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Deep Ecology as an Aesthetic Movement

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ABSTRACT: Many deep ecologists call for a 'new ecological ethic'. If this ethic is meant to be a moral ethic, then deep ecology fails. However if deep ecology is interpreted as an aesthetic movement, then it is both philosophically coherent and practically adequate.

KEYWORDS: Deep ecology, morality, aesthetics, nonanthropocentrism.

For the purposes of this paper modern environmental thought may be divided into two camps. The first camp is populated by those whose concern for the environment follows from their concern for the satisfaction of particular human ends. These people conceive of nature and its importance from within a broadly *anthropocentric* framework.¹ The second camp is populated by those whose concern is to develop a theoretical and practical appreciation of the environment *in itself*, without relying upon the anthropocentric framework.² This aspiration for a nonanthropocentric 'ecological ethic' is, in Arne Naess' language, the aspiration for a *deep*, rather than a *shallow*, environmentalism.³ Deep environmentalism (or 'deep ecology') involves, as Robert Goodin persuasively argues,⁴ the attribution of moral value to 'the natural', where 'the natural' is that in the world which is as it is independently of substantial human modification.⁵ The primary imperative of this 'new ethic' is that we conserve and preserve wild nature, where this means both wilderness, and those non-domesticated species still remaining in the world. On the meta-ethical level, and precisely because of the repudiation of the anthropocentric framework for viewing nature, deep ecologists often find it important to understand the value of the natural in strongly objectivist or realist terms. To defend a subjectivist account of environmental value can easily seem to import a kind of Protagorean relativism in which ultimately humanity provides 'the measure of all things.'

In this paper, which is to be understood as a response to William Grey's recent dismissal of deep ecology as a moral movement,⁶ I wish to understand deep ecology's call for a new ecological ethic as a call to view wild nature as an *aesthetic* phenomenon, rather than as a moral rival to the humanistic ethic of

environmentalism which characterises our first camp. Only if we do this, I shall argue, can we make sense of the deep ecological concern for wild nature. In particular, properly developed, the aesthetic reading gives us the only viable model for a nonanthropocentric phenomenology of natural awareness. Further, only on the aesthetic reading does value realism have a chance.

Let me make it clear that this 'understanding' involves a reconceptualisation of deep ecology as its proponents typically understand it.⁷ My aim is to reconstruct deep ecology in a way that is both rationally coherent, and which does better justice than the moral reading in specifying the basis of our concern for wild nature.

Before moving on, let me make it clear that it is *not* my intention to run down deep ecology by viewing it as an aesthetic movement. The reconceptualisation I offer is not intended in a debunking spirit.⁸ The importance of the aesthetic in human life is not to be underestimated. Depending on the way one approaches this importance, it is a matter of avoiding the stultification of terminal boredom, or of ensuring the possibility of that creative imagination which makes meaning come alive. Consider the Platonic trilogy of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, *sans* the latter. Without an aesthetic delight in discovering the nature of reality, the True becomes an uninteresting and lifeless body of propositions, useful, if at all, in a merely strategic or utilitarian sense, while morality or the Good uninformed by the aesthetic imagination, is an equally lifeless matter of discovering and upholding the determinations of an oppressively rigid 'Duty'. Certainly the individual or community which finds nothing of beauty in the world and their life in it, is in a pretty bad way. As we shall see, it is one of the results of viewing deep ecology as an aesthetic movement that we can interpret it as a protest against the loss of a sense of beauty in things of the human world. Our aesthetic imagination, for the deep ecologist, finds no succour at the breast of our anthropocentric lives and concerns, and so is driven to escape (or retreat) to the nonanthropocentric world of the 'natural'.

The grounds for this reading of deep ecology will come out later; for the present our concern is with the meaning of the call for a new ecological ethic. The best way to approach this is sympathetically, accepting that it is, as it purports to be, a call to moral concern.

