

ECOLOGICAL SELF: THE PASSAGE TO SELF REALIZATION

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I INTRODUCTION:

The environmental crisis reflects a deeper issue within our minds and spirits. The pressures of ecological degradation are so clear that protecting the environment has become essential. In this regard, deep ecology represents a new and significant ecological movement that emerges as a fresh perspective to address the unavoidable transformations humanity is facing. Arne Naess' deep ecology theory seeks to address our sense of emptiness and anxiety, allowing individuals to restore a sense of connection with both living and non-living entities. Deep ecology plays a crucial role in enhancing our ecological awareness as we confront worldwide environmental challenges for several reasons. Ecological awareness represents an emerging mind-set that leads us toward sustainable development. It fosters a connection with nature, establishing ecological harmony since all elements are interconnected within the web of life. Therefore, the eco-centric approach to environmental ethics serves as a comprehensive method for addressing environmental issues, integrating thought, emotion, spirituality, and action. The relationship between humans and the environment relies on the ability to connect with otherness, allowing the self to expand and deepen. This realization fosters a stronger bond with all forms of life, enabling a transition from an ego (G) perspective to an eco (C) perspective. To achieve this transformation from 'G' to 'C,' we must cultivate our ecological awareness. It is essential for the world to undergo a significant shift toward an eco-centric mind -set rooted in ecological understanding, prompting us to care for and act on behalf of whole ecosystems, not just ourselves. When there is a balance between 'G' and 'C,' beings exist harmoniously within the universe. However, when the focus leans too heavily toward the 'Self,' or 'ego,' an imbalance occurs, leading to emerging issues. The notion of Self-realization stands out as one of Arne Naess's key contributions to ecological philosophy. In Naess's framework of deep ecology, it is an essential endeavour for grasping our role within nature, as it facilitates the transition from an anthropocentric worldview to an ecocentric one. Naess describes the process of identifying oneself with the ecological Self as Self-realization (Naess, 1987). He posits that through expanding one's self-conception and identification, one embodies the ecological Self. This illustrates that the act of identification is crucial in Self-realization, as well as signifies the acknowledgment of nature's intrinsic value. As rational beings, humans continuously seek to comprehend the essence of the self. The inquiry into the nature of self has long been a pivotal topic in philosophy, particularly within psychology and religion. In the realm of psychology, the self is characterized as the entirety of a person's attributes, encompassing their physical, mental, and emotional characteristics, which enable individuals to distinguish themselves from others. Our understanding of ourselves aids in interpreting and recognizing patterns within our surroundings. Conversely, religion proposes that the self or soul is a spiritual entity that can be either elevated or tarnished by one's thoughts and actions. According to Naess, the identification of the self with the

ecological Self is known as Self-realization (Naess, 1987). He argues that through the process of identification and widening of one's self-conception, one becomes the ecological Self. It shows that the process of identification plays an important role in Self-realization, as well as represents the recognition of intrinsic value of nature. Humans, being rational, always strive to understand the nature of the self. The question of what is self has been an important concern of philosophy, especially in the fields of psychology and religion. In psychology, the self is defined as the sum of a person's attributes that includes their physical, mental and emotional traits, and through which people define themselves as separate or different from other people. There are two major functions of the self: the executive function and the organizational function. The executive function of the self refers to the way our sense of self helps us regulate our actions. The organizational function of the self plays a role in organizing information. Our knowledge of ourselves helps us interpret and recognize patterns in our environment.

II Concept of the Ecological Self:

Arne Naess introduces the idea of the ecological Self. The ecological Self indicates the self in a physical form that can be recognized in space and time. Naess asserts that to fully understand the nature of the ecological self, one must take into account the three distinct stages of self-development. These phases of growth signify the self's evolution. "Historically, personal maturity has been viewed as progressing through three phases: from ego to social self, which includes the ego, and then from the social self to the metaphysical self" (Naess, 2008, p. 82). Ego, social identity, and metaphysical identity or ecological self-represent the three phases of self-development. Naess employs the phrase "ecological Self" to denote the metaphysical self" (Drengson, 2008, p. 36). The ego or egoic self exists in the initial phase. The social self, including the egoic self, represents the second stage. The last phase is the metaphysical Self or the ecological Self, which includes the social self. In this concluding phase, "one feels oneself to be an authentic component of all existence" (Kheel, 2008, p. 170). Self can attain maturity through ecological self--- A child begins to recognize their identity with their body during the initial phase of growth. In subsequent years, the child develops a more profound sense of self-awareness and gains an understanding of identity or individuality. His identity is confined to his physical form. In this context, the self is merely a self-centered ego that seeks to fulfil the primary biological necessities. The child then adequately fosters his social identity and discovers how not to stay as a solitary individual. He enhances his ability to relate to other people by cultivating his social identity. To genuinely care for others, we must initially understand how to care for ourselves. In other terms, self-love serves as the base on which love for others develops. Lacking self-compassion, true compassion for others remains unfulfilled. As individuals develop Self-awareness, they start to recognize their own joys and pains reflected in the people around them. He identifies with friends, foes, and even their religion, community, and surroundings, along with their family. Arne Naess (1987) observes: In early life, the social 'self' is well-developed enough that we tend not to want to eat the whole food for ourselves. We divide the food among our friends and loved ones. We resonate with these individuals enough to share in their happiness and to reflect our own

