

AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM of ANTHROPOCENTRISM: DEEP ECOLOGY and ITS ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

[İnsanmerkezcilik Sorununa Bir Yanıt: Derin Ekoloji ve Etik Boyutları]

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to introduce the Deep ecology movement and show how to apply it into our real world experiences. Importance of Deep ecology comes from its being an answer to the problem of anthropocentrism. In this study, the necessity of reason in practicing ethical rules in our relation with nature is mentioned. Reason is needed to avoid from anthropocentrism. In Deep ecology, although we are part of nature and what we do is naturel –because of this reason *care flows naturally-*, our self-realization must be achieved in a right way and this is possible only with reasoning. However, one should keep in mind that anthropocentrism is very tricky. Because, reason and ethical rules can lead us to human-centeredness in a way. In order to get rid of this puzzle, one should combine these two in a smart formula.

Keywords: Deep ecology, anthropocentrism, nature, ethics, reason, self-realization.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı Derin ekoloji hareketini tanıtmak ve onu gerçek hayat deneyimlerimize nasıl uygulayacağımızı göstermektir. Derin ekolojinin önemi onun insanmerkezcilik sorununa

çözüm olmasından gelmektedir. Bu yazıda, doğa ile ilişkimizde, etik kurallarının pratiğini yaparken aklın gerekliliğinden bahsedilmiştir. Akıl insanmerkezcilikten kurtulmak için gereklidir. Derin ekolojide, doğanın bir parçası olmamıza ve yaptığımız şeyin de doğal olmasına rağmen – ve bu sayede *özen kendiliğinden gelir-* , kendini-gerçekleştirme doğru bir şekilde başarılmalıdır ve bu da ancak akıl ile mümkündür. Bununla birlikte, insanmerkezciliğin ne kadar tehlikeli olduğu akılda tutulmalıdır. Çünkü, akıl ve etik kuralları bizi bir şekilde insanmerkezciliğe itebilir. Bu muammadan kurtulmak için aklın ve etik kurallarının akıllıca bir şekilde kombine edilmesi gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Derin ekoloji, insanmerkezcilik, doğa, etik, akıl, kendini gerçekleştirme.

In this study, the aim is to show how the deep ecology movement can be an answer for the problem of anthropocentrism (human-centeredness), and how can ethical traditions be needed in being one with nature in deep ecology in fighting against the anthropocentrism and how we should use our reasoning, and hence how deep ecology movement is challenging human-centeredness on its own.

Anthropocentrism, or human-centeredness, is basically the view that human beings are at the center of everything and other things or beings that are external to humans are for the good of them.

Deep ecology is the movement that we take part in an active way. This is the case because we are not apart from the nature. We and all the other things constitute the whole. So that, whatever we do in this huge system has an effect on everything including ourselves. If one acts morally, it turns into a moral action toward oneself. Every action, good or bad, has an effect on the actor –so in the whole system. Due to this reason, one cares for the whole naturally, just like she cares for herself. And this interactive relation needs one to use her reason to manage this natural moral flow in order to avoid from anthropocentrism: because any moral tradition requires two sides, but if we use our reason this can be prevented.

Can Deep Ecology be an answer to the problem of Anthropocentrism?

The term “deep ecology” was first used by Arne Naess in 1972 in his paper named “The Shallow and Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement”. In his paper firstly he makes the distinction between shallow ecology movement and deep ecology movement. The main distinction between deep ecology and shallow ecology is that although they both benefit from the science of ecology, they do this for different purposes. On the one hand shallow ecology does this for the interest of human beings, on the other hand deep ecology does this *not* for the human interest. They put different concerns at the center. As Naess says about shallow ecology movement, “First against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries” (Boylan, 2001, s. 49). According to this shallow ecology, the important thing is the control or management of the natural environment for the good of human beings. Then, he talks about deep ecology and sums up the basics of deep ecology in three: first “...the norms and tendencies of the Deep Ecology movement are not derived from ecology by logic or induction. Ecological knowledge and the lifestyle of the ecological field-worker have *suggested, inspired, and fortified* the perspectives of the Deep Ecology movement.”, second “..., it should be fully appreciated that the significant tenets of the Deep Ecology movement are clearly and forcefully

