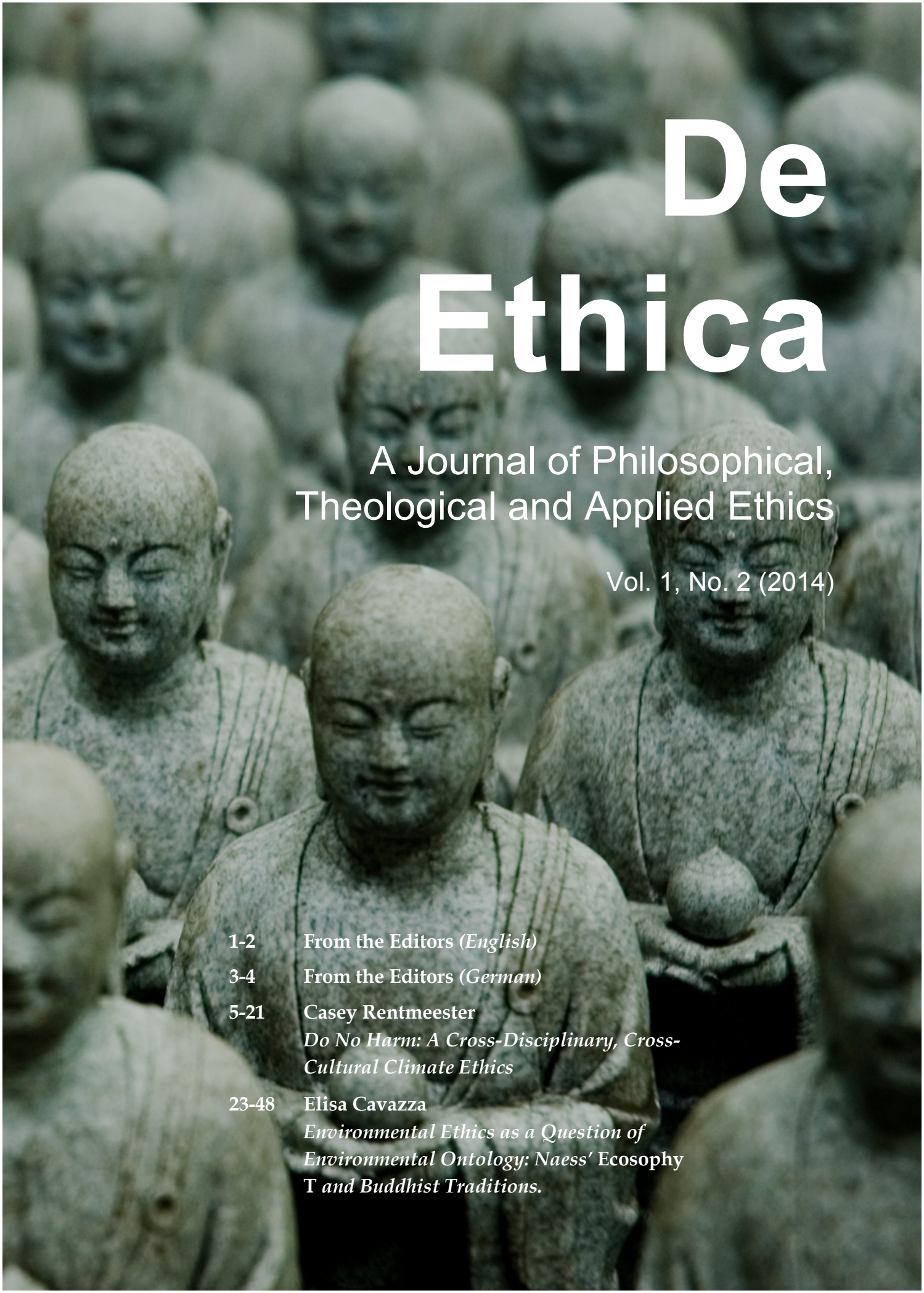

De Ethica

A Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics

Vol. 1, No. 2 (2014)

D E E T H I C A

A JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

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From the Editors

Our second issue picks up the general theme of the first issue, environmental ethics, the challenges of climate change, and our relationship to nature. In her contribution 'Environmental Ethics as Environmental Ontology', Elisa Cavazza explores the parallels between Buddhist teachings and Arne Naess' 'Deep Ecology'. Cavazza shows how Naess, consciously and unconsciously, picks up ideas that have been central to Buddhist teachings. Cavazza's paper urges us to reconsider our moral attitude, toward the conception of a processual, embedded self, as we find it both in Naess' philosophy and in Buddhist sources.

The second paper in this issue, Casey Rentmeester's 'Do No Harm: A Cross-Cultural, Cross-Disciplinary Climate Ethics', takes a very simple principle and applies it to a global issue: the idea that we ought not harm other human beings unnecessarily. Rentmeester's paper attempts to shift the focus in climate ethics: from international and global responses and political responsibility to the everyday decisions we all face, and the personal contribution many of us are able to make. The particular attraction of Rentmeester's approach is that it is not committed to any theoretical background, and thus wholly independent of religious or political commitments.

It might seem that Cavazza's paper represents the 'abstract' or the 'spiritual' side of the issue while Rentmeester pushes a hands-on, practical approach. But I believe that this would be a mistaken generalization. Rentmeester's practical conclusions, to become effective, presuppose something like an attitude shift, as we find it in Cavazza's paper. Why would we want to abstain from unnecessarily contributing to climate change through our lifestyle choice, if we didn't have reason to see ourselves as interwoven both with the environment we live in, and the other people who inhabit it? Conversely, it makes sense to say that Cavazza's paper, despite its 'abstract' appearance, is deeply practical. 'Ecosophy' as well as Buddhism are teachings not just on how to see the world and perceive one's place in it, they are teachings about how to interact with this world.

So despite their apparent differences in scope, tone, and method, I believe that the two contributions for this issue complement each other very well. They bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical, and incidentally, also the gap between the religious and the secular. Cavazza's paper tracks the religious inspirations of the 'secular' philosopher Naess. Rentmeester's paper, with its clear analytic bent, should nevertheless resonate with ethicists who approach the discipline from a religious background.

And thus the present issue represents the full scope and the richness of the discipline of ethics that we want to promote in this journal. In just two papers, it connects ontology and practice, religion and philosophical analysis, abstraction and the concrete. We hope that we can continue the journal on this path, and we hope that our readers will enjoy reading these contributions as much as we did.

Publication made possible by generous support from the Swedish Research Council.

From the Editors

Unsere zweite Ausgabe greift die Themen der ersten Ausgabe wieder auf: Umweltethik, die Herausforderungen des Klimawandels, und unsere Beziehung zur Natur. In ihrem Beitrag ‚Umweltethik und Naturontologie' spürt Elisa Cavazza den Parallelen zwischen buddhistischen Lehren und Arne Naess' Tiefenökologie nach. Cavazza zeigt auf wie Naess, bewusst oder unbewusst, Ideen aufgreift, die auch in buddhistischen Lehren einen zentralen Platz innehaben. Cavazza ruft uns dazu auf, unsere moralische Einstellung gegenüber der Umwelt zu revidieren, hin zu einer prozessualen und kontextualisiereten Auffassung des Selbst, wie es sich sowohl in Naess' als auch in der buddhistischen Philosophie findet.

Der andere Beitrag dieser Ausgabe, Casey Rentmeesters ‚Do No Harm: Eine kultur- und disziplinübergreifende Klimaethik', greift ein einfaches Prinzip auf – den Gedanken, dass wir anderen Menschen nicht ohne guten Grund schaden sollten – und wendet es auf ein globales Problem an. Rentmeesters Beitrag will den Fokus der Klimaethik verschieben: von internationalen und globalen Reaktionen und politischer Verantwortung hin zu den Entscheidungen, mit denen wir uns jeden Tag befassen, und dem persönlichen Beitrag, den viele von uns zu leisten imstande sind. Die besondere Attraktivität von Rentmeesters Ansatz rührt daher, dass er nicht auf einem bestimmten theoretischen Hintergrund angewiesen ist, und daher völlig unabhängig von religiösen oder politischen Grundannahmen operiert.

Es könnte so scheinen, als würde Cavazzas Beitrag die ‚abstrakte' oder ‚spirituelle' Seite des Themas repräsentieren, während Rentmeester einen hemdsärmelig-praktischen Ansatz vertritt. Ich denke jedoch, dass es ein Fehler wäre, die Beiträge so einzuordnen. Rentmeesters praktische Schlüsse bedürfen, um effektiv zu werden, einer Veränderung unserer Einstellung zur Natur, so wie sie in Cavazzas Beitrag skizziert wird. Warum sollten wir uns bemühen, unseren Beitrag zu unnötigen Emissionen zu verringern, wenn wir keinen Grund hätten, uns als Teil der Umwelt zu begreifen und dadurch verbunden, mit denen, die sie bewohnen? Auf der anderen Seite lässt es sich durchaus sagen, dass Cavazzas Beitrag, trotz seiner ‚abstrakten' Anmutung, zutiefst praktisch eingerichtet ist. ‚Ökosophie' und Buddhismus sind beides Lehren, die nicht nur darauf abzielen unser Verständnis der Welt und unserer Rolle darin zu verändern, sie sind Lehren, die unsere Interaktion mit der Umwelt direkt betreffen.

Daher meine ich, dass sich die beiden Beiträge, trotz ihrer Unterschiede in Fokus, Anspruch und Methode, direkt ergänzen. Sie schlagen eine Brücke zwischen Theorie und

Praxis, und indem sie hier zusammen erscheinen, auch zwischen säkularem Denken und Religion. Cavazzas Beitrag spürt den religiösen Inspirationen des ‚säkularen' Philosophen Naess nach. Rentmeesters Beitrag mit seinem deutlichen analytischen Einschlag, dürfte trotzdem auch Ethikerinnen und Ethiker mit religiösem Hintergrund ansprechen.

Und damit repräsentiert die vorliegende Ausgabe die Reichweite und den Reichtum der Disziplin Ethik, die wir in dieser Zeitschrift fördern wollen. Mit nur zwei Beiträgen verbindet sie Ontologie und Praxis, Religion und philosophische Analyse, Abstraktion und das Konkrete.

Wir hoffen, dass sich die Zeitschrift in diesem Sinne weiter entwickelt, und wir hoffen, dass unsere Leserinnen und Leser die vorliegen Artikel mit demselben Interesse lesen, wie wir sie gelesen haben.

Publication made possible by generous support from the Swedish Research Council.

Do No Harm: A Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Cultural Climate Ethics

Casey Rentmeester

Anthropogenic climate change has become a hot button issue in the scientific, economic, political, and ethical sectors. While the science behind climate change is clear, responses in the economic and political realms have been unfulfilling. On the economic front, companies have marketed themselves as pioneers in the quest to go green while simultaneously engaging in environmentally destructive practices and on the political front, politicians have failed to make any significant global progress. I argue that climate change needs to be framed as an ethical issue to make serious progress towards the path to a sustainable human civilization. In an effort to motivate the urgency needed to confront climate change, I argue that climate change seriously affects human beings living here and now, and if one cares about unnecessarily harming fellow innocent living human beings, then one should care about one's own environmental impact related to climate change. Since this argument does not depend upon any specific philosophical, religious, or ethical tradition but applies regardless of one's particular background, I hope to induce genuine concern among all human beings regarding this issue.

Preliminaries

James Hansen, the most eminent climatologist in the world, states, 'Climate change is likely to be the predominant scientific, economic, political and moral issue of the 21st century'.[1] While the science behind climate change becomes clearer each year, the economic and political responses have varied. On the economic front, while many companies have made concerted efforts to go green, many others simply tout themselves as pioneers in the shift to a green economy while simultaneously engaging in environmentally-destructive behaviors. Consumers are left wondering whether the green products they purchase are truly eco-friendly or whether they are being duped into the all too familiar 'greenwashing' trap. Since the major oil and coal companies are clearly

[1] James Hansen and Makiko Sato, 'Paleoclimate Implications for Human-Made Climate Change', in *Climate Change: Inferences from Paleoclimate and Regional Aspects*, edited by A. Berger, F. Mesinger, and D. Sijacki (New York: Springer, 2012), pp. 21-47, at p. 21.

the main perpetrators of the problem but insist that they are committed to environmental sustainability, it has become difficult to trust that any corporation is truly green.[2] The political front has been even more frustrating. Although the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) in 1992 was well-intentioned, the UNFCC has yet to agree upon a worldwide treaty to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a sustainable level. Rather than genuine cooperation, the political front has been fraught with bureaucratic hemming and hawing that has hindered any meaningful progress. Perhaps due in part to the lack of progress on the economic and political fronts, some environmentalists have shifted their focus to the ethical dimensions of climate change.[3] In recent years, two of the most important public figures on climate change, former Vice President Al Gore and Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, the Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have argued that climate change is essentially an ethical or moral issue. Philosophers have worked on the ethics of climate change since the early 1990s, and the questions that have guided this research have varied as the science behind climate change has become increasingly clear. After briefly explaining the scientific, economic, and political dimensions of climate change and the ethical arguments that have been offered concerning climate change, I offer a basic, straightforward ethical argument that I think will convince any reasonable person: if you think it is wrong to unnecessarily harm innocent people through your actions, then you should care about your individual contribution to climate change.

The Scientific, Economic, and Political Responses

Although scientists have conjectured about the possibility of anthropogenic climate change as early as 1896,[4] the first rigorous, data-based, scientifically grounded explanation of anthropogenic climate change came from NASA scientist James Hansen in a 1988 paper in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*. In this article, Hansen states: 'The temperature changes [due to climate change] are sufficiently large to have major impacts on man and his environment'.[5] After publishing this paper, Hansen went in front of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in June of 1988 and explained the science behind climate change. This made international news, and the global response was to create the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a United Nations-sanctioned intergovernmental body whose aim is to explain the science behind climate change and the impacts climate change will likely have on the planet. In its first

[2] If one surveys the websites of the major oil companies, one will almost invariably find a major part of their platform to be dedicated to environmental sustainability. While the major coal companies are not as prevalent on the public radar, they do try to create a green public image. Peabody Energy, which has been the top U.S. coal producer for decades, calls itself 'a global leader in sustainable mining and clean coal solutions'. Cf. www.peabodyenergy.com (accessed 2013-12-18).

