

Deep Ecology after Arne Naess

Deep Ecology is a term devised by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972 to refer to an environmentalism that believes fundamental changes in the way our species conceives our relation to nature are necessary before we are to find a way out of the ecological crisis. As such it is a normative political philosophy, contrasted with Shallow Ecology, which assumes that minor “technical fixes” in our present way of doing things will solve our environmental problems. Tinkering with our present way of considering nature as resource will never work, according to deep ecology. Nature must be appreciated for its intrinsic value, or worth in itself, regardless of how humans might benefit from it. Starting from this axiom a whole new philosophy of living with nature will develop.

This is the term’s political meaning , and it has thus been the guiding conceptual framework for several radical environmental movements, presenting a platform of deep ecology that usually expresses the following ideological principles:

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in the human population.

6. Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in economic and technological policies.
7. Life quality should be given more primacy than a high standard of living.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to implement the necessary changes.

The eight points were developed by Arne Naess in collaboration with George Sessions, and are periodically revised, so they do not approach a kind of dogmatic certainty that is anathema to the flexibility claimed by the movement.

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