

Bill Devall and George Sessions
Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered
(Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1985, 267pp.)

In his *Small is Beautiful* Fritz Schumacher wrote “*In the affairs of men, there always appears to be a need for at least two things simultaneously, which on the face of it, seems to be incompatible and to exclude one another. We always need both freedom and order. We need the freedom of lots and lots of small, autonomous units, and, at the same time, the orderliness of large-scale, possibly global, unity and co-ordination.*”

Likewise, there must be transformation both at the individual level as well as collective change. The two are closely linked. Only a whole and autonomous person can act, resist, walk away, and build something new. However, collective change is something more than the sum of individual changes. Collective change is a vision for a society. Thus individual change and political action must go together.

One of the predicaments facing the emerging Green-ecology political movements is the need to gather enough people together to be a credible political force – which means general agreement upon a small number of basic options – while having a deep enough political philosophy so that people are not seduced by the current political parties using a few Green slogans. There is wide-spread support for reform environmentalism which aims to stop gross pollution, extensive despoliation of land, lakes, and seas, mistreatment of animals. But those who support such localized reforms may not see the need for a basic transformation of society and the system of values.

Yet we need planet-wide changes, for ecological awareness has shown us that the planet we live on is one inter-related system upon which we are all dependent. In order to survive, we must learn to work together to build a world beyond war, a society with sustainable development – which means sustainable agriculture and appropriate technology, wholistic approaches to education and health, a spiritual outlook based on reverence for life. Albert Schweitzer from his work in Africa re-launched the human-scale revolution by insisting that production ought to serve peoples’ real needs; that there must be a new relationship with nature; that solidarity must replace antagonism; and that there must be sane consumption and active individual participation in society.

The world as an interrelated system has come to be called the “Gaia hypothesis” after the work of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulies who wrote “*We defined Gaia as a complex entity involving the earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil, the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet. Gaia remains a hypothesis, but much evidence suggests that many elements of this system act as the hypothesis predicts.*” (Gaia is the first goddess of early Greek thought. From the void, neither born nor destroyed – what the Chinese call the Tao – Gaia danced forth and rolled herself into a spinning ball.)

Systems are integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller units. The systems approach emphasizes basic principles of organization. Thus, nature has an order, a pattern that as humans we need to understand, to respect, and to preserve. This order has intrinsic value and is the base of Life.

This book is an effort to outline the rich spiritual-religious-mystical component of the Green movements. The term “deep ecology” was coined in 1973 by Arne Naess, a social scientist and philosopher who has written widely on Mahatma Gandhi, non-violence, and the Buddha. He wanted to describe the deeper more spiritual approach to nature exemplified by Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold. This is a most useful analysis of Green values. The book should be widely used for discussion and political planning.

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