[3] Martin Schönfeld nicely chronicles the shift to framing climate change as an ethical issue in 'Introduction: Plan B: global ethics on climate change', in *Global Ethics on Climate Change: The Planetary Crisis and Philosophical Alternatives*, edited by Martin Schönfeld (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-8.

[4] Cf. Svante Arrhenius, 'On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air upon the Temperature of the Ground', *Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science* 41:5 (1896), pp. 237-276.

[5] James Hansen *et al*., 'Global Climate Changes as Forecast by Goddard Institute for Space Studies Three-Dimensional Model', *Journal of Geophysical Research* 93:8 (1988), pp. 9341-9364.

assessment report of 1990, the IPCC spells out what anthropogenic climate change is as follows:

> For a thousand years prior to the industrial revolution the abundances of [greenhouse] gases were relatively constant. However, as the world's population increased, emissions of greenhouse gases…have increased substantially due to industrialisation and changes in agriculture and land-use.[6]

The increase in greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide and methane, due to human practices enhance the greenhouse effect, trapping more energy in the atmosphere, which leads to climate change. In this initial assessment report, several hundred scientists from 25 countries contributed. In the recent report from 2007, there were over 2500 contributors from more than 130 countries. Here, the IPCC states that 'warming of the climate system is unequivocal'.[7] Given the scientific consensus regarding climate change, it is not only beyond any sort of reasonable doubt that climate change is happening but also that it is an anthropogenic phenomenon. In fact, authors in reputable scientific journals are now attributing specific extreme weather patterns to anthropogenic climate change.[8] The IPCC argues that we have to massively decrease our reliance on fossil fuels if we are to usher in a sustainable future for human civilizations as we have come to know them in the 21st century. In June of 2014, the atmospheric level of carbon dioxide, the most dangerous greenhouse gas, was 401 ppm (and it has been steadily rising each year).[9] The sustainable level we must stabilize at is 350 ppm if we want to ensure a proper energy balance in the earth's atmosphere.[10]

As Dale Jamieson notes, there was a public backlash in the United States to the climate change 'doom-and-gloomers' shortly after Hansen's initial testimony before the Senate.[11] Many people (in the United States, at least) simply wanted more evidence that climate change was happening. In step with the general lack of public agreement on climate change, fossil fuel companies typically did not change their business strategies and went on with business as usual. As the science became increasingly clear, however, fossil fuel companies had to address the issue. George Monbiot has shown that they responded by deliberately funding lobby groups to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the science behind climate change. He states that fossil fuel companies 'sought to distance themselves from their own campaigns, creating the impression that they were

[6] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change: The IPCC Scientific Assessment*, edited by J.T. Houghton *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. xxxvii.

[7] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 'Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report: Summary for Policymakers', *Fourth Assessment Report*, edited by the Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and A. Reisinger (Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2007), p. 2.

[8] This was first done by Cynthia Rosenzweig *et al.* in 'Attributing physical and biological impacts to anthropogenic climate change', *Nature* 453, (2008) pp. 353-357, and has become increasingly common since.

[9] This is based on the observations of the Mauna Loa Observatory, which can be found at CO2now.org, 'Earth's CO2 Home Page' (accessed 2014-07-09).

[10] Cf. James Hansen *et al.*, 'Target Atmospheric CO2: where should humanity aim?', *Open Atmospheric Science Journal* 2 (2008), pp. 217-31.

[11] Cf. Dale Jamieson, 'Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming', *Science, Technology & Human Values* 17:2 (1992), pp. 139-153.

spontaneous movements of professionals or ordinary scientists'.[12] The logic behind this technique is simple: if doubt can be cast on the science behind dangers of fossil fuels by entities separate from the fossil fuel companies, then people will believe that there are genuine differing opinions on whether fossil fuels are contributing to the problem of climate change.[13]

As it turned out, such factitious skepticism only went so far: as the reality of climate change became increasingly apparent, more and more people understood that climate change was happening. In response, the fossil fuel industry changed its basic approach. Instead of denying that climate change is happening, they decided to face the issue head-on.[14] Now, the major fossil fuel industries admit that climate change is happening and they also make it an essential element of their platform that they are working towards a sustainable future. However, the bottom line is that fossil fuel corporations, like all private, market-based corporations, are motivated by profit, and the less we make limiting our greenhouse gas emissions a priority, the less the corporations themselves will take this issue seriously.[15]

Turning our attention to politics, it is clear that the global political response has been nothing short of disastrous. The first coherent political response happened in 1992 during the Rio Earth Summit when the UNFCC was created. Here, nations vowed to take voluntary steps to lessen their greenhouse emissions. Since there were no official sanctions on emission levels, however, this did practically nothing to solve the issue. In fact, global greenhouse gas emissions only increased. The next step came with the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 in which representatives from over 70 countries came together to set legally-binding caps on the levels of carbon emissions for each country. Although sanctions were set, countries could voluntarily opt out of the Kyoto Protocol, and the United States did just that in 2001. Recently, several other high-emitting countries—Russia, Japan, and Canada—have also opted out. We are left with representatives from countries meeting quarterly to strike a deal on curbing emissions but no global agreement has been reached as of yet. And, since the 2009 UNFCC conference in Copenhagen, which was touted as the venue in which the world would take an historic step forward, turned out to be an utter failure, environmentalists are left wondering if the

[12] George Monbiot, *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), p. 34.

[13] Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway provide a more recent analysis of the misinformation campaigns regarding climate change in their book *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010). Cf. pp. 186-215 especially.

[14] As it turns out, many of the major fossil fuel industries still fund conservative think-tanks to spread misinformation on the human contribution to climate change. However, in their public image, they (generally) no longer deny that climate change is happening and that it is partially anthropogenic.

[15] Several eco-socialists have argued that economic solutions in a capitalistic system are entirely inadequate to address the problem of climate change. Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster, for instance, argue that capitalism can never allow for environmental sustainability. They state, 'A system that has only one goal, the maximization of profits, has no soul, can never have a soul [and] can never be green' in 'What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism', *Monthly Review* 61:10 (2010), pp. 1-30, at p. 20. I am not arguing that we should do away with capitalism or with economic solutions altogether, but I do think they are currently insufficient to address the issue of climate change.

necessary shift will occur in a political climate fraught with differences that prevent good faith discussion and agreement. Earth Policy Institute President Lester Brown notes that 'since no government wants to concede too much compared with other governments, the negotiated goals for cutting carbon emissions will almost certainly be minimalist, not remotely approaching the bold cuts that are needed'.[16] Therefore, just as we cannot count on an economic response to sufficiently address the issue, we cannot count on a global political response either.[17]

The Ethics of Climate Change

Looking at the ethical response to climate change, we can see two distinct waves since Hansen's testimony in the late '80s. The first wave comes from environmentalists like Bill McKibben and Dale Jamieson who argue that the danger that humans inflict upon the environment through our greenhouse gas emissions is unethical due to the harm inflicted upon nature and the wild species that depend upon it. In the first book-length treatise on climate change for a general audience, McKibben states, 'the way of life of one part of the world in one half century is altering every inch and every hour of the globe'.[18] The result will eventually be a world devoid of wild nature, which is simply a *worse* world. In an early article on the ethics of climate change, Jamieson, a trained philosopher, states: 'While our species dances with the devil, the rest of nature is held hostage. Even if we step back from the precipice, it will be too late for many or even perhaps most of the plant and animal life with which we share the planet.'[19] In these early works, McKibben and Jamieson argue that we should care about our relations to other species or our relation to nature itself since not doing so is a sign of gross *hubris*. They support a humbler, more respectful sort of attitude that celebrates the mystery and wonder that nature has to offer rather than simply seeing the natural world as a vast array of resources to be used as we see fit.

The second wave of responses is initiated by Michael Grubb, an economist and contributor to the IPCC's second assessment report. Grubb points out that climate change does not only affect the natural world or the animal and plant species that depend on it; rather, climate change is a moral issue between two groups of people: the rich, high-emitting citizens of industrialized countries and the poor, low-emitting citizens of the least developed countries. He states:

> In aggregate, developing countries will suffer more than developed countries as a result of climate change, though doubtless there will be exceptions. From this perspective, the central

[16] Lester Brown, *Plan B 4.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), p. xii.

[17] As I argue later in the paper, I think political action can be extremely impactful in certain circumstances. As global climate change negotiations have been conducted, however, I do not believe meaningful change can be brought about solely in this sphere at this time. With appropriate ethical backing (which I aim to partially provide with this paper), political action could be more decisive and meaningful in the future.

[18] Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 2006 [1989]), p. 39.

[19] Jamieson, p. 147.

> ethical issue is that the greenhouse gas emissions involve the rich imposing risks upon the poorer and more vulnerable.[20]

Here, a new dimension of the ethics of climate change arises since Grubb focuses specifically on the impacts that climate change will have on people and not nature itself or natural species. Grubb goes on to note another dimension to the ethics of climate change that has generated perhaps the most discussion in the field of climate ethics: the intergenerational aspect to climate change. He states, 'Since climate change is such a very long-term issue, the weight placed on the welfare of future generations is of central importance, one which indeed may well override most other concerns and uncertainties'.[21] This has prompted philosophers to focus on questions of justice and fairness regarding the risks of climate change and the unfair burdens placed on the most vulnerable: the people in the least developed countries and future generations.

Henry Shue and Stephen Gardiner were the first philosophers to take on the issues of climate justice. Shue focuses primarily on the issue of fairness in his 1999 article, 'Global Environment and International Inequality'. Noting that citizens in developed countries have contributed far more to the enhanced greenhouse effect, have far more resources to solve the problem, and are often living beyond the means necessary for basic human flourishing while others in the least developed countries have less than is needed for a decent human life, Shue argues that developed countries are responsible for tackling climate change from basic principles of fairness.[22] Essentially, their failure to do so entails a commitment to making the future lives of people in the least developed countries worse than they otherwise would be, and this is simply wrong. Stephen Gardiner takes a similar approach, but focuses mainly on the intergenerational aspect to climate change. In his 2001 paper 'The Real Tragedy of the Commons', he cited the intergenerational problem of climate change as one of the major reasons that impedes a serious response.[23] The problem is that the current generation prefers to overexploit the atmosphere because it benefits immediately from this practice, but future generations are put at serious risk by this overexploitation. Since overexploitation immediately benefits the current generation, we ignore the consequences bestowed upon later ones and therefore continue to overexploit. Without a serious argument as to why we should care about people that do not exist yet, this argument holds little persuasive weight for people living today,[24] which is why Gardiner rightly calls the intergenerational aspect a 'serious problem'.[25]

Recently, as the reality of climate change has become so apparent, climate ethics has become a full-fledged field in applied ethics. Most approaches to climate ethics take

[20] Michael Grubb, 'Seeking fair weather: ethics and the international debate on climate change', *International Affairs* 71:3 (1995), pp. 463-496, at pp. 467.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Cf. Henry Shue, 'Global Environment and International Inequality', *International Affairs* 75:3 (1999), pp. 531-545. Shue makes a similar argument from fairness in 'Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions', *Law & Policy* 15:1 (1993), pp. 39-59.

[23] Cf. Stephen M. Gardiner, 'The Real Tragedy of the Commons', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30:4 (2001), pp. 387-416.

[24] Cf. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 351-379.

[25] Stephen M. Gardiner, 'The Pure Intergenerational Problem', *Monist* 86:3 (2003), pp. 481-500, at p. 485. See also Gardiner's recent book, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

on the issue from standard ethical theories and apply the moral principles from a particular theorist to the issue at hand. I have argued that Kant's moral philosophy is a good starting point to approach climate change from an ethical perspective;[26] John Broome has used utilitarian argumentation in his analysis of the ethics of climate change;[27] Terry Barker et al. have argued for a contractarian approach to the injustice of overexploiting the atmosphere utilizing the philosophy of John Rawls as their lynchpin;[28] and the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* recently published a special issue on environmental virtue ethics with some articles devoted to climate change.[29] Most of these articles still emphasize issues of justice between the developed countries and least developed countries and the intergenerational aspect to climate change. However, given recent evidence concerning the real impacts of climate change, it is clear that people are being affected by climate change here and now, and it doesn't take a complex ethical theory to show what is wrong with those who ignore their carbon footprint. Therefore, I urge that this theory-dependent approach to climate ethics, while well-intentioned, overcomplicates the issue. If we simply chronicle the current damage that climate change is contributing to, we can shift the focus from issues of intercontinental and intergenerational justice to the simple principle of not harming other innocent human beings unnecessarily. In this way, instead of learning about Kant's categorical imperative or Mill's utilitarian standard, we can base our ethical stance on commonsense principles of fairness. Before we turn to these principles, however, we should emphasize the damage wrought by climate change.

