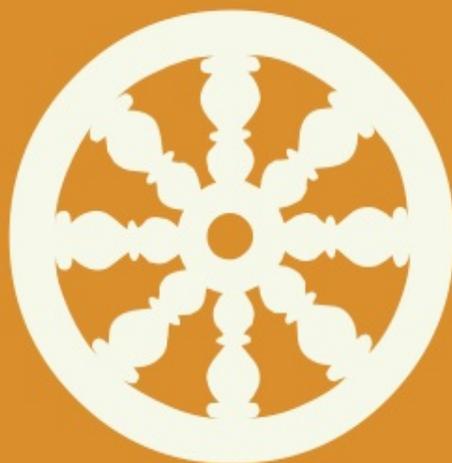


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**Buddhist Perspectives
on the Ecocrisis**

*With a Declaration on
Environmental Ethics by H.
H. the Dalai Lama*

Klas Sandell (Ed.)



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Abbreviations

All Pali texts referred to are editions of the Pali Text Society, London. Abbreviations used are as follows:

A	Aṅguttara Nikāya
D	Dīgha Nikāya
Dhp	Dhammapada (verse)
Dhp-a	Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā
J	Jātaka
M	Majjhima Nikāya
S	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Sutta-nipāta (verse)
Th	Theragātha (verse)
Vin	Vinaya Piṭaka

Foreword

Bhikkhu Bodhi

The current crisis arising over environmental pollution and the over-exploitation of our natural resources has gripped the attention and aroused the concern of virtually every human being alive today. The anxiety provoked by the

“ecocrisis” stems from a cause lying far deeper than the immediate predicament which it creates. For the ecocrisis does not confront us simply as one more set of problems to be disposed of through further research and legislation. It comes upon us, rather, as a disturbing manifestation of the dangers inherent in unbridled technological proliferation and industrial growth and a grim portent of even graver dangers ahead if current trends continue unchecked. Thereby it causes us to reassess some of the basic premises upon which modern Western civilization is grounded and the goals towards which so much of our energy and wealth are directed.

The development of Western technology was spurred by the belief that applied science could eliminate all human wants and usher in a golden age of unlimited prosperity for all. Now, having utilised technology to subjugate nature and to serve human desire, we have doubtlessly succeeded in making life more comfortable and secure in many respects than it had been in an earlier era. However, our smog-covered cities, polluted waterways, devastated forests and chemical dumps remind us painfully that our material triumphs have been gained at a terrible price. Not only is the beauty of the natural environment being gradually destroyed, but its very capacity to sustain life is seriously threatened, and in the process of vanquishing nature, man himself has placed himself in danger of losing his own humanity.

In most industrialised nations, and in much of the Third

World, national authorities have endeavoured to prevent the further spread of environmental pollution, sometimes under pressure. Despite partial success, however, the ecocrisis continues to mount, and as it does so it becomes increasingly clear that the deficiencies in our programmes are not merely quantitative but pertain to a far more fundamental level.

For the most part the approaches to environmental protection that have been sponsored and implemented in official quarters are those that are consonant with the dominant technocratic mentality. Thus they operate within the same closed frame of reference, and draw upon the same fixed premises, as the projects originally responsible for the ecocrisis. Unable to envisage any alternatives to the aims of industrial society, their proponents simply assume that our troubles stem from a lack of adequate scientific expertise and thus that they can be remedied by filling the lack through greater scientific ingenuity and more efficient technological management. However, while so much money is poured into research aimed at extending human control over the environment in order to prevent specific hazards, the basic presupposition at the root of the whole ecocrisis is allowed to stand unquestioned, namely, that the means to achieve human well-being lies in increased production and consumption.

Among a growing number of thoughtful people today it is just this presupposition that is coming to be called into question. The realisation has been dawning that if our

natural environment is to be saved—indeed, if we ourselves are to be saved from destroying ourselves along with our environment—a more radical approach to the entire ecocrisis is imperative. We are now coming to recognise that the project of gaining technological mastery over nature springs from a number of assumptions specific to Western industrial society: that happiness and well-being lie in the satisfaction of our material needs and sensual desires; that the basic orientation of man to nature is one of conflict and struggle aimed at subjugation; that nature must be conquered and made subservient to the satisfaction of our desires. We can also see that these assumptions are fallacious ones which, if not challenged and replaced soon, may well have grave consequences for humanity.

At the same time that disillusionment sets in with the ends and means of industrial society, an intense search is under way for alternative world-views which can enable us to live in greater peace and harmony with nature, with our fellow beings who share this planet with us, and with ourselves. In the course of this search for alternative world-views, an increasing amount of attention has been focused on the religions and philosophies of East Asia, which advocate harmonious and peaceful co-existence between man and the natural world. Prominent among the Eastern religions in this respect is Buddhism. With its philosophic insight into the interconnectedness and thoroughgoing interdependence of all conditioned things, with its thesis that happiness is to be found through the restraint of desire in a life of

contentment rather than through the proliferation of desire, with its goal of enlightenment through renunciation and contemplation and its ethic of non-injury and boundless loving kindness for all beings, Buddhism provides all the essential elements for a relationship to the natural world characterised by respect, humility, care and compassion.