The first point is that deep ecologists do mean a *new* ethic. It is not a question of simply *extending* the range of moral patients beyond the limits of the human.⁹ This kind of moral extensionism suffers from a fatal flaw for the deep ecologist. The flaw is that extensionism is inevitably human-centred (anthropogenic, if not precisely anthropocentric) in a way that rules out the possibility of a genuine, and genuinely universal, respect for nature.¹⁰ Extensionism presupposes that our moral concerns lie originally within the human world, and attempts, from the basis this provides, to encourage us to generalise that concern outside of the merely human world. If first we enter the moral world by becoming aware, indeed being forced to become aware, that other people may have interests, needs

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and desires which one cannot simply ride roughshod over in the pursuit of selfish interest, later on, according to the extensionist, we may become aware, and be forced by our fellows to become aware, that beings other than human may equally have needs, interests and desires in this sense.

Clearly the extensionist position depends heavily on David Hume's notion of 'sympathy', or, more accurately, of *empathetic identification*, for it is only through such identifications that we are able to comprehend accurately the needs, interests and desires of another, and so take them into due account when we deliberate. The difficulty for the deep ecologist is that the need for empathetic identification seems to imply the kind of substantive human-centredness which rules out a genuinely new ecological ethic.

Consider that a chief exponent of this kind of moral extensionism is Peter Singer, and Singer is *not* a deep ecologist.¹¹ He is an animal welfare theorist. The reason for this is not hard to fathom. Singer argues that only sentient beings (those which have 'a capacity for suffering and enjoyment'¹²) can be said to have interests in a morally meaningful way. And clearly to attribute sentience to a being is both the condition and content of successful empathetic identification. Thus for Singer the crucial question is how far empathetic identification can reach before it dissolves into the purely self-referential fantasies of anthropomorphism. And his answer is, in its crudest terms, probably about as far as a shrimp, but not as far as an oyster.¹³

The position is not arbitrary. Singer has reasons for drawing the limits of empathetic identification somewhere around here. How, he asks, does empathetic identification get a real, rather than fantasised, hold on the object of concern? A natural first answer is in terms of overt behavioural similarities. Thus to the extent that the behaviour of some entity resembles our own, we can fairly theorise that similar psychological states of need and desire underpin those activities. If this were all there was to legitimate empathetic identification, then it might seem that we have the resources to extend morality to all living things, and perhaps even further, for it would seem that virtually all objects may exhibit behaviour in certain circumstances which can be read as 'desire' or 'aversion'; that is to say, as a purposeful moving towards an object, or moving away from it. But, as Singer is well aware, this is not all there is to legitimate empathetic identification. The notion of 'overt behaviour' is itself a product of interpretation, and the validity of the interpretation depends on whether the explanation we give shows that overt activity to be the result of those kinds of conditions and processes which, in our own case, we know to underpin such behaviour. Only then can we legitimately read the supposed behaviour along lines analogous to our own. So, for instance, if we come across an object that moves towards one end of a magnet and away from the other, we cannot by itself take this as evidence of pleasure and pain driven behaviour. The internal structure of the moving object is, we find out, quite unlike our own, indeed of a kind which, so far as we know, cannot instantiate the psychological properties which help us identify and

explain sentient behaviour. The degree of explanatory similarity necessary for the possibility of genuine empathetic identification cannot be determined *a priori*, but Singer is surely correct when he argues that for us a certain *neurophysiological* similarity is necessary if claims of empathetic identification are not to be sheer fantasy. In extensionist sympathy we move out from our own case, from our own behaviour as it is explained by our psychological states, and these psychological states supervene essentially on (the arrangement of) our central nervous system. And so the shrimp/oyster distinction – for shrimps (so Singer thinks) still have something recognisable as a central nervous system while oysters do not.

