

Biocentrism: Ideology Against Nature

1999

That humanity is somehow ‘out of balance’ with nature is hardly a topic of controversy nowadays. There is little question that humans are fouling the world to the point of suicide for us and mass extinction for all other life. To claim otherwise is ludicrous. In a variety of ways, people have attempted to grasp the problem, define it, and seek solutions. Of the many new and more faddish results, few have been as popular as Deep Ecology – also known as Biocentrism – the view that humans are acting out of excessive human-centredness (anthropocentrism) and thus destroying the planet and the rest of the species which have just as much ‘intrinsic right’ to live out their biological destiny as we do. Accordingly, Biocentrism (life/earth/nature centredness) calls for a new way of acting. Specifically, it calls for ‘earth-centred’ activity and thinking – putting the ‘earth first’ (instead of putting ourselves first) as a way out of the global dilemma.

In the following rant I wish to take a critical look at these assertions and show them for what I believe to be false, misleading and even counter-productive. I don’t mean this to be a sermon or some statement of absolute truth. No way!

What follows is, more than anything else, just my initial attempt at deciphering and understanding the relationships between some types of ideas and activity that I’ve discovered to be true to the best of my experience. The points I take on here, and their broader implications, have been of central importance to many of the great disputes and inconsistencies within what can loosely be called the ‘radical ecology movement’. Hopefully, my efforts here will help to encourage further discussion.

According to its proponents, Biocentrism is nature-centred living. It therefore must be premised on an irreconcilable separation of humans and nature. This is so because if humans were inherently natural beings – i.e: an equal part of nature,

fully integrated into the natural flow of life — then to be human-centred (anthropocentric) would also imply being nature-centred (biocentric). But Biocentrism has already been defined by its practitioners to be the opposite of Anthropocentrism. So, according to Biocentrist thought (nature-centred philosophy) humans are irredeemably estranged from nature — or were never part of it in the first place — because ‘human’ is posited as the opposite of ‘nature’ (Anthropocentrism versus Biocentrism). Oddly, Anthropocentrism implies the very same thing. If Anthropocentrism is human-centred living and this is the opposite of Biocentrism, or nature-centred living, then once again, ‘human’ and ‘nature’ are opposite and therefore separate. It is a contradiction to say that two positions which are identical are, in fact, opposite. I will try to resolve this dilemma by going outside of what is common to both Biocentrism and Anthropocentrism — ideological thinking.

Ideological thinking is false consciousness. In other words, it is ideas and activity which originate elsewhere, outside of our own emotional and intellectual subjectivity, our identity. Ideology is when we mistake others’ thoughts for our own or when our own thoughts become rigid and fossilised and those thoughts come to control us — instead of the other way around. Marxism, all religions, guru cults are all very clear and obvious examples of ideological thinking. The politically correct sacred or official line is what one must adhere to. These ideas and demands on our activity originate not out of our own needs or desires, or ideas or personal lived experience or community, but from outside of us, externally to us. Other examples of ideologically (false) activity include: all political ideologies, ‘causes’ (doing things for ‘the cause’ instead of for our own needs), consumerism (externally created wants and preferences) and philosophies.

Both Biocentrism, and its necessary companion, Anthropocentrism, are ideologies. They both place *external* demands on our thinking and activity. Biocentrism differs from, say, Marxism, Christianity or the Moonies only in *content*. In *form* it is identical. How it differs is that it demands that we act, not according to the politically, morally or guru determined correct line, but to the ‘naturally’ correct one. ‘Nature’ — or an abstract overruling *idea-of-nature* replaces the guru, Bible or Party doctrines. There is no room in any of these (or any other ideologies) for the vagaries of human wildness, independent thought, activity or desire — or nature. All thought and activity is pre-scribed, determined externally to our human need, desires. At times we may agree with something that is also part of an ideology. But at this point, if it is truly no longer ideological, no longer external, no longer false consciousness, then we need not invoke the label, category, guru, or other ‘authority’ to justify our ideas and activity. In other words, instead of saying “according to the Marxist doctrines...”, or “The Bible says...”, or “Deep Ecology says...”, we would say “I think that...”, “I’ve noticed that...”, “I feel that...”, or “I’m doing this because...”. In this case — authentic, subjective ideas and activity based

on our constantly changing needs and desires and always personally checked out against our own everyday lived experience — we can defend and explain our ideas and activity with arguments and examples that we know to be true because we've thought about or actually experienced them. (This has been called 'theory' — more on that later). In other words, we can claim our ideas as our own.

