

## **Deep Ecology and its relevance for GNH and Bhutan**

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**«Let the river Live!»  
Arne Næss in a civil disobedience action to protect nature.  
The beginning of Deep Ecology in 1965.**



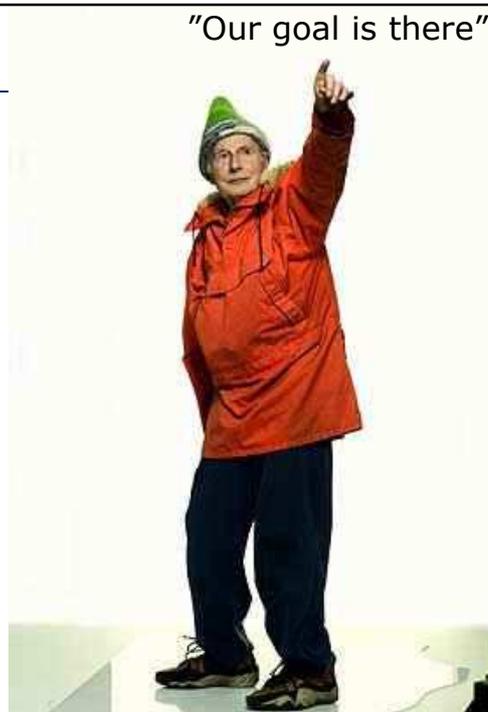
**Problem statement:**

**Deep Ecology is not a finished ready-made theory, but an outline, open to be filled out. Every person has a responsibility to work out his own ecosophy, a reasoned process of ecocultural harmony.**

**Could Gross National Happiness research and Deep Ecology complement and inspire each other?**

- Deep ecology admits a great diversity at the level of ultimate premises. We may be inspired by Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Christianity...., and nevertheless work cooperatively.
- The “front is very long” and each person may contribute on his own premises.

Arne Næss (1912-2009)



### Gross National Happiness =

**GNH** - a "holistic, balanced, collective, sustainable and equitable" measure of happiness (Ura et al 2012 p 7).

Replaces Gross National (Pollution) Product = GNP, a one-dimensional measure of welfare based upon market transactions

GNH is based upon nine domains:

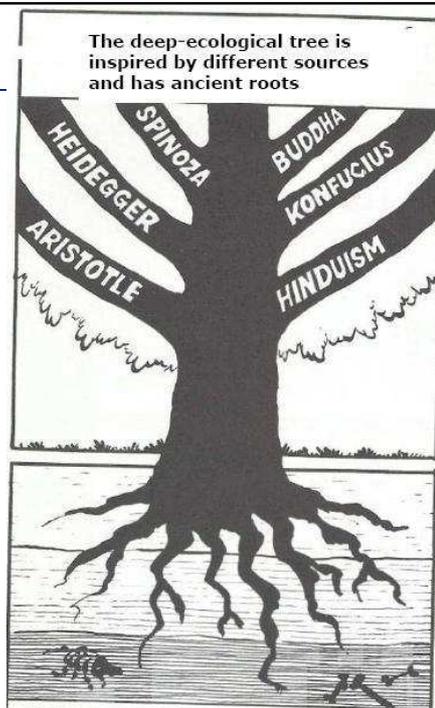
1. Education,
2. Living standards,
3. Good health,
4. Environmental diversity and resilience,
5. Good governance,
6. Time use,
7. Community vitality,
8. Cultural diversity and resilience,
9. Psychological well-being.



### Deep Ecology and its inspirational sources

- Arne Næss formulated and structured deep ecology, but the roots of deep ecology is ancient:

Some of the inspirational sources are indicated by "the deep ecological tree" with branches consisting of ideas from Hinduism, Confucius, and Buddha, and Aristotle, Heidegger and Spinoza



### Deep ecology – central ideas

- Assumes a **relational** ontology that fits into a holistic, non-reductionist, non-anthropocentric worldview.
- Focuses on the underlying causes, *the roots of the problems*. (while Shallow ecology is concerned with the symptoms)
- The personal knowledge of the environment in most rich countries is at an all time low. Most of us are ecologically autistic. We need to **change the basic ideological structure**, which ultimately means to change how we as humans regard ourselves. Thus Deep ecology *redefines the very notion of self as a subject – and opens up for an eco-Self*.
- **Self-Realization for all beings** is the top norm.
- Man is inseparable from nature: “If we harm nature, we harm ourself”.