disappointment in their sadness. When a person has an ego-driven sense of self, he claims the whole food for himself. Our capacity to share with others evolves through the influence of the social self. But in this process of maturity of self, according to Naess, nature is totally left out and humans become alienated from other living beings and the ecosystem as a whole. Considering these situations, Naess formulates the concept of ecological Self. "We may be said to be in, and of, nature from the very beginning of ourselves. Society and human relationships are important, but our own self is much richer in its constitutive relationships" (Naess, 2008, p. 82). People can expand their relationships to include all of nature by realizing the ecological Self. Before one realizes the ecological Self, he identifies only with other humans. However, in deep ecology, we are identified not just with our species but also with the entire non-human world. At this point, Naess introduces the concept of mixed community and says, "These relationships are not only those we have with other humans and the human community, but also those we have with other living beings" (Naess, 2008, p. 82). Therefore, people can grow and achieve the maturity of self with the help of the '*ecological Self*'.

III ECOLOGICAL SELF AND EGOIC SELF:

According to Naess, there is a difference between the 'ecological Self and egoic self', which represents the distinction between the 'extended Self and narrow self'. Warwick Fox, in his book 'Toward a transpersonal ecology; Developing new foundations for environmentalism' (1995) makes this distinction very clear. In regard to Naess's terminology, it should be noted that he generally employs the terms "self", written with a lower case "s", and "Self", written with a capital "S", to distinguish between a narrow, atomistic, egoic sense of self and a wide, expansive, nonegoic sense of self respectively. Thus, for Naess, the term "self-realization" refers to realization of the narrow self, which is consistent with self-aggrandizement and "ego-trips," whereas the term "Self-realization" refers to the realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible. (Fox, 1995, p. 176)

A broad sense of identity includes all living beings, which is provided by the extended Self, also known as the ecological Self. Deep ecology of Arne Naess gives us important guidelines to guide human actions and protect the environment. However, in Naess's opinion, these deep ecological principles are not sufficient to address all ecological problems. An ecological identity is necessary for this and accordingly he encourages people to develop their ecological identities, ecological feelings as well as actions. In this context, Naess discusses the ecological Self, which is an extension of one's own self. Naess (1987) remarks, "Our home, our immediate environment, where we belong as children, and the identification with non-human living beings, are largely ignored. I therefore tentatively introduce, perhaps for the first time ever, a concept of ecological Self" (p. 35). According to Arne Naess, our surroundings and environment resemble our home, where all living beings belong as members of one family. Therefore, we start to identify with our environment and this has inspired Naess to develop the concept of the extended Self or ecological Self. It provides us with the concept of interconnectedness with the environment, something that is missing from modern human society. Arne Naess defines the ecological Self clearly and succinctly using a straightforward sentence. He states, "I will provide just one brief sentence that

resembles a definition of the ecological Self. The ecological Self of an individual is what that individual recognizes as their identity” (Naess, 1987, p.) This definition highlights the idea of identification, which Arne Naess describes in a very straightforward manner. By engaging in this process, individuals can shed their sense of individuality and merge into the ecological community. He stated that he did not intend any technical implication with this use of identification. Identification is essential to experience feelings of inferiority or a lack of greatness and to sustain balance within one’s experiential self. For example, "the mountains teach us humility; their magnitude makes us feel insignificant and humble, and thus we engage in their majesty" (Drengson, 2008). According to Naess, a case of identification is one that fosters deep empathy and compassion. To illustrate this, he draws on his own experience as an example. In the provided example, it states that Naess was investigating various chemical reactions using a traditional microscope. A flea suddenly leaped in the acidic chemicals. The small flea's actions quickly turned disastrous, and Naess could not rescue it. He instinctively experienced a feeling of distressing compassion and empathy (Naess, 1987). He stated that intense empathy was the process of relating to others. Naess could recognize himself in the flea and its pain. It demonstrates that a strong feeling of togetherness fosters identification. He stated that such profound empathy was the process of identification. According to Naess, “there has to be identification for compassion to exist, and, among people, solidarity” (Naess, 1987).