In the present Wheel publication, Klas Sandell—a serious student of Buddhism and a researcher in ecology—has brought together articles from several Buddhist scholars and thinkers dealing with the relevance of Buddhism to the ecocrisis. This compilation, we hope, will help to initiate an ongoing dialogue between concerned Buddhists and those ecologists who are open to new perspectives on this crisis now threatening the very survival of the human race. It is our further hope that this work will do more than stimulate thought, that it will also exert a wholesome influence upon those charged with the protection of the environment. To the West the Buddhist world-view offers a fruitful holistic alternative to the mechanistic and reductionistic modes of thinking at the root of our crisis, while its way of life offers a means to deep satisfaction without need for a superabundance of material goods. In the East the Buddhist outlook on nature must also be newly articulated to underline its practical implications for environmental policy to those responsible for economic development. Otherwise, it is very likely that the traditional homelands of Buddhism, seduced by the wealth, power and glitter of the West, may abandon their own valuable heritage to embark upon a

course that may ultimately prove self-destructive.

This compilation on Buddhism and the ecocrisis makes it abundantly clear that Buddhism, inheriting a continuous 2500 year-old tradition and a way of thinking astonishingly modern, can offer those concerned with the future of life on our planet a lofty inspiration and solid grounding for many of the attitudes central to the new ecological awareness.

Introduction — The Ecocrisis

Klas Sandell

Alarming reports about contaminated waterways, polluted air and depletion of natural resources reach us with increasing frequency. Today, it is becoming customary to talk in terms of a crisis, an “ecocrisis,” in matters concerning society and its relation to the natural environment. This development, which a number of specific instances dramatically illustrate, signifies a growing concern for the survival prospects of coming generations.

In the World Conservation Strategy drawn up by the United Nations and other world organisations the following can be read:

- Thousands of millions of tonnes of soil are lost every year as a result of deforestation and poor land management.
- At least 3000 square kilometres of prime farmland disappear every year under buildings and roads in developed countries alone.
- In widening swaths around their villages the rural poor strip the land of trees and shrubs for fuel so that now many communities do not have enough wood to cook food or keep warm.
- The coastal support systems of many fisheries are being destroyed or polluted (in the United States the annual cost of the resulting losses is estimated at \$86 million). **[1]**

Environment problems exist both in the industrialised countries and in the Third World, albeit in different forms. In industrialised countries toxic discharges in air, water and soil, estrangement from nature, etc. are the consequences of the existing system based on mass production. Here, it is important to abandon over-consumption and short-term speculations in favour of non-material values and forethought.

In the Third World, however, it is above all a question of a

sensitive balance between population pressures and natural resources, bearing in mind such risks as erosion, unsanitary living conditions, desertification, declining ground water supplies, etc. The UN Conference in Stockholm on the Human Environment says in its declaration: “In the developing countries most of the environmental problems are caused by under-development.” [2] International dependency, e.g. via international companies, is also a significant factor. World industry demands cheap raw materials and exploits the Third World via forms of production and selling that are often forbidden in the industrialised countries themselves.

However, the ecocrisis is not solely a technological problem. Better purification methods, alternative energy technologies, more stringent laws—all may prove effective as emergency measures and may suffice as short-term solutions, but in the long run they are inadequate. The Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, mentions a “shallow” and a “deep” ecology movement. [3] While the shallow movement involves itself in a limited struggle for better management of resources, population stability, and the prevention of pollution, the deep ecology movement tackles a whole series of questions concerning economics and values. In modern industrialised society man is becoming increasingly isolated and estranged from his natural environment, and this drastically increases the risk of short-sighted exploitation rooted in the thoughtless urge to possess. The ecocrisis, especially in industrialised countries, has come about mainly due to our

own basic sense of values, as a result of our particular approach to nature. The seriousness of this situation is made all the more apparent when we consider that the prevailing attitude towards nature in industrialised society today is one of exploitation and that this attitude is swiftly gaining ground in the Third World.

Three Aspects of the Ecocrisis

The ecocrisis manifests itself in a variety of ways, and here I would particularly like to point out three important aspects: (1) The technological ecocrisis, which arises due to modern production methods applied within agriculture, communication, housing, etc., methods which are responsible for a rapidly expanding process of contamination and depletion of natural resources. (2) The political ecocrisis, which involves the ways in which economy, laws, commerce and dependent factors encourage a short-sighted exploitation of nature both locally and globally. (3) The value-related ecocrisis, which involves basic values concerning man's relation to nature today, values which through their growing influence present a threat to the long-term survival prospects of the human race.

