

Is Radical Ecology related to Deep Ecology?

Only indirectly, in that it emerges from a similar momentum, a similar inclination to go deeper, to find more fundamental connections. Whereas Deep Ecology is a deepening of Ecology, Radical Ecology is a grounding of spirituality. It is about relating the Wholeness to everyday life. In doing so it embraces the concerns and attitudes of Ecology and Deep Ecology, while contextualising them in the depths and subtleties of human nature. Which is consciousness.

So, whereas Ecology and Deep Ecology are looking at life and finding the wholeness, Radical Ecology looks at wholeness and finds consciousness and life. It is not in conflict with Deep ecology, it just has a different flavour. You could maybe call it a more cosmic flavour. This doesn't make it better, only different. It speaks more directly to our deeper, ineradicable spiritual needs and nature.

Radical Ecology is what emerges from seeing clearly the indivisibility of wholeness in its totality. Not just within ecosystems. Not only within and as our habitat, Gaia.

Scientists are still looking for wholeness, for the unified theory. They haven't found it yet, and they are unable to recognise anyone else's version of it. Religious people do have a sense of wholeness: they call it God. Yet they usually can't quite see how that wholeness functions and embraces all apparent contradictions and paradoxes.

Yet there are those who are not caught in the contradiction. I think Einstein is one of those. His God, which he said was Spinoza's God, was not a narrow one, not an anthropomorphic one. But his sense of the wholeness that he couldn't quite explain pushed him to use the word God. One of the things he came to see from the depth of his remarkable perspective was "Time and space are modes by which we think. They are not conditions under which we live." If you can get a clear sense of where he was coming from to say that you are feeling the roots of a Radical Ecology.

What he's saying is that time doesn't exist until you think as if it does. If time doesn't exist until you think as if it does, what's the big deal about the future? What's the big deal about the future of the human race? What's the big deal about the future of planet earth? The big deal is that they are already here. We just haven't noticed yet.

Just as as we sit here in Bedford, London is still here, even though we are not noticing it. In the same way: what's the big deal about evolution? Evolution is about time. If time is an illusion does this make evolution an illusion. No it doesn't. Because from Einstein's perspective of Relativity, everything except the Totality, except the wholeness, is an illusion. Which doesn't mean that nothing really exists. It just means that we all see it in our own way. And that way is intrinsically distorted. While, unless we are clinically insane, being totally workable, totally functional.

This is not to say that evolutionists are wrong. Of course they are right. From the perspective of time they are right. But it's a limited perspective. A perspective that gives the impression that consciousness is a latecomer on the scene.

Actually they are not talking about consciousness the way that I'm talking about it. They're talking about conscious intelligence – rational intelligence, and the self awareness that results from the massive cerebral development that we enjoy and suffer from. I'm not talking

about that. An amoeba in a primeval swamp is consciousness. It distinguishes between primeval stimuli. That's what I mean by consciousness.

Nature is consciousness. They're not separate and I think that that's what we need, that's what we most want: the silence that is consciousness, that we find in nature. Because consciousness doesn't say anything. It just hears everything.

When people go into nature, that's one of the big things they recognise: the silence. Sometimes that disturbs them. Sometimes they know that yes, that's what they want, but they don't really understand it in the way I've just put it. That it's much more than just an absence of sound. The silence. The longing that we have for nature, for silence.

And space...

Yes, they're the same.

Do you think that we can access that anywhere?

Yes: in your own body. That's what somatic spirituality is about. The journey is a very very simple one and it's got nothing to do with prowess with the body. You can be in a wheelchair in which case you just feel the body within its restrictions. Of course if your body is not happy you can't go very far because it's unpleasant, so the body has to be in a pleasant, comfortable condition.

So when the body's ok and you're feeling the body, you're feeling sensations. Feeling sensation means you're feeling the response of cells to the situation that they're in. But at the same time you're interpreting. Your mind is interpreting the presence of your body as sensation. So as you encounter your body you're encountering your mind.

As you encounter your body and your mind you're encountering their relationship. And the boundary between them can not be delineated. Then you realise that actually there's no experience without the mind and there's no experience without the body. Eventually you realise there's no experience without consciousness.

That's true for an amoeba no less than you or I. So you realise that distinctions between mind and body and consciousness are mental ones. They're functional ones, they're usable ones. It's not that they're wrong or anything like that. It's just that being distinguished in that way is a function of a limited perspective.