It is worth noting that Singer's conclusion undermines that peculiar variant of deep ecology called 'Transpersonal Ecology', which is championed by Warwick Fox.¹⁴ The 'philosophically distinctive aspect of deep ecology', Fox claims, 'lies in the fact that ... [it] argue[s] for a state of being that sustains *the widest possible identification*'.¹⁵ The novelty of this claim (what makes it 'deep ecological') is that while it does not reject the extensionist conception of morality as human centred, and so dependent on empathetic identification, it seeks to negate any hint of human chauvinism by arguing the possibility of, and need for, a kind of *super* act of empathetic identification. According to Fox this act, if successful, changes our sense of ourselves from its usual, limited, 'egoistic' character, to a 'broader, transpersonal (i.e., transegoistic) sense of "ecological self"'.¹⁶ We are required to extend our sense of identity, so as to include in it the identities of all other things in the world. Not only, as it were, are we to 'think like a mountain, to think like a bear', we are to think like every mountain and every bear and everything else.¹⁷

We are in a position already to see how empty is Fox's proposed method. Certainly there is nothing at all to the thought that we could, let alone should, think like a mountain, and what there is to the thought that we could and should think like a bear has already been captured by Singer. But let us assume for the moment that Singer's critique fails, and that Fox has the resources to make sense of this totalising act of empathetic identification.¹⁸ In that case the problem shifts, but is equally intractable. Instead of moral concern shading off into the self-referential fantasies of anthropomorphism, the difficulty is that the concern now encompasses more than any single agent could hope to encompass without disintegration.

Consider what it would mean to have a lived extensionist empathetic identification with all things, at least, all natural things in the world, in the totalising way Fox recommends. For the point is not merely that one must take account of all things, it is that for this taking account of to be morally adequate it is necessary for all these things to become a genuine part of oneself. This means making a genuine part of oneself, for instance, both the desires and interests of the predator and the prey. But these desires are contradictory – they cannot both be fulfilled, and to fulfil one is to thwart the other – and they are deeply embedded

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for each agent (predator and prey) in that they are desires which 'go all the way down' in their lives. If, then, they really are now to be the desires of a single agent, then, not to put too fine a point on it, that agent is in serious trouble. Not only do their possibilities for directed moral action seem to be self-stultifying, so that they face in an even more tormenting form the fate of Buridan's Ass, but their very sense of themselves as an agent, no matter how inclusive, must be under deep threat.

The trouble with extensionism for the deep ecologist is that it remains human centred as with Singer, or else drifts off into New Age fantasies as with Fox. What deep ecologists are after is a form of 'moral' vision, a vision of wild nature, which is non-anthropocentric. The deep ecologist wishes to articulate a way of viewing the world that does not follow Protagoras in using mankind as the ultimate measure of all things, but which is, somehow, directly receptive to the independently valuable nature of natural objects. Notice that this non-anthropocentric mode of vision cannot be simply inhuman, so that it may simply leave us *cold*. It must be, as it were, an essentially *hot* mode of vision which, while non-anthropocentric in its outlook, still has the necessary resources to effectively motivate human beings, and motivate us, of course, in a way that expresses an original respect for the integrity of natural objects.

Grey has criticised those deep ecological theories which eschew the anthropomorphic fantasies of transpersonal ecology for a genuinely non-anthropocentric view on the world, on the grounds that any such view on the world *will* leave us cold. 'If we attempt to step too far outside the scale of the recognizably human,' he argues, 'rather than expanding and enriching our moral horizons, we render them meaningless.'¹⁹ The point is not that 'stepping outside the human scale of experience' is of no use for reflection – the perspectives, for instance, of evolutionary biology and geology are far from irrelevant for scientific reflection concerned to discover how the material world works – it is rather that 'it is neither relevant or helpful for human action' to take up such a vantage-point on existence.

We approach the reason for this when we see that 'once we eschew all human values, interests and preferences we are confronted with just too many alternatives'. Grey illustrates this point by pointing out that from the nonanthropocentric perspectives of evolutionary biology and geology there are (if one is interested in the game) endless 'different possibilities' for evaluatively interpreting the historical record and projecting it into the future. And, of course, to have too many (because humanly unconstrained) alternatives of evaluation, is equally to have no alternatives which matter.

