

ECOSOPHIA – POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS

Henrieta Anișoara ȘERBAN¹

Abstract. *The study relates the term „ecosophia”, or ecological wisdom, to ecology and political philosophy and observes the consequences or such correlations. This wisdom is assessed in its philosophical and political aspects, since it sustains an ideology of either moderate or radical change. The ethics inspired by ecosophia is not mere idealism or „eutopia”, but a chance for a prolonged existence for humanity, and, at the same time, a chance for humanity to show its true and highly qualitatively „humane” meaning. As more or less radical as it may be, ecosophia has to mediate and amend technological progress, with wisdom.*

Keywords: political ecology, ecosophia, ecological reform, social change.

Motto: *Political ecology construes the reality of environment as a political entity...*

Political ecology concerns the study of the relationships between political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes.

Social sciences include the discussions triggered by the ecological thought and relate these to the aspects generally correlated with political economy.²

Ecology, generated by the natural sciences, is based on environmentalism, another expression for the activism of contesting political thought in political science.

We believe that environmentalism is part of political science, comprising the concept of ecosystem relevant not only in the natural science and for a good civic education, but also to the study the political system. In essence, the idea that there are political decisions that maintain and enhance democratic ecosystems, beyond the situations when ecology is the best solution in technical, economic, ethical or electoral terms, only captures the essence of the relationship between environmentalism and politics. The international and national support for ecology presupposes:

¹PhD, Institute of Philosophy and Psychology “C. Rădulescu-Motru”

²The term "political ecology" was first coined by anthropologist Eric R. Wolf in 1972 in an article entitled "Ownership and Political Ecology," in which he discusses how local rules of ownership and inheritance "mediate between the pressures emanating from the larger society and the exigencies of the local ecosystem" (Wolf 1972, p. 202). Peet and Watts 1996, p. 6.

abandoning the race for productivity at any cost and the consumer society, changing agricultural policy and the policy on nuclear energy. Local action (and meditation) can lead to ecological decisions limiting / regulating the movement of cars, for instance, or, in order to change polluting facilities in enterprises, etc. Scientific warnings on, for example, the state of the ozone layer, the degree of pollution of various areas of water, land, air, the extinction of species of plants or animals, or even data and analysis about the stress of city life are provided by ecology, the natural science, but since they widely echoed among population and specialists now they succeed to create popular movements that affect the initial passivity of governance. Nowadays there are not only ecological movements, but also numerous green political parties. Ecology, as a manner of thinking, as pro-ecological attitude and action is the future, but this future is determined by two factors - the public opinion and economic factors.

The most interesting topics in this respect are those marked not only by political ecology and political economy, but the ones influenced by philosophical wisdom as well, more precisely, by *ecosophia*: marginalization and conflict, conservation and degradation, control and identity, ecological movement.³

Environmentalism, ecologism as a thinking, pro-ecological attitude and action has a future, but this future is determined by two factors: public opinion factor and economic factor. We witness the development of a reformist ecology that extends ethical consideration beyond humans to all living beings. Meanwhile, a more extended and serious ecology, a deep ecology, leads the reform further deconstructing the traditional humanist environmentalism, and supplementing it with additional value represented by the diversity of life, diversity contributing to the goals of humanism.⁴

³ Robbins, 2004, p. 14.

⁴ Arne Naess, *The Deep Ecological Movement. Some Philosophical Aspects*, Philosophical Inquiry, vol. III, 1986, p. 14.

⁵ The environmentalism has an intricate relationship to the feminisms, and both find their place in a wider postmodern, contemporary cultural climate, which enhances the philosophy of deep ecology. Postmodernism discredits the great narratives of humankind such as: "progress", "production", "consumer society" (all of them un-ecological), as well as "the male position 'scientifically' justified in terms of 'natural' leadership and hegemony, in relation to women, naturally' subjected to men" (in my view, the main un-feminist narrative). Therefore, the insistence on women's rights, to respect for women both in public and in private and for providing the possibility to promote their key positions, management, and the insistence on the environmental responsibility in the exploitation of the environment find a stronger and more convincing echo. Nature as women has been sung in poetry and at best ignored, when they were not heavily exploited in everyday life.

A growing number of militant individuals get involved in this language “game” of ecological participation, challenging the established traditional power, which proved to be un-ecological, and technology and modernization oriented (at all costs). And all these costs represent also a democratic stake. The question is whether the state or political organizations of the future, become feminists and environmentalists, in their attachment to democracy (for these two orientations go often hand in hand). Will the established power defend the rights of the ecosystem?⁵ Will these public goods ever become a priority?