Energy supply can serve to illustrate these three aspects of the ecocrisis. The technological aspect concerns, among other things, a choice between different kinds of energy technologies: on the one hand, renewable energy sources

such as solar energy, wind and biodynamic fuels, and on the other, energy sources that in human perspective are non-renewable, such as oil, coal and nuclear energy. The political aspect of energy supply relates to such things as taxation, costs and laws which may be favourable or unfavourable towards different energy systems. A significant factor of the political ecocrisis is that the non-renewable energy sources are given priority from a research point of view. The value aspect of energy supply can apply to weighing material needs (which are energy-demanding) against non-material needs. Here, in addition, questions like the time aspect must be considered (how do we evaluate the living environment of future generations?) and also the geographical aspect (to what extent should we be allowed to export waste and pollution, and to what extent is the importation of resources desirable?).

It is important to remember that similar approaches to nature can manifest themselves in a variety of ways depending upon natural conditions and available technology. For example, from time immemorial it has been customary to proclaim certain areas or elements in nature sacred (e.g. trees and mountains), and it has often been claimed that if these particular areas were destroyed, then various punishments would be inflicted upon man. Modern nature-conservation movements, though they do not speak in terms of sacredness, have, via their knowledge of ecology, been able to point to innumerable instances where man through careless exploitation (e.g. of forests and

mountainsides) has with devastating force inflicted great damage upon himself. Despite dissimilarities, it is apparent that parallels can be drawn between these two views of nature, even though they may find entirely different forms of expression and may recur in cultures and epochs far removed from one another.

The Aim of this Book

This book seeks to present some aspects of Buddhist philosophy as one source of inspiration for developing a more enduring and harmonious relationship between man and nature. Buddhist philosophy does not presuppose the existence of any God, but is based on individual insight, and thus ought to have a great deal to contribute in a world continually influenced by scientific thought. Buddhist religion, like all other religions, is extremely complex, embracing philosophy, moral standards, religious practices, etc., all of which have been influenced and modified by the passage of time and contact with different cultures. Thus, Buddhism today is by no means a univocal concept, but is interpreted and applied in various ways and in various circumstances. Buddhism as discussed in this book represents the principles of Theravada Buddhism as outlined in the books and articles from the Buddhist Publication Society. Nature is defined principally as the non-cultural physical and biological environment, e.g. vegetation, mountains, rivers, animals and certain aspects of

the human body.

The book consists of five chapters, and each author is responsible for the content of his or her own chapter. The first chapter presents the Buddhist view of nature via references to the Pali texts and is written by Professor Lily de Silva of the Department of Buddhist Studies at the Peradeniya Campus, University of Sri Lanka. The second chapter attempts to throw light upon some aspects of a Buddhist approach to nature by linking them to current discussions centred on a more ecologically conscious “alternative” development. This perspective ties up with my work as research assistant at the Department of Water in Environment and Society, University of Linköping, Sweden. This chapter might serve as a point of departure for others interested in this source of inspiration for a more sustainable man-nature relationship.

Professor Padmasiri de Silva is the head of the Department of Philosophy at the Peradeniya Campus, University of Sri Lanka. He has written a chapter concerning the search for a Buddhist environmental ethics. The next, more “action-oriented” chapter by the well recognised Norwegian Buddhist ecophilosopher, Sigmund Kvaloy, gives examples of the potential of the Buddhist outlook for ecodevelopment. The book concludes with a statement on the Buddhist Perception of Nature project by the project’s founder and international coordinator, American conservationist, Nancy Nash. The project also provided the declaration on environmental ethics by H. H. the Dalai

Lama which opens this compilation. The Dalai Lama's message is dated 5 June 1986, in recognition of World Environment Day, and that day's 1986 theme, Peace and the Environment.

Hopefully the whole book can serve as a starting point for further discussion and action centred around these issues. Comments and viewpoints are welcome.

In conclusion, I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to the Buddhist Publication Society. Without their help this book could not have been put together.

An Ethical Approach to Environmental Protection

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Peace and survival of life on earth as we know it are threatened by human activities which lack a commitment to humanitarian values.

Destruction of nature and natural resources result from ignorance, greed and lack of respect for the earth's living

things.

This lack of respect extends even to earth's human descendants, the future generations who will inherit a vastly degraded planet if world peace does not become a reality, and destruction of the natural environment continues at the present rate.

Our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case only if we care for it.

It is not difficult to forgive destruction in the past which resulted from ignorance. Today, however, we have access to more information, and it is essential that we re-examine ethically what we have inherited, what we are responsible for, and what we will pass on to coming generations.

Clearly this is a pivotal generation. Global communication is possible, yet confrontations more often than meaningful dialogues for peace take place.

Our marvels of science and technology are matched if not outweighed by many current tragedies, including human starvation in some parts of the world, and extinction of other life forms.

Exploration of outer space takes place at the same time as the earth's own oceans, seas, and fresh water areas grow increasingly polluted, and their life forms are still largely unknown or misunderstood.

Many of the earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects, and even micro-organisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability, and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late.

The Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature

Lily de Silva

Modern man in his search for pleasure and affluence has exploited nature without any moral restraint to such an extent that nature has been rendered almost incapable of sustaining healthy life. Invaluable gifts of nature, such as air and water, have been polluted with severely disastrous consequences. Man is now searching for ways and means of overcoming the pollution problem as his health too is alarmingly threatened. He also feels that it is irresponsible and morally wrong on his part to commit the future generations to a polluted planet. If man is to act with a sense

of responsibility to the natural world, to his fellow human beings and to unborn future generations, he has to find an appropriate environmental ethic today to prevent further aggravation of the present pollution problem. Hence his search for wisdom and attitudes in a hitherto neglected area of knowledge, namely, religion.

Buddhism strictly limits itself to the delineation of a way of life designed to eradicate human suffering. The Buddha refused to answer questions which did not directly or indirectly bear on the central problem of human suffering and its ending. Furthermore, environmental pollution is a problem of the modern age, unheard of and unsuspected during the time of the Buddha. Therefore it is difficult to find any specific discourse which deals with the topic we are interested in here. Nevertheless, as Buddhism is a full-fledged philosophy of life reflecting all aspects of experience, it is possible to find enough material in the Pali Canon to delineate the Buddhist attitude towards nature. The word "nature" means everything in the world which is not organised and constructed by man. The Pali equivalents which come closest to "nature" are *loka* and *yathābhūta*. The former is usually translated as "world" while the latter literally means "things as they really are." The words *dhammatā* and *niyama* are used in the Pali Canon to mean "natural law or way."

Nature Is Dynamic

According to Buddhism changeability is one of the perennial principles of nature. Everything changes in nature and nothing remains static. This concept is expressed by the Pali term *anicca*. Everything formed is in a constant process of change (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*). [4] The world is therefore defined as that which disintegrates (*lujjati ti loko*); the world is so called because it is dynamic and kinetic, it is constantly in a process of undergoing change. [5] In nature there are no static and stable “things”; there are only ever-changing, ever-moving processes. Rain is a good example to illustrate this point. Though we use a noun called “rain” which appears to denote a “thing,” rain is nothing but the process of drops of water falling from the skies. Apart from this process, the activity of raining, there is no rain as such which could be expressed by a seemingly static nominal concept. The very elements of solidity (*paṭhavī*), liquidity (*āpo*), heat (*tejo*) and mobility (*vāyo*), recognised as the building material of nature, are all ever-changing phenomena. Even the most solid looking mountains and the very earth that supports everything on it are not beyond this inexorable law of change. One sutta explains how the massive king of mountains—Mount Sineru, which is rooted in the great ocean to a depth of 84,000 leagues and which rises above sea level to another great height of 84,000 leagues and which is the very classical symbol of stability and steadfastness—also gets destroyed by heat, without leaving even ashes, with the appearance of multiple suns. [6] Thus change is the very essence of nature.

Morality And Nature

The world passes through alternating cycles of evolution and dissolution, each of, which endures for a long period of time. Though change is inherent in nature, Buddhism believes that natural processes are affected by the morals of man.

According to the *Aggañña Sutta*, [7] which relates the Buddhist legend regarding the evolution of the world, the appearance of greed in the primordial beings—who at that time were self-luminous, subsisting on joy and traversing in the skies—caused the gradual loss of their radiance, the ability to subsist on joy and move about in the sky. The moral degradation had effects on the external environment too. At that time the entire earth was covered over by a very flavoursome fragrant substance similar to butter. When beings started partaking of this substance with more and more greed, on the one hand their subtle bodies became coarser and coarser; on the other hand, the flavoursome substance itself started gradually diminishing. With the solidification of bodies differences of form appeared: some were beautiful while others were homely. Thereupon, conceit manifested itself in those beings, and the beautiful ones started looking down upon the others. As a result of these moral blemishes the delicious edible earth-substance completely disappeared. In its place there appeared edible mushrooms and later another kind of edible creeper. In the beings who subsisted on them successively sex

differentiation became manifest and the former method of spontaneous birth was replaced by sexual reproduction.

Self-growing rice appeared on earth and through laziness to collect each meal man grew accustomed to hoarding food. As a result of this hoarding habit, the growth rate of food could not keep pace with the rate of demand. Therefore land had to be divided among families. After private ownership of land became the order of the day, those who were of a greedier disposition started robbing from others' plots of land. When they were detected they denied that they had stolen. Thus through greed, vices such as stealing and lying became manifest in society. To curb the wrong doers and punish them a king was elected by the people and thus the original simple society became much more complex and complicated. It is said that this moral degeneration of man had adverse effects on nature. The richness of the earth diminished and self-growing rice disappeared. Man had to till the land and cultivate rice for food. This rice grain was enveloped in chaff; it needed cleaning before consumption.

The point I wish to emphasise by citing this evolutionary legend is that Buddhism believes that though change is a factor inherent in nature, man's moral deterioration accelerates the process of change and brings about changes which are adverse to human well-being and happiness.