The term ‘self’ can be interpreted in three ways— ego, self, and Self. The ego refers to the narrow self. The self refers for care of immediate friends or family members only. But Naess clearly says about Self with capital ‘S’ refers to all entities or all life forms. Self-realization can be interpreted in various ways, yet each interpretation inherently suggests a hiding of the self; thus, to reveal the authentic self, it is essential to rise above or release the ego or the limited self. This hiding aligns with the notion of a genuine self, or a self that is more authentic than the self that shows itself to us. In this context, revealing pertains to an internal process. The self to be realized, or the true self, might expose a ‘nothingness’ or the comprehension that nothing is more profound and meaningful than our everyday habits and convictions.

IV Arne Naess & Warwick fox View: The concept of ‘Self-Realization:- An Identification

‘Self’ results from a process of identification in which the person comes to relate to others. Traditionally, the self evolves through three phases—from self to social existence, including the self and from that to metaphysical self-including the social self. With the growing maturity and identification with others, the self is widened and deepened. (Arne Naess, 1989). Both the Selves with a capital ‘S’ carrying significance to the India atman and small letter ‘s’ signifying personal self are characterized by Naess. Self is written with a capital letter ‘S’ signifies that it represents an expanded sense of self, not a limited perception of self. The phrase 'self-actualization' additionally has an exclamation point indicating "perform it" – which means, “achieve a broader understanding of self.” The inquiry, consequently, emerges in our thoughts – “how can we achieve as broad and as profound a sense of self as achievable? For Naess, the response is by means of achieving a complete understanding of shared characteristics with the surrounding world. Hence, Naess states, “All living creatures are closely linked and from this closeness arises the ability for

identification “and consequently, the implementation of nonviolent practices.” (Deep Ecology and Virtue Ethics, Issues 26 Warwick Fox.). Thus, the personal attempt to cultivate wider and deeper sense of identification with the world around us must certainly approach to virtue ethics. So, when Arne Naess objects to ethics saying “Just as we do not need morals to make us breathe..... so if your ‘self’ in the wide sense embraces another being you need no moral exhortation’ to show care You care for yourself without feeling any moral pressure to do it.” (Deep Ecology and Virtue Ethics, Issues 26, Warwick Fox.). Conversely, an individual who has achieved self-realization and clearly recognized within the nonhuman realm will act from a sense of inclination rather than obligation as Immanuel Kant suggested two ideas – Ethical action and appealing action. Ethical actions are consistently driven by ethical principles, and it turns into an obligation for us to carry it out regardless of our feelings towards it or otherwise. At times, it contradicts our tendencies, yet we are compelled to act by our regard for ethical principles. Should we execute something solely due to ethical principles, then the result our contentment diminishes? And if we act in a just manner with our tendency, it becomes a lovely deed. Thus, Arne Naess argues that individuals ought to prioritize environmental concerns. Warwick Fox explains very distinctly about a person who realized his self. A ‘Self-Realized’ individual would not experience confusion over what is his or her own body or person and what is a sparrow, tree, or stone. “What is being emphasized is the tremendous common experience that through the process of identification my sense of self can expand to include tree even though I and the tree remain physically separate.” (W.Fox. 1990 a, p.81). Consequently, Fox's assessment of the identification of the self is broader and more profound. “How can a person come to understand, in this global perspective, as broad a self-conception as achievable? Fox’s straightforward response is the method of “recognition.” (Fox. 1990 b, p. 249).