Within this context there is even a cultural climate that constitutes feminisms and ecologism(s) as “natural” allies. This is especially true considering New Age philosophy, a generic name for an eclectic design (philosophical, cultural, social, political and mystical), announcing the dawn of a new union both among the nations and, more generally, between the various dichotomies (that is, inclusively the harmony between sexes), toward collaboration, “de-individuation”, and World peace.

Meanwhile, nowadays we witness the emulation of diverse philosophical and religious compared and complementary studies, related to the sciences of nature to the research of the inexplicable, of the paranormal matters, to the promotion of the inner forces of the human beings, for equilibrium and continuity, in their most generous, spiritual and broad meanings and in all the spheres of human existence.

F. Capra, one of the very important names of the New Age movement and ideology, indicates the unbalance generated within Western society by the exaggerated value placed on rational knowledge, science, competition and the exploitation of the resources of nature, to the detriment of intuitive knowledge, religion, cooperation, and of the protection of nature. The consequence, as shown by the same author is the crisis related to the health of the individual, society, eco-system. Within this conceptual context feminism, and especially the feminism that is characteristic to the New Age movement is related to the interest for the equilibrium of the ecosystem, with the cherishment of continuity and of the totality. Thus, New Age philosophy is a holistic philosophy retrieving the themes of ecology (along with feminism, and other topics) as domains worth to be studied from the perspective of respect, protection and rights.

From this perspective, political ecology differs from apolitical ecological studies by politicizing environmental issues and phenomena as well as philosophical issues related to the human manner of approaching nature.

In my view political ecology is a development of “deep ecology”, a phrase introduced by Arne Naess to environmental literature in 1973.⁶

It was the most influential expression of the concern about the detrimental environmental effects of modern industrial technology. Deep ecology was both a philosophy and a practical movement. Activists and well-known writers like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Aldo Leopold were involved in this movement, too. Philosopher Gifford Pinchot also attempted to raise awareness in ecological matters with his writings approaching a "wise-use" conservation philosophy.

Naess made a presentation in Bucharest in 1972, at the Third World Future Research Conference. In his speech, he approached the philosophical background of the ecology movement and its main focus on an ethic respecting nature and the inherent worth of other beings. In other words, not only human beings are considered as ends in themselves, as sustained by Kant, but also the other beings enjoy an ethical worth in themselves. This philosophical background entangles political and social activism different in diverse cultures but united by this constant represented by the ethic of respect for nature and the inherent worth of other beings.

In his theoretical writings Naess employed two methods: one of historical analysis and the other one of interpretation of contemporary aspects, ideas and movements. The results of his study emphasize two different forms of environmentalism: the "long-range deep ecology movement" and the "shallow ecology movement". The interpretation of the word "deep" occasioned in time some debates.⁷

The main characteristics of the deep ecology movement were correlated with its accent placed on the inherent value of all living beings. These characteristics were central in shaping environmental policies. Those who work for social changes based on this recognition are motivated by love of nature as well as for humans. They rose the point that our societies and cultures should radically reshape the attitude toward industrialism,

⁶Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements", *Philosophical Inquiry*, 16, 1973; Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement. Some Philosophical Aspects", *Philosophical Inquiry*, vol. III, 1986; și Arne Naess, "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes", in A. Tobias (ed.), *Deep Ecology*, Avant Books, San Diego, 1985.

⁷The "deep" movement involves the deep questioning of the environmental fundamental causes. Naess considered that shallow approach stops before the fundamental change taken to its upmost consequences, often promoting technological solutions (for example recycling, increased efficiency of engines, export-driven monocultural organic agriculture) based on values that still could be consumption-oriented and on the methods of the traditional industrial economy. Conversely, the long-range deep approach implies a deep reform with the aim to redesign the political, industrial and economic systems in order to preserve first of all the ecological and cultural diversity of natural systems.

with radical changes in traditional values and practices, making a priority from the maintenance of the diversity and beauty of the world, and of the human cultures.

The term “ecology” was used for the first time by Ernst Haeckel as early as 1868 with attention to the inter-dependences among organisms within the world of nature. Naess defined ecology as “the scientific interdisciplinary study of life conditions of the inter-related organisms, also in relationship to their environment, be it organic or inorganic.”⁸

Hence, we notice the convergent orientation of the ecological and sociological approach, since they support the common goals of “healthy and independent transactions” between people and their surrounding environments. Ecologist actions are part of a social practice already established in the 70s. However, significant progress in this direction owes its existence to field theories such as “deep ecology” (Naess 1989) and “social ecology” (Bookchin, 1980, 1982).

