actuality < Lat. *actualis*, "practical."
- <sup>85</sup> Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 78.
- <sup>86</sup> *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 136.
- <sup>87</sup> March 23, 1853, *Journal*, vol. 5, p. 45.
- <sup>88</sup> February 19, 1854, *Journals & Misc. Notebooks*, v. 6, pp. 131-132.
- <sup>89</sup> *Walden*, p. 130.
- <sup>90</sup> *Moral Agency*, p. 4.
- <sup>91</sup> July 16, 1851, *Journal*, v. 2, pp. 314-315.
- <sup>92</sup> In *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Kirk, Raven and Schofield, pp. 203 and 211.
- <sup>93</sup> *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing*, p. 3.
- <sup>94</sup> Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 291.
- <sup>95</sup> Roszak, *Wasteland*, p. 291.
- <sup>96</sup> *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 136.
- <sup>97</sup> See Alfred Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing*.
- <sup>98</sup> May 6, 1854, *Journal*, v. 6, pp. 236-237.
- <sup>99</sup> *Journal*, February 18, 1852.
- <sup>100</sup> November 5, 1857, *Journals*, v. 10, pp. 164-165.
- <sup>101</sup> Tauber, *Moral Agency*, p. 118.
- <sup>102</sup> *Walden*, p. 162.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>104</sup> *Nature*, in *Essential Writings*, p. 32.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>106</sup> Thoreau, April 2, 1852, *Journals*, v. 3, pp. 381-382.
- <sup>107</sup> Thoreau, "Walking," *Walden and Other Writings*, p. 657.

- <sup>108</sup> See Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 149.
- <sup>109</sup> "Walking," *Walden and Other Writings*, p. 659.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 662.
- <sup>111</sup> For example, see Tauber, *Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing*, p. 179, and Alan Hodder, *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness*.
- <sup>112</sup> See the last three paragraphs of "Walking."
- <sup>113</sup> "An Address," (more commonly known as "The Divinity School Address"), *Essential Writings*, p. 78.
- <sup>114</sup> *Journal*, March 7, 1859, vol. 9, p. 360.
- <sup>115</sup> Thoreau in a letter to H. G. O. Blake, April 30, 1850, quoted in Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict*, p. 126.
- <sup>116</sup> Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, p. 305.
- <sup>117</sup> *Walden*, p. 92.
- <sup>118</sup> *Moral Agency*, p. 2.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- <sup>120</sup> *Environmental Imagination*, p. 139.
- <sup>121</sup> See *Walden*, pp. 286-290.
- <sup>122</sup> *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 133.
- <sup>123</sup> Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 79.
- <sup>124</sup> Buell, "Thoreau and the Natural Environment," p. 171.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- <sup>126</sup> Robert Sattelmeyer, Introduction, *Henry David Thoreau: the Natural History Essays*, p. xxvii.
- <sup>127</sup> June 24, 1863, *Journals*, v. 9, p. 522.
- <sup>128</sup> See *Seeing New Worlds*, pp. 52-53.
- <sup>129</sup> For example, John Swett wrote: "When Ralph Waldo Emerson visited the Yosemite, Muir was his guide for a week, and on his return Emerson said of him, 'He is more wonderful than Thoreau'" ("John Muir, *Century*, 26.1, p. 120. Muir himself said that meeting Emerson was one the greatest events in his life (see Jim Butler, "The First Environmentalist: John Muir" *Borealis*, p. 26. See also Frederick Turner, *John Muir*, pp. 213-215.
- <sup>130</sup> Quoted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p.128.
- <sup>131</sup> Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way*, p. 51.
- <sup>132</sup> Richard F. Fleck, "John Muir's Homage to Henry David Thoreau," *The Pacific Historian*, v. 29, n's. 2&3, p. 56.
- <sup>133</sup> John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, in *John Muir: Nature Writings*, p. 30.
- <sup>134</sup> Turner, *Rediscovering America*, p. 37.
- <sup>135</sup> See Turner, *Rediscovering America*, p. 41.