In his recent book, *Eaarth*, Bill McKibben, who is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College, chronicles the effects of climate change on people living here and now. He begins by stating, 'global warming is no longer a philosophical threat, no longer a future threat, *no longer a threat at all*. It's our reality. We've changed the planet, changed it in large and fundamental ways'.[30] This new planet that we inhabit, which McKibben calls 'Eaarth', is one that is simply harsher than the one that we have taken for granted in the 10,000 years of human civilization. With the additional energy in the climate system that comes with climate change, we have more frequent and more extreme weather events, an increase in airborne diseases, an increase in heat waves and droughts in certain regions and an increase in floods in others, greater stress on water sources, and an increase in environmental refugees as the sea level rises and low-lying coastal regions are submerged.[31] McKibben provides personal accounts of how climate change affects people living here and now, including: the president of the low-lying island of Maldives saving a billion dollars annually to relocate its population before their extremely vulnerable island goes underwater; the victims of increased drought in Brazil and the effect on the quality of life; the increase of storms in Bangladesh and new challenges of unpredictability that accompany them for Bangladeshi residents; and the increase of floods in Nepal, negatively affecting the crop yields for farmers and those

[26] Casey Rentmeester, 'A Kantian Look at Climate Change', *Essays in Philosophy* 11:1 (2010), pp. 76-86.

[27] Cf. John Broome, 'The Ethics of Climate Change', *Scientific American* 298:6 (2008), pp. 96-102.

[28] Cf. Terry Barker *et al*., 'Climate Change, Social Justice, and Development', *Development*, 51:3 (2008), pp. 317-324.

[29] Cf. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23:1-2 (2010).

[30] Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Henry Holt, 2010), p. xiii.

[31] Cf. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change: The IPCC Scientific Assessment*.

who count on them.[32] Lester Brown chronicles similar events in his book, *World on the Edge*, such as the devastation caused by the heat wave of Western Russia in 2010 and the destruction of homes that accompanied Pakistan's massive flood of 2010.[33] Perhaps the most disastrous event of all happened in 2013 with Typhoon Haiyan, the strongest storm ever recorded on landfall, which killed over 6,000 people and left about 11 million people homeless in the Philippines. Christiana Figueres, the climate chief of the United Nations, rightly called Haiyan the 'sobering reality' of climate change.[34] While some scientists have been hesitant to directly attribute Typhoon Haiyan to anthropogenic climate change, the Climate Vulnerability Monitor of 2012 listed the Asia-Pacific as 'severely vulnerable'[35] to climate events such as this. A climate change-induced planet is a more energetic planet, leading to more frequent and more severe disasters, which are especially devastating in vulnerable countries, especially the least developed ones.

The sense of urgency that accompanies the reality of the damage wrought by climate change here and now is not adequately dealt with in the academic literature on climate ethics. For instance, in his book *Climate Matters*, Broome states: 'The harm done by climate change is insidious. Its progress till now has been so slow that we scarcely notice it, and its biggest harms will not emerge for many decades yet'.[36] While he does note that the damages of climate change are now becoming apparent, his arguments are generally still focused on our obligations to future humans. For instance, he states: 'If we continue to emit greenhouse gas profligately, the lives of future people will be much worse than they would have been if we had controlled our emissions. That is the biggest reason we have for controlling emissions; the harm we do to present people is less'.[37] While it is true that the progress of climate change is slow and that its biggest harms may be decades away, it is simply not the case that our focus should be future-oriented. The problem with such an approach is that it trivializes the damage experienced by humans living here and now. McKibben and Brown have chronicled the damage to current human beings, and the increasing frequency of climate-related weather events proves that the damage is already upon us. In the scientific community, this is understood. James Hansen states unequivocally that 'the unusually great temperatures extremities' seen in various parts of the world in the summer of 2011 are 'a consequence of global

[32] McKibben, *Eaarth*, ch. 1.

[33] Lester Brown, *World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), Ch. 1.

[34] This statement comes from her opening speech at the climate negotiation talks in Warsaw, Poland in November of 2013.

[35] Development Assistance Research Associates (DARA), 'Climate Vulnerability Monitor: A Guide to the Cold Calculus of a Hot Planet,' 2 Ed., p. 70. Cf. http://daraint.org/climate-vulnerability-monitor/climate-vulnerability-monitor-2012/report/ (accessed 2013-12-19).

[36] John Broome, *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), p. 6. While my view differs from Broome's in this regard, claims he makes later in the book are consistent with mine. His first three points of emphasis on the ethical status of emitting greenhouse gases are especially significant: 1) The harm caused by your emissions is the result of something you *do*; 2) The harm we do by our emissions is serious; and 3) The harm we do is not accidental. Cf. pp. 55-56.

[37] *Ibid.*, 59.

warming'.[38] Importantly, Hansen notes that his analysis 'is an empirical approach that avoids use of global climate models, instead using only real world data'.[39] In other words, without even looking to the future, we can see that climate change is affecting us. This shift in our scientific knowledge requires a shift in our ethical orientation and argumentation.

We must also note that the damage does not only affect people in the most vulnerable countries like Brazil, Bangladesh, Nepal, Russia, Pakistan, or the Philippines. Since climate change is a planetary phenomenon, no country is exempt from its consequences, which the United States has recently discovered. In the spring and summer of 2012, the United States had massive heat waves wherein literally thousands of record high temperatures across cities were shattered, wildfires raged across Colorado, the Midwest experienced intense drought, leading to devastating crop failures, and the northeast was devastated by Hurricane Sandy, whose particular strength could arguably be attributed to climate change.[40] All of these phenomena are in line with the predictions that the IPCC has been making for decades. Scientists are now beginning to attribute anthropogenic climate change as a contributing factor to specific disasters. This means that if you accept the simple principle that you should not harm other innocent human beings unnecessarily—the 'Do No Harm' principle—you should care about your greenhouse gas emissions since your environmental impact will affect others negatively. Moreover, the impacts caused by these emissions are not trivial. The damages wrought by floods, droughts, hurricanes, etc., devastate lives, and your individual emissions contribute to the severity of these disasters that affect other humans on this planet right now. Since much of our economy is dependent on fossil fuels, there is probably no way no completely avoid emitting some fossil fuel emissions, which is why when we apply the 'Do No Harm' principle to our environmental footprint, it only states that one should not harm others unnecessarily. This means that one should not only be conscientious of one's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, but also that one should avoid using them unnecessarily so as not to harm other human beings unnecessarily.

The word 'unnecessarily' is the key aspect to the 'Do No Harm' principle. To explain this, we can invoke Henry Shue's distinction between subsistence emissions and luxury emissions.[41] Due to the fact that our infrastructure is heavily dependent upon fossil fuels, most (if not all) human beings living here and now must depend upon them to subsist. To this extent, such usage is necessary. When a person is relying upon fossil fuels for the purpose of luxury, such as a Sunday afternoon drive with no destination in mind for sheer enjoyment or insisting on foreign bottled water when a clean tap water is readily available, this clearly exceeds subsistence measures. These latter luxury emissions are transgressions of the 'Do No Harm' principle, while subsistence emissions, such as those used to heat one's home, for instance, are not.

We all already ascribe to the 'Do No Harm' principle in our individual lives, provided we are not psychopaths or downright evil people. What many of us do not do,

[38] James Hansen *et al*., 'Perception of climate change', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 109:37 (2012), p. 14726.

[39] *Ibid*.

[40] This last statement regarding Hurricane Sandy comes from Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, the vice chairman of the IPCC at the U.N. climate negotiation talks in Doha, Qatar in November of 2012.

[41] Shue, 'Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions', p. 56.

however, is apply this principle to our lives in an environmental context. Many of us commute 30 minutes to work alone in our gas-powered cars and SUVs without thinking twice about it or set the dial of our thermostats to our habitual level of comfort without questioning the long-term consequences of this action. What is needed is a way to connect the dots of our seemingly innocuous actions to the consequences that other living humans incur because of them. This requires more moments of reflection in one's everyday life. Instead of mindlessly ascribing to the status quo in the United States, for example, and commuting individually to work downtown from one's house in the suburbs, one could take up biking: a healthier alternative with no carbon footprint accompanying it. In line with this psychological shift that one has to make, one must start to think of such things in a human-oriented context rather than merely in an environmental context. In other words, one should ask oneself, 'How is this action affecting other human beings?' instead of asking 'Is this action environmentally destructive?' The more we can link up our actions to their likely consequences to other human beings, the more likely we are to actually make steps toward environmentally sustainable living. While we are hopefully sympathetic to the climate change imagery such as a polar bear stranded on a melting ice floe, a more appropriate image to incite genuine care about the issue would be images of the victims of Typhoon Haiyan. Any excess fossil fuel emissions makes disasters such as these more severe and more frequent, and we can avoid harming others unnecessarily by not using fossil fuels more than what is necessary, which would mean avoiding luxury emissions.

We have seen such movements already in environmentalism. Take, for instance, the animal rights movement. Recently, the animal rights movement has no longer focused exclusively on the pain of animals but rather on the poor working conditions of laborers in factory farms or in industries that support factory farming such as the fast food industry. While the most recent influential book on factory farming, *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser, documents the sad plight of animals in this sphere, stating that 'at times animals are crowded so closely together it looks like a sea of cattle,'[42] the real ethical force of the work lies in the chronicling of the destitute working conditions of the laborers in the industry, the manipulation of children in marketing campaigns, and the sheer lack of attention to health concerns in this industry, all of which one implicitly supports by purchasing products from this industry. The conclusion to Schlosser's book is that we need a 'global realization' about the realities of factory farming.[43] In regard to the negative effects of climate change on fellow human beings, a similar global realization needs to occur. The more we can frame environmental issues as *issues of human well-being*, the more traction we will attain on the ethical front of climate change. In other words, we need to shift our narrative from 'Save the Planet,' 'Save the Polar Bears' or even 'Save Our Grandchildren' to '*Save Each Other*.'

The argument provided here is simple: if you care about not harming other innocent people unnecessarily through your actions, you should care about your environmental impact regarding your contribution to climate change since climate change harms other human beings. The current disasters made worse by climate change are partially caused by human actions, and the more one relies on similar actions

[42] Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2012 [2001]), p. 150.
[43] *Ibid.*, Ch. 10.

unnecessarily, the more one transgresses the 'Do No Harm' principle. One of the benefits of this argument is that it does not rely on any sort of controversial ethical theory to back it up. The *prima facie* principle that it is simply wrong to harm innocent human beings unnecessarily is a cornerstone in virtually all cultural, religious, and ethical contexts. As it is theoretically uncommitted, the 'Do No Harm' principle is efficient on a practical level. Instead of working through the details of an ethical, philosophical, or religious theory and relying on the assumptions that guide it, this principle is straightforward and commonsensical, which makes it not only simple but also appealing on a wide scale. It thereby avoids the familiar problem in ethics of getting dragged down in theoretical details when the emphasis should be on how to guide action. After all, the fundamental question is ethics is 'What should we do?' and not 'Which theory should I ascribe to?' Despite the simplicity of the argument offered and the advantages that it provides, there are potential objections that must be considered.

Objections and Replies

First, one may object by saying that literally billions of other people are also part of the problem of climate change, many of which are doing nothing to cut down on their own impact on the environment. Therefore, one's own concerted effort to cut down on one's emissions really won't matter all that much since greenhouse gas emissions will continue to rise despite my own actions. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong asks the following question to make this case: Do I have a moral obligation not to drive my gas-guzzling sport utility vehicle for fun on a beautiful Sunday afternoon? He answers thusly:

> My act of driving does not…make climate change worse. Climate change would be just as bad if I did not drive…Global warming and climate change occur on such a massive scale that my individual driving makes no difference to the welfare of anyone.[44]

Sinnott-Armstrong clarifies this point with the following argument from analogy:

> Global warming is…like a river that is going to flood downstream because of torrential rains. I pour a quart of water into the river upstream (maybe just because I do not want to carry it). My act of pouring the quart into the river is not a cause of the flood. Analogously, my act of driving for fun is not a cause of global warming.[45]

He concludes that since my individual actions are so insignificant compared to such a large-scale issue, we have no moral obligation not to perform any such eco-unfriendly action. Using John Nolt's analysis that the average American's greenhouse gas emissions cause harm to one or two people,[46] Avram Hiller has argued persuasively that Sinnott-

[44] Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, 'It's Not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations', *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics*, Vol. 5, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Richard B. Howarth (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 285-307, at p. 293.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 291.

[46] John Nolt, 'How Harmful are the Average American's Greenhouse Gas Emissions?', *Ethics, Policy & the Environment* 14:1 (2011), pp. 3-10, at p. 9.