It is the point of Grey's argument that if we seek a moral vision which is thoroughly detached from human 'contamination', then inevitably we will render that vision vacuous. We will do so because the point of moral vision is to discern those reasons for action which we anthropoids ought to respect in the various circumstances of our lives. Our basic moral question is what we, as (this

or that) human being, ought to do in these particular circumstances, and it is to other people we must account to for our actions and decisions. The problem with the deep ecological vantage-point is precisely that it takes us away from our particular circumstances and particular lives, and by doing so removes not merely the urgency of morality, but any perspective in which there is friction enough for practical reason to grip an agent to the world.²⁰

The mistake Grey's argument locates is that of seeing deep ecology as concerned to push a directly *moral* conception. But perhaps the call for a new ecological ethic is better understood as a call for an appreciation of the *aesthetic* value of the natural world. Deep ecologists insist that we require a 'new ecological ethic', an ethic distinguished from our previous ethics in being, in the relevant sense, non-anthropocentric. But before leaping to the conclusion that this is a moral ethic, we should appreciate that the essential point is the call for a non-anthropocentric mode of access to the world that finds reasons for acting which embody a respect for the integrity of natural objects. It is of no use simply to abandon the human point of view, nor to try and extend to include everything in the world – either way, that is to have no view at all. But *contra* Grey, this is not something deep ecologists should take themselves to be committed to. Rather the point is to establish the possibility of a human point of view – a view of the world possible to creatures like us – which does not place anything objectionably human at the centre of concern.

Robyn Eckersley makes a distinction between *formal* and *substantial* anthropocentrism which is useful here.²¹ Formal anthropocentrism, she says, simply reflects the point that whatever vision of the world deep ecologists come up with, it must be a point of view that human beings can utilise. Substantial anthropocentrism, which she rejects, involves this vision being structured in some way so as to further specifically human ends and goals. As we have seen this distinction, while essential to deep ecology, cannot be sustained if we insist that we are developing a new moral ethic. But there is a far more persuasive case to be made for the validity of the distinction in the context of aesthetics. Aesthetics, like morality, like anything human beings do, is formally anthropocentric, but there are reasons to think it less objectionably local in nature than morality.

The crucial point is that in aesthetic experience, unlike moral experience (at least on the everyday understanding of the two²²), the object of the experience makes no *direct demands for action* on the spectator. The object is not viewed in such a way that it generates demands which bear directly on our will, leading us at once (if not finally) to favour certain kinds of actions towards it over others, and nor does it engender in us any system of desires for doing anything immediately with it, except perhaps (and this only indirectly, through the power of the object as it exercises itself in our experience) to continue gazing at it, or listening to it, or whatever. Indeed, if we look at some object and see it immediately through the eyes of desire or duty, then we are not contemplating

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for the moment anything aesthetic, for it is the mark of aesthetic experience that in it the will is *silent*. It is a different matter for morality – there the will is not silent, but actively called by the object to fulfil certain demands. With the will involved in this immediate fashion it follows that moral demands must be suited to key directly into our standing motivational possibilities as human beings, and, of course, these possibilities are not endless, but are constrained by the contingencies of our nature and existence. But it is not at all obvious that a mode of appreciation of objects, like the aesthetic, in which the will is silent and does not (pre)determine the interest we take in that which we confront, must be limited in this way, constrained by prudence to the grosser demand of human life, or by morality to the homocentric demands of empathetic identification.

Consider how the will is engaged in moral experience. It is called forth to answer the demands of the object, in particular, to respect its needs, desires and interests, and that means first identifying these interests. This identification, as Singer argues, we make on analogy with our own case. We ‘put ourselves in the shoes of others’, and, from there, decide on the interests, etc., of the object. But ‘putting ourselves in the shoes of another’, constrained by the requirement of relevant explanatory similarity, simply indicates the essentially homocentric focus of moral experience. With aesthetic experience, on the other hand, in its silence to the demands of the will, there is no need for this kind of sympathy to constrain the possibilities of identification. True, the aesthetic understanding in question will be the aesthetic understanding of a human being, living in a certain society, and answerable to that society’s traditions of aesthetic understanding (something true of all our sensitivities to the world, independently of that to the most brutal natural facts), but the claim of substantial anthropocentrism is severely compromised by the independence the experience has of the will and of the identifying mechanisms of sympathy.²³