- <sup>136</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, p. 123.
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- <sup>138</sup> Muir, *Boyhood and Youth*, in *Nature Writings*, p. 142.
- <sup>139</sup> Turner, *Rediscovering America*, p. 120.
- <sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- <sup>141</sup> Nash, *American Mind*, p. 125.
- <sup>142</sup> See *The Frontier in American History*, p. 2.
- <sup>143</sup> Catlin, quoted in Nash, p. 101.
- <sup>144</sup> Nash, p. 108.
- <sup>145</sup> See Nash, *Wilderness*, pp. 106, 108.
- <sup>146</sup> See Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy*, p. 111.
- <sup>147</sup> Quoted in Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 266.
- <sup>148</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- <sup>149</sup> Muir, quoted in Fox, *John Muir*, p. 116.
- <sup>150</sup> See Duncan Taylor, "Disagreeing on the Basics," p. 29.
- <sup>151</sup> Quoted in Nash, *Wilderness*, p. 161.
- <sup>152</sup> See Nash, *Wilderness*, pp. 161-170.
- <sup>153</sup> Thomas J. Lyon, *John Muir*, p. 5.
- <sup>154</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, p. 180.
- <sup>155</sup> Lyon, *John Muir*, p. 5.
- <sup>156</sup> *Main Currents*, p. 12.
- <sup>157</sup> See Herbert F. Smith, *John Muir*, p. 26.
- <sup>158</sup> Muir, *Boyhood and Youth*, in *Nature Writings*, p. 139.
- <sup>159</sup> *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 173.
- <sup>160</sup> Muir, quoted in Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 190.
- <sup>161</sup> See Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, pp. 188-204.
- <sup>162</sup> Muir, quoted in Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 190.
- <sup>163</sup> Vol. 7, p. 202.
- <sup>164</sup> See *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4, p. 100, vol. 7, pp. 202-205, and *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 641.
- <sup>165</sup> See *Routledge Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, p. 202, and *A Companion to Metaphysics*, p. 376.
- <sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 100.
- <sup>167</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. vol. 4, p. 100, and Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 123.

- <sup>168</sup> *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 182.
- <sup>169</sup> Oelschlaeger, *Ibid.*, p. 192.
- <sup>170</sup> Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way*, p. 163.
- <sup>171</sup> Oelschlaeger, *Idea*, p. 192.
- <sup>172</sup> *John of the Mountains*, L. M. Wolfe, ed., p. 439.
- <sup>173</sup> *The Pathless Way*, p. 151.
- <sup>174</sup> Oelschlaeger, *Idea*, p. 192.
- <sup>175</sup> Muir, "Cedar Keys," *Nature Writings*, pp. 825-826.
- <sup>176</sup> For example see Oelschlaeger, *Idea*, p. 195, George Sessions, Preface, *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. ix, Hay, *Main Currents*, p. 14.
- <sup>177</sup> *John of the Mountains*, p. 138.
- <sup>178</sup> For example see James D. Heffernan, "Why Wilderness? John Muir's 'Deep Ecology'" in *John Muir: Life and Work*, S. M. Miller, ed. Heffernan equates deep ecology with biocentrism, but, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the position that Næss articulates viz. deep ecology is much more sophisticated.
- <sup>179</sup> "Yellowstone National Park," *Nature Writings*, p. 756.
- <sup>180</sup> "Cedar Keys," *Nature Writings*, p. 826.
- <sup>181</sup> *My First Summer in the Sierra*, in *Nature Writings*, pp. 243-244.
- <sup>182</sup> Muir, *Wilderness World of John Muir*, p. 313.
- <sup>183</sup> "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes," *Radical Environmentalism*, P. List, ed., p. 30.
- <sup>184</sup> Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, in *Nature Writings*, p. 245. It is an interesting phenomenon that the second sentence – "One fancies a heart like our own must be beating in every crystal and cell..." – is left out of the vast majority of quotes.
- <sup>185</sup> Muir, "Cedar Keys," *Nature Writings*, p. 826.
- <sup>186</sup> Muir, quoted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 129.
- <sup>187</sup> For example, see Don Weiss, "John Muir and the Wilderness Ideal," *John Muir: Life and Work*, S. M. Miller, ed., p. 119-120, and Michael Cohen, *Pathless Way*, pp. 120 and 128.
- <sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- <sup>189</sup> Dennis Williams, "John Muir: Christian Mysticism and the Spiritual Value of Nature," *John Muir: Life and Work*, S. M. Miller, ed., p. 94.
- <sup>190</sup> See Heffernan, "Why Wilderness," pp. 108 and 110.
- <sup>191</sup> Michael Cohen, *Pathless Way*, p. 190.
- <sup>192</sup> Næss, "The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, G. Sessions, ed., p. 67.
- <sup>193</sup> Preface, *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. ix.