Armstrong is actually mistaken in his belief that there is nothing morally wrong with Sunday drives for pleasure. In critiquing Sinnott-Armstrong's idea that one's own emissions are not causes of climate change, he states, 'if individual actions such as Sunday drives are not causes of climate change, then what does cause climate change? The cause would have to be some metaphysically odd emergent entity'.[47] In other words, if individual actions have no bearing on climate change, what does? Clearly, an individual drive does not *itself* cause climate change, but it is certainly a contributing factor, and this contribution is significant. He states, 'one Sunday drive is…*prima facie* wrong *to a not-insignificant extent*'.[48] Using data from the National Academy of Sciences, he goes on to state that '*going on a Sunday drive is the moral equivalent of ruining someone's afternoon*'.[49] Unlike Hiller, I hesitate to ascribe a one-to-one relationship between particular acts and particular consequences, though we can use Hiller's argument to support our case since it does highlight the fact that each and every person's impact on the environment matters, and the more that a person participates in fossil fuel emissions unnecessarily, the more he or she is contributing to the problem and affecting the lives of others when he or she does not have to do so. Therefore, the line of argument based on the claim that 'my own emissions are only a trivial part of the problem' does not hold. In the realm of climate ethics, I urge that we stop thinking about our fossil fuel emissions on an individual action scale and attempt the nearly impossible task of linking up particular actions with particular consequences and instead think more broadly about our lifestyle choices and how we can avoid unnecessary emissions from fossil fuel usage. Instead of avoiding 'ruining someone's afternoon', as Hiller would have us consider, we should think more broadly at the harsher world we are condemning others to have to live in. According to the Climate Vulnerability Monitor, 'in less than 20 years climate change could cause thousands of deaths and hundreds of billions of dollars in damage due to a further aggravation of weather'.[50] Thinking of statistics like this and without attempting to provide a one-to-one relationship between particular acts and particular consequences, we can simply say that if one is using fossil fuels unnecessarily, one is contributing to the problem unnecessarily, and thereby transgressing the 'Do No Harm' principle. In other words, we need to reframe the debate between Sinnott-Armstrong and Hiller from 'do my individual, particular actions actually contribute to climate change?' to 'what sorts of lifestyle practices do I participate in that harm others unnecessarily?' In this way, we avoid the notoriously difficult one-to-one linking of cause and effect and engage in thinking about this issue on a more holistic scale.[51]

A second objection is that issues of curbing greenhouse gases should be settled by governmental bodies, not individuals, since governments have the power to make significant changes and set us on the path towards sustainability, while individuals do not. We sometimes forget that governmental bodies, at least in democratic countries, are supposed to represent the interests of the people and are dependent on the people in

[47] Avram Hiller, 'Climate Change and Individual Responsibility', *The Monist* 94:3 (2011), pp. pp. 349-368, at p. 349.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 358.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 357.
[50] DARA, p. 63.
[51] From a practical perspective, this shifts the argument from specifying the exact harm caused by our actions to changing our attitudes and lifestyles concerning climate change as a whole. I owe this insight to Maren Behrensen, who calls this a 'pragmatically paternalistic' perspective.

order to get elected. James Hansen, still the most important voice when it comes to climate change, has recently argued that 'the biggest obstacle to solving global warming is the role of money in politics, the undue sway of special interests'.[52] Regardless of how corrupt we think our government has become, we can still affect policies through our voices as long as democracy still exists. Bill McKibben played a huge role in convincing the Obama administration to delay the Keystone XL pipeline in 2011 through concerted grassroots efforts, proving that genuine citizen-based action *can* incite meaningful change. The more people begin to see this issue as not only an environmental issue, or even an issue of justice between citizens of different countries or different generations, but as a clear case wherein people are harming innocent human beings through their actions, the more citizens will make this a national issue that government officials *must* take seriously.

A third objection regards the difficulty in assigning moral worth to actions that are seemingly innocuous. In his early article on the ethics of climate change, Dale Jamieson argues that climate change requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of ethics since conventional ethics 'presupposes that harms and their causes are individual, that they can be readily identified, and that they are local in space and time' while acts contributing to climate change are apparently innocent but have devastating consequences that are diffuse and remote in space and time.[53] Gardiner picks up on this aspect of climate change in his recent book, *A Perfect Moral Storm*. Here, he states:

> Human-induced climate change is a severely lagged phenomenon. This is partly because some of the basic mechanisms set in motion by the greenhouse effect, such as sea level rise, take a very long time to be fully realized. But it is also because by far the most important greenhouse gas produced by human activities is carbon dioxide, and once emitted molecules of carbon dioxide can spend a surprisingly long time in the atmosphere.[54]

While typical ethical issues such as abortion have an easy one-to-one correlation to them (typically if I abort a fetus, I am responsible for the death of that fetus), no such correlations can be made in the realm of climate change. A molecule of carbon dioxide, for instance, can stay in the atmosphere for around 100 years or longer,[55] and therefore one's particular emissions can never be directly linked to particular disasters. This leads Sinnott-Armstrong to argue, for example, that 'there is no way to identify any particular victim of my wasteful driving in normal circumstances'.[56] Be that as it may, we *are* able to do a simple calculus and say that the disasters we see today that harm people are made more frequent and more severe by anthropogenic climate change, which is caused by fossil fuel emissions, and one's own fossil fuel emissions contribute to future disasters that will similarly harm people. As Jamieson notes, this does require a shift in our understanding of ethics. However, I think that the more people start to conceive of their environmental impact in terms of its harms towards other humans and less in terms of

[52] James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. x.
[53] Jamieson, pp. 148-149.
[54] Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, p. 32.
[55] Cf. David Archer, 'Fate of fossil fuel CO_2 in geologic time', *Journal of Geophysical Research* 110 (2005), pp. 1-6.
[56] Sinnott-Armstrong, p. 294.

the environment itself, the more individuals will be able to make this step. We used to think of environmentalists as hippie tree huggers who perhaps spent too much time worrying about the rights of trees, landscapes, or polar bears when actual people were suffering. Now that our environmental destruction is actually affecting humans, any reasonable person should care about their environmental impact if they hold onto the simple principle that harming innocent humans unnecessarily is wrong.[57] While this shift in consciousness is not easy to make, no one promised that being an ethical person was supposed to be easy in the first place. The fact of the matter is that every single person's carbon footprint contributes to the problem, and though it is not feasible to say that your particular emissions directly caused a disaster like Hurricane Sandy or the 2012 Midwest heat wave to occur, it is clear that you contribute to disasters such as these by overly relying on fossil fuels and ignoring your environmental impact.

A final objection comes from those who say that any meaningful shift towards a green lifestyle would simply require too drastic of a lifestyle change. Since 87% of our energy use comes in the form of fossil fuels like oil, coal, and natural gas, a shift away from a lifestyle that is heavily dependent on these sources of energy would require drastic changes. People would have to rethink their transportation methods, the dial they set their thermostats at, and even the foods they put on their plates. It would mean commuting by bike, public transport, or carpool; being a bit colder in the winter months and warmer in the summer months in one's own home; and eating less from the supermarket and more locally grown foods. There is no doubt that such changes are inconvenient and sometimes difficult to take on. However, there is evidence that engaging in such lifestyle changes can often be fulfilling as well. From a social scientific perspective, Ada Ferrer-i-Carbonell and John Gowdy have shown that 'there is a strong relationship between environmental awareness and measures of subjective well-being'.[58] Riding public transportation or engaging in rideshare programs can be a hassle, but it can also lead to connections among other people that we would otherwise miss out on. Going to one's local farmer's market may mean limiting the foods one can eat at any given time of the year but knowing that you are supporting local farmers instead of transnational corporations might make up for this.

Of course, the types of lifestyle changes that each individual person can afford to make are relative, and it is up to each individual person to decide what is feasible. For instance, a person living in rural Alaska must necessarily have a greater carbon footprint than someone living in San Diego simply due to geographic reasons (heating one's home, transportation options, etc.). I suspect this is true for nearly all of us. The point is not to judge others in their quest to make environmentally sustainable changes in their individual lifestyles. Rather, the point is to recognize that one's actions that rely upon greenhouse gas emissions affect people negatively, and the more one can take steps to reduce one's environmental impact, the less one is contributing to the problem. It is virtually impossible to live an entirely fossil-fuel free lifestyle in the modern world, but it

[57] I do not aim to demean those who fight for the basic rights to life of trees, landscapes, and individual species; rather, I am simply making the point that environmentalism has changed in that anyone who cares about not harming other humans unnecessarily should be environmentally conscious.

[58] Ada Ferrer-i-Carbonell and John M. Gowdy, 'Environmental degradation and happiness', *Ecological Economics* 60:3 (2007), p. 512.

is almost certainly possible for most of us to reduce our environmental impact through lifestyle changes, thereby reducing the harm on not only the environment, but to fellow human beings.

Conclusion

I have argued that one's individual greenhouse gas emissions clearly and seriously affect other human beings in negative, nontrivial ways and that anyone who thinks it is wrong to harm others should consider their environmental impact to be a part of their ethical identity. Although we have little progress when it comes to climate change in the realms of economics and policy, if we can simply understand the basic ethical implications of greenhouse gas emissions, and we subscribe to the principle of 'Do No Harm', we should be able to make progress in our individual lives, which will eventually infiltrate the public sector. Hopefully, the non-theoretical, cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural 'Do No Harm' principle will ignite individual concern about the issue, which will then incite changes in the economic and political sectors.

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Publication made possible by generous support from the Swedish Research Council.

Environmental Ethics as a Question of Environmental Ontology: Naess' *Ecosophy T* and Buddhist Traditions

Elisa Cavazza

Arne Naess included several references to Buddhist teachings in his ecophilosophy. I suggest an inquiry into and interpretation of the Buddhist sources of Naess' proposal, in order to understand the role Buddhist elements play in it, and how they can offer a further understanding of central elements in Naess' ecosophy. The focus is on the union of theory, worldview and practice, which lies at the core of both fields. A particular emphasis is placed on the idea that only a change of outlook on the nature of reality can promote an ethical transformation. In Naess' approach, the ecological crisis is first of all a problem of our experience of the world, posing a question of 'environmental ontology'. I suggest an hermeneutical approach primarily into early Indian Buddhist sources, and I argue that although a homogeneous 'Buddhism', as well as a 'green Buddhism' are problematic, different strands of thinking in Buddhist philosophy can facilitate the analysis of critical points also raised by Ecosophy T, supporting and expanding an ecosophical approach to ecological challenges.

> All 'formations' (*saṃskāra*) are impermanent. [...] Look into the self and discover that it is made only of non-self elements. A human being is made up of only non-human elements – the air, the water, the forest, the river, the mountains, and the animals. The *Diamond Sutra* is the most ancient text about how to respect all forms of life on earth, the animals, vegetation and also minerals. We have to remove the notion of human as something that can survive by itself alone. Humans can survive only with the survival of other species. This is exactly the teaching of the Buddha, and also the teaching of deep ecology.
>
> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching*[1]

[1] Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching* (London: Ebury Publishing, Kindle edition, 2008, loc. 1849). The Buddhist term in the quoted text is in Sanskrit. Below, I will quote Pali terms, unless otherwise indicated.

Environmental Ontology

Responses to the intricacy of the current environmental situation, both on a local and global scale, are hardly a matter of rationally founded sets of prescriptions. As argued by different strands of radical environmentalism,[2] 'a rethinking of both the meaning of humanity and the meaning of nature in which normative and ontological issues are at stake' is necessary.[3] In Arne Naess' thinking, an effective change of attitude in individual behaviour and its political significance can only be achieved through a radical challenge to our dualistic view of the relationship between self and world, including some misconceptions of the divide between the two. *Ecosophy T*, as proposed by Naess, is a form of wisdom, in which ethics springs spontaneously from deeper inquiry and awareness concerning the relational nature of our selves and the world.[4] For this reason, Naess suggests that environmental ethics are a matter of moving '*from ethics to ontology and back*'.[5] Without laying bare our basic assumptions about what natural objects are and our relation to them, the deepest concrete motivations for our decisions and policies remain obscure. No matter what metaethical approach we choose, those assumptions affect its efficacy, range of action and scope. According to Naess, two opponents may share the same ethical prescriptions, but eventually disagree on a decision of environmental character because the object of moral attention is perceived through radically different ontologies:

> Confrontations between developers and conservers reveal differences in experiencing what is *real*. What a conservationist *sees* and experiences as *reality*, the developer typically does not see - and vice versa. A conservationist *sees* and experiences a forest as a unity, a gestalt, and when speaking of the heart of the forest, he or she does not speak about the geometrical centre. A developer sees quantities of trees and argues that a road through the forest covers very few square kilometres, so why make so much fuss? [...] *The difference between the antagonists is rather one of ontology than of ethics*. They may have fundamental ethical prescriptions in common, but apply them differently because they see and experience differently. They both use the term 'forest', but refer to different realities.[6]

[2] Radical environmentalism is a label typically including deep ecology, ecofeminism and social ecology. For example, see Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory. Toward an Ecocentric Approach* (London: UCL Press, 1992) and Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[3] Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), p. 4.

[4] A clarification of terms: Naess distinguishes *ecology* ('the interdisciplinary scientific study of the living conditions of organisms in interaction with each other and with the surroundings, organic as well as inorganic'), *ecophilosophy* (the more general locus of debate about problems common to ecology and philosophy), and *ecosophy*, ('one's personal code of values and a view of the world which guides one's own decisions [...] applied to questions involving ourselves and nature'). *Ecosophy T*, then, is Naess' personal ecosophical proposal, considered that many different *ecosophies* can support the principles of the deep ecology activist platform (Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 32-36).

[5] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 67, emphasis in original.

[6] Arne Naess, 'The World of Concrete Contents', *Inquiry* 28:4 (1985), pp. 417-428, at p. 423, emphasis in original. I use the term 'gestalt' in the same way as Naess. In his writings, Naess tends to naturalise the word, which becomes part of his common vocabulary, losing the German capital letter and any foreign word emphasis.

Naess' insistence on environmental ontology opens a critical inquiry into the tacit 'ultimate premisses' of our philosophical, religious or cosmological worldviews which, being generally implicit, need to be verbalised. Worldviews, in fact, yield 'genetic relations' with our value priorities and principles, namely 'influences, motivations, inspirations and cause/effect relations'.[7] On the basis of the latter, we shape our norms, lifestyles and policies with cardinal consequences in relation to the natural and to environmental issues. The starting point of his ecosophy can be summarised by the following passage: 'I am for what I call a focus on environmental ontology, how you see the world, how you *see* it, how you can bring people to *see* things differently'.[8]

Ecosophy and Buddhism

One of the most important philosophical challenges for Naess is the critical recognition of the relation between our own cosmology and our attitude towards nature. His analysis suggests that particular attention should be given to the acknowledgement of materialistic reductionism. Since the moment modern science became the dominant paradigm of reality, this kind of materialism has informed our worldview in a majoritarian way. Indeed, Naess' ontological problematisation of our description of nature is directed against the idea that entities are objectively characterised only by the quantitative dimensions of physics.[9] The natural objects, understood as material things-in-themselves, instead of *relata* revealed in the lived-world experience, condemn the subject to an irreconcilable separation from the world. At its core, ecophilosophical investigation still necessarily deals with our confidence in an ontological separation between self and world. Our view of a natural world as dead matter on which humanity applies the freedom of its spirit still appears to be widespread and dominant.