normative.” and third “..., in so far as ecology movements deserve our attention, they are *ecophilosophical* rather than ecological” (Boylan, 2001, s. 52). And this third one in a way explains why this movement’s name is deep ecology, because as Naess says it is ecophilosophical rather than ecological, it asks “how” and “why” questions about environmental problems. Deep ecology does not only try to find solutions to the problems of pollution or sustainability or depletion of the natural sources, but it also tries to function as a means for us to feel ourselves as a part of nature and relate to it in an efficient and radical way, and understanding our real place in the “whole picture”. In this way, deep ecology movement can be a way for us in going beyond anthropocentrism. As Rachel Carson recommended in her book *Silent Spring*, we should rethink of “our place in the larger scheme of things”, and the solutions for ecological problems are not “bigger or better technical solutions”. The solution for the ecological problems cannot totally come from technological progress; rather it should come from social and psychological improvement of human beings and from understanding our real *place* in nature as being a part of it. And, seeing ourselves as a part of nature, rather than seeing apart from it, may be a good approach in order to avoid from anthropocentrism.

In the book named *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, Warwick Fox gives “five arguments *against* anthropocentrism”. These five arguments (Fox, 1995, s. 14-17)

go as follows:

- 1) “...we are not psychologically, socially, or culturally different in *kind* from all other animals and that we are not the ‘end point’ of evolution.”
- 2) “...our anthropocentric attitudes have proved disastrous in practice.” [ex. human-caused ecological ills]
- 3) “...anthropocentrism is not even a logically consistent position: it is not possible to specify any reasonably clearly discernible, morally relevant characteristic that includes all humans but excludes all nonhumans.” [ex. rationality, self-awareness, free will, etc.]
- 4) “...anthropocentric attitudes are morally objectionable.”
- 5) “...anthropocentrism simply does not accord with a genuinely open approach to experience.”

If we summarize them, the arguments go like this: anthropocentrism is “...empirically bankrupt and theoretically disastrous, practically disastrous, logically inconsistent, morally objectionable, and incongruent with a genuinely open approach to experience” (Fox, 1995, s. 18-19). As Fox states, Peter Farb says in the beginning of his book *Humankind*: “Scientists now know that the chasm separating humans from animals is not so wide as it once appeared. Some animal species have evolved a rich communication system, while others make and use tools, solve difficult problems, educate their younger, live in complex social organizations, and apparently possess an aesthetic sense.... So any definition of human uniqueness obviously would have to be based on differences in degree” (Fox, 1995, s. 15). So, there are lots of things that human beings are better off, but it is true for many animals too, and this makes our thinking that human beings are superior to others is questionable, and also supports the arguments against anthropocentrism above and makes them reasonable. Still, there are some reactions to those arguments, such as: *misanthropy*, which claims that being opposed to anthropocentrism is being against humans per se, but this is not true, because being against anthropocentrism is being opposed to human-centeredness, not humans per se.

Moreover, the other reaction defends that it is not possible to get rid of anthropocentrism, because we are human beings and all our thoughts are just products of what we think as being humans, so it is impossible to escape from anthropocentrism. However, this is not a good and true way of thinking about our human identities. This argument is the example of confusion of *human identity* with *human chauvinism*. Because, in escaping from anthropocentrism we do not abandon our human identities, but we try to evade from our chauvinist thoughts and way of thinking about human beings. In a way, getting out of anthropocentrism is seeing ourselves as a part of the whole, and beside other living and non-living things, rather than seeing ourselves apart from the whole and on the top of some kind of hierarchy. So, these reactions are the examples of incorrect ways of reasoning, that is, they are fallacies: the first one is *the fallacy of misplaced misanthropy*, and the second one is *the anthropocentric fallacy* (or sometimes called as *the fallacy of equivocation* and *the perspectival fallacy*).

It can be helpful to see three different senses of deep ecology. As Fox states these three different senses, they are the formal sense, the popular sense and the philosophical sense of deep ecology. The formal sense of deep ecology is “asking deeper questions” about environmental issues. This sense of deep ecology follows the view of a historian of the medieval period Lynn White. In White’s paper “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”, the solution to ecological problems lay in the abandonment of anthropocentrism and this is possible with freeing our *minds* and *emotions* from the deep-rooted understandings about man’s hierarchical superiority over other beings, and, according to Naess, deep questioning reveals those assumptions and their fundamentals, and this makes us aware of our anthropocentric views and actions that affect ecology.