If the aesthetic reading can make more sense of the non-anthropocentric aspiration of deep ecology, it may seem that it does so at the expense of eliminating that which is most important to deep ecologists. For aesthetic experience, as I have insisted, involves the silence of the will. But what policies and strategies for the environment would, or could, follow from a mode of vision that, by itself, does not motivate us in these ways?

The first point to make is that in one sense this absence of motivation is just what deep ecologists want, for one thing the aesthetic mode of vision does do is to entirely rule out the proprietary of *instrumental* attitudes in this area. It may be thought that the same is true of moral vision – that it rules out instrumental considerations entirely – but this would be a mistake. For while to view an object aesthetically is to view it in a way that rules out our holding and acting on instrumental attitudes towards it, to view another morally – despite Kant – is not at all to see them in a way which simply rules out instrumental thought. Rather it rules out instrumental thought which fails to acknowledge that underneath the taxi-driver, or dentist, or politician, or warden of the university, or whatever,

there is, there remains, a centre of moral standing. Morality rules out pure instrumentalism and insists on humanity and decency in our dealings with each other, but peak aesthetic experiences seem to me to rule out even this decent instrumentalism. You cannot see, say *Blue Poles* as an aesthetic object and also see it, at the same time, as just the thing to cover that bare space on the wall at home, nor even do so in a 'decent' fashion, perhaps by paying a 'fair price' for the service.²⁴

If instrumentalism is ruled out in the having of aesthetic experiences, and if many of those objects deep ecologists wish to value cannot be approached through empathetic identification so cannot generate direct moral demands on the will, then it may seem that the aesthetic approach is motivationally vacuous, but that would be a mistake. For while the will is silent *in* aesthetic experience, it most assuredly is not silent *about* such experiences. It is no accident that we build galleries and museums to house works of aesthetic value, even though the thought that this is where such things should be housed is no part of the aesthetic experience itself. It is *important* to us that the will is – can be – silent in aesthetic experience, and all this is formally anthropocentric. But it is not substantially anthropocentric, for the possibility of aesthetic experience means that it is important to us that there are objects which are suited to, or can sustain, this experience. And these are objects which we must be able to experience and think of independently of the human-centred moral demand for sympathy, or of our equally human-centred instrumental purposes. The very point of the aesthetic attitude on this view is to protect and to cherish that which makes no human, no moral and no instrumental, demands on us.

So far we have spoken of aesthetic value as if it were something there to be *found*, even though our mode of access will be through the importance such experience has in our lives, freeing our appreciation of an object from the insistent demands of morality and of our desiring natures. This means we have spoken of aesthetic value as if it were something real – and so as if it might exist even though the right kind of receptive subject might not, and this has seemed important to many deep ecologists.²⁵ It has seemed important because there are reasons for thinking even the most sophisticated subjectivism concerning (environmental) values remains threateningly homocentric.

The point of insisting on value realism here is not difficult to comprehend, though a number of theorists seem incapable of recognising the point. The secret is to pitch the debate at the right level. Thus it is no good objecting to value realism on the grounds that a subjectivist account can perfectly well make room, within subjectivity, for a commitment to the real over mere appearance. Both the realist and the subjectivist may have a subjectively realised commitment to the real, but for the realist there is something fundamentally flawed about the kind of commitment that the subjectivist can make to reality. Consider that the defining claim of a subjectivist, so anti-realist, conception of some realm of subjectivity is that at some point there comes a place, no matter how deeply

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located or how far back, where, as it were, *thinking or holding such and such to be the case and such and such being the case comes to the same thing*. Now one apparent advantage of the anti-realist commitment to this deep Protagoreanism is that it rules out the possibility of an ultimate skepticism as to our contact with value of the kind that realism (always) opens up, but it does so only by importing a final homocentrism into evaluation.²⁶ In denying that, on some ultimate level, mind and world can come apart, the subjectivist is equally holding that the world here possesses no independent being which lies beyond the limits of human subjectivity.