## DE and GNH: An exploration

The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves – independent of the usefulness for human purposes.

There are basic similarities between the non-anthropocentric view of Deep Ecology and the Buddhist and Hindu traditions in Bhutan. The tradition of Buddhism has a 'moderately anthropocentric worldview' (Gabor 2015 p 59)

## DE and GNH: An exploration

Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity **except to satisfy vital human needs**.

"Ecological diversity and resilience" is measured with four indicators in the GNH index. One is wildlife, measured in terms of crop damage. This might be in line with Deep Ecology. **Vital human needs** may justify the right to reduce the richness and diversity of life and wildlife. (Cf GNH index, domain 8).





## **DE and GNH: An exploration**

We need a substantial decrease of human population.

It is "not to foster animosity towards humans as such – *on the contrary, human fulfillment seems to demand and need free nature.*"

The present interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and had to stop.

We have entered a new geological epoch, 'the age of *Anthropocene*'. "This is a world of waste and imbalance.

(800 million go hungry every night, but 2 billion suffer from obesity. Every dollar of GNP produced, produces more than a dollar in unaccounted pollution, waste, health risks and loss of nature" (P. Shrivastava, Sept 2015)).

## DE and GNH: An exploration

- Policies, which affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures, must be changed.

GNH and DE share this view,  
and are strong opponents of GNP growth, which does not imply any progress along the course of Self-realization"

DE can learn from GNH's measurement of "Community vitality"

- Local communities, togetherness, decentralization and self-reliance are key terms in DE thinking. Nobody wishes to be absorbed into a society that is "big but not great".

## DE and GNH: An exploration

- *Deep Ecology can learn about the notion of sufficiency from GNH:*

- On time use. A balance between work and leisure is necessary.
- On ideology: A key pillar of the new paradigm of GNH is sufficiency".
  - In measuring Living standard, *sufficiency* means that GNH Index does not use the poverty line, because sufficiency threshold refers to higher conditions for wellbeing than poverty lines (Ura et al p 169).

"..an absolute sufficiency threshold was chosen, since the GNH values encourages people to achieve happiness through their accomplishments, and discourages a relative approach in which one is satisfied only if one has relatively more income...than one's peers. ( Ura et al 2012 a p 169).

## DE and GNH: An exploration

- *The ideological change is mainly that of **appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value)** rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.*
- Deep Ecology can learn about spirituality from GNH
- For the purpose of GNH, spirituality is 'intrinsic to development'  
*If material growth undermines the spiritual framework of society and its values of compassion and integrity, then development has not occurred". (Ura et al 2012a p 132).*



## DE and GNH: An exploration

- Those that support these points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes, in a non-violating way.
- Via democratic spirit and listening to all relevant stakeholders, civil-disobedience actions are not necessary.
- **Good governance** is an important domain in the GNH index



### DE and GNH: "*Final*" remarks.

- DE and GNH both represents clear ethical positions, knowledge and wisdom, and can reinforce and enrich each other.
- 1) *Deep Ecology needs GNH!* Because GNH's concepts of *sufficiency, mindfulness and spirituality* contributes to an *elaboration of DE.*
  - 2) *Deep Ecology* – may inspire GNH researchers to continue to raise basic questions on how to contribute to human flourishing in Bhutan. The non-anthropocentric assumption in DE may challenge Bhutan's GNH measurement. *Deep Ecological thinking implies living a rich life with simple means and Self-Realization for all beings!*
    - GNH is a milestone towards understanding and elaboration of the Deep Ecological narrative, often regarded as a distant ecotopy.*
- *GNH is implemented in practice*, represents a role model for the global community, and directly benefits the people of Bhutan.
- My students – economists *in spe* from many countries admire and are inspired by your innovative and humanistic way to pursue happiness in a deep sense in Bhutan.

Kardenchey for your attention.