The *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* of the Dīgha Nikāya predicts the future course of events when human morals undergo

further degeneration. [8] Gradually man's health will deteriorate so much that life expectancy will diminish until at last the average human life-span is reduced to ten years and marriageable age to five years. At that time all delicacies such as ghee, butter, honey, etc. will have disappeared from the earth; what is considered the poorest coarse food today will become a delicacy of that day. Thus Buddhism maintains that there is a close link between man's morals and the natural resources available to him.

According to a discourse in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, when profligate lust, wanton greed and wrong values grip the heart of man and immorality becomes widespread in society, timely rain does not fall. When timely rain does not fall crops get adversely affected with various kinds of pests and plant diseases. Through lack of nourishing food the human mortality rate rises. [9]

Thus several suttas from the Pali Canon show that early Buddhism believes there to be a close relationship between human morality and the natural environment. This idea has been systematised in the theory of the five natural laws (*pañca niyāma-dhamma*) in the later commentaries. [10] According to this theory, in the cosmos there are five natural laws or forces at work, namely *utuniyāma* (lit. "season-law"), *bijaniyāma* (lit. "seed-law"), *cittaniyāma*, *kammaniyāma* and *dhammaniyāma*. They can be translated as physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, moral laws and causal laws, respectively. While the first four laws operate within their respective spheres, the last-mentioned

law of causality operates within each of them as well as among them.

This means that the physical environment of any given area conditions the growth and development of its biological component, i.e. flora and fauna. These in turn influence the thought pattern of the people interacting with them. Modes of thinking determine moral standards. The opposite process of interaction is also possible. The morals of man influence not only the psychological make-up of the people but the biological and physical environment of the area as well. Thus the five laws demonstrate that man and nature are bound together in a reciprocal causal relationship with changes in one necessarily bringing about changes in the other.

The commentary on the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* goes on to explain the pattern of mutual interaction further. [11] When mankind is demoralised through greed, famine is the natural outcome; when moral degeneration is due to ignorance, epidemic is the inevitable result; when hatred is the demoralising force, widespread violence is the ultimate outcome. If and when mankind realises that large-scale devastation has taken place as a result of his moral degeneration, a change of heart takes place among the few surviving human beings. With gradual moral regeneration conditions improve through a long period of cause and effect and mankind again starts to enjoy gradually increasing prosperity and longer life. The world, including nature and mankind, stands or falls with the type of moral

force at work. If immorality grips society, man and nature deteriorate; if morality reigns, the quality of human life and nature improves. Thus greed, hatred and delusion produce pollution within and without. Generosity, compassion and wisdom produce purity within and without. This is one reason the Buddha has pronounced that the world is led by the mind, *cittena niyati loko*. [12] Thus man and nature, according to the ideas expressed in early Buddhism, are interdependent.

Human Use of Natural Resources

For survival mankind has to depend on nature for his food, clothing, shelter, medicine and other requisites.

For optimum benefits man has to understand nature so that he can utilise natural resources and live harmoniously with nature. By understanding the working of nature—for example, the seasonal rainfall pattern, methods of conserving water by irrigation, the soil types, the physical conditions required for growth of various food crops, etc.—man can learn to get better returns from his agricultural pursuits. But this learning has to be accompanied by moral restraint if he is to enjoy the benefits of natural resources for a long time. Man must learn to satisfy his needs and not feed his greed. The resources of the world are not unlimited whereas man's greed knows neither limit nor satiation. Modern man in his unbridled voracious greed for pleasure and acquisition of wealth has exploited nature to the point

of near impoverishment.

Ostentatious consumerism is accepted as the order of the day. One writer says that within forty years Americans alone have consumed natural resources to the quantity of what all mankind has consumed for the last 4000 years. [13] The vast non-replenishable resources of fossil fuels which took millions of years to form have been consumed within a couple of centuries to the point of near exhaustion. This consumerism has given rise to an energy crisis on the one hand and a pollution problem on the other. Man's unrestrained exploitation of nature to gratify his insatiate greed reminds one of the traditional parable of the goose that laid the golden eggs. [14]

Buddhism tirelessly advocates the virtues of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion in all human pursuits. Greed breeds sorrow and unhealthy consequences. Contentment (*santutṭhi*) is a much praised virtue in Buddhism. [15] The man leading a simple life with few wants easily satisfied is upheld and appreciated as an exemplary character. [16] Miserliness [17] and wastefulness [18] are equally deplored in Buddhism as two degenerate extremes. Wealth has only instrumental value; it is to be utilised for the satisfaction of man's needs. Hoarding is a senseless anti-social habit comparable to the attitude of the dog in the manger. The vast hoarding of wealth in some countries and the methodical destruction of large quantities of agricultural produce to keep the market prices from falling, while half the world is dying of hunger and starvation, is really a sad

paradox of the present affluent age.