The second sense of deep ecology, the popular sense, is a kind of formulation of basic principles of the deep ecology movement. This formulation first was presented by Naess and George Sessions in 1984, and the formulation consists of eight characterizations. They basically talk about the intrinsic value of diversity and richness in nature, and human nonviolence on diversity, richness in nature, and inherent value of nonhuman beings as long as it is not for vital needs of human beings. And what is distinctive of deep ecology is using this view in environmental policies, and preserving those policies (diversity, richness, integrity of natural systems).

And the third one is the philosophical sense of deep ecology. Warwick Fox summarizes this sense in the following way: “Naess’s fundamental – or level one- norm of ‘self-realization!’ refers to this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes” (Fox, 1995, s. 113-114). According to Naess, we are selves in the bigger Self, and “H1: The higher the Self-realization attained by anyone, the broader and deeper the identification with others” (Fox, 1995, s. 103). One of the basic principles of deep ecology is *self-realization*, and the other is the “interrelatedness of all systems of life on Earth”. And, these two provide the well-being of the all lives on the earth and the preservation of the ecology as much rich and diverse as possible.

Now we should understand how we are all interrelated to each other and, in need and dependent on others for the good of the whole system and so for the good of ourselves. As I have mentioned

before, in deep ecology we are part of the whole system, rather than separate from it, and we have a role in protecting this system, and protecting the whole is an attempt to protect the self. And because we are a part of the whole, what we do affects the whole system and makes changes on it either positively or negatively based on the goodness or badness of what we do. If our bad actions affect the world and make changes on it (and they really do as we know), then we should think that our good actions can also affect the world positively and make changes that support the world. Even if we do something tiny or that may seem to us as insignificant, that thing triggers the bigger system and in this way what we do may be the cause of a big change. This action does not have an egoistic benefit, because the self is vanished or surrendered in the Self, and damaging nature is like damaging one's own body by reason of self-realization-in-the-Self is one's *identification* with the whole. Eventually, as Naess says, from this interrelatedness identification (and so self-realization) comes up: "Every living being is connected intimately, and from this intimacy follows the capacity of *identification* and as its natural consequences, practice of non-violence. Now is the time to share with all life on our maltreated earth through the deepening *identification* with life forms and the greater units, the ecosystems, and Gaia, the fabulous, old planet of ours" (Naess, 1995, s. 22-23). Hence, our relations of selves and others come from the interrelated relations of us and others, and deepening these relationships.

Having said these, we can say that deep ecology as a whole is an answer to anthropocentrism with its all basic principles and its attitudes towards nature and its brand new policy which conceives human beings and others that are external to humans as one big processing system, and moreover deep ecology is a distinguishing challenge for anthropocentrism with its another basic principle, which comes up with interrelatedness, "self-realization-in-the-Self". This characteristic principle is what challenges the anthropocentrism in the core. In short, deep ecology movement is an answer to the problem of anthropocentrism on its own.

The Problem of Moral Consideration in Deep Ecology

In ethics, there are three fundamental traditions, namely, consequentialism, virtue ethics, and duty ethics. Briefly described: for consequentialism what is good or bad can be measured by its

consequences; it does not consider-people as good or bad, it is a theory about acts (act morality). As opposed to consequentialism, in virtue ethics, the person and his being virtuous is important, and the aim is not right people's having right decisions, rather to make people virtuous who can make right decisions. And the third one is duty ethics, which can be seen as Kant's duty ethics, which says that we act out of duty in a rational way and the conditions for an act to be acceptable for duty ethics are its being universalizable and treating people as ends, not treating as means *only*. Moreover, because duty ethics is also about acts, it is an act morality like consequentialism but more complicated than the consequent view (which I will not discuss here).

In deep ecology, because we are part of the whole, we cannot use ethical norms/rules in the way that nature is external to us. On the contrary, we naturally act in a moral way. And in doing this, we need to use our reasoning. Reason balances the relation between us and nature. We should combine ethical rules and reason in a good way, so that we neither act in an immoral way nor can we be anthropocentric. In a nutshell, in deep ecology, our moral actions come with reasoning. They are the two sides of the same coin.