In this paper, I investigate *Ecosophy T*'s 'ontological' premisses. These go in the direction of a relational understanding of self and world. However, 'ontology' assumes in Naess a looser and somehow improper meaning. It does not refer to a systematic study of Being, but rather to the question about 'what there is', that lies at the root of our sense of reality and our practical being in the world. I will, then, explore the philosophical aspects of Naess' relationalism by drawing a comparison to different Buddhist teachings.

Buddhism is one of Naess' minor philosophical sources which shaped his environmental thinking (Spinoza and Gandhi representing the more evident sources).[10]

[7] Arne Naess, 'The Apron Diagram', in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, edited by Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), pp. 10-12.

[8] Arne Naess, in Andrew Light, 'Deep socialism? An interview with Arne Naess', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 8 (1997), pp. 69-85, at p. 84.

[9] For instance, see Naess, 'The World of Concrete Contents'; 'Ecology, Community and Lifestyle', pp. 47-67. As explained later in this article, the connection between cosmology, concept of nature and physics is likely a Whiteheadian influence on Naess. For a critique of materialistic naturalism and the new theoretical situation it has informed since modern science, see also Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001 [1966]).

[10] 'I am inspired by Zen Buddhism and Spinoza [...]' (Arne Naess, 'Self-Realization. An Ecological Approach to Being in the World' [1985], *The Trumpeter* 4:3 (1987), pp. 35-42, at p. 42). Influences from Husserl, Whitehead and William James are also evident.

Resonances between Buddhist philosophy and deep ecology have often been evoked both by contemporary Buddhist scholars, especially in the field of *Engaged Buddhism* and by supporters of the deep ecological movement.[11] Naess himself mentions them on more than one occasion.[12] He also makes use of a recurrent formula, *sarvam dharmam niḥsvabhāvam* (all entities have no essence), possibly paraphrasing Nāgārjuna.[13] There are also at least two specific papers in which Naess compares ideas from Ecosophy T to Buddhist teachings: 'Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism' and 'Through Spinoza to

[11] *Engaged Buddhism* is a term created by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. It refers to activist social movements that emerged during the last century applying traditional Buddhist principles to issues of war and peace, economics, the environment, and human rights. The most famous engaged Buddhist can be considered H.H. the Dalai Lama (*Cf.* Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009)). Connections with deep ecology have been variously established by engaged Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa (*Cf.* Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching*. Also, *cf.* Sulak Sivaraksa, 'True Development', in *Dharma Gaia. A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, edited by Allan H. Badiner (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990), pp. 169-177; Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace. A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992)). Moreover, since the 70s, several supporters and activists of the deep ecology movement, in addition to Naess, have been variously influenced by Buddhism (*e.g.*, Robert Aitken Rōshi, 'Gandhi, Dogen e l'ecologia profonda', in *Ecologia profonda. Vivere come se la natura fosse importante*, edited by Bill Devall and George Sessions (Torino: Edizioni Gruppo Abele, 1989), pp. 209-213; Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Boston: Shambala, 2010 [1975]); Bill Devall and George Sessions (eds), *Ecologia profonda. Vivere come se la natura fosse importante* (Torino: Edizioni Gruppo Abele, 1989); Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory. The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Johanna Macy, 'The Greening of the Self', in *Dharma Gaia. A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, edited by Allan H. Badiner (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990), pp. 53-63; Andrew McLaughlin, *Regarding nature. Industrialism and Deep Ecology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); John Seed, 'Wake the Dead!' in *Dharma Gaia. A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, edited by Allan H. Badiner (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990), pp. 222-226; Gary Snyder, *La grana delle cose* (Torino: Edizioni gruppo Abele, 1987); Gary Snyder, 'Il buddhismo e le possibilità di una cultura planetaria', in *Ecologia profonda. Vivere come se la natura fosse importante*, edited by Bill Devall and George Sessions (Torino: Edizioni Gruppo Abele, 1989), pp. 233-235; Zimmerman). Most commentators who analysed the connection between Naess and Buddhism actually compared deep ecology and Buddhist doctrines (exceptions are Michael E. Zimmerman, Deane Curtin and Padmasiri De Silva; examples of their work include: Zimmerman; Deane Curtin, 'A State of Mind Like Water: Ecosophy T and the Buddhist Traditions', *Inquiry. Special Edition. Arne Naess's Environmental Thought*, 39:2 (1996), pp. 239-255; Padmasiri De Silva, *Environmental Philosophy and Ethics in Buddhism* (London: Macmillian Press LTD, 1998)). This operation can raise several misunderstandings, considering the philosophical inconsistency of deep ecology as a whole. I will consider only elements form Naess' philosophical thinking and Ecosophy T.

[12] For example, 'There is an intimate relationship between some forms of Buddhism and the deep ecology movement. The history of Buddhist thought and practice, especially the principles of non-violence, non-injury and reverence for life, sometimes makes it easier for Buddhists to understand and appreciate deep ecology [...]' (Arne Naess, 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by George Sessions (Boston-London: Shambala, 1995), pp. 64-84, at p. 79).

[13] For example, see Naess, 'The World of Concrete Contents', p. 419; Arne Naess, 'Reflections on Gestalt Ontology', *The Trumpeter* 21:1 (2005), pp. 119-128; Arne Naess, 'Heidegger, Postmodern Theory and Deep Ecology', *The Trumpeter* 14:4 (1997), pp. 1-7.

Mahayana Buddhism or through Mahayana Buddhism to Spinoza?'.[14] I will specifically refer to 'Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism', because it contains Naess' most significant comments on Buddhism regarding the nature of self and phenomena. In these sources, Naess mainly refers to Mahāyāna Buddhism: the *Diamond Sutra* and the Japanese philosopher Dōgen. There are also references to the Theravāda texts: *Majjhima Nikāya* and *Dhammapada* from the Pali Canon, the *Visuddhimagga* from Buddhaghoṣa. Deane Curtin includes the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna in his analysis of Naess' Buddhist influences.[15] Although lacking historical and textual precision, Naess' constant interest in Buddhist philosophy can provide interesting and less established interpretations of the fundamental tenets of his ecosophy.[16]

Some important remarks, however, need to be made. First of all, the very definition of a 'Buddhist philosophy' is an over-generalisation. There is no unitarian Buddhism. Different schools and traditions in time and regions can be very far one from another. Damien Keown uses the Buddhist metaphor of the elephant to suggest a simple definition of Buddhism itself: 'it has a curious assembly of somewhat unlikely parts but also a central bulk to which they are attached'.[17] With the term 'Buddhism', I will then refer to some basic ideas which can be traced back to early Indian Buddhism and which are accepted and developed in most later schools; in other words, ideas which can be said to belong to that 'central bulk'. Otherwise I will provide context reference when taking into consideration peculiar developments belonging to particular traditions.

The possibility of identifying a Buddhist ecological attitude towards nature is similarly problematic. This difficulty has been highlighted by most, if not all Buddhist scholars commenting on 'eco-Buddhist' literature.[18] As Lambert Schmithausen has shown

[14] Arne Naess, 'Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism' [1985], in *The Ecology of Wisdom. Writings by Arne Naess*, edited by Bill Devall and Alan Drengson (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), pp. 195-203; Arne Naess, 'Through Spinoza to Mahayana Buddhism, or through Mahayana Buddhism to Spinoza?', in *Spinoza's Philosophy of Man. Proceedings of the Scandinavian Spinoza Symposium 1977*, edited by Jon Wetlesen (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1978), pp. 136-158.

[15] For an analysis of Naess' Zen references, *cf.* Curtin.

[16] Even if critical about Naess' references to Buddhism, Padmasiri De Silva recognises 'a great sensitivity on the part of Naess that he should keep to the Buddhist stance as far as possible' (Padmasiri De Silva, p. 130).

[17] Damien Keown, *Buddhism* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

[18] *Cf.*, for example, Padmasiri De Silva; Ian Harris, 'How Environmentalist is Buddhism?', *Religion* 21 (1991), pp. 101-114; Ian Harris, 'Causation and *Telos*: The Problem of Buddhist Environmental Ethics', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994), pp. 46-57; Ian Harris, 'Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of EcoBuddhism', *Religion* 25 (1995), pp. 199-211; Ian Harris, 'Getting to Grips with Buddhist Environmentalism: A Provisional Approach', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2 (1995), pp. 173-190; Ian Harris, 'Buddhism and Ecology', in *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, edited by Damien Keown (Richmond: Routledge Curzon, 2000), pp. 113-136; Ian Harris, 'Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern: Some Methodological Problems Considered,' in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds,* edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 377-402; Christopher Ives, 'Resources for Buddhist Environmental Ethics', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013), pp. 539-571; Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature. The Lecture delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990. An Enlarged Version with Notes*. Studia Philologica Buddhica. Occasional Paper Series VII (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991); Lambert Schmithausen, 'The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997), pp. 1-74; Lambert Schmithausen,

in his textual analysis of the crossroads of Buddhism and nature, the moral consideration of nature in Buddhism extends mainly to sentient beings. It also presents obstacles in the positive evaluation of the ordinary worldly dimension.[19] These problems and many others should not be underestimated, but the gravity of these difficulties depends, among other things, on which concept of nature we choose to investigate. Through his concepts of 'intrinsic value' and 'biospheric egalitarianism', Naess dialogues with the established axiological approach to environmental ethics.[20] I argue, nevertheless, that the nature of Naess' environmental ontological questioning differentiates itself from the value approach of environmental ethics. The focus is not on the identification of criteria for moral considerability in nature, but on a different experience of nature and of our sense of reality. With this said, Naess' ecosophy does not profit much from a simple comparison to Buddhist ethical norms and moral attitudes towards natural entities (although he mentions *ahiṃsā* (non violence) and compassion). A comparison to cosmological topics of Buddhist philosophy,[21] namely those regarding to the nature of phenomena, is more fruitful since the problem raised by the ontological questioning is that of our description of nature itself.

As shown by Ian Harris, the very idea of nature is problematic in Buddhism because no direct parallel to the western 'nature' can be found there.[22] He also suggests that, before delving into the Buddhist terminology, the western writer should clarify his or her own notion of nature, whether physical, metaphysical or aesthetic. Harris pokes here at a fundamental issue. The concept of nature is problematic not only in Buddhism, but also in the West. Naess does not provide a definition or a semantic field for it. He makes use of the Husserlian *Lebenswelt*, our lived world, or of vague expressions like 'living beings in a wide sense of *bios*'.[23] In other contexts he suggests that nature occupies

'Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature. Some Remarks', *The Eastern Buddhist. New Series* XXXII:2 (2000), pp. 26-78; Alan Sponberg, 'Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion', in *Buddhism and Ecology: the Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds*, in *Buddhism and Ecology: the Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 351-376; Donald K. Swearer, 'An Assessment of Buddhist Eco-Philosophy', *The Harvard Theological Review* 99:2 (2006), pp. 123-137.

[19] Some interpretations of *nirvāṇa*, indeed, can be considered world-rejecting; *cf.* Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, and Schmithausen, 'The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics'.

[20] For instance, see Arne Naess, 'Intrinsic Value. Will the Defenders of Nature Please Rise', in *Wisdom in the Open Air. The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology*, edited by Peter Reed and David Rothenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 70-82. 'Biospheric egalitarianism - in principle' as opposed to the anthropocentric perspectives on ecological issues is one the very first positions explored by Naess in the renowned 1973 article, where he distinguishes for the first time between shallow and deep ecology (Arne Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary', *Inquiry* 16:1 (1973), pp. 95-100, at p. 95.

[21] *Cf.* the analysis of the Buddhist cosmological approach to the concept of nature and to environmental ethics in Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism. A Virtues Approach* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008).

[22] Harris suggests a long list of terms that can render different aspects of the western 'nature': *saṃsāra*, *prakṛti*, *svabhāva*, *pratītya-samutpāda*, *dharmadhātu*, *dharmatā*, *dhammajāti* (Ian Harris, 'Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern', pp. 380-381).

[23] Naess' examples include rivers and ecosystems. For instance, see Arne Naess, 'Equality, Sameness and Rights', in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, edited by George Sessions (Boston: Shambala, 1995), pp. 222-224.

the place of the philosophical problems of *world* or *reality*.[24] The problem is not fully thematised by Naess, but it exposes a fundamental and potentially contradictory issue since the modern idea of nature and materialistic reductionism are undermined by the reopening of the 'environmental ontological' question.

Suffering and Ignorance

The initial element I would like to explore is a movement from a moral issue to a problem of epistemology and worldview. This movement is the starting point of Naess' ecosophy with his acknowledgement of the current crisis of life conditions on Earth.

Starting with Buddha's earliest teachings, a similar movement can be read into the context of Buddhist philosophy. Suffering is the universal existential problem, a specific ethical theme, which quickly evolves into a problem of worldview, deeply rooted in the nature of our understanding of the world and life in general. The problem of suffering and the path towards liberation, which are expressed at the centre of all Buddhisms, shed an interesting light on philosophical reasons and importance to approach the ecological crisis through a non-substantial thinking of self and phenomena.

From Naess' ecosophical viewpoint, ecological concern lies not only with the acknowledgement of our environmental woes *per se* (such as resource depletion or biodiversity reduction, and the later climate change issue) as if environment was something merely external to us. This is what 'shallow ecology' represents. Naess stated this in his ground-breaking article which gave birth to the deep ecology movement in 1973.[25] The on-going ecological crisis coexists along with an ethical and existential crisis, stemming from a degraded relationship to the natural world and to the *world* in general. As Naess points out, the concept of 'crisis' itself, as well as those terms describing environmental degradation, conveys an instinctive negativity. 'Crisis' cannot be considered a merely neutral descriptive term. It requires the admission of diminishing value, a loss and a negative impact upon the configuration of our life quality.[26] Not only does crisis imply an ethical negative, but it also demands change. The change we need is not limited to technical solutions organised around the 'man-in-the-environment' view. Acknowledging the crisis from within a 'relational, total-field image' opens a new perspective onto a change in the paradigm of our self-representation within the natural world.[27]

A widely acknowledged reading of the historical phenomenon of the ecological crisis underlines the role of an epistemology of dominion, turning domination into the ultimate meaning of the human enterprise. Modern nature separates itself from the subject, and is reduced to its mechanical structures. The materialistic reduction of nature into separate objects and the concurrent dualistic worldview, separating the subject from spiritless objectivity, is the theory that Whitehead designates as the dominant 'cosmology

[24] *Cf.* Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 35.