### Chapter 3 – *The Deep Ecology Movement*

- <sup>1</sup> See Harold Glasser, Introduction, *Life's Philosophy*, p. xxv, and Næss, *ibid.*, p. 171.
- <sup>2</sup> Lorne Hammond, personal communication, April 16, 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Harold Glasser, Introduction, *Life's Philosophy*, p. xxiii.
- <sup>4</sup> Rachel Carson, quoted in Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 349.
- <sup>5</sup> For example, see Andrew Brennan, "Comment: Pluralism and Deep Ecology," *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Philosophy*, Witoszek and Brennan, eds., p. 175.
- <sup>6</sup> See Alan Drengson, Introduction, *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Anthology*, Drengson and Inoue, eds., p. xix.
- <sup>7</sup> Alan Drengson, "Shifting Paradigms: from Technocrat to Planetary Person," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, Drengson and Inoue, eds., p. 76.
- <sup>8</sup> Næss, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, p. 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Drengson, "Shifting Paradigms," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 76.
- <sup>10</sup> See Næss, "The Deep Ecology 'Eight Points' Revisited," in *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pp. 213-221, and Alan Drengson, "The Deep Ecology Movement," *Trumpeter*, 12.3, p. 143.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- <sup>12</sup> See "Deep Ecology and Lifestyle," *21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pp. 259-261.
- <sup>13</sup> Arne Næss and George Sessions, "Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, Drengson & Inoue, eds., pp. 49-50.
- <sup>14</sup> Drengson, "Ecophilosophy: Comprehensive, Deep Value Inquiry," p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> Næss, "The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 67. See also Næss, "The Deep Ecology 'Eight Points' Revisited," *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pp. 213-214.
- <sup>16</sup> See "Terminology of the Deep Ecology Movement," *The Trumpeter*, 13.3 (1996), pp. 106-107, and "An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement and Diverse Ecosophies," *The Trumpeter*, 14.3 (1997), pp. 110-111. See also Karen Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy and Deep Ecology," p. 255.
- <sup>17</sup> Steven Van Wyck, *Primitives in the Wilderness*, p. 36. See also Karen Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy and Deep Ecology," *Philosophical Dialogues*, Witoszek and Brennan, eds., pp. 255-269. Warren distinguishes Næss's Ecosophy-T from the 'deep ecology' of George Sessions, Bill Devall, and Warwick Fox "which tends to undercut Næss's hope for a broad-based deep ecology movement" (p. 260).
- <sup>18</sup> See Michael Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future*, especially pp. 1-17 and Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology*.
- <sup>19</sup> Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology," *Philosophical Dialogues*, Witoszek and Brennan, eds., pp. 301 and 281 respectively.