Moreover, there are some critics who accuse the deep ecology movement in not being a member of moral tradition; on the other hand there are some who think that deep ecology is, in some way, a tradition of moral philosophy. Let us know how Naess, who is in a sense father of deep ecology movement, thinks about the relation between ethics and deep ecology. Warwick Fox points Naess's position with Naess' own words in "Deep Ecology & Virtue Ethics" like this:

Care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves...Just as we do not need morals to make us breath...so if your 'self' in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral exhortation to show care...You care for yourself * without feeling any moral pressure to do it (Fox, 2000, s. 21).

(*See, this is not an egoistic self, because you realized yourself in the Self and you are no more the same self, rather a bigger, wider and deeper one.)

We can say that Naess does not mention about any moral tradition in the deep ecology movement for its operation, because of two ultimate norms of deep ecology: one is *self-realization* and the other is *biocentric equality*. Moreover, the norm biocentric equality is in a close relation with the norm Self-realization, that is, everything is interrelated and “if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves” (Boylan, 2001, s. 56), and “The intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger Self-realization” (Boylan, 2001, s. 56). So, in deep ecology movement it seems that there is no such need because of the self-realization-in-the-Self of things in the biosphere which are equal. I think that, morality is such a code which *originates in the social relations* among human beings, but it is difficult to act out of morality or to manage our relation with nature because there can be the danger of human mind’s sovereignty and this results in anthropocentrism, it is also difficult because of nature’s own order, and because of the impossibility of mutual social relations. Ethical traditions are needed in human beings’ social relations either among people or in relations in which one side is human, because *we are social animals*. *In order to be in relation with nature, only our reason is not a good answer*, hence we need moral code(s) in our relation with nature although we care for nature naturally and it is like caring for ourselves because of the identification with nature in deep ecology. Because moral codes are needed to manage our any kind of relation, as I have said above these codes are requirements of our human-based relations. The deep ecology system is itself moral as Naess says in this system “care flows naturally”, but this does not mean that we should not manage this natural flowing. But in this management we always have the risk to be anthropocentrists. Because, we can see ourselves apart from nature and this is the reason for anthropocentrism. That is, morality is with us, “care flows naturally”, but in this natural flowing we need moral code(s) to guide us because it should be what regulates our relations in order to avoid from anthropocentrism because ethics is just. Hence, anthropocentrism is tricky, because in our relations if we only use our reasons, then we are anthropocentrists, on the other hand if we do not have any ethical code, then we are again anthropocentrists because we lack justice.

On the other hand, Fox (2000, s. 23), in his article says that: "..., the personal attempt to cultivate a wider and deeper sense of identification with the world around us must certainly qualify as a deeply ecologically-informed approach to virtue ethics". Fox interprets Naess's position as being against the Kantian conception of duty ethics. He can be right about Naess' position toward Kantian duty ethics because in deep ecology movement our actions in nature is just natural, it is in us and we do not do this thinking that it is our duty rather we act as we feel as our self-realizations occur . But, about having only virtue ethics in deep ecology I do not agree with Fox, because from his point of view, in deep ecology besides virtue ethics we can also talk about consequentialism in some sense. In deep ecology what we do must continue in order for us to achieve our full self-realizations in the Self. This can be thought as our purpose and moreover we can be responsible for what we do and the results of it, then we can be considered as consequentialists and according to the consequences we can be virtuous or not and this is what virtue ethics does. This is just like Aristotle's model, in achieving "eudemonia" he guided by virtues, being in the medium in every act, for instance for Aristotle courage is a mean in between confidence and fear. He guided by virtues in achieving his aim, and in deep ecology system we can also be guided by virtues or ethical codes to achieve our purpose- here it is self-realization-. Think the whole system and the beings on it as only one thing and imagine that all things work for the well-being of this huge system, but they do not do this because this is their duty rather because this is the way to achieve their aim. They do this just because this is the way for the system to survive and move on in a healthy way. Moreover, they are not doing this because this is their duty, because there is no such a conception or awareness of this thing's being a duty because of their idealization and self-realization-in-the-Self, they are just doing what is good for themselves, and in this way for the system. For instance, you do not act morally towards one of the members of your family out of duty, but you do it because you want to do so, it is inherent in you, and in doing this you do not feel any pressure to do so. And, what you do for nature as being a self-in-the-Self is not an imperative order, but you do it because you see yourself as a part of nature and acting in a moral way is not something you do because of external reasons or conditions, rather it is like being good towards yourself.