[25] 'The Shallow Ecology movement: Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries' (Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep', p. 95).

[26] *Cf.* Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, pp. 23-24.

[27] *Cf.* Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep'.

with which the European intellect has clothed itself in the last three centuries'.[28] He describes it thus:

> There persists [...] throughout the whole period the fixed scientific cosmology which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter, or material, spread throughout space in a flux of configurations. In itself such a material is senseless, valueless, purposeless. It is this assumption that I call 'scientific materialism'. Also it is an assumption which I shall challenge as being entirely unsuited to the scientific situation at which we have now arrived.[29]

Even though Whitehead wrote this lecture in the early twentieth century, it appears that the dominance of dualistic cosmology and its materialistic counterpart still bears relevance. As Hans Jonas points out,

> […] dualism itself represents so far the most momentous phase in the history of thought, whose achievement, however overtaken, can never be undone. The discovery of the separate spheres of spirit and matter [...] created forever a new theoretical situation. [...] Every conception of being that can come thereafter is in essence, not merely in time, postdualistic.[30]

The critical understanding of how worldview determines responsibility and the practical relations to nature must also include the recognition of the covert role of general views or cosmologies. I refer to what Naess calls 'total view' or '*Welt-und-Lebensanschauung*'. He sees 'a general orientation with concrete applications,' providing a frame of consistency to our world and containing the complexities of implicit descriptive and prescriptive premisses, on the basis of which we make decisions and take action.[31] Whitehead shows how the objects of modern science, for example the 'newtonian trinity of matter, time and space' crossed over from their specific field and became the paradigm of the objective description of reality:

> This quiet growth of science has practically recoloured our mentality so that modes of thought which in former times were exceptional, are now broadly spread through the educated world. [...] The new mentality is more important even than the new science and the new technology. It has altered the metaphysical presuppositions and the imaginative contents of our minds. [...] This new tinge to modern minds is a vehement and passionate interest in the relation of general principles to irreducible and stubborn facts.[32]

Science, as a singular and abstract concept, Science with a capital 'S', is a spiritual force, which scarcely corresponds to the concrete manifestations and practices of investigation

[28] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 1938 [1926]), p. 29. Whitehead is one of the important influences in Naess' thinking.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[30] Jonas, p. 16. This new theoretical situation implies what Jonas calls 'the ontology of death', in which 'reality must turn into series of points juxtaposed in space and succeeding in time: points of extensity necessarily as external to one another as they all together are to consciousness' (p. 20).
[31] Arne Naess, 'Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement', in *The Ecology of Wisdom. Writings by Arne Naess*, edited by Bill Devall and Alan Drengson (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008 [1991]), pp. 230-251, at p. 234.
[32] Whitehead, pp. 12-13.

of the sciences.[33] It generalises its objects and informs other cultural and historical manifestations. But the reciprocal movement is also neglected: indeed, the very development of science itself occurs within the bounds of broader and disparate movements of thought and concrete interests and actors. Whitehead writes: 'Every philosophy is tinged with the colouring of some secret imaginative background, which never emerges explicitly into its trains of reasoning'.[34] Naess, on his part, lays the blame upon an illegitimate generalisation and damaging reduction of scientific structures to the only admissible knowledge about the state of the world:

> The cold detachment and brutality within the attitude of exploitation of nature has reduced the sensitivity towards the vastness of the perpetrated devastations, as well as the capability to confront systematically their deepest causes. They produced a negative effect on the human view of reality. Detachment from the rich and spontaneous experience of nature enabled certain abstract structures, or even the scientific models of those structures, to be arbitrarily accepted as the very content of reality. Our point of arrival was a false distinction between subjective and objective.[35]

Conceding the impossibility of a *single* scientific worldview, Naess' critique attacks a 'social usage' of the term 'scientific'. 'Scientific' serves as a synonym for 'objective', uncritically carrying an ideological adherence to particular views of reality and dominant interests. This conformity, which restricts the 'richness' of experience and actions, has little to do with the specific purpose and apparatus of scientific fields.[36] Problems arise when the instrumental excellence of scientific descriptions of the world are taken as the only objective knowledge. Still worse, they are regarded as a neutral *descriptions* or representations that serve the ground for subjective values and practices, for moral theories, as well as a model for general philosophy.[37] The 'false distinction between subjective and objective' which Naess refers to, becomes then a fundamental epistemological issue, namely questioning how, as already alienated subjects, we perceive and know the world. Naess' ecosophical proposal begins with a reference to Husserl's *Lebenswelt*. The richness of our 'spontaneous experience' with its elements of meaning and value, is the locus of concreteness and non-duality. Letting go of any hypostatising attitude, we embrace 'possibilism' as a practical background of our world

[33] For more recent developments of this reflection, see Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, translated by Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993 [1984]), and Bruno Latour, *Politiche della natura*, translated by Maria Gregorio (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2000).

[34] Whitehead, p. 18.

[35] Arne Naess, 'Dall'ecologia all'ecosofia, dalla scienza alla saggezza', in *Physis. Abitare la terra*, edited by Mauro Ceruti and Ervin Laszlo (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), pp. 455-465, at p. 455. My translation.

[36] Naess insists on the idea that our 'spontaneous experience' envisages a far richer reality and number of relations than the restricted selection we tend to consider as 'objective'. For example, *cf.* Naess, 'Reflections on Gestalt Ontology', p. 124. *Cf.* also *Ecology Community and Lifestyle*, p. 35: 'An attempt is made to defend our spontaneous, rich, seemingly contradictory experience of nature as more than subjective impressions'.

[37] *Cf.* Arne Naess, 'The Place of Joy in a World of Fact' [1974], in *The Ecology of Wisdom. Writings by Arne Naess*, edited by Bill Devall and Alan Drengson (Berkeley: Counterpoint 2008), pp. 127-128.

descriptions. The subject-object dichotomy is called into question through a suspension of our prejudices on self and world:

> Is not the value-laden, spontaneous and emotional realm of experience as genuine a source of knowledge of reality as mathematical physics? If we answer 'yes!', what are the consequences for our description of nature? The deep ecology movement might profit from greater emphasis on spontaneous experience, on what is called the 'phenomenological' outlook.[38]

Naess' inquiry starts with a practical philosophical problem (what to do and why in the face of our ecological challenges), that soon unveils its correspondence to a crisis of meaning and of the existential locus of humanity in nature. This crisis cannot be addressed, except through an inquiry into our ontological assumptions.

A similar movement from the practical-existential problem of suffering to a questioning of our experience of reality is addressed in the very first Buddhist teaching of the Four Noble Truths. Although in its own context and terms, the Buddhist analysis of the problem of suffering can offer fruitful insights about this central point, *viz*. that we don't address fundamental ethical problems through a change in prescriptions, but through a change in outlook.

The First Noble Truth states that everything is suffering (*dukkha*). Every aspect of life includes a form of mental or physical suffering. It is not a matter of pessimism, but a deep acknowledgment of the condition of all living beings. Liberation from sorrow becomes, then, the primary aim of Buddhist ethics and philosophy. *Dukkha* is not only psychophysical distress, but it is *existence* itself. Phenomena are *dukkha* because they are conditioned and relative, and these characteristics are precisely what our ignorance is of.[39]

In order to achieve liberation from suffering, the Buddha invites us to commence a personal journey to attain awareness and knowledge regarding the deep causes of suffering and the way to overcome it. The Second Noble Truth (*samudaya*), explains the arising of *dukkha* with craving (*taṇhā*) and passionate greed, which produce desperate attachment or clinging (*upādāna*) to things as objects and essences,[40] as if egos and objects were independent and separate things-in-themselves, something we can possess and define once for all. Clinging arises from ignorance, *avijjā*: a view of reality which does not accept that phenomena, in their deep nature, are psycho-physical combinations, imperfect, insubstantial or impermanent. *Avijjā* is not a general form of ignorance, but the ossification of views, opinions and conceptual constructions that cover our knowledge of

[38] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 32.

[39] Although *dukkha* intended as a character of phenomena is an acknowledged notion already present in early Buddhism, this fomulation of the problem is particularly developed in the *Mādhyamika* treatment of the two truths (*cf.* Emanuela Magno, 'Né il sé né l'altro. Un percorso intorno al problema dell'identità nel pensiero di Nāgārjuna', in *Xenos. Filosofia dello straniero*, edited by Umberto Curi and Bruna Giacomini (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2002), pp. 343-366. On early Buddhism, *cf*. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught. Revised and Expanded Edition with Texts from Suttas and Dhammapada* (New York: Grove Press, Kindle edition, 2007)).

[40] The formula names three categories of greed: (1) thirst for sense pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*); (2) thirst for existence and becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*); (3) thirst for non-existence and self annihilation (*vibhava-taṇhā*). (*Cf*. Rahula, loc. 781).

reality.[41] The ethical problem of Buddhist soteriology begins with 'right vision' (*sammā diṭṭhi*). This is not a divine revelation but a form of inquiry, the abandonment of previous uncritical representations and a quest for an experiential, operative knowledge, a change of outlook that needs to be experienced and practiced. Much emphasis can be found in the Buddha's predicament on free inquiry and the value of doubt.[42] Buddhist philosophies all tend to refuse unconditioned belief and uncritical adherence to teachings and doctrines. Teachings cannot become themselves objects of attachment. The term *saddhā*, faith, (skt. *śraddhā*) is certainly present in the Buddha discourses, but it appears to have a wider semantic field that includes the idea of trust, enthusiasm, confidence in the possibility of developing wisdom (p. *paññā*, skt. *prajñā*).[43]

Environmental Ontology: Relationality and Not-self

According to Naess, the most important philosophical contribution that ecological science provides to our description of the world is the maxim 'everything hangs together'. Through the maxim, ecology provokes our prejudices and reifications of nature to move towards a description of intrinsic relations between all things.

Interdependence within the 'relational-total-field' image of reality immediately brings up the necessity to review and abandon 'certain conceptions about the status of "things"'.[44] Intrinsic relations determine identity. Such a suspension can only lead back to

[41] *Cf.*, for example, the critique of metaphysical opinions about the nature of self and world in the *Brahmajālasutta, Il discorso della rete di Brahmā*, *Dīgha Nikāy*a, in *La rivelazione del Buddha*, Vol. 1, *I testi antichi*, edited by Raniero Gnoli (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), pp. 271-321.

[42] *Cf.* the renowned *Kalama sutta*: 'It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them'. (*Kalama Sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 3.65, edited and translated from the Pali by Soma Thera, *Access to Insight* (2013), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html (accessed 2014-03-06). *Cf.* also the words of the dying Śākyamuni to Ānanda. The Buddha reassures the disciple, worried that the young monk community will be left without a guide: the monks should be islands unto themselves (*Maha-parinibbana Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 16, edited and translated from the Pali by Sister Vajira and Francis Story, *Access to Insight* (2013), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html (accessed 2014-03-06)). Another interesting element in this respect is the idea that the teachings are a raft that needs to be abandoned once the river is crossed. The raft theme will develop in the Mahāyāna doctrine of *upāya kauśalya*, the doctrine of the skilful means, by which every theory or concept has purely instrumental soteriological function (c*f.* Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Duckworth, 1978). Also, *cf.* the raft theme in the Pali Canon: *Alagaddūpamasutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, 22; *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, 38; *Suttanipāta*, 1).

[43] See Raniero Gnoli (ed), *La rivelazione del Buddha*. Vol. 1, *I testi antichi* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), p. 1351.

[44] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 57. *Cf.* the definition of intrinsic relation given by Naess in his article 'The Shallow and the Deep', p. 95: 'An intrinsic relation between two things *A*

the world as spontaneously experienced, the *Lebenswelt*, which becomes the starting point of Naess' environmental ontology. Before selection and analysis, concrete experience contains not only 'primary qualities' such as the geometrical, physical and chemical properties of entities but also Galileian 'secondary qualities' and even more complex qualities [tertiary], such as value and emotion These, too, belong to the concrete contents of experience, so that nothing around us seems simply to have a neutral or 'objective' reality. Naess confronts us with an inversion: the extraction of abstract structures from experience is a perceptive and epistemological necessity. But the functional level of those abstract structures cannot be taken for reality. Naess writes:

> The ontology I wish to defend is such that the primary properties (in a narrow sense) are *entia rationis* characteristic of abstract structures, but not contents of reality. The geometry of the world is not *in* the world.[45]

The world, then, does not come as a collection of separate objects external to each other and external to the perceiving subject.

The world appears in 'comprehensive totalities', always in unique configuration, in 'gestalts'. Naess' gestalt ontology promotes the following idea: interrelated totalities which constitute the concrete contents of experience are not just a matter of perception. They are the only facts, inevitably including subjectivity. In contemplation or in action, Naess argues, 'there is no epistemological ego reaching out to see and understand a tree or an opponent in a fight, or a problem of decision. A tree as experienced spontaneously is always part of a totality, a gestalt'.[46] Concrete totalities are the only reality we can afford. They represent the living world. The 'primary qualities', commonly identifying things in themselves describing their essential spatial and material framework, are functional abstractions which do not tell us all that is important about the world, leading to 'a conception of *nature without any of the qualities we experience spontaneously*'.[47]

Identity appears to be a constellation of relations and conditions. The more we increase our ecological knowledge of the world, the more we acknowledge otherness as something identifying us, in which we can identify ourselves. The kind of identification Naess talks about is not merely psychological, but a recognition of processual, intrinsic determination of identity. In Ecosophy T, Naess' systematic formulation of his ecosophy, the norm 'Self-realisation' stands at the top: the realisation of others' interests - considering the Latin origin *inter-esse* - is the realisation of our expanded self. Subjectivity as ego leaves room for the 'ecological Self', a processual ever-changing relational identity. Nature is no longer a mere resource when we recognise how it constitutionally forms part of our self.

and *B* is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of *A* and *B*, so that without the relation, *A* and *B* are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the man-in-the-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept - except when talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication'.

