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*Saturday 27th January 2007, Arne Næss celebrated his 95th birthday.*

In the following article, Petter Mejlænder and Arne Næss present the basic principles of their Deep-Ecological philosophy. Dagbladet 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2007.

## **The future way of thinking**

**We are living on an** incredibly beautiful little planet, but our human existence is threatened. If we are to survive we have to learn to think differently. The thinking for the future has to be loyal to nature. It must encompass all humans and all living creatures, because everything alive, in itself, has a value.

Deep Ecology is a way of thinking for the future. It can help us to find alternatives, to what seems today, to be life threatening and non-committed thoughtlessness. Deep Ecology is a form of moral seriousness, based on analysis and science. As a matter of fact, Deep Ecology is a way to clarify the expression “life quality” and find out what long term joy we can experience as humans. This is why Deep Ecology is also playfulness and fantasy, but in the core of the Deep Ecology is an attitude, an attitude with obligations.

**Thinking is life.** When life is threatened, thinking is also threatened. This is why our thinking has to change, because it is a question of life and death: Life on Earth and the existence of thinking. Without thinking life will not be saved, and without life, thinking will not be saved. This is why we say that thinking has to be loyal to life and nature. Not as a romantic idealisation of nature, but as a consequent, scientifically based realism.

Basically, the future way of thinking is to be built around the question: How shall as many living creatures as possible, have the best possible existence in the foreseeable future? This is our historic challenge. Deep Ecology is a method to understand and examine life on earth. The prefix “deep” is nothing more than a verbal metaphor. It signals that our understanding is thoroughly thought through and that we are intending to go even deeper. This means; ask even more critical questions, hunting the best answers.

With “Ecology” we first and foremost address that all living creatures, including humans, are interdependent. And that there are limits to what nature can handle in terms of human activity and freedom. We humans have, in many areas, already exceeded the limits of what nature can handle, for example; by causing the extinction of many species. This is why the Deep Ecological way of thinking is crucial. We are increasingly confronted with choices that demand clear decisions.

We believe that it is possible to turn around the destruction of nature. We also believe that this turning operation, which must include restrictions on human behaviour, will lead to an increase in the quality of life experience - not a decrease.

**The main point** is that our understanding and knowledge increases. This knowledge, besides orientating us towards new questions and answers, will constantly try to present practical solutions, solutions that again can lead to new and better alternatives.

The driving force of this “deep” way of thinking is that humans will never face a definite limit, concerning knowledge and well-being. Deep Ecology suggests that one of the aspects of being human is the possibility to be on the way to something better. It’s essential that this “better” goes beyond me and my peer group. It is to include all humans in the foreseeable future.

One of the characteristics of a human being is the ability to imagine and create alternative solutions. These human characteristics give us a greater responsibility than any other living organism.

This explains why the expression “fellow humans” is so important to Deep Ecology. Any question and any answer must consider and include our fellow humans. In Deep Ecology “fellow humans” mean all humans. National borders, colour of skin, religion, and ethnic background are of secondary importance.

But the thinking goes further. Deep Ecology wants the best for all living creatures. That is to say, it is not only humans that have a life value. All life forms must be ensured the best possible living conditions, be treated with dignity.

We do not state that humans and animals are alike, but we do state that humans have no right to view other species as a means for their own existence, and only that. We do not regard humans as “nature”. Humans live in nature, and need to behave in the best possible way towards nature. The Deep Ecologist will therefore not say: Thou shall not kill. The Deep Ecologist will ask: Is it necessary to kill? Or: Is it necessary to kill so many? This means that we do have a right to limit the expansion of other species, but we do not have the right to cause unnecessary pain or the extinction of a species.

**Life quality** is a basic expression in Deep Ecology. We must never cease to ask ourselves: What is life quality? What kind of experience gives the highest possible quality to life? And; what is the relationship between our quality of life and the quality of life of others.

Life quality cannot be measured in relation to a defined norm. The expression “life quality” is demanding and challenging us in such a way that our way of thinking and the development we support, must orientate towards a qualitative improvement concerning the conditions for life on Earth.

We believe that “life quality” and “joy for life” are two expressions of the same experience. A higher level of quality of life leads to more joy and well-being, and more joy and well-being leads to a higher life quality. Joy and well-being are essential goals in Deep Ecology.

We believe it is very important to respect the inner voice that says: “I desire....”, or “I do not desire....” This is why Deep Ecology uses the expression “spark”. Without “spark”, life for a human becomes poor and dead. If a culture is to remain, it presupposes well-being and spark.

**We believe that** there is no continuous, stable and irreplaceable core of truth somewhere in, over or under the reality we experience. Deep Ecology, in other words, is not dogmatic or metaphysic and neither is it religious, in the meaning of being faithful to any written word.

Deep Ecology therefore does not explain point of views or give answers in relation to statements of knowledge or “God”. Deep Ecology is taking the road of the experienced world. Truth is something we are always searching for. Truth is “the search for truth”: A process and ethic governed by values. Our form of truth is an ecological expression, because it is a part of a complex and organic interdependent nature, which is constantly developing.

Our search for truth is in dialogue with the general development of knowledge. Its blueprint is left in history. This is why truth today, is always something different than that of yesterday or tomorrow.

**Today our life quality is threatened** from all directions. First and foremost it is threatened by an unsatisfying craving for material things and expensive experiences. We call our craving unsatisfying, because it is mainly an industrial construction and a substitute, that constantly

streams upon us in new variations and takes us away from simple, long lasting, more environmentally healthy desires and needs.