What intimacy with the body does, and what being in nature does, is dissolve not only the distinction between them but it also the interest in such distinctions. I think that's what nature does. It calms you to a point where you don't give a shit about how anybody could explain it or define it. You're happy with it, you're being nourished by it and it doesn't matter how it can be described .

I lived in Ibiza for a few years. In many people's minds it's a toxic hell. Psychologically, environmentally, emotionally, pharmacologically it can be a terrible place. I can relate to that, I can see all of that. I don't live there anymore and you could say my not living there anymore is a response to that. Yet at the same time I could lie on the beach with people making music, talking about sex, smoking drugs and it not matter because nature was there.

There was an experience of being held, nurtured, contained by nature. By the sunlight and the wind, the oxygen and the hydrogen. In this room you don't notice that. It's happening but

you don't notice it. Because the static, continuous nature of all the stuff in this room creates a sensory barrier. You start to ignore your environment because it isn't changing. But when you're in nature there is no sensory barrier. Sensory data is constantly changing so you're constantly having to deal with it. Although of course most of that is sub conscious, but your brain is hard at work down there.

Do you think that for that reason we lose a sense of self? That I am this person because it's easier to be absorbed into something bigger.

I think what you're saying is right but you could say it the other way around. That when we're out of nature we lose the bigger sense of ourself. We think that we're just our passions and our ambitions and our anxieties. But when we get into nature it's not that we lose those things. It's that there's an expansion. So those things are ok then. They lose their weight as they get contextualised. They become less relevant. They lose the absoluteness, the tyrannical authority that they get in our urban isolation.

In this room you and I are being stimulated only by you and I because the rest of the information is constant. But if we were in nature it would be totally different. The input flowing between you and I would be coming in along with constantly changing input from nature. So it would be a much softer thing within which I would be totally different and you would be totally different.

In this situation indoors it's like a spotlight is on you and a spotlight is on me. Then what I do, what you do suddenly becomes really important, whereas in nature it's not so important. And so then my peculiarities and yours are not so important. So in a sense I am not so important, and you are not so important. The whole has become important. The whole of which we are only a part. The wholeness of nature.

I've noticed that it changes the way that I talk – when I'm walking in nature it's easier to express my self, to just be.. In an enclosed space it's harder to access that.

Yes. It's like there's a pressure when you're inside. The pressure is on you, and on me. It creates a sense of self in a defined and therefore vulnerable and needy sense. When you're in nature there isn't that pressure. You're just part of something much, much bigger. Your thoughts and feelings are part of something much, much bigger. Then your thoughts and feelings don't have the same weight. They're not such a big deal. When we're cut off from nature our thoughts become the whole movie. They are the only moving part of the scene. It's just our thoughts that are moving. Otherwise we're sitting in a room and the stimulation is constantly the same.

And they get too loud... and we need more distractions as well. I noticed when you're living very close to nature you don't need TV...

Because you're getting the changing stimuli. When we're in a building we feel deprived. We are deprived. We are deprived of nature. But on a more concrete level we're deprived of stimulation. We're deprived of constantly differing sensory stimuli coming through our skin.

We feel deprived so we need to do something about that. So we create our addictions. I think addictions are to a great extent a substitute for nature. This is not to say that rural communities don't have addicts. Of course they do. But how many crack addicts are shepherds? Of course it's very easy to romanticise nature, as a concept. But what I mean more is action, activity in nature. That is what we need. Direct engagement with nature. Working in nature especially.

We need to experience the transmutation of the elements of nature into human culture. We need to be a part of that. Even if only occasionally. Most human beings are no longer participating in the roots of human culture, in the roots of our existence. They're just recipients of the garbage, more or less. So there's a deep dissatisfaction that they're not expressing the creativity that's implicit in all nature, and not least in the awesome sophistication of the neocortex.

Agriculture – farming has just become about chemicals and machines.

I don't know that that's a universal. Agriculture is still very varied. In Ibiza people will plough a field the size of this room which they'd never do in England. They'll make that effort. Where I live in Italy it's definitely changed a lot. Also almost every person in my region was a farmer a generation ago. Even though most of them are not anymore they are still deeply connected to nature. They know the land and they still grow vegetables. They pick herbs and cut wood. They have to act differently when it's snowing to when it's raining. So I think that that's not lost. Agribusiness is not the whole story. Even where it is dominant, nature is still there. It's still coming from nature even through all the mechanisation.