It might be argued that this ultimate frictionless coincidence of mind and world is merely formally anthropocentric and not substantially so, but for the deep ecological realist this is inadequate. The point is that once one accepts the anti-realist claim concerning mind and world, there is a powerful tendency for persons to locate that frictionless level at a whatever level it is that they themselves refuse to think beyond. That is to say, it is all too easy to draw the line of identity all too soon, and so to slip unwittingly into a full blown substantial anthropocentrism. The tendency is not one of logical implication in a strict sense, but it is still a genuine implication. For the value realist, antirealism means that the subjectively realised commitment to the real is to a reality which cannot finally defend itself against the ravages of human subjectivity in all its propensity for self-serving indolence and comfort, and so to a 'reality' which lacks the independence of the genuinely real. Anti-realism, on this view, seems to place nothing of significance in the way of viewing the value of wilderness (or anything else, for that matter) as finally a matter of sentiment and fashion, however far back this truth might be hidden.

It is not an unnatural conclusion that deep ecology requires a *realist* meta-ethic in the sense that the value of the natural lies entirely outside the creations of human subjectivity. But if that meta-ethic must be moral, then on one persuasive view it is a non-starter. For John Mackie moral realism could be dismissed with two arguments: the Argument from Queerness, and the Argument from Relativity.²⁷ First the argument from queerness.

If environmental values must be moral values, then they are required to possess a property that no other kind of fact possesses, or seems in any way capable of possessing. That is to say, the ordinary, uncontroversial, kind of fact, just *lies* there. There it is, *a fact*, and if it matters, it matters because it might be useful or a problem for some purpose we might have. But not so with moral facts. They have the property of somehow being able to key into our will direct. A moral fact is not just a fact, lying there, it is also, and necessarily, a reason for action. But such a fact seems utterly queer. How can a fact, something that is simply there, possess the magical power of necessarily motivating us in certain ways? How can a bit of the world get inside our practical reason, and get in in a way that gives it content and authority? Surely, indeed, it is one of the positive advantages of subjectivism here that motivation becomes unproblematic.

The argument from relativity is especially pressing for environmentalists, for many critics of environmentalism argue that it is more a matter of fashion rather than substance. The argument from relativity begins from the obvious point that those things which are attributed moral value in different societies is often very different, sometimes even contradictory. This is a difficulty for a view which says that the moral world is there just like the physical, and that we must find our way around it. For if the moral world is there and the same for all people, as is the physical world, how comes the rampant disagreement evident on moral matters across cultures? Disagreement, indeed, which shows no sign of abating? The realist explanation has to be in terms of various peoples and persons having some sort of 'clouded' moral vision of the one value reality, but as Mackie says, a more plausible (and morally humble) explanation of these differences in value is to think they answer to different underlying social needs and problems which arise with particular, individual, social systems. (Notice that the argument from relativity does not rest simply on the *differences* in moral evaluation evident across societies, it rests on the persuasive claim that that these differences are *best explained* in, say, sociological and historical terms, rather than in the terms of the Prophets.)

If Mackie persuades us, then, if deep ecology must hitch itself to the moral realist star, it is in a bad way. But if deep ecology is primarily an aesthetic movement – and if it will understand itself this way – then Mackie's arguments against realism are largely worthless.

The argument from queerness does not threaten aesthetic realism, because aesthetic facts are distinguished precisely in their refusal to demand an active and immediate response from the will. Aesthetic facts, as we access them in aesthetic experience, have no internal connection with the will, on the contrary such experiences have no place for such a connection. The will enters the experience only from outside, from the importance we attach to accessing such facts. Aesthetic experiences give us second-order motivations concerned with protecting the possibility of this realm of fact and experience. But the point of its protection, the reason for it, lies finally in the independent and unique existence of the aesthetic object. It is the object which makes it important and even essential to will, but only reactively, only defensively, only in protection. There is nothing queer about a concern for the world which itself calls for the preservation of our access to this range of facts.