Buddhism commends frugality as a virtue in its own right. Once Ānanda explained to King Udena the thrifty economic use of robes by the monks in the following order. When new robes are received the old robes are used as coverlets, the old coverlets as mattress covers, the old mattress covers as rugs, the old rugs as dusters, and the old tattered dusters are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls. [19] Thus nothing usable is wasted. Those who waste are derided as “wood-apple eaters.” [20] A man shakes the branch of a wood-apple tree and all the fruits, ripe as well as unripe, fall. The man would collect only what he wants and walk away leaving the rest to rot. Such a wasteful attitude is certainly deplored in Buddhism as not only anti-social but criminal. The excessive exploitation of nature as is done today would certainly be condemned by Buddhism in the strongest possible terms.

Buddhism advocates a gentle non-aggressive attitude towards nature. According to the *Sigālovāda Sutta* a householder should accumulate wealth as a bee collects pollen from a flower. [21] The bee harms neither the fragrance nor the beauty of the flower, but gathers pollen to turn it into sweet honey. Similarly, man is expected to make legitimate use of nature so that he can rise above nature and realise his innate spiritual potential.

Attitude towards Animal and Plant Life

The well-known Five Precepts (*pañca sīlā*) form the minimum code of ethics that every lay Buddhist is expected to adhere to. Its first precept involves abstention from injury to life. It is explained as the casting aside of all forms of weapons, being conscientious about depriving a living being of life. In its positive sense it means the cultivation of compassion and sympathy for all living things. [22] The Buddhist layman is expected to abstain from trading in meat too. [23]

The Buddhist monk has to abide by an even stricter code of ethics than the layman. He has to abstain from practices which would involve even unintentional injury to living creatures. For instance, the Buddha promulgated the rule against going on a journey during the rainy season because of possible injury to worms and insects that come to the surface in wet weather. [24] The same concern for non-violence prevents a monk from digging the ground. [25] Once a monk who was a potter prior to ordination built for himself a clay hut and set it on fire to give it a fine finish. The Buddha strongly objected to this as so many living creatures would have been burnt in the process. The hut was broken down on the Buddha's instructions to prevent it from creating a bad precedent for later generations. [26] The scrupulous non-violent attitude towards even the smallest living creatures prevents the monks from drinking unstrained water. [27] It is no doubt a sound hygienic habit, but what is noteworthy is the reason which prompts the practice, namely, sympathy for living creatures.

Buddhism also prescribes the practice of *metta*, “loving kindness” towards all creatures of all quarters without restriction. The *Karaṇīyametta Sutta* enjoins the cultivation of loving kindness towards all creatures, timid and steady, long and short, big and small, minute and great, visible and invisible, near and far, born and awaiting birth. [28] All quarters are to be suffused with this loving attitude. Just as one’s own life is precious to oneself, so is the life of the other precious to himself. Therefore a reverential attitude must be cultivated towards all forms of life.

The *Nandivīsāla Jātaka* illustrates how kindness should be shown to animals domesticated for human service. [29] Even a wild animal can be tamed with kind words. Pārileyya was a wild elephant who attended on the Buddha when he spent time in the forest away from the monks. [30] The infuriated elephant Nālāgiri was tamed by the Buddha with no other miraculous power than the power of loving kindness. [31] Man and beast can live and let live without fear of one another if only man cultivates sympathy and regards all life with compassion.

The understanding of kamma and rebirth, too, prepares the Buddhist to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards animals. According to this belief it is possible for human beings to be reborn in subhuman states among animals. The *Kukkuravatika Sutta* can be cited as a canonical reference which substantiates this view. [32] The Jātakas provide ample testimony to this view from commentarial literature. It is possible that our own close relatives have been reborn

as animals. Therefore it is only right that we should treat animals with kindness and sympathy. The Buddhist notion of merit also engenders a gentle non-violent attitude towards living creatures. It is said that if one throws dish-washing water into a pool where there are insects and living creatures, intending that they feed on the tiny particles of food thus washed away, one accumulates merit even by such trivial generosity. [33] According to the *Macchuddāna Jataka* the Bodhisatta threw his leftover food into a river in order to feed the fish, and by the power of that merit he was saved from an impending disaster. [34] Thus kindness to animals, be they big or small, is a source of merit-merit needed for human beings to improve their lot in the cycle of rebirths and to approach the final goal of Nibbana.