These led to another perspective on environmental work, less mechanistic, more emancipating and less insistent on hierarchy, as revealed in the following eight principles enlightening for the novelty of this approach. The changes that occurred are consistent with the critical, feminist and postmodern, critiques which reflect the epistemological effort to understand persons-in-their environment, and power the dynamics of phenomena occurring in social processes, as an inherent transaction that takes place in everyday life (Chambon and Irving 1994, Van Den Bergh 1995, Ife in 1997, Leonard 1997). Earliest conceptualization of ecology in social practice is to simplify the mechanistic and modeling of type systems theory (see Auerswald 1968, Germain 1978, 1981, Meyer 1983).

Edgar Auerswald (1968) was among the pioneers who worked to integrate ecology, and more general systems theory in social practice, so that the area of ecosystems and that of green practice had both won their substance. With the evolution of ideas, ecological theory has come to be specifically refereeing to transactional processes that occur in society as in the cultural and natural environment, and less to the individual components of nature, taken either as individual components or within the environment, in a given system (Woodrow 1983).

⁸Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, translated by David Rothenberg, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 36.

“The ecology of human development implies the scientific study of the mutual and progressive accommodation among the active human being, in continuous development and the changing properties of the immediate environment lived by a developing person as this process becomes affected by these “sceneries”, as well as by the wider contexts of inclusion for these environments” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 21). This provides an accurate idea for what Murray Bookchin (1982) calls “social ecology”.

Such models have proliferated; with the models “life” as was that of Carel Germain and Alex Gitterman’s (1980). They offered more of a guiding theory to practice, than practical prescriptions themselves. Greif and Lynch (1983) observed that sociological practice is consistently “a fragmented vision of sociological practice based rigidly on a single method derived from the study given the circumstances”⁹ which accurately described the earlier sociological attempts (one more instance where ecology and sociology concurred to the description of reality). The opinion of the sociologists, the reflections on their own field, the extension or the necessary demarcation of sociology against other fields had influence in different areas of ecology, for instance in training ecological activists, in describing their role as agents of change in society, in the study of the importance of public opinion and information campaigns for ecology, etc.

Although some sociologists still consider environmental models as a type of system theory, there is a positive aspect, as Jerome Wakefield (1996a) argues that such parting of ways with practice caused the ecological theory to be redundant to sociological work, since, as applied discipline, ecology should base itself on the empirically tested aspects. Thus, in ecology appeared new sub-domains: the study of the animal behavior (etology) and the study of the effects of the physical environment on the human psychic (the ecological psychology) and the social knowledge of ecological aspects but not necessarily only of these aspects within the contexts of everyday life (etnology).

Ecology, as philosophy, highlights diversity and complexity of the real world, the world of life that is both biological and socio-cultural. Therefore, authors as Bookchin challenge ecology, feminism and community development to follow through specific movements, achieving a non-hierarchical society, where the domination of nature by human beings, along the rifts of gender, race and class is to be abolished. Bookchin is in this respect a neo-anarchist writer who takes from the study of ecology the necessary metaphors to outline the path toward a society free of social oppression. This author is also one of the representatives of radical environmentalism—*deep ecology*—struggling to remove the weak ecology reform representative for the mid of the 80s—*shallow ecology*. According to Bookchin there are neither “kings of the animals” nor “ants of lower rank”.

⁹Geoffrey L. Greif, Arthur A. Lynch. “The Eco-Systems Perspective.” in *Clinical Social Work in the Eco-Systems Perspective*, edited by Carol H. Meyer. New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 54.

Ideas like those of the author, prepared the way, by informing and educating public opinion to the spirit of a new environmentalism first environmental action plan of mass activism and democratic participation and secondly, for the reception of his ideas Næss the so-called “deep ecology”.

With Næss, deep ecology is the study of mutual dependence, found in all aspects of an ecosystem. The intrinsic value of each component is independent of the value that human beings traditionally assign those components. (Taylor 1994). The concept of deep ecology states that there is no separation between organic and non-organic elements. While radical environmentalists call for more perspective and for gaining distance from anthropocentric humanism to the benefit of the eco-centrism guided by the standard of self-completion for all beings, the eco-sociologists claim that people are aware of the nature itself and therefore will create anarchist and egalitarian societies, which are based on the recognition that their existence is inextricably linked to human welfare that of the natural world, on which human life itself depends.