When we are in the grips of ideological thinking and acting we cannot do this because the ideas are not our own — we did not think, feel or experience them for ourselves. (Ideology, in this way, is administered thought, directed action — more on that later.) Therefore, we cannot argue, explain or justify them ourselves. Instead when someone opposes or challenges our ideology, we must put them into a category — i.e: label them as 'other'. The label (authority, justification) of the ideologist is then used to justify *evasion* of any challenge. Some examples are "That's just Marxism...", "That's Violence, we follow the Non-Violence Code...", "She's a Humanist...". Thus, any challenge to an ideology can be dismissed as that of an 'outsider' in the eyes of the Party faithful who will all nod their heads in agreement at how clever the ideologist is.

Earlier I referred to 'theory'. Theory is (to clearly define it at least for the sake of this discussion) the opposite of ideology. Ideology is inside-out theory. In ideological activity, the motivations come from without. With theory, motivations come from within, from our own *subjective* ideas, experiences, longings and needs. Thus theory can also be called 'self-theory'. Most people today are walking around inside-out, motivated and directed by a myriad of things — anything but themselves. Theory is never static, never rigid. Our theory, if we fail to constantly evolve and test it against our experience and new information, quickly fossilises into ideological thinking.

When we base our activities and ideas on our self-theory, we can clearly see what the actuality behind new information is and choose to take or leave whatever we want. The self-theorist skips and dances through the great supermarket of ideology, tearing open every package, scattering the contents and appropriating what seems good and nourishing and discarding the rest. The ideologist shops carefully, or even perhaps on impulse, looking for just the right fit of pre-packaged ideas to take home and consume wholeheartedly — after paying at the register of course! Ideologists often are brand switchers. They'll stick with one package of (non-) thought only until the next one in a shinier package comes along and lures them in. Other ideologists maintain a lifelong brand loyalty!

In the earlier discussion about ideologists using labels to evade challenges, we can say that the self-theorist can easily see — and see past — ideological boundaries of the opponent by watching for examples of ideological thinking such as statements like "Deep Ecology says that...", "Marxism says that...", "Gandhi would've said that...". The person under the influence of an ideology, a false consciousness,

on the other hand, having constructed these barriers, cannot see out. It has become a wall, a real barrier to advancement, a very un-radical thing to do.

Note also that just as the ideologist isn't the originator of his/her ideas, so s/he neither claims the credit for them (e.g. "*Biocentrism* says..."). But here is another example of how the ideologist is mystified. Doctrines, ideologies and the like do not *themselves* talk and so it is wrong and misleading to say "*Biocentrism* says...". Who is *Biocentrism*? When we begin to ask such questions, we can peel off layers of mystification and confusion like the skin of an onion until we can see what lies beneath: Actually *Biocentrism* doesn't say anything. Actual people do and say things such as "*Biocentrism* this and that...", not some mystical *Biocentrism* force or creature. It's important to uncover the real source of ideas we hold so they can be fully evaluated on their actual content and meaning. If we then really do agree, then we can say "I think this and that..." and the ideas will no longer have control over us. We will control the ideas. Beware the dangers of attributing concrete activity and thinking to abstract concepts or doctrines or slogans.

In response to attacks, the person who engages in ideological thinking and activity simply builds higher and bigger walls. To continue this imagery for a moment longer, we can see that eventually the ideologist will be overwhelmed by the theorist who, being free to think, evaluate and rove around, will eventually find the cracks and weak spots that will bring the whole thing down with little effort. Imagine a guerrilla group with a radical self-theory challenging a monolithic state military force under the grip of a rigid chain of command (external control, ideology). This whole preceding discussion has obvious relevance for anyone engaged in direct subversive resistance — or think they are: ideology creeps up where you'd least expect it. But you can draw you own conclusions on that...

I've tried to present a fairly clear and simplified (if not simplistic) picture of what ideological activity is, how it operates and how it can limit us. I've tried to contrast that with theory, a better way to understand the world and think and act. What I'll try to do now is explain how ideology is the death knell of radical change, of humanity, of nature and of the earth and wilderness. I showed at the very beginning how *Biocentrism* (an ideology, a category of Nature-ally correct thought and activity, a label used to discredit opposing views, an external source of ideas and action, an authority) is premised on the view that humans are separate from nature and act out of human-centeredness (*Anthropocentrism*) and this is what is destroying the earth. But I also showed that the apparent *opposites* of *Biocentrism* and *Anthropocentrism* both in fact mean the *same* thing. I said that this dichotomy was resolvable by breaking out of *ideological* forms of thought. This is what I mean.

I'd like to start with this assertion: Humans are not separate from nature. Our 'nature' is that which is most 'natural' to us — our deepest needs, desires, dreams, internally defined ideas (self-theory), our emotional wants and expression, our

wild, animal instincts. Our human nature is our wild, free animal instinct and subjectivity. This is what is *most natural* and also what is *most human* about us since these qualities arise *naturally* and from *within us*. 'Human' and 'nature' are not contradictory, mutually exclusive terms.