[45] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 57. *Cf.* Fyodor Ippolitovich Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2003 [1930]), p. 65: 'There is no concrete universal corresponding adequately to this synthesis in the external world'.

[46] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 66. *Cf.* Arne Naess, 'Ecosophy and Gestalt Ontology'. *The Trumpeter* 6:4 (1989), pp. 134-137, at p. 136.

[47] Naess, 'The World of Concrete Contents', p. 420. Emphasis in original.

The conceptual structure of Naess' gestalt ontology, as briefly recounted above, shows some extraordinary similarities in its fundamental tenets to the Buddhist general approach to phenomena and knowledge. Naess primarily ascribes the deep causes of our ecologic crisis to an epistemological root. Buddhist philosophy appraises that ignorance (*avijjā*), giving rise to clinging and suffering, is primarily responsible for a long chain of actions and attitudes leading to the very opposite of liberation.

'*Avijjā* involves both cognitive deficiency and an "unfavourable attitude" or "prejudice"' and is precisely a blinkered vision of the 'true reality' of things.[48] Buddhism indeed acknowledges the existence of two levels of reality or truth: a common reality or conventional truth (*sammutisacca*), and an ultimate reality or absolute truth (*paramattha saccā*).[49] While we conventionally use expressions naming individuals and beings, the entities seized by our perception and language are not 'real' in an absolute sense. If we look closely and freely at phenomena, we find that every *dharma* (element, phenomenon)[50] is impermanent (*anicca*) and composed of infinite not-self factors. Instead of theorising a truth beyond appearance, when looking to things *sub specie aeternitatis*, Buddhism is strictly a-metaphysical.[51] This attitude is explored through different meticulous phenomenological inquiries, that in ancient Buddhism focus mainly on personal identity, the 'mine', the 'I', and the 'my self'. What today we could call the subject, the willing subject, longing for existence, is a concept that needs to be deconstructed. Early Buddhism does this mainly through two ways, one analytical and one synthetical.

The analytical way considers every being as an ever-changing combination of physical and mental factors, cognisable under five categories of aggregates. The *pañcakkhandha* (five aggregates) comprise:

1. Rūpa	Form, material and sensible aggregates;
2. Vedanā	Sensation, both physical and mental;
3. Saññā	Perception and notion, which discriminates external objects;
4. Saṅkhāra	Karmic and mental formations, depending on our past and environmental conditions (coefficients or co-agents);
5. Viññāṇa	Conscience, the presence of an object to a subject.

[48] Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 65.

[49] The doctrine of the Two Truths represents one of the very first teachings of the Buddha. Although there have emerged some doctrinal differences in time and in schools, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, the teaching of different levels of knowledge of reality remains a fundamental universal Buddhist concept (*cf.* Philippe Cornu, *Dizionario del Buddhismo*, translated by Daniela Muggia (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), pp. 182-184).

[50] Sanskrit; the Pali equivalent is *dhamma*.

[51] 'The silence of the Buddha can be considered a central topic regarding the nature of self. The refusal to give metaphysical answers and the care against dogmatic positions about the ultimate elements of existence was reworked in Mahāyāna Buddhism to address the substance of phenomena and the middle way between stating and abstaining to state. *Cf. Ananda Sutta: To Ananda*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 44.10, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Access to Insight* (2012), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn44/sn44.010.than.html (accessed 2014-03-06); Tirupattur Ramaseshayyer Venkatachala Murti, *La filosofia centrale del Buddhismo*, translated by Fabrizio Pregadio (Rome: Ubaldini, 1983 [1955]).

These five aggregates cover all kinds of perceived phenomena, and are said to be the basis of attachment. They describe, indeed, the deep nature of our experience. Ancient Buddhism is mainly preoccupied with refuting the false identification between aggregates and our very identity. When I look for my self, I see my material form (*rūpa*), but my form is not me. Form is not-self:

> 'Bhikkhus, how do you conceive it: is form permanent or impermanent?' — 'Impermanent, venerable Sir'. — 'Now is what is impermanent painful or pleasant?' — 'Painful, venerable Sir'. — 'Now is what is impermanent, what is painful since subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: "This is mine, this is I, this is my self?"' — 'No, venerable Sir'.[52]

Rūpa comprises sensible, physical and material processes. Discontent, frustrated craving, fear of change and death are properly the effect of the instability, impermanence and insubstantiality of what we mistake for sensible stable beings. The same analysis holds for all the five *khandha*.[53] Particularly remarkable is the inclusion of conscience (*viññāṇa*) among the five aggregates. We can find no self in the discriminating function of conscience. The dichotomy of subject and object is in itself only one of the ever changing, conditioned identities we mistake for the essence of our self. I, the self, things, persons are something we cling to, in the illusion of their duration and self-subsistence. The attempt to hold what is impermanent gives rise to frustration and sorrow, so that the so-called 'beings' are designated as clinging-aggregates and are said to be, in themselves, *dukkha*.[54]

The synthetic way, in contrast, is the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In early Buddhism it describes the causal process of existence and its entanglement of mental and physical factors. In later developments of Buddhist philosophy, however, interdependent co-arising becomes more central and serves as a synonym of relativity, non-essentiality and vacuity (*śūnya*) of all things.[55] Instead of essences and identities, we find multiple conditions. Conditions of things and things themselves become the same. Things arise conditioning and conditioned by multiple factors. The formula is recurrent in many of the Buddha's speeches: 'When this is, that is. This arising, that arises. When this is not, that is not. This ceasing, that ceases'.[56] The interdependent co-arising refutes every linear conception of causality, and rejects the idea of cause and effect as separable events:

[52] *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta: The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 22.59, edited and translated from the Pali by Ñanamoli Thera, *Access to Insight* (2010), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.nymo.html (2014-03-06).

[53] *Ibid*.

[54] As mentioned before, in the *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 56.11, the Buddha lists the main examples of suffering and concludes saying: 'In short the five aggregates of attachment are *dukkha*'. This alludes to the less ordinary and more philosophical meaning of *dukkha* which is not just a matter of ethics or psychology, but a character of phenomena themselves, a synonym for imperfection, impermanence, emptiness. *Cf*. Rahula, loc. 545.

[55] Especially in Mādhyamika philosophy, and Tibetan Buddhism. *Cf*. Murti.

[56] Rahula, loc. 1287. Rahula also puts it 'into a modern form: When A is, B is; A arising, B arises; When A is not, B is not; A ceasing, B ceases'. *Cf*. also, for example, *Assutavāsutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya,* 2.12.7.1, in Gnoli, *La rivelazione del Buddha*, Vol. 1, p. 100; *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, 38, in Gnoli, *La rivelazione del Buddha*, Vol. 1, p. 32; *Śālistambasūtra*, in Gnoli, *La rivelazione del Buddha*, Vol. 1, p. 1306.

'Cause and effect inter-are'.[57] Moreover, causes are traceable infinitely, environmentally, contextually and in time. The rise of phenomena is doctrinally explained with a circular chain of simultaneous cosmological and psychological factors:

> And what is dependent co-arising? From ignorance [*avijjā*] as a requisite condition come fabrications [*saṅkhāra*, karmic co-efficients]. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness [*viññāṇa*]. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form [*nāmarūpa*]. From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media [*ṣaḷāyatana*]. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact [*phassa*]. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling [*vedanā*]. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving [*taṇhā*]. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging [*upādāna*]. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming [*bhava*]. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth [*jāti*]. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death [*jarāmaraṇa*], sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play.[58]

According to the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, all beings are considered to be conditioned (*paṭiccasamuppanna*) and conditioning (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) factors in such a radical sense that every single link (*nidāna*) of the circle of causes cannot even be defined, except by mentioning it in its own conditionality:

> [...] A certain monk said to the Blessed One: 'Which aging and death [*jarāmaraṇa*], lord? And whose is this aging and death?'
>
> '*Not a valid question*', the Blessed One said. 'If one were to ask, "Which aging and death? And whose is this aging and death?" and if one were to ask "Is aging and death one thing, and is this the aging and death of someone/something else?" both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. When there is the view that the soul is the same as the body, there isn't the leading of the holy life. And when there is the view that the soul is one thing and the body another, there isn't the leading of the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata points out the Dhamma in between: From birth [*jāti*] as a requisite condition comes aging and death'.[59]

It is worth noting the prominent position ignorance occupies in nearly all the formulations of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Consequently, for the Buddhist, a hypostatising look on reality is the primary cause of the very emergence of phenomena as conventional definite entities, subject to birth and death, trapped in the wheel of *saṃsāra*. Epistemological and ontological levels are not discernible when speaking from a non-conventional standing. There are no distinct discourses about the subjective conditions of knowledge and about reality itself. Speaking about the objectification of concrete realities is speaking about the subject, and vice versa. This kind of interrelated image of reality conveyed by the teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, implies an idea of phenomena, both psychological and physical, as impermanent and empty of any substantial nature. Walpola Rahula points

[57] Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching*, loc. 3231.

[58] *Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta: Analysis of Dependent Co-arising*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 12.2, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Access to Insight* (2010), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.002.than.html (accessed 2014-03-06).

[59] *Avijjapaccaya Sutta: From Ignorance as a Requisite Condition*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 12.35, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Access to Insight* (2010), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.035.than.html (accessed 2014-03-06). My emphasis.

out that the five aggregates analyse the sense of self, while the interdependent co-arising constitutes its synthetic counterpart. Both of them generate not-self [*anattā*] as a natural corollary.[60] Initially connoting the absence of ego or soul within a definite psychological I, *anattā* subsequently indicates the fundamental non-being of all phenomenal selves.

On the fundamental character of not-self, Buddhism adopts a strictly a-metaphysical perspective. While refuting the existence of a substance lying unaffected under the turmoil of the ever-becoming surface of things, Buddhism also dismisses any nihilistic interpretation of *anattā*. Significant in this respect is the silence of Buddha:

> 'Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?'
> When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.
> 'Then is there no self?'
> A second time, the Blessed One was silent.[61]

None of the answers - the Buddha explains later in the *sutta* - would have helped a non-trained mind to let the 'knowledge that all phenomena are not-self' arise. The concept of not-self is so central that the development of later Mahāyāna Buddhism not only maintains this exact same position, but focuses its theoretical attention on emptiness (*śūnyatā*)[62] as the true nature of everything existing.

Within this theoretical picture, early Buddhism states that the three basic characters of existence are impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*).[63] Naess' 'Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism' take into consideration the essential features I outlined while comparing gestalt ontology to the Buddhist philosophy of nature. Naess recognises objects as *entia rationis* under two profiles. On one hand, the concrete contents all have different degrees of impermanence. It is only the abstract structures which acquire a formal fixed identity, being outside experience. On the other hand, objects cannot be identified once and for all as separate, because they are only knots in the net of intrinsic relations. Naess respectively refers to the *anicca* and *anattā* characters. He then draws a parallel between Buddhahood and the concept of self-realisation, the supreme ethical norm of the Ecosophy T system. Many later Buddhist traditions, predominantly in the far East, consider the attainment of enlightenment and liberation a prerogative belonging to every living being. Every being participates in the Buddha Nature, the potential to be free from suffering and to realise one's true nature. Here Naess raises an important point:

[60] *Cf.* Rahula, loc. 1278.

[61] *Ananda Sutta.*

[62] The Sanskrit concept of *śūnyatā* has been widely explored by different philosophical schools and practiced through different meditation techniques. A first explanation of it, although heavily reductive, would be as follows: when we inquiry into the deep nature of an object, we can settle on no essence or conclusive definition of it.

[63] *Cf. Dhammapada*, XX.277-279: '277. "All conditioned things are impermanent [*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*]" — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification. 278. "All conditioned things are unsatisfactory [*Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*]" — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification. 279. "All things are not-self [*Sabbe dhammā anattā*]" — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification'. (*Dhammapada*, XX, edited and translated from the Pali by Acharya Buddharakkhita, *Access to Insight* (2012), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.20.budd.html (accessed 2014-03-06)).