I have a friend in Northumberland I've known since I was 7. When he was a child his father was very wealthy. My friend is not wealthy; the situation has changed a lot. I went to stay with him for Christmas a few years ago. On Christmas Eve he said to me as we went to bed 'Godfrey, when you wake up make me some breakfast' and I said: 'Does it matter what time?' And he said 'No, just as soon as you get up cook me some bacon, eggs and sausages and then come and find me.' He was getting up at 5am to work.

I found him underneath a tractor with a spanner in his hand doing God knows what at about 8.00 am on Christmas morning. And I thought how far have he and I gone apart? We've known each other for 45 years; and he's living totally in nature and he's totally at home in it. That evening, Christmas day, drunk of course being a farmer, he said to me, 'Go into the shed there's a lamb there whose mother has died. See if you can give it some milk from the bottle there.' I went and tried but I couldn't. The lamb wouldn't open its mouth. I came in and I said: 'I can't handle it, I can't get it to do it.' And he said 'oh it doesn't fucking matter.' And it died.

That shocked me. How could you say 'fuck it, it doesn't matter when you know that you could go out there and stick the bottle in its mouth.' But actually it didn't matter. How many hundreds of little lambs has he had to let go and die. He's in nature in a non romantic way. There's a healthiness and a robustness about him that comes from that. He abuses himself in terms of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. But because he's living totally in nature he's very alive, very responsive. That morning, Christmas morning, he was out there in the dark and the wind and the snow on his back against the cold earth with a growling stomach. That blew my mind. Here I was sleeping in a tipi every night and getting off on nature but he was being truly intimate with it in a way I can't even imagine. And it was nourishing him so that he can handle a huge input of toxins that would destroy me.

Do you think we romanticise it because we're cut off from it?

Yes. We romanticise it because we need to. Because we need to not forget about it. We need to remember. So we romanticise it. We give an eternal soul to every animal. When there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that even a human being has an eternal soul. That's just idealised wishful thinking well demolished by the teaching of the Buddha more than two thousand years ago. People can talk about one, think about one, dream about one. But no one has ever found one. No one ever will. We only need an eternal soul because we have lost

touch with nature. We only need eternity because we can't be intimate with what is actually happening right here, right now.

What I did in Ibiza was kind of uncivilised, let's say, but it wasn't really being intimate with nature. I wasn't converting nature into my life. Somebody else was doing that for me and I was paying. I could walk around bare foot and naked and sleep on the earth and wash and shit outside. So my romanticising it did nourish me a little but I don't think that's the same kind of nourishment as actually working in nature.

Working in nature I don't mean just farming. I mean being involved with the elements of nature within your means of survival. It could be as a harbour master or fisherman, or a landscape gardener or a tree surgeon. Nature is real to these people, it directly effects their daily decision making process and their daily experience of being human in an immediate, tangible way. They can't afford to idealise, romanticise it.

We pretend that nature is kind and compassionate. But it isn't. Nature is pretty ruthless really. Life is pretty ruthless. It depends entirely on death. There is no life without death. There is no joy without suffering. Those who would like to eradicate death, whether its human death or animal death, don't even know what they're trying to do. They're not just trying to turn nature on its head. They're trying to eradicate the roots of life, the roots of joy.

Of course it's immoral to exploit human beings and animals. But it's not immoral to survive. You need to have a hierarchy of perspectives if you want to enjoy genuinely skilful action. I know some animal activists that condemn all meat eating indiscriminately. If you eat meat you are immoral. Certainly you are unspiritual. Well if they with their self righteous and unacknowledged prejudice are spiritual you can count me out of that bandwagon. I'll go with nature any day rather than any self righteous and self justifying idealism.

I remember watching David Attenborough about this little red crab that's born a rocky island on an island in the Pacific. Millions and millions and millions of these seething crabs go into the sea. A little while later about a few hundred thousand, the only survivors, come back to breed.

Nature is ruthless to the individual. We've become obsessed with the individual. I recognize that there's great danger in saying that. I don't mean to endorse totalitarian exploitation. I'm not saying that therefore the individual doesn't matter and that some people can starve. Be compassionate, take care of people but be realistic and don't assume that you can politicise against the way things are. Political solutions ungrounded in personal change just cause more problems: sooner or later.

If you want a different political and economic system then you have to have different people. That's the way I see it. I think that is possible. I think it is possible that we can lose our rapaciousness and hostility and mistrust in each other. Because that originates in our mistrust of nature and ourselves.