Buddhism expresses a gentle non-violent attitude towards the vegetable kingdom as well. It is said that one should not even break the branch of a tree that has given one shelter. [35] Plants are so helpful to us in providing us with all necessities of life that we are expected not to adopt a callous attitude towards them. The more strict monastic rules prevent monks from injuring plant life. [36]

Prior to the rise of Buddhism people regarded natural phenomena such as mountains, forests, groves and trees with a sense of awe and reverence. [37] They considered them as the abode of powerful non-human beings that could assist human beings at times of need. Though Buddhism gave man a far superior Triple Refuge (*tisaraṇa*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, these places

continued to enjoy public patronage at a popular level, as the acceptance of terrestrial non-human beings such as *devatas* [38] and *yakkhas* [39] did not violate the belief system of Buddhism. Therefore among the Buddhists there is a reverential attitude towards specially long-standing gigantic trees. They are called *vanaspati* in Pali, meaning “lords of the forests.” [40] As huge trees such as the ironwood, the *sāla* and the fig are also recognised as the Bodhi trees of former Buddhas, the deferential attitude towards trees is further strengthened. [41] It is well known that the *Ficus religiosa* is held as an object of great veneration in the Buddhist world today as the tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

The construction of parks and pleasure groves for public use is considered a great meritorious deed. [42] Sakka the lord of gods is said to have reached this status as a result of social services such as the construction of parks, pleasure groves, ponds, wells and roads. [43]

The open air, natural habitats and forest trees have a special fascination for the Eastern mind as symbols of spiritual freedom. The home life is regarded as a fetter (*sambādha*) that keeps man in bondage and misery. Renunciation is like the open air (*abbhokāsa*), nature unhampered by man’s activity. [44] The chief events in the life of the Buddha too took place in the open air. He was born in a park at the foot of a tree in Kapilavatthu; he attained Enlightenment in the open air at the foot of the Bodhi tree in Bodhgāya; he inaugurated his missionary activity in the open air in the

sale grove of the Mallas in Pāva. The Buddha's constant advice to his disciples also was to resort to natural habitats such as forest groves and glades. There, undisturbed by human activity, they could zealously engage themselves in meditation. [45]

Attitude towards Pollution

Environmental pollution has assumed such vast proportions today that man has been forced to recognise the presence of an ecological crisis. He can no longer turn a blind eye to the situation as he is already threatened with new pollution-related diseases. Pollution to this extent was unheard of during the time of the Buddha. But there is sufficient evidence in the Pali Canon to give us insight into the Buddhist attitude towards the pollution problem. Several Vinaya rules prohibit monks from polluting green grass and water with saliva, urine and faeces. [46] These were the common agents of pollution known during the Buddha's day and rules were promulgated against causing such pollution. Cleanliness was highly commended by the Buddhists both in the person and in the environment. They were much concerned about keeping water clean, be it in the river, pond or well. These sources of water were for public use and each individual had to use them with proper public-spirited caution so that others after him could use them with the same degree of cleanliness. Rules regarding the cleanliness of green grass were prompted by ethical and

aesthetic considerations. Moreover, grass is food for most animals and it is man's duty to refrain from polluting it by his activities.

Noise is today recognised as a serious personal and environmental pollutant troubling everyone to some extent. It causes deafness, stress and irritation, breeds resentment, saps energy and inevitably lowers efficiency. [47] The Buddha's attitude to noise is very clear from the Pali Canon. He was critical of noise and did not hesitate to voice his stern disapproval whenever occasion arose. [48] Once he ordered a group of monks to leave the monastery for noisy behaviour. [49] He enjoyed solitude and silence immensely and spoke in praise of silence as it is most appropriate for mental culture. Noise is described as a thorn to one engaged in the first step of meditation, [50] but thereafter noise ceases to be a disturbance as the meditator passes beyond the possibility of being disturbed by sound.

The Buddha and his disciples revelled in the silent solitary natural habitats unencumbered by human activity. Even in the choice of monasteries the presence of undisturbed silence was an important quality they looked for. [51] Silence invigorates those who are pure at heart and raises their efficiency for meditation. But silence overawes those who are impure with ignoble impulses of greed, hatred and delusion. The *Bhayabherava Sutta* beautifully illustrates how even the rustle of leaves by a falling twig in the forest sends tremors through an impure heart. [52] This may perhaps account for the present craze for constant auditory

stimulation with transistors and cassettes. The moral impurity caused by greed, avarice, acquisitive instincts and aggression has rendered man so timid that he cannot bear silence that lays bare the reality of self-awareness. He therefore prefers to drown himself in loud music. Unlike classical music that tends to soothe nerves and induce relaxation, rock music excites the senses. Constant exposure to it actually renders man incapable of relaxation and sound sleep without tranquillisers.

As to the question of the Buddhist attitude to music, it is recorded that the Buddha has spoken quite appreciatively of music on one occasion. [53] When Pañcasikha the divine musician sang a song while playing the lute in front of the Buddha, the Buddha praised his musical ability saying that the instrumental music blended well with his song. Again, the remark of an Arahāt that the joy of seeing the real nature of things is far more exquisite than orchestral music [54] shows the recognition that music affords a certain amount of pleasure even if it is inferior to higher kinds of pleasure. But it is stressed that the ear is a powerful sensory channel through which man gets addicted to sense pleasures. Therefore, to dissuade monks from getting addicted to melodious sounds the monastic discipline describes music as a lament. [55]

The psychological training of the monks is so advanced that they are expected to cultivate a taste not only for external silence, but for inner silence of speech, desire and thought as well. The sub-vocal speech, the inner chatter that goes on

constantly within us in our waking life, is expected to be silenced through meditation. [56] The sage who succeeds in quelling this inner speech completely is described as a muni, a silent one. [57] His inner silence is maintained even when he speaks!