By identification, Fox means the experience of commonality between my self and the world. An ecologically sound life would be one that sustains the widest and deepest possible identification.” (Fox 1990 b, p. 249). Naess states that self-realization hinges on the achievement or actualization of human potentials (1987). It suggests the characteristics that differentiate humans, no matter our outward appearance. Inside each of us exists an amazing and limitless realm of potential. We possess the ability to rise above our confined or restricted ego. Naess advocates for “significant levels of fulfillment of human potentials concerning both inherent values and the equal right (in principle) to exist and thrive (1979) (p. 234). He motivates individuals to recognize their own capabilities to aid in local and global environmental accountability. According to Drengson he rejoices in the opportunities for all of us to achieve our potentials and to engage gracefully for the well-being of ourselves and our communities. He states that many of us eventually come to understand that some of our fundamental methods of knowing are based on intuitions like “everything is interconnected” .According to Naess, realizing our inner potentialities can help us to appreciate all living beings in the ecosystem. Living in harmony with everyone is possible when we realize our true nature or Self, which is always universal. For Naess, this is Self-realization or realization of inherent potentialities. Naess in his article, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World”-- makes it clear that, Joy of life and meaning of life

is increased through increased Self-realization. That is, through the fulfilment of potentials each has, but which never are exactly the same for any pair of living beings. Whatever the differences, increased Self-realization implies broadening and deepening of sense of self. (Naess, 1987, p. 35) Self-actualization grows as the potentials within every living being are realized. In contemplating our innate capabilities, we cannot merely act on our impulses at any particular moment or respond to immediate urges. This becomes significant when we take into account species aside from humans. Plants and animals possess unique methods of expressing their innate possibilities, which we can only discover through engaging with them. Consequently, we must avoid relying on fleeting urges, regardless of how persuasive they seem. Naess cautions about the risks of ignorance and the potential for misreading or misunderstanding our capabilities. A limited perspective on human capabilities will merely diminish human dignity. He states, "the ego-trip view of human potential assumes a significant undervaluation of the depth and extent of our capabilities" (Naess, 1987, p 37). A person will mislead himself regarding his self-interest if he fails to acknowledge his genuine nature and its actual requirements for Self-realization. The abundant reality of this world is becoming more enriched through a clear comprehension of possibilities, which is essential for coexisting with all other life forms. "Life could have a significant future in which we are involved and transforming"--- Naess 1989). Arne Naess recognizes the significance of spirituality in his ecological philosophy. Spirituality encompasses more than just fostering our personal development; it is a lifestyle in which we authentically experience love and empathy for all living beings in the ecosystem. According to Naess, self-realization "supports intrinsic values, both material and spiritual" (1989, p. 143). An exploration of our core values and beliefs regarding our innate energies encourages us to pursue the sacred and spiritual aspects of everyday life, providing various opportunities to enhance our understanding, compassion, and spectrum of positive actions and emotional engagement.

V Arne Naess : Deep Ecological Perspective (Spirituality):

Deep ecological awareness is considered as spiritual awareness when human spirit is understood as a mode of consciousness in which individual feels the sense of connectivity to the cosmos as a whole. This connectivity shows that ecological awareness has a spiritual sense in its deepest essence. Hence, the emerging new vision of reality, based on ecological awareness is consistent with spiritual traditions. Spirituality of deep ecology can be inspiring essence for living the integral ecology. Arne Naess acknowledges the importance of spirituality in his eco-philosophy. Spirituality is not only about nurturing our own inner growth; it is also a way of living where we genuinely feel love and compassion for all life in the ecosystem. Naess view on Self-realization "favours intrinsic values, material and spiritual" (1989, p. 143). An inquiry into our ultimate values and beliefs about the nature of our wild energies leads us to seek the sacred, spiritual dimensions of daily life, with many options for expanding our understanding, compassion, and range of positive actions and active feelings. (Drengson, 2008, p. 39) Spiritual growth fosters a distinct quality of experience, prompting individuals to connect not solely with fellow humans, but as Arne Naess's deep ecology proposes, with all non-human entities, rather than perceiving them as isolated from ourselves. In deep ecology, Naess advocates for a spiritual perspective on the natural