The argument from relativity may threaten moral realism, but it merely highlights the attractiveness and naturalness of aesthetic realism. Just as with what is morally valued, so too what is aesthetically valued, differs across cultures and time. But the urge – and the possibility – of explaining this difference in reductionist terms, on the grounds that as such evaluations are often contradictory, they cannot all claim to be revelations of the one reality, is considerably diminished. When we look at the aesthetic objects of other times and cultures, even while we recognise that they are alien to our own traditions, we do not think

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either that these objects are not aesthetically valuable, nor that they are, in some way, in real conflict with our own, so that a *decision* must be made. It is in art, in fact, that we find the idea of a reality on which there are many perspectives and vistas the most natural and appealing.

Aesthetic experience, and so aesthetic value, depends on the possibility of attending to an object in all its particularity, and without instrumental or moral thoughts intruding. This does not mean that the objects of aesthetic appreciation might not themselves constitute a causal or moral danger to the individual or community, it means only that there are times when they can be viewed, can be attended to, without these concerns intruding. Both natural items and non-natural, humanly produced, items, have, in the past, been able to sustain this kind of attention. Sunsets and Modiglianis have both been able to sustain that kind of reverent attention. But the trouble today, I suggest, is that increasingly, humanly produced objects, and particularly, but not only, those produced as 'aesthetic objects', are unsuited, or unable, to sustain this kind of attention.

Increasingly, it seems to me, our world is *saturated* with the now all-too-human. It is saturated both with instrumental reasoning, as members of the Frankfurt School have endlessly insisted, and, as the media continually bring the details of an often terrible and ravaged human world to us, with moral demands which are far in excess of our powers of response, even comprehension. The human world today leaves little time, less and less all the time, for the kind of detached, willess, absorption in an object which drives away boredom and enables us to create and invigorate the meaning in our lives. Our historical position is such that, for many of us, anything human is simply unsuited, too full of desire or moral demand, for the kind of attention which recognises the aesthetic value of the world. There is, so it often seems, nowhere else for our aesthetic sense to go but away from, even out of, the human world and to the world instead of wild nature. It is here, outside the constraints of desire and morality, that we overcome the boredom of a saturated life, and here in wild nature that the meaning in and of our lives can be (re)discovered.

If this is so then deep ecology as I have reconstructed it is both a protest against the condition of the human world – against the terrifying boredom and meaninglessness of a world in which everything is to be used, or in which we are continually subject to impossible moral demands on our time and kindness – and an affirmation of the importance of the aesthetic in human lives. It may not be a moral position in opposition to humanism as many of its proponents contend and as Grey effectively criticises, but it deserves to be taken very seriously indeed.

NOTES

This paper owes much to discussions with my colleague, David Wells, and has benefitted from the comments of referees for this Journal.

¹ The classic example is Passmore 1972. For a recent presentation see Wells 1993.

² Classic texts include Devall and Sessions 1985, and Naess 1973 and 1989. The journal *Environmental Ethics* is a main forum for deep ecological ideas.

³ Naess 1973.

⁴ Goodin 1993, pp. 30-41. Goodin's argument is a development of ideas found first in Elliot 1982.

⁵ It is true that many define deep ecology in terms of 'biocentric egalitarianism', which would involve giving equal moral weight to domesticated and wild creatures, and not necessarily involve a concern for wilderness, but this is misleading. Arne Naess is a typical case. He begins from biotic equality, but soon wild nature and non-domesticated species occupy his whole attention. The deep ecologist J. Baird Callicott is most aware of this tension. See Callicott 1987. It is also worth noting that the deep ecological focus on wild nature predominates in North America, Australasia and Scandinavia, while in Europe generally the environmental movement is more deeply connected with the anti-nuclear movement and focuses on questions of the quality of the urban and rural environment. For a lucid discussion of this important difference, see Hay and Haward 1988.