If we are able to consider the possibility that nature and life are actually trustworthy then we can lose that hostility, that impulse to exploit. As long as we see nature as a battlefield we will find it hard to trust and care about strangers. As long as we don't take time to be intimate with nature, especially as our bodies, we will find it hard to really trust the ones we love: including ourselves. Any political alternative would have to rest on that. It would need to rest on trust in nature, trust in life, trust in human beings.

When I was in Mexico looking at butterflies – the scientist was explaining how butterflies knew how to go from Canada to Mexico thanks to their sensitivity to environmental signals. They're so finely sensitised to these signals – it's that which is moving them. I was just so in awe...

Except they don't know where to go in the way that we know what day of the week it is. They just go. It's their nature. That's nature. That's what we've lost. We get lost in the cerebral cortex. We have all of this knowledge that we think is ours, but it's nature's knowledge functioning in us. It's a legacy. We've lost touch with nature's interdependencies, its indivisible wholeness.

As a human being we have those same sensitivities. Every cell in our body that's not corrupt or dying has that exquisite sensitivity to its needs. If we don't fulfil those needs we start to die. So we haven't lost our sensitivity. We've just lost touch with it.

I think that the beauty of a somatic spirituality is that you have to encounter that sensitivity directly and deeply. You become in awe of the intelligence of life taking care of itself in and as your body. Through cellular intelligence, biological sensitivity.

Of as a teacher of somatic spirituality I'm going to be prejudiced about this. I think that awe, reverence, or at least appreciation of nature is what we need more than anything else. First of all though we need to trust, respect it as our source and sustenance. We need that individually to not go insane, and we need it collectively to not destroy the planet.

I think awe is the best word because respect can be something like a cloak you can put on. I respect the police, the government because I have to, because they have power over me. I don't feel it in my heart, my bones. I have to follow the line.

That's actually what's going on with a lot of environmentalism. It's not respect for nature; it's not awe for nature; it's fear. And that's not a very good recipe for creativity: fear. I think the primary environmental issue is establishing a love of nature. I don't mean recognition of its complexity. I don't mean recognition of the intricate interweavings of mutual interdependence. I mean love of it. I mean "wow, it's fantastic, it's so amazing". Not: "wow isn't it sweet".

That's what the director of this movie said – the aim is to get people to fall in love with it. With these creatures.

It has to be more than that unfortunately. I could fall in love with you, Laura, and still hate women. Do you see what I mean. So it's not the specific, it's not the particular. We have to fall in love with the abstract essence, the heart of it: nature itself, life itself.

That's very difficult for people to do because it's an abstraction. To fall in love with a particular is easy enough. To fall in love with a certain amount of the particularities is not enough. It's not enough. You have to see the wholeness, the indivisible wholeness behind it. And to realise that that's actually what's functioning.

When I'm talking to you, what's functioning? I couldn't even begin to start describing it. Our love of yoga is underpinning our knowing each other. The dramatic cerebral development of the neocortex is providing the means for us to talk to each other. The long slow drift towards vertebral verticality is behind this conversation. Cellular respiration is a necessary precondition for our existence. The love of oxygen for hydrogen, water, is functioning through me talking to you. The strong and weak nuclear force and gravity are supporting us.

Everything that's involved in the evolution of life is expressing itself through this phrase. Totally. And that word, this gesture depends upon all of that. This is what people have to encounter deeply for there actually to be any possibility of environmental recovery. Otherwise it's just a tax we're having to pay.

Targets to be met..

Yes: "fuck it, I'll take one less flight this year because otherwise my grandchildren....." That's not going to work. It has to come from the heart. There has to be a change of values enough to bring about a change of motive. You have to really, really not want all this destructive consumer accumulation.

To not want that strongly enough means you have to want something else so badly that you can see the false shine on all that stuff very, very clearly. Clearly enough to let go of your self deceptions, to let go of reassuring yourself with your carbon offsets. Stop using aeroplanes! Or admit that you are one of the destroyers.

It's not enough to want to save nature, to save the planet. It's not enough because it needs to be saved from us. From human beings. From human consumption and accumulation. Saving the planet does not come from understanding the subtleties of interlocked ecosystems. It can not come from agreeing to reduce fossil fuel consumption. It will not come from targeting limits on global warming. It can only come from a total transformation of human behaviour, of human culture.