> It is not asserted that a tree defined solely by its primary or 'objective' qualities may attain Buddhahood. Rather, I assert that attainment of Buddhahood is only permissible for gestalts, such as those that connect the tree with all qualities and attain semipermanence through recurring traits.[64]

In this passage Naess defines objects as *entia rationis*, whose concreteness can be found in semipermanent gestalt units,[65] touching a very sensitive point in Buddhist philosophy: when seeing conditionality and relationality in everything, the individual (and its responsibility) does not fade away in the passive acceptance of any mystical dissolving unity. As mentioned earlier, Buddha teaches the self from the point of view of a Middle Way between nihilism (*ucchedavāda*) and substantialism (*sassatavāda*). What remains in the middle way, after rejecting both the extremes, is *tathatā*, (suchness): a paradoxical point ever eluding every attempt of fixation or annihilation. As Naess points out, 'the acceptance that all beings can attain Buddhahood depends upon the rejection of subject-object dualism,'[66] in favour of a view of things as processual, relational instant-events.[67]

Ethical Implications: Self and Others

Ethical implications are considered by Naess to be a spontaneous, direct consequence or inherent aspect of his questioning of environmental ontology. Where beings fade, and leave room for concrete relations, everything appears dependent and conditioned. There is no master, no legitimate value holder subjectively projecting value on selected categories of beings. According to Naess, when we consider entities as concrete contents of experience, the separation of factual and value affirmations is no longer a valid basis for distinguishing between descriptive and prescriptive statements. On the contrary, the *designation* of descriptive elements already implies evaluation within its complexity:

> The tertiary qualities of things have an ontological status which is best expressed by complex relations. [...] In symbolic logic, a tree's sombreness S is represented by a relational symbol S(A,B,C,D,...), where A could be a location on a map, B location of observer, C emotional status of person, D linguistic competence of the describer. There are formidable number of variables compared to technical height, H(P,Q), where P gives the number of units of height, and Q the type of unit. Subjectivism need not to arise in either S or H, if you are able to specify the exact context in which the quality occurs.[68]

[64] Naess, *Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism*, p. 196.
[65] 'The concrete structure may have a lower or higher degree of permanence. The structure of an ecosystem may show notable change during a century or practically none. [...] The concrete contents of reality are shifting. Discontinuity and universal impermanence characterize the world of gestalts. Perhaps not quite in the sense of Buddhism, but in a closely related sense'. (*Ibid.,* p. 195.)
[66] *Ibid*., p. 198.
[67] *Cf*. Naess on 'suchness', in *ibid*., p. 201. Concrete realities as relational instant-events are well documented in the poetic of Japanese Haiku, which can be considered one of the Zen Buddhist traditional arts. Naess, at p. 200, quotes the most famous Haiku poem from Matsuo Bashō: 'Old pond / A frog jumps in / The sound of water,' for its 'high-level expression of a concrete content' from the point of view of gestalt thinking.
[68] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 65.

Naess' theory, then, considers value to be objective; a characterisation that has to be understood while constantly keeping in mind his notion of 'objective'. Evaluative elements, entangled with emotional tones, belong to phenomena themselves.[69] If spontaneous experience is also experience of value, the result is exactly as outlined in deep ecology: a horizontal, anti-hierarchical perspective where everything has intrinsic value, an 'equal right to live and flourish' just for the sake of being, or no value at all. But since we immediately experience value about ourselves and our loved ones, evaluation is not a projection process. Value appears to be the actual concrete experience of a complex quality of phenomena.

The kind of anthropocentrism challenged by the ecocentric perspective is the kind that thrives on the following assumption: humans, being the only subjects of any value assertion, are the only bearers of the right to decide and project value based on their own species and individual preferences or utility. The 'relational-total-field' disrupts the very possibility of a legitimate thinking in that direction, even when it implies humanistic or altruistic care for other entities. Ecosophical thinking means adopting a different phenomenological perspective. On one hand, '"*objects*" will then be defined in terms of gestalts, rather than in terms of heaps of things with external relations and dominated by forces. This undermines the subject-object dualism essential for value subjectivism'.[70] On the other hand, *subjects* are substituted by a processual concept of selves. The self Naess addresses is the relational and processual result of the dissolution of objects as things defined by material properties, in contrast to the subject as an observing and valuing consciousness. All kinds of properties are experienced in the world where the world is intended by gestalts. Value and meaning are not projected by the subject onto the world in a somehow arbitrary manner (whether cultural or individual). Traditionally considered subjective qualities are, then, part of the experienced world. The individual is better defined through a synthetic concept of self, which includes relations with her surrounding.

Self can shrink in an alienated *ego* dimension, or widen towards the *ecological Self* through a process of identification:

> In the shallow ecological movement, intense and wide identification is described and explained psychologically. In the deep movement this philosophy is at least taken seriously: reality consists of wholes which we cut down rather than isolated items which we put together. In other words: there is not, strictly speaking, a primordial causal process of identification, but one of largely unconscious alienation which is overcome in experiences of identity.[71]

The emphasis here is on the recognition of 'self' as inherently shifting and ever-processual. The awareness of the richness of our constitutive relations and

[69] ' [...] value statements are normally made with positive or negative feeling, and it would be nonsensical to ask for neutrality' (*Ibid*., p. 64). Although Naess' credit to Husserl is limited to the concept of *Lebenswelt,* the argument against the subjectivity of value seems largely to the benefit of Husserlian intentionality and the idea that objectivity is value and meaning laden.

[70] Arne Naess, 'Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes', in *Deep Ecology*, edited by Michael Tobias (San Diego: Avant books, 1985), pp. 256-270, at p. 268, my emphasis.

[71] *Ibid*., p. 262.

interdependence tallies a naturally and concretely shifting self-identity: 'The self is as comprehensive as the totality of our identifications'.[72]

As I see it, ethical relation with otherness is implicated in a two-way street by this concept of relational identity. In one direction flows the genealogical side, for which we understand our identity as an expanded and fluid self, far beyond our skin suit. On this causal side, we understand both ourselves and all existing objects as a result of conditions and always in need, vitally dependent on surroundings and circumstances. On the other side flows the idea that every action we take has deeper and larger consequences than the ones we can calculate as relevant. We arrive at a further inversion. Dominion over a lifeless, valueless nature, is converted into a natural extension of responsibility in a potentially infinite way. The theoretical basis of either the idea of calculating the consequences for the other, or representing the other through criteria of moral considerability is lost.[73] The responsible self is the 'ecological Self', which, in the act of realising itself, keeps shifting its self-representation, taking into account the flourishing of others, and making space to his inter-beings. A relational look is the only one providing effective personal motivations to take care of, and to be kind to, Earth. This is why Naess retrieves the Kantian notion of 'beautiful action': only a spontaneous, internalised decision can be called properly 'moral', no imperative has the power to do what 'seeing' things in a different way can.[74]

The Buddhist maximisation of respect and minimisation of harm, expressed for example by the virtue of *ahiṃsā*, is found within a similar ethical implication, and it can be properly said to derive more from a reflection on 'being' than from one on 'ought'. Buddhisms are first and foremost practical philosophies, where the soteriological problem intrinsically weaves the study of logic and reality with moral practice. As Keown points out, the goal in Buddhist philosophy 'is not simply the attainment of an intellectual vision of reality or the mastery of the doctrine (although it includes these things) but primarily the *living* of a full and rounded human life'.[75] So, even though 'the malfunction of *vedanā* [sensation] and *saññā* [perception] [...] is the basic soteriological problem of Buddhism,'

> [i]mmoral conduct [...] comes about through a misapprehension of the facts (most fundamentally involving the belief in a self) together with an emotional investment made on the basis of that factual error (attachment to the imputed self). It is commonly assumed in connection with Buddhism that the fundamental problem is a simple lack of knowledge. This underestimates the power of the emotions to dominate and manipulate reason, to 'drag it around like a slave,' as Plato puts it.[76]

[72] *Ibid*., p. 261.

[73] For a clarification of the problems of the 'moral considerability' criterion, *cf*. the analysis of Thomas H. Birch, 'Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration', *Environmental Ethics* 15:4 (1993), pp. 313-332.

[74] *Cf*. Arne Naess, 'Beautiful Action. Its Function in the Ecological Crisis', *Environmental Values* 2:1 (1993), pp. 67-71. In the article, Naess retrieves the pre-critical Kantian distinction between moral and beautiful actions. The keynote of the article is the statement that 'acting from inclination is superior to acting from duty'. The remark supports the idea of identification following by a deepening of awareness and a change of outlook on the relational dimensions of reality.

[75] Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, p. 1. Emphasis in original.

[76] *Ibid.,* p. 67.

This perspective can highlight an ethical significance of knowledge that in Naess tends to maintain the necessity of rational argumentation. The insufficiency of theoretical knowledge for the attainment of liberation is the reason for the recurring idea that wisdom must be practised through right mindfulness. The ancient ethical path for liberation from *dukkha*, the Noble Eightfold Path expounded in the Fourth Noble Truth[77] is composed of three main areas, namely *paññā*, *sīla*, *samādhi*: wisdom, ethics and meditative concentration. These are mutually intertwined. Furthermore, the path itself begins with the first step of 'right view' (*sammā diṭṭhi*), a change of perspective on reality which concurs with a change of attitude. 'Right cognition is successful cognition, that is to say, it is cognition followed by a resolve or judgement, which is, in its turn, followed by a successful action'.[78]

It is also worth considering the weaving of worldview and practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in which the tradition of the Noble Eightfold Path leaves room for a special focus on the pair *prajñā*, (wisdom) and *karuṇā* (compassion) as the complementary features of the spiritual path of the *bodhisattva* (the future enlightened one). Aspects of the Mahāyāna's understanding of compassion, especially in Mādhyamika philosophy, can further the interpretation of philosophical aspects of Naess' identification which are less explored but worth mentioning. As Naess observes: 'compassion extended to all beings implies 'seeing oneself in all things', a process of identification. Without this, things appear foreign, *devoid of life*, and impossible as objects of compassion'.[79]

Comparable to the ecosophical concept of 'identification', the Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) arises spontaneously when *anicca* and *anattā* are truly seen. In Naess the overcoming of the subject/object dichotomy removes the ethical separation of *altruism* and *egoism* by refuting the ontological separation between *ego* and *other* (*alter* in Latin). Similarly, already in early Buddhism, the awareness of impermanence and interdependence generates the capacity to see yourself in others, and see others in you. 'When watching after oneself, one watches after others. When watching after others, one watches after oneself'.[80] This celebrated passage from the Pali Canon, however, cannot be mistaken for a mere suggestion of voluntary solidarity (*anukampā*). Compassion is a universal, object-free attitude, stemming from the deep understanding of the true nature of being, of the universal character of *dukkha* and of the interrelatedness connecting all beings with my self.

In Mādhyamika philosophy, compassion occupies an interesting philosophical place. The Sanskrit term *saṃvṛti*, reality conventionally seen, means that everything exists conditionally, relative and void of essence. Things are relative and therefore empty. In terms useful to our discussion, we can say that, within this view, establishing value in

[77] See again the teaching of Benares, or *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 56.11. The eight steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are: (1) Right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*); (2) Right intention (*sammā saṅkappa*); (3) Right speech (*sammā vācā*); (4) Right action (*sammā kammanta*); (5) Right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*); (6)Right effort (*sammā vāyāma*); (7) Right mindfulness (*sammā sati*); (8) Right concentration (*sammā samādhi*).

[78] Stcherbatsky, p. 59.

[79] Naess, *Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism*, p. 196. Emphasis in original.

[80] *Sedaka Sutta: At Sedaka*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 47.19, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Access to Insight* (2010), available online at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn47/sn47.019.than.html (accessed 2014-03-06).

relation is impossible.[81] The Sanskrit term *prajñā* is seeing, realising the *śūnyatā* (emptiness) of everything in existence. At the same time, the counterpart of *prajñā* is *karunā*, compassion. *Karunā* is the worldly virtue *par excellence*, for example expressed in the bodhisattva resolution to delay the ultimate liberation to help liberate all beings. *Śūnyatā* is not a mere vision, a theoretical conquest, but it conveys a practical-existential attitude. The eradication of ego and its attachment does not lead to disinterest or moral detachment, but to compassion for all beings, finally seen as empty, relative, and trapped in suffering.[82]

We can successfully interpret Naess' identification as intended to maintain the movement of continuously re-entering relations, or different gestalt configurations. Relationality and identification entail a questioning of one's self-identity through wider and further dimensions of meaning and otherness. This interpretation emphasises the exercise of avoiding the hypostatisation of the subjects of the relation itself. In addition, this reading can clarify a difficult criticism, often raised against relationalist positions, which would not account for the implication of responsibility and care for others that follows from a relational view.[83] In the type of wisdom required to suspend the reification of the relational terms lies the ethical aspect of relation. Wisdom as implied in eco*sophy* cannot be merely and conclusively replaced by the enforcement of a normative system. Without wisdom there is no morality. Wisdom has to do with the capacity to suspend the objectification and the fixed representations of others, letting others emerge, and allowing more and more relations to occur.

Concluding Remarks

As is now clear, the arguments and terminology of ecosophy and Buddhist philosophies do not completely overlap. Nevertheless, a comparison with a heterogeneous number of Buddhist sources is useful for understanding the horizon within which some of Naess' statements are placed. This is because a reopening of the discussion about the nature of phenomena is in play in both cases. Further interpretation of Buddhist sources also helps to problematize central issues raised by the ecosophical approach to environmental challenges. The Buddhist traditions, then, can offer a strong case for adopting this approach as valid and fruitful.

Among the fundamental ecosophical issues that can be addressed through the lens of Buddhist doctrines are the emphasis on the change of outlook and our sense of reality in the face of practical and existential crisis;[84] a relational and conditioned understanding of all phenomena and the need to avoid clinging onto essences and definitions; a relational understanding of the personal self; compassion or identification

[81] *Cf.* Nāgārjuna's confutation of relation in *Mādhyamakakārikā*, 14, in *La rivelazione del Buddha*, Vol. 2, edited by Raniero Gnoli (Milano: Mondadori, 2004, pp. 585-656, and the analysis in Magno.

[82] See Murti, and Magno.

[83] *Cf.* Ives.

[84] This aspect recalls the stress in some climate change social research on the 'ability to change paradigms' as the most important leverage point for climate change adaptation. See Karen O'Brien, 'The Courage to Change: Adaptation from the Inside-Out', in *Successful Adaptation: Linking Science and Practice in Managing Climate Change Impacts*, edited by Susanne C. Moser and Maxwell T. Boykoff (Routledge: London, 2013).

as spontaneous outcomes of the acknowledgement of this relationality, also to be understood as requiring continuous questioning of the pattern of relations we take to define ourselves.

In order to open new ways to face our current environmental and climate challenges, meaning and value need to remain a continuous ethical quest of the greatest intersubjective importance. Without this kind of wisdom and compassion for others, no normative prescriptions can produce any change in our treatment of ecological issues.

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Publication made possible by generous support from the Swedish Research Council.