Furthermore, what the beings of an ecosystem do make that things subjects of virtue ethics and for them consequences of the acts are important as well, because of the reason that for an act to be virtuous, its consequences must be taken into account and according to these consequences we

become virtuous or not, and according to these consequences we manage our relation with nature. As I have said above our self-realizations-in-Self is an *on-going process* and although it is an on-going process we get intermediate results and in the light of these results we both run the process and we determine the virtues that make us virtuous in this relationship. Again this resembles Aristotle's ethics, because in a sense in his ethics the whole life is a process and one gets intermediate results and manages his life in accord with these results in order to achieve his end. According to Dale Jamieson (2008, s. 86): "Consequentialists would say that we can understand people's characters by the consequences they bring about." and in the same paragraph he also says that: "Character isn't about a single act; it's about habits and dispositions" (2008, s. 86). Hence, I can say that virtue ethics and consequentialism go together (not just virtue ethics as opposed to Fox) in achieving our self-realizations in deep ecology. However, as I have warned above, in achieving our ends and using both virtue ethics and consequentialism we should be very careful. Because in evaluating our actions in nature we need to use our reasons but if we do not pay attention this can result in anthropocentrism. In using our reasons we should not cross the line, in self-realizations it is true that we need virtue ethics and consequentialism because moral codes are the ways that we use in our relations. We are social animals and in our relation with nature ethics comes from us (because it is very product of human nature) and in evaluating our actions we use our reasons. At this point we should be careful because we should only use our reasons in evaluating our actions and its results in using or choosing virtues and using our reasons should not turn into managing nature. Because if we use our reason apart from it is needed not just we see ourselves different from things that are external to human beings (and we become anthropocentrists) but we have conflicts among us. Virtue ethics becomes a problem, because if we just look at people's characters, then the problem of individual-community arises. This leads us to society-based ethical rules and brings different rights and wrongs. However in deep ecology morality is something intrinsic and it flows naturally and only for managing this flowing we need reason. Moreover, who we are is not important because we become a whole with nature. The ecosystem or nature, as a great being, is valuable in itself so are we and all the things in it.

I claim that, before morality became *autonomous* and our behaviors are managed by reason, we only need virtue ethics and consequentialism, because "care flows naturally" and this is the case of deep ecology. But, once reason shows up and becomes a *leading* thing, that kind of morality

(virtues ethics, and consequentialism) becomes a product of our anthropocentrism. Any moral code or tradition which is led by only reason is what prevents us from being a part of the Self. They become the walls that prevent us from seeing the real nature, they are the paths that force us to walk through, and in this way they send us away from our real natures, they prevent us from being one with the whole.

I mean that, in our relations with nature and in our being a part of it we must be totally released from our human perspectives and we should use our reasons objectively and for the good of all. Because, if we do not, then all the moral traditions (virtue ethics, duty ethics, consequentialism, etc.) at some point make us to think ourselves as external to other beings or things around us. However, this kind of thinking or these impulsive norms, in deep, make us to think ourselves as *apart* from the whole/nature/ecology and as being observers which is very contrary to deep ecology movement fundamentally, so in the end they are the outcomes of our *anthropocentrism*. Because of this reason, we should be very careful in our relation with the whole; *we act in a moral way as we feel like because of our identity with the whole system*. Just like Dale Jamieson says (2008, s. 86) in his book *Ethics and the Environment*: “Aesthetically appreciating nature also seems to require a deep distinction between humans and nature”, so that making moral commitments about our acts *toward* nature or ethical evaluation is also seeing ourselves apart from nature, because in deep ecology what we do firstly is not towards nature because we are part of it, and secondly *what we do is natural*. In deep ecology, we act according to our instincts and we do this naturally and in a right way as our self-realizations achieved. There is care, it is in us and we should use our reasons only in managing our relation with nature in a moral platform to protect the unity.

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