- <sup>20</sup> For example see Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," *People, Penguins, and Plastic Trees*, pp. 197-213, Ariel Kay Salleh, "Deeper Than Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics*, 6.4 (1984): 339-345, Jennifer Sells, "An Eco-Feminist Critique of Deep Ecology" *Canadian Dimensions*, 23.6 (1989): 13-15.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future*, p. 66.
- <sup>22</sup> Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 66.
- <sup>23</sup> Næss, "Interview with Arne Næss," *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Devall and Sessions, eds. p. 74.
- <sup>24</sup> Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 65.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>26</sup> Warwick Fox, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?," *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Philosophy*, Witoszek and Brennan, eds., p. 158.
- <sup>27</sup> "The Apron Diagram," *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Anthology*, Drengson and Inoue, eds., p. 11.
- <sup>28</sup> Peter C. van Wyck, *Primitives in the Wilderness: Deep Ecology and the Missing Human Subject*, p. 37.
- <sup>29</sup> See Næss, "Reflections About Total Views," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 25 (1965), pp. 18-19. Characteristically, Næss avoids concise definitions, preferring instead to demonstrate important concepts by way of examples. The advantage of this tactic is that it leaves key terms somewhat 'open-ended,' acknowledging that language has an inherent elasticity at fairly high levels of abstraction anyway.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Web of Life*, p. 6.
- <sup>31</sup> Næss, "Reflections About Total Views," p. 26.
- <sup>32</sup> "The Limits of Objectivity," p. 90.
- <sup>33</sup> Wilber's most accessible work is the short and highly readable *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. For a more detailed account of his 'theory of everything' see *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, or *A Brief History of Everything*. Very briefly Wilber advocates a nondual ontology with a quasi-Hegelian evolutionary theme in which Spirit (or pure Being) manifests itself in matter for the purpose of reaching higher and higher levels of consciousness on its way back to achieving the awareness of pure Spirit. Any theory of reality, according to Wilber, must take into account not only all levels of consciousness but the four 'quadrants' of reality as well: two individual (interior and exterior) and two social (interior and exterior).
- <sup>34</sup> See Alan Drengson, "An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement and Diverse Ecosophies," *The Trumpeter*, 14.3, (1997), p. 110.
- <sup>35</sup> Næss, "Reflections About Total Views," p. 19.
- <sup>36</sup> Næss, "A Plea for Pluralism in Philosophy and Physics," *Selected Works of Arne Næss*, v. 9, manuscript, p. 153.
- <sup>37</sup> "The Systematization of the Logically Ultimate Norms and Hypotheses of Ecosophy T," *Anthology*, p. 31, my italics. 'A living structure!' As I understand Næss, one's total view is, to speak metaphorically, a soft dove not a steel fork.
- <sup>38</sup> Næss, "The Systematization of the Logically Ultimate Norms," p. 31.
- <sup>39</sup> "A Plea for Pluralism," *Selected Works*, v. 9, manuscript, p. 145.
- <sup>40</sup> Arne Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 33.

- 41 See *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, pp. 140-141, and 166.
- 42 See *Malaise of Modernity*, pp. 31-41.
- 43 Næss, "The Apron Diagram," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, Drengson and Inoue, eds., p. 11.
- 44 Næss, "The Encouraging Richness and Diversity of Ultimate Premises in Environmental Philosophy," *The Trumpeter*, 9.2 (1992), p. 53.
- 45 Næss, "The Encouraging Richness," p. 53.
- 46 Næss, "Interview with Arne Næss," *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Devall and Sessions, eds., p. 74.
- 47 Arne Næss, *Life's Philosophy*, p. 13.
- 48 Personal conversation, Oct. 15, 2002, Oslo, Norway.
- 49 Næss, "A Plea for Pluralism," *Selected Works*, v. 9, manuscript p. 153.
- 50 *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 35.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 52 See Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life*, p. 31
- 53 Capra, *The Web of Life*, p. 32, my italics.
- 54 *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, pp. 57-58.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 56 Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 56.
- 57 Næss, "The Shallow and the Deep" p. 3.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Næss, "The World of Concrete Contents," *Inquiry*, 28, p. 419.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 418.
- 62 Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, trans., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 190.
- 63 Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 39.
- 64 Locke, quoted in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 718.
- 65 Næss, "Self-Realization," p. 27.
- 66 Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 54. See A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, pp. 51-55. Whitehead claims that the Western mind, particularly since the eighteenth century, has consistently fallen into an intellectual trap of "mistaking the abstract for the concrete" (p. 51).
- 67 *Science and the Modern World*, p. 54.
- 68 William Wordsworth, from "Lines Written in Early Spring," 1798.
- 69 Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 51.
- 70 Næss, "Ecosophy and Gestalt Ontology," *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 242.