⁶ Grey 1993. The finality of Grey's argument against deep ecology depends on the assumption that the deep ecological sensibility must be specified in directly moral terms. Only on this assumption do his remarks on the necessity and emptiness of the deep ecological abandonment of the 'human point of view' have force. This paper argues that deep ecology is not committed to the assumption.

⁷ A philosophical reconceptualisation. Historically the appreciation of wild nature has aesthetic roots, though for modern deep ecologists this approach often seems frivolous and (mistakenly) lacking in practical import.

⁸ That is to say, by reading deep ecology as an aesthetic movement, I do not intend to suggest that it is a movement characterised by purely 'post-materialist values', so that it is a Maslowian luxury.

⁹ One sometimes hears that such extensionist aspirations define deep ecology, but the aspiration finds equal expression in the animal liberation and welfare movements.

¹⁰ Cf. Rodman 1977.

¹¹ Singer 1991, Ch. 4. See also Singer 1986.

¹² Singer 1991, pp. 8-9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

¹⁴ Fox 1990.

¹⁵ Fox 1987 (my italics).

¹⁶ Fox 1990, Ch. 4.

¹⁷ Fox requires a conception of empathetic identification which sustains an appearance/reality distinction (a distinction between genuine acts of empathetic identification, and the mere fantasy of such). Thus it is not enough for him simply to appeal to an unanalysed notion of 'imagination' as the means to such identifications, for imagination unconstrained simply obliterates the required distinction. Equally the identification Fox seeks

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is not merely theoretical or abstract, but is (as he insists it must be to generate normative content) a *lived* sense of identification.

¹⁸ It seems to me that the only way of really making sense of Fox's call for a 'super act' of empathetic identification is from within a certain kind of explicitly religious framework. For instance, it made sense for St Francis of Assisi to deliver sermons to the birds because they were his 'brothers and sisters', made by the same power and benevolence of God and equally watched over by Him. But without the unification of the world and its creatures effected by such a God, St Francis' actions would be both pointless and (as many in our mainly secular world now tend to think) lacking in all sense.

¹⁹ Grey 1993, p. 464.

²⁰ Even if some friction for individual interest and decision somehow remains it may not be of the kind suitable to moral seriousness. The point is that by stepping back from the human as the deep ecologist recommends one also steps back from that hot concern with interpersonal justification, explanation and excuse, which keeps us on our toes morally, and prevents us from slipping into the pseudo-morality of personal fantasy.

²¹ Eckersley 1992, pp. 55-56.

²² In this paper I assume that the internalist conception of morality is both natural and correct, and that aesthetic experience is as it represents itself to the vast majority of people, a kind of meditation in which the empirical self, to put it in Kant's terms, is for the moment off the scene.

²³ That aesthetic experience escapes the limits of moral sympathy is the major source of the conservative hostility to (anything except desperately old or trivial) art. It is also the reason why no-one knows, or can know, what are the limits of aesthetic experience.

²⁴ There is a complicating case with such things as the aesthetics of (for instance) architectural products. After all it seems that a kind of instrumentalism in the form of functional adaptation and adequacy must have a role here. Notice however that the functional element of architectural aesthetics may enter only as a condition of the possibility of such value, and not as a constitutive element of the experiential relationship between viewer and object.

²⁵ See, for example, Attfield and Belsey 1994; especially their 'Introduction' pp. 1-12, and Rolston 1994 in the same volume

²⁶ The possibility of scepticism on the realist reading of natural value may seem to place the conception in grave doubt, but we should realise two things: (1) scepticism in any area seems unable to undermine our everyday realist commitments, either in the theoretical or the practical realm; and (2) that scepticism, as a consequence, can be seen as a permanent reminder for us not to think we have the world in our hands, and to remain open to the thought that we have not yet attained the truth, but must continue to work to refine, and continually test and reassess, our commitments in the relevant area.

²⁷ Mackie 1978, pp. 36-41.

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