Both Biocentrism (life/nature/earth-centred) and Anthropocentrism (human-centrism) mean the same thing, yet one is defined as being opposed to the other. They both are ideologies. They both are external, packaged thought for consumption and directed action. Both have adherents who purport that the ideology must be allowed to do the thinking for us, and that we must act out of motivations it prescribes. Ideological thinking requires that we relinquish our desires, our unpredictability, our ability to change and adapt and submit them to the category, label, doctrine, guru, Bible or, in the case of Biocentrism, to an abstracted Nature; *an idea of nature*.

When we relinquish our desires and wild animal instincts, we are relinquishing what is most *natural*, what is most *human* about us. Ideological thinking (false consciousness, since the thoughts and actions are not our own) is the enemy of nature. It is the enemy of humans because it deprives us of what makes us human — our human nature, our wildness. *All* authority — since it is ideological, externally imposed — is the enemy of nature and wildness. All domination and obedience kills nature in us, deprives us of our natures by depriving us of our humanity, our dreams, desires and wildness.

This is the mistake of claiming to act or think in the name of something external to us — whether it be Biocentrism, Marxism, Non-Violence, 'The Cause', America, Deep Ecology or *an abstracted idea of Nature itself*. These all kill our unruly, natural wild humanity. To say we are thinking or acting for Deep Ecology of the Earth or Nature or the Spotted Owl is to act for reasons external to us. To do this we must submit our desires to these ideological forms of thought, we must suppress our wildness, individuality — our nature. What a bizarre circumstance, to be risking injury or imprisonment to defend *an idea of nature* while killing the *real living nature* in ourselves! Of course, if you are doing/thinking those things for yourself and not killing wildness, not killing nature, not involved in ideological activity, then there is no reason to invoke labels as justifications. Be able to say: "I'm doing this out of my own desires for wildness, for my own human nature (or whatever)." And herein lies the way out of the contradiction.

Both Biocentrism and Anthropocentrism are ideologies and therefore anti-nature. If we act out of Biocentrism we are actually killing our nature, *not* being nature-centred. If we act out of Anthropocentrism, we are *not* acting out of our human-centred desires and wild animal instincts. We are acting out of ideological demands. So, Biocentrism is anti-nature and Anthropocentrism is anti-human! So they are both anti-human and anti-nature.

So, big deal? But this becomes critical when we see that it is this same mode of self-denial or self-repression of wildness that allows us to do anti-human activity and anti-nature activity in this society. Biocentrism (and all ideologies), therefore, reinforces this precondition, reinforces our domestication. The actual daily activity, the dominant mode of human existence on the earth today is *mislabelled* by the Biocentrists. It is not Anthropocentrism, not human-centred. It is not done to meet human needs, not done as a result of the fulfilment of wild human desires. This activity is done to fulfil the needs of power and capital, nation-states and commodity-exchange, the whole military-industrial-national-empire. It should rightly be called production-centred or power-centred or death-centred since we must kill our wild natures to be part of it. Our daily activity is done to keep this 'Machine' running. This Machine is what is devouring the earth, nature, wilderness and humanity. To work in the entrails of this 'leviathan' requires that we submit all our wildness to the needs, schedules and routines of it. On a daily basis, this is how we individually kill our desire for our nature, our wildness.

To do this, to suppress our own wild, human, animal instincts, we must put on successively think layers of emotional 'armour' to protect ourselves from the pain of a murdered nature trying to break through. Like asphalt and herbicide to keep the wild plants from destroying the roadbed, this armour must be constantly added to or it begins to fall away. This armour can also be thought of as the *internalisation* of the Machine, its logic and schedules. Eventually the armour can be mistaken for what it is suppressing in the same way that so many people today mistake concrete, machinery and media images for the real world. This is the success of the system, the goal of our education, the triumph of Domestication over Wilderness.

It is only such armoured beings, domesticated humans who have internalised the Machine, that would engage in self-destructive/nature-destructive activity. Herein lies the danger of *all* modes of ideological (pseudo) awareness and activity (of which Biocentrism is but one of many, many). By encouraging us to follow that which is external to us, that which negates our own *human* wildness and desires, these ways of thinking and acting, *help build our emotional armour against nature!* They encourage self-repression and domestication. Ideology causes us to further distrust our wild natural instincts to be free. In this way, we are more able to destroy the world while at the same time we are that much less able to transcend and break free from this very mode of destructive behaviour.

What is needed is a subjective, critical, internal-human-nature-centred type of 'self-theory' that helps us peel away the mystification surrounding our relation to ourselves, our world and our daily activity. We need to see domestication and suppression of wilderness and freedom clearly and without illusions before we can begin the wild, liberatory celebration of our nature, the creation of planetary wilderness and the pitiless annihilation of everything which stands in the way.

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