- 71 See "Spinoza and Ecology," *Speculum Spinozanum*, S. Hessing, ed., p. 419.
- 72 See *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 641.
- 73 "Spinoza and Ecology," *Speculum Spinozanum*, p. 419, Næss's italics.
- 74 Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 60.
- 75 Næss, "Concrete Contents," p. 424.
- 76 Næss, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," *Anthology*, p. 13.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 78 *Ibid.*
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 William James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 188.
- 81 Næss, *Life's Philosophy*, p. 23.
- 82 Næss, "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes," p. 29.
- 83 See Næss, "Self-Realization," p. 15, and Næss, "Identification... Source," p. 29. Recall the etymology of empathy: *em*, "in/into," + *patheia*, "to feel" and sympathy: *sum*, "with," + *patheia*, "to feel."
- 84 Næss, "Concrete Contents," p. 422.
- 85 J. Krishnamurti, *Meditations*, p. 21.
- 86 From the Buddhist doctrine of *Visuddhimagga*. Quoted in Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen*, p. 56.
- 87 From "Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me," *What Do We Know*, pp. 36-37.
- 88 Næss, *Life's Philosophy*, p. 23.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 Alan Drengson, "The Deep Ecology Movement," *The Trumpeter* 12.3, p. 144.
- 91 Næss, "Self-Realization," p. 14.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 This is one of the misreadings of Næss that many people such as Val Plumwood make. See "Nature, Self, Gender," *People, Penguins, and Plastic Trees*, p. 204.
- 94 "Self-Realization," p. 24.
- 95 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 457.
- 96 "Nature, Self, and Gender," p. 203.
- 97 "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?" *The Ecologist*, 14.5-6 (1984) p. 200.
- 98 *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 195.
- 99 *Contesting Earth's Future*, p. 21.
- 100 *Ethics*, V.24, trans. Samuel Shirley.

- <sup>101</sup> Næss, "Through Spinoza to Mahayana Buddhism or Through Mahayana Buddhism to Spinoza?" *Spinoza's Philosophy of Man*, p. 136.
- <sup>102</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Great Chain of Life*, p.
- <sup>103</sup> Næss, "Self-Realization," p. 16.
- <sup>104</sup> See Arne Næss, "The Three Great Movements," *The Trumpeter*, 9.2, p. 85.
- <sup>105</sup> See *Biophilia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- <sup>106</sup> "Concrete Contents," p. 422.
- <sup>107</sup> "The Apron Diagram," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, Drengson and Inoue, eds., p. 11.
- <sup>108</sup> "Spinoza and Ecology," p. 421, my italics.
- <sup>109</sup> Næss, "Man Apart: A Reply to Reed," *Environmental Ethics*, 12 (1990), p. 189.
- <sup>110</sup> Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 24.
- <sup>111</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.
- <sup>112</sup> Næss, "An Answer to W. C. French: Ranking, Yes, but the Inherent Value is the Same," *Philosophical Dialogues*, Witoszek and Brennan, eds., p. 148.
- <sup>113</sup> Næss, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, p. 166.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- <sup>115</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 176.

#### Chapter 4 – Conclusions

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, p. 363.
- <sup>2</sup> *Nature*, in *Essential Writings*, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> *Earth in Mind*, p. 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Orr, paraphrasing Elie Wiesel, *ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>5</sup> *Continental Philosophy*, p. 8.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Web of Life*, p. 7. See also Arne Næss, "The Apron Diagram," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 11.
- <sup>7</sup> Preface, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, p. xiii.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted in Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 196.
- <sup>9</sup> Anna Bramwell, quoted in Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 196.
- <sup>10</sup> For example, see Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, where he discusses the deep affinities between modern quantum physics and ancient Eastern philosophies.
- <sup>11</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity*, p. 40.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Reenchantment of the World*, p. 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Lawrence Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, p. 386.