Much of what we surround ourselves with are illusions of well-being, that plainly speaking, impact us in a negative way. The growing amount of technology, that supposedly should make our lives easier and better, is increasingly harmful both to nature and man. The number of depressed, crippled and unhealthy humans is increasing. Toxic damage to animals, humans and nature is growing directly in proportion with production and the amount of garbage we leave behind. In the same way, the damage from warfare becomes more severe with the use of increasingly speculative weapons.

For us humans, it is becoming more difficult to discover the connections between symptoms and causes. Every accident is a part of a very complex chain of incidents. The lack of well-being is immediately blurred by new illusions of well-being, which actually prolong and amplify the lack of well-being.

Pain and suffering on an existential level becomes in itself an important base from which we make ourselves receptive to new illusions of well-being, and the increasing material production our culture of today thrives upon. This is often the reason why the push of powerful economic interests contributes to maintain our lack of well-being.

The battle for the future way of thinking is therefore in reality, a battle for power. We are in the midst of an ideological value battle that encompasses every aspect of human life. We must understand that there are powerful producers of ideology that benefit from the harmful one-way consumption and increasing poverty. With poverty, we do not limit the expression to economic and physical poverty, but also indeed, to existential poverty.

The general short-term attitude and craving for profit, in our culture's present way of thinking, is steering us towards a decrease in life quality. The worst case scenario would be that we walk in herds, towards a total collapse and the extinction of all life on Earth.

**More and more** of us lose contact with what it means to be human. The material craving, stress and production ideologies lead us away from our understanding of ourselves and our humanness. We lose faith in ourselves, and are, in a way, captured inside an artificial form of life, where our humanness fades and our fellow humans are kept on the outside. We become hard hearted and inhuman because our own, and our fellow humans' ability to understand other humans is reduced.

“Meaning of life” is therefore an important expression. But this can be either seductive or it can lead us to greater insights.

The expression can be seductive, in that the search for meaning can lead us to uncritically believe that there is “something” that gives life meaning. Something we lack. Something we can buy or get or find, something that exists “out there” somewhere, something that confirms our lack of connection to our own humanness.

It can lead to greater insights because it could motivate us to think through, more thoroughly, what deserves to be called “good meaning” and what “life” and “humanness” are, in reality.

We find it fruitful to also talk about “human worth”, a worthy human society, worthy human life and so forth. In our way of thinking, war, for instance, is not worthy of humans.

War is not a state in which one can exist in the long run. War is just a means to accomplish something that we believe is human worth. But war seldom leads towards solution. Far too many resources are used to develop our ability to destroy. Our ability to keep peace and co-existence is suffering from this. This is connected to our short term attitude. War is a short term affair, leading to quick and perceivable results; Work for peace is a long term affair with a long term horizon. Deep Ecology has a long term horizon.

It is our ability to help and assist our fellow humans to a qualitative improvement of their way of life that will lead to a better future for humankind. Many know this, but we still do too little to develop this ability. In economics, war is valuable because the production of weapons leads to an increase in trade and GDP. Cooperation, in contrast, leads to different types of products and values; human values that has to be measured in a very different way.

**With a free** capitalistic, competitive economy and the continually high level of global population growth, we assume that the differences and conflict potentials in the world will increase. This is why the future has to be strictly regulated.

We need to take care of the world. “To take care of the world” means that we will need to help our fellow humans to get what they need, for instance; clean air and clean water, and that we stop the spread of AIDS, which in many places kills more people than malaria. To take care of the world means we will do whatever is necessary to stop global warming.

Even the most wealthy among us understand that our way of living has to change radically, and that the change has to include everybody. This is strengthening our hope.

We do believe it is vitally important and necessary to continue to develop obligatory international laws and regulations. As long as pollution, international finance, corruption, disease and the flow of products are global and international; laws and regulations have to reach just as far. They need to be implemented effectively, obeyed and adjusted and impact all countries and people on an equal level.

An American can no longer use 100 times more oil than an Asian. A Deep Ecological future does not look like this. At a point that cannot be very far away in the future, every human must respect and live by the same restrictions and have the same rights and possibilities.

It will then be of no importance, that the people who are living in a country were born there or not. What will make a difference is whether they respect and follow the laws and regulations and treat each other as fellow humans; whether they feel a real and obligatory responsibility for all life on Earth.

In this perspective, the ethnic Norwegian is of secondary importance.

**We believe business or corporate life** will be able to easily adjust to these laws and regulations. In Norwegian, business or corporate life is called “Næringsliv”, directly translated this would be “Nutrition-life”. Nothing can give us a better basis for the future. The future needs to be richly nutritious and life protecting in the very widest sense. The exceptional wealth of Norway leads us to believe that Norway has a special responsibility in relation to Deep Ecology. We have an historic possibility. We have our heads above water and can use our common sense in a way history, up til now, has not seen. The will to change is growing stronger every day. The change of direction will be a continuous process. It is already happening. And it is natural to ask the question: What else can we use our wealth for than to develop our knowledge and wisdom? - The opposite?

A Deep Ecological way of thinking is contributing to a continuous change of direction. We know this is the way to go, and we know we have no choice, but we postpone making the jump because we believe it will be uncomfortable. But if we do not take command, the changes will force themselves upon us, in the form of dictatorship or natural disaster that we cannot escape.

We believe in our willingness and ability to take care of our future. We also believe that humans understand that the changes needed, will improve our lives. We can create ourselves. That is realistic, but it demands that the language, and the attitude expressed in our use of language are changed. All historical epochs have experienced how words and

expressions blossom and fade away. It is the time now to find our words and the meaning of the future.

Herein lays a big responsibility for the politicians and media. All institutions and public people who use words to find solutions need to contribute. The premises, the values and the goals need to be pointed out and made clear. We need to be more conscious, feel and experience this as humans in our everyday life - how every one of us, every day are creating the future and that we live in and with nature and are enriched by that fact.

This is the future way of thinking.