environment. Holmes Rolston III, a leading eco philosopher recognized for his work in environmental philosophy, also explores the foundation of human superiority, particularly the capacity to move beyond a self-centered perspective. Rolston claims that humans excel in “cognitive,” “ethical,” “critical ”and“ cultural” dimensions” (Marti Kheel, 2008, p. 143). They have intelligence characterized by exceptional cognitive abilities and are the only species that possess unique personalities and engage in self-aware actions. The ability to understand the ecological whole reflects the moral significance tied to humans' superior cognitive skills. Moreover, Rolston asserts that humans' capacity to appreciate nature is a fundamental aspect of their excellence. As a result, he posits that “humans need to integrate nature into their ethical frameworks; humans should recognize themselves as a part of nature” (Rolston, 2003, p. 518). His writings do not elucidate whether “the simple capacity to cherish the rest of creation offers sufficient grounds for human superiority, or if only those who are ‘self-actualized’ possess that superiority” (M.Kheel, 2008, p. 144). Rolston contends that a person's ascent to spirit signifies a second and heightened form of birth. He makes an analogy between surpassing our biological existence and the expansive awareness that characterizes Maslow's theory of self-actualization. Maslow (1968) claims that self-actualized individuals tend to perceive the world as existing independently of themselves and humanity as a whole. This perception is often mirrored in the average person during their most elevated moments, or peak experiences, when they can view nature more objectively, as if it exists for its own sake rather than merely as a resource for human exploitation (p. 166). Rolston regards ecological awareness as the basis for a transcendent perspective that motivates us to care for the larger ecological community. He further enriches this idea by describing it as an appreciation of divine creativity, a transcendent realm that transforms our limited biological existence. In Rolston's perspective: Maybe there is no divine presence; however, the natural world is, indeed, extraordinary. One might question the existence of any God or ultimate reality to which one should humbly submit. Yet, it is difficult to doubt the existence of nature, which serves as the fundamental basis for our existence. Should we not at least show some reverence to this Nature? (p. 59) As biological beings, humans must navigate their environment, which requires protecting themselves from potential dangers, like poisonous plants, and making use of the resources around them to satisfy their fundamental needs. However, unlike other species, humans operate not just as biological creatures but also as ethical beings. This means that while humans have the inherent right to exploit nature for their survival, they also hold a moral responsibility to acknowledge the intrinsic value of all living entities—both plant and animal life, as well as the entire ecosystem. Rolston asserts that “a complete ethics encompasses all living beings” (2003, p. 522). As per Naess, uncovering our inherent capabilities can enhance our appreciation for all life forms within the ecosystem. Living in harmony with everyone is possible when we realize our true nature or Self, which is always universal. For Naess, this is Self-realization or realization of inherent potentialities. Naess in his article, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World”, makes it clear that--Joy and meaning of life is increased through increased Self-realization. That is, through the fulfillment of potentials each has, but which never are exactly the same for any pair of living beings. Whatever the differences,

increased Self-realization implies broadening and deepening of self. (Naess,1987, p. 35) Self-realization increases with the fulfilment of potentials that every living being has. When considering our inherent potentialities, we cannot simply follow our impulses at any given moment or act on immediate impulses. This is relevant when we consider species other than humans. Plants and animals have their own ways of realizing inherent potentialities that we can learn about only through interacting with these creatures. Therefore, we should not depend on momentary impulses, no matter how compelling they may appear. According to Devall and Sessions, ecological consciousness is an essential requirement for a proper realization of both nature and ourselves, which is considered to be the foundation of deep ecology. The heart of deep ecology, according to them “is the cultivation of ‘ecological consciousness’ , the same as Naess means by ‘Self-realization’ (Fox, 1995, p. 336). The development of many significant human qualities is necessary for the cultivation of ecological consciousness. Humans should act in accordance with some recognized principles and should be honest. “This process involves being honest within ourselves and seeking clarity in our intuitions, then acting from clear principles. It results in taking charge of our actions, taking responsibility, practicing self- discipline and working honestly within our community” (Sessions, 1985, p. 8). Cultivating ecological consciousness is a vital human need and it is intrinsically connected to the well-being of the Earth. Moreover, humans need deep connection with untainted wilderness areas, which have not been domesticated for narrow human interests. Ecological consciousness requires a psychological expansion, where one transcends his narrow or isolated ego and identifies oneself with all living beings. As George Session remarks, “Ecological consciousness is the result of a psychological expansion of the narrowly encapsulated sense of self as isolated ego, through identification with all humans (species chauvinism), to finally an awareness of identification and interpenetration of self with ecosystem and biosphere” (Fox, 1995, p. 345). Therefore, in the context of ecological consciousness, the contribution of identification is important, as it involves both psychological as well as ethical processes of seeing oneself as an integral part of the larger ecological community. In the same let us describe about Rothenberg’s ‘Self-realization ‘-----

According to Rothenberg three features of self-realization can be seen---

Firstly, Self-realization does not mean self-centeredness.

Secondly, Self-realization means expanding our inner self so that one can understand the relation with nature.

Therefore, according to Naess, our environment resembles our home, where everyone belongs as part of one family. Consequently, we begin to identify with our environment, which motivated Naess to formulate the idea of the extended Self or ecological Self. This concept offers us an understanding of interconnectedness with the environment, which is often absent in contemporary human society.

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