Deep ecology holds that the ethical domain should be extended beyond the human beings as a species, and to support this, it structures a conceptual architecture formed by a diversity of ethical theories where moral consideration is directed to other beings than the human beings, too. Within these theories, the species to which any being belongs to is not important, since the species, affirm these authors of the new ecology, and does not constitute a valid moral criterion.

For this reason, one must search for a different, stronger and more comprising ethic fundament, that would allow to the non-human beings the right to respect and moral consideration equal to that for humans, the radical reform is that this the value in itself for a (any) being.

Postmodernity witnessed many interpretations of the slogan “I am animal”, in the attempt to reclaim the interest for nature and the challenge of the refusal of hierarchies related to the empire of nature. Derrida deconstructed the notions of animalism and humanity at once with a multiplex view where “the plural of animals” could be “heard in the singular”. He considers that there is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit and thus, we have to envisage the existence of “living creatures” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.

The interesting aspect in this perspective proposed by Derrida is that this does not mean *ignoring* or *effacing* everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating *a single large set*, or *a*

fundamentally homogenous and continuous family tree extended from the *animot* to the *homo* (*faber, sapiends*, or whatever else).

The Derriderian perspective is rather a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits emphasizing the fact that among non-humans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. "From the outset there are animals and, let's say, *l'animot*. The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority; it is also a crime. Not a crime against animality precisely, but a crime of the first order against the animals, against animals. Do we agree to presume that every murder, every transgression of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" concerns only man (a question to come) and that in sum there are only crimes "against humanity?"¹⁰

The criterion according to which a being acquires value in itself from a moral standpoint proves to be different for each of the representatives of this version of ecology. According to Peter Singer, criterion according to which a being acquires value in itself is the *interest* and for Thomas Regan, the criterion for a being to have a value in itself is the fact that that certain being possesses a life.¹¹ Deep ecology can be termed as radical ecology and requires a reversal of the epistemological paradigm that dominated until recently Western societies. Philosophically speaking, it is, first, a deconstruction of the entire tradition of Western humanities.

This tradition puts first the human being in all its essential (ontological, ethical, legal etc.) aspects which, after followers of "deep ecology" should be changed urgently, and secondly, all by these authors, there is a critical need (and urgency) to address more versions of ecological reform, even if considered to be incomplete and naive. Deep ecology is therefore a revolutionary current, while it is still based on a metaphysics, epistemology and a new cosmology and environmental ethic, dealing in a totally unique manner with the relationship between a new man and planet respected in detail and above all through its components possessing life. Arne Naess¹² presented the key terms and phrases at the basis of *deep ecology*:

¹⁰ From Jacques Derrida, „The Animal that Therefore I Am”, transl. by David Wills, excerpt available at <http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v28/v28n2.derrida.html>

¹¹ După Tincu Andreia, *Etica mediului*, 2004. http://sacri.ro/files/texte/_ftn77

¹² Arne Naess, *op.cit.*, p.29

1) Well-being and flourishing of human and non human life on earth are values in themselves. These values are independent of the utility that non-human world would have it for human purposes.

2) The richness and diversity of the forms of life contribute to the accomplishment of these values and are therefore also values in themselves.

3) People have the right to reduce this richness and diversity of life but in the extreme, to meet vital needs.

4) The flowering of human life and culture are compatible with a substantial decrease in human population. This decline is required precisely for the flourishing of non-human life.

5) Human intervention in non-human world is excessive and the situation is deteriorating rapidly.

6) One must, therefore, change our very serious political reporting to the environment, as well at the level of the economic, technological and ideological structures. The result of this complex operation is expected to be completely different from the current general state of the environment (and also in what it concerns the relationships human-environment).

7) The ideological change would be mainly to reconsider the quality of life, rather than to envision, at all costs, a higher standard of living. We should seriously insist on educating and raising the awareness of the difference between *big* and *great*.

8) All those who subscribe to the above mentioned points already enounced have the obligation, either directly or indirectly, to engage in achieving these necessary changes.

Here there is a theoretical, philosophical and ideological attack on the prejudice of anthropocentrism that transforms the world into a theatre meant to accommodate human actions. From this perspective, deep ecology appears as a theoretical construct targeted to raise awareness and a consciousness of anti-”human chauvinism” for the human population of the planet.