It is not inappropriate to pay passing notice to the Buddhist attitude to speech as well. Moderation in speech is considered a virtue, as one can avoid four unwholesome vocal activities thereby, namely, falsehood, slander, harsh speech and frivolous talk. In its positive aspect moderation in speech paves the path to self-awareness. Buddhism commends speaking at the appropriate time, speaking the truth, speaking gently, speaking what is useful, and speaking out of loving kindness; the opposite modes of speech are condemned. [58] The Buddha's general advice to the monks regarding speech is to be engaged in discussing the Dhamma or maintain noble silence. [59] The silence that reigned in vast congregations of monks during the Buddha's day was indeed a surprise even to the kings of the time. [60] Silence is serene and noble as it is conducive to the spiritual progress of those who are pure at heart.

Even Buddhist laymen were reputed to have appreciated quietude and silence. Pañcaṅgika Thapati can be cited as a conspicuous example. [61] Once Mahānāma the Sakyan complained to the Buddha that he is disturbed by the hustle of the busy city of Kapilavatthu. He explained that he experiences calm serenity when he visits the Buddha in the quiet salubrious surroundings of the monastery and his

peace of mind gets disturbed when he goes to the city. [62] Though noise to the extent of being a pollutant causing health hazards was not known during the Buddha's day, we have adduced enough material from the Pali Canon to illustrate the Buddha's attitude to the problem. Quietude is much appreciated as spiritually rewarding, while noise condemned as a personal and social nuisance.

Nature as Beautiful

The Buddha and his disciples regarded natural beauty as a source of great joy and aesthetic satisfaction. The saints who purged themselves of sensuous worldly pleasures responded to natural beauty with a detached sense of appreciation. The average poet looks at nature and derives inspiration mostly by the sentiments it evokes in his own heart; he becomes emotionally involved with nature. For instance, he may compare the sun's rays passing over the mountain tops to the blush on a sensitive face, he may see a tear in a dew drop, the lips of his beloved in a rose petal, etc. But the appreciation of the saint is quite different. He appreciates nature's beauty for its own sake and derives joy unsullied by sensuous associations and self-projected ideas. The simple spontaneous appreciation of nature's exquisite beauty is expressed by the Elder Mahākassapa in the following words: [63]

Those upland glades delightful to the soul, Where the
Kaveri spreads its wildering wreaths, Where sound the

trumpet-calls of elephants: Those are the hills where
my soul delights. Those rocky heights with hue of dark
blue clouds Where lies embossed many a shining lake
Of crystal-clear, cool waters, and whose slopes The
'herds of Indra' cover and bedeck:

Those are the hills wherein my soul delights. Fair
uplands rain-refreshed, and resonant,
With crested creatures' cries antiphonal, Lone heights
where silent Rishis oft resort: Those are the hills
wherein my soul delights.

Again the poem of Kaludāyi inviting the Buddha to visit
Kapilavatthu, contains a beautiful description of spring: [64]

Now crimson glow the trees, dear Lord, and cast Their
ancient foliage in quest of fruit, Like crests of flame
they shine irradiant, And rich in hope, great Hero, is
the hour. Verdure and blossom-time in every tree
Wherever we look delightful to the eye, And every
quarter breathing fragrant airs, While petals falling,
yearning comes fruit: It is time, O Hero, that we set out
hence.

The long poem of Tālaputta is a fascinating soliloquy. [65]
His religious aspirations are beautifully blended with a
profound knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha against
the background of a sylvan resort. Many more poems could
be cited for saintly appreciation of nature, but it is not

necessary to burden the essay with any more quotations. Suffice it to know that the saints, too, were sensitive to the beauties and harmony of nature and that their appreciation is coloured by spontaneity, simplicity and a non-sensuous spirituality.

Conclusion

In the modern age man has become alienated from himself and nature. When science started opening new vistas of knowledge revealing the secrets of nature one by one, man gradually lost faith in theistic religions. Consequently, he developed scanty respect for moral and spiritual values as well. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the acquisition of wealth by mechanical exploitation of natural resources, man has become more and more materialistic in his attitudes and values. The pursuit of sense pleasures and the acquisition of possessions have become ends in themselves. Man's sense faculties dominate him to an unrelenting degree and man has become a slave to his insatiable passions. (Incidentally the sense faculties are called in Pali *indriyas* or lords, because they control man unless he is sufficiently vigilant to become their master.) Thus man has become alienated from himself as he abandoned himself to the influence of sense pleasures and acquisitive instincts.

In his greed for more and more possessions he has adopted a violent and aggressive attitude towards nature. Forgetting

that he is a part and parcel of nature, he exploits it with unrestrained greed, thus alienating himself from nature as well. The net result is the deterioration of man's physical and mental health on the one hand, and the rapid depletion of non-replenishable