- <sup>14</sup> "Ecosophy and Gestalt Ontology," *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 244, my italics.
- <sup>15</sup> William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 457.
- <sup>16</sup> In *The Orient and American Transcendentalism* Arthur Christy wrote "No one Oriental volume that ever came to Concord was more influential than the *Bhagavad Gita*" (p. 23). Of the few books Thoreau mentions in *Walden* he said of the Hindu classic: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial" (p. 280). Emerson was also enamoured with the book. "In all nations there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity. The raptures of prayer and ecstasy of devotion lose all being in one Being. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East... [especially] the Bhagavat Geeta... These writings contain little else than this idea, and they rise to pure and sublime strains in celebrating it" ("Plato," *Representative Men*, p. 28.).
- <sup>17</sup> Eknath Easwaran, Preface, *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. xii.
- <sup>18</sup> Easwaran, Preface, *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. xviii.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, 6.32.
- <sup>20</sup> *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 599.
- <sup>21</sup> See *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 366.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Psychopath' is an outdated term (personal conversation, Hana S. Masata, M.D., Victoria, BC, Oct. 31, 2004).
- <sup>23</sup> Kaplan and Sadock, *Synopsis of Psychiatry*, p. 784.
- <sup>24</sup> American Psychiatric Association, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 785.
- <sup>25</sup> Kaplan and Sadock, *Synopsis of Psychiatry*, p. 785.
- <sup>26</sup> Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> "The First and the Last," *New York Review of Books*, May 14, 1998, p. 58
- <sup>28</sup> See Berlin, "The First and the Last," p. 58.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- <sup>30</sup> *Politics*, 1253a.
- <sup>31</sup> *Against the Current*, p. 11.
- <sup>32</sup> See Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, pp. 4 and 11.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Mary Midgley, *Science and Poetry*, p. 10.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 11.
- <sup>37</sup> See "Reflections on Total Views," pp. 23-24.
- <sup>38</sup> *Lyric Philosophy*, 302 (p. 538).
- <sup>39</sup> *Walden*, p. 273.

- 40 Isaiah Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," *The Sense of Reality*, pp. 15-16.
- 41 "Reflections on Total Views," p. 25.
- 42 "How My Philosophy Seemed to Develop," p. 226.
- 43 *Lyric Philosophy*, 295 (p. 530).
- 44 Michael Moran, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 478.
- 45 "Experience," *Essential Writings*, p. 325.
- 46 "Self-Reliance," *Essential Writings*, p. 133.
- 47 Isaiah Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," *The Sense of Reality*, pp. 14-15.
- 48 See "A Plea for Pluralism," manuscript p. 145.
- 49 Fritjof Capra, *Web of Life*, p. 4.
- 50 Henry Hardy, Introduction, *Against the Current*, p. 1.
- 51 See, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *People, Penguins, and Plastic Trees*, pp. 358-366.
- 52 *Radical Ecology*, p. 59.
- 53 "How My Philosophy Seemed to Develop," *Philosophers on Their Own Work*, v. 10, Mercier and Silvar, eds., p. 214.
- 54 Næss, "The Encouraging Richness and Diversity of Ultimate Premises in Environmental Philosophy," *The Trumpeter*, 9.2 (1992), p. 60.
- 55 II.7, Samuel Shirley, trans.
- 56 Taylor, "Disagreeing on the Basics," p. 32.
- 57 Emerson, *Journals*, September 13, 1831, and Næss, *Life's Philosophy*, p. 139.
- 58 Whitehead, *Anthology*, p. 87.
- 59 Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. xxii.
- 60 Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," *The Proper Study of Mankind*, p. 1.
- 61 *Earth in Mind*, p. 12.
- 62 Geldard, *Esoteric Emerson*, p. 63. Geldard wrote with Emerson in mind, but I think the quote applies equally to Thoreau, Muir, and Næss.
- 63 Næss, Introduction, *Four Modern Philosophers*, p. vii.
- 64 See David Orr, *Earth in Mind*, p. 12.
- 65 Roszak, *Wasteland*, pp. xxii-xxiii.
- 66 Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 3.

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