This philosophical endeavor sustains that our environment is not the periphery of an idealized human existence oriented toward spiritual, technological and civilization achievements, but the very stake of human existence, both physically and from an ontological, axiological, or legal point of view, too. Nevertheless, this change of the public opinion toward ecosophia and deep ecology would not entertain any impact unless it succeeds to generate a green consciousness for the political leaders and all the decision making factors of this globalized world.

Among the newer and fresher postmodern philosophical standpoints on contemporary world and its matters, Gilles Lipovetsky situates

protection of nature at the privileged centre of preoccupations and ideals of our contemporary conscience. We live in a post-moral era, he states, as underlined by this author in several instances, and this era has as one of the main characteristics the ascension of the new values, which are centered on nature. Post-moral era is governed by the ethics of environment. Nature represents nowadays the “common patrimony of humanity,” people are citizens of the world—“our country is the planet” - in a global village formed by a natural contract. Even if this conscience thrives as a fashion, this author notices that it represents a stake for the green planetary conscience.

Nevertheless, eco-sophia seems to be a greater philosophical preoccupation for the neo-anarchist thinkers. Among these, Wolfgang Schirmacher, from the Polytechnic University in Hamburg meditates on the subject of “Eco-Sophia”, from the perspective of neo-anarchist humanism who should be an “Artist of Life” in order to be able to qualify for the title of “human being”.¹³ The author notices that as long as there are states there will be no true knowledge about the human individual, for we are keeping ourselves concealed and fear the sanctions of the rulers.

As Schirmacher explains, there is a tradition of philosophical thought that benefited ecosophia initiated by Heidegger: “Thinking with a critical turn toward language and contemporary times as well as ecological re-thinking is indebted to Heidegger for having been made aware of a “trace” so inconspicuous that it went unnoticed by pre-Heideggerian criticism of technology and culture. Heidegger himself must have had only a vague premonition initially that the odd-sounding “question concerning the meaning of Being” signalled the definite end of our way of life developed over the course of millennia. (...) Critics of reason and alternative thinkers of all orientations from Michel Foucault to Jacques Derrida, from Richard Rorty to Hans-Peter Dürr-have fruitfully taken up Heidegger’s initiative.”¹⁴

The human being is defined in relation to the other human and non-human beings, in relation to nature and the natural world. In replacing the world of nature with the world of technology, politics and national states, the being loses most of its authenticity. Paradoxically, we can perceive the human being as an “artificial being by nature”.

¹³Wolfgang Schirmacher, “Eco-Sophia – The Artist of Life,” *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, no. 9: Ethics and Technology. Ed. Carl Mitcham, JAI Press: Greenwich/London 1989, pp.125-134

¹⁴*Ibidem*, p. 126.

Schirmacher insists that the “meaning of being” reveals that the contemporary human being is the result of the “professionalization of our global behavior and relations”, that is, an artificial being by nature. In the most desirable event that the human individual lives in accord with the cosmic home, this happens as a worldly-wise technician and not as a nature-happy dreamer!¹⁵

From this perspective, learning from nature, finding natural ways of life, an ethics of partnership between human beings and nature-these are hopes necessarily betrayed. For we ourselves are the ones who suddenly take nature's standpoint so as to sneak a legitimating which can never be ours. We may strive for such identification with nature, the phenomenon of the whole, but as individual beings our claim is insupportable. Hegel called such immediacy plain “terror”.¹⁶

And Wolfgang Schirmacher continues, capturing one of the most important ideas of this analysis: “Our private life is a defense technology necessary against the crude political technology-the state! The ignorance of the essential questions of our time has increased despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the flood of information. The over-informed citizen now chooses the assumed security of traditional solutions but will still only gain an ever more apparent absence of governability in public matters. But institutions and artifacts are long-lived; the walls will still be standing and the advertising billboards will still be legible when there is no longer anyone alive who knows their meaning. Do only a negative ethics remain for *Eco-Sophia*, does it rest with this bearer of wisdom to teach us as a species to die and to issue the death certificate for humankind with the exact date to be filled in later?”¹⁷

The “technological suicide” indicated by the Heideggerian critique of technology and by his followers becomes a danger only in the absence of pragmatic wisdom that leaves for technology solely a pragmatic value, a thinking that places nature and posterity at the same level, and that places the value of life in the equilibrium of scientific and technological progress with spiritual advancement.

¹⁵*Ibidem*, p. 129.

¹⁶This constitutes as well the origin of the sensationalism that makes vantage the TV shows of the paradigm „Survivor”.

¹⁷*Ibidem*, p.132.

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