

Authenticity Beyond the Anthropocene: Self-Realization and Symbiosis in Naess and Watsuji

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In contemporary literature, the concept of authenticity has been espoused as an ethical ideal which takes self-realization (in relation to other human beings) to be the highest good (Taylor 1991, Guignon 2004, Varga 2011, Shuttleworth 2020). However, in Deep Ecology, Arne Naess has attempted to go beyond an anthropocentric ethic of authenticity and to apply self-realization to all forms of life. Such an approach is important for overcoming the issue that ethical value is human-centred, which lies at the heart of environmental ethics. In this presentation, I will illustrate that the account which Naess espouses is implausible for the reason that it lacks the philosophical foundations necessary to develop beyond mere intuition. However, rather than reject Naess' theory, it will instead be supplemented and supported with the spatial-phenomenology and hermeneutical-ethics of Watsuji Tetsurō. It will be further illustrated that putting Naess and Watsuji into dialogue will result in a mutually beneficial exchange. That is, not only can we supplement and support Naess' theory of Ecosophy by providing a philosophical foundation for his concept of Self-realization, but applying Watsuji's ideas to Naess' Ecosophy, leads us to think about and draw out the ecological implications of Watsuji's ethical thought. In this way, not only will this presentation seek to contribute to the literature on Deep Ecology, but also authenticity, by establishing two theorists as advocates of an ecologically extended account of authenticity.

In order to achieve this aim, this presentation will be divided into four parts. In the first part, I will begin by defining Deep Ecology in order to contextualise the discussion of ecological ethics. In the second part, I will focus on Arne Naess and his theory of Ecosophy as an ecologically extended ethic of authenticity. Here it will be argued that Naess' theory of Ecosophy is based on mere intuition, and whilst he attempts to systematize his intuition by appeal to Kant, Spinoza, and Gandhi, he fails to justify his extension to the latter two of these philosophical aids. In the third part, I will turn to the ethics and phenomenology of Watsuji Tetsurō in order to supplement and support Naess' theory. In particular, I will illustrate that Watsuji's phenomenology of space and hermeneutical ethics provides the means to establish Naess' ecological Self. In the fourth part, it will be further claimed that this encounter enables us to draw out an implicit ecological ethic which is latent within Watsuji's thought. Thus, not only will it be claimed that Watsuji can contribute to Deep Ecology, but when read within the context of Naess' Ecosophy, that Watsuji can also be seen to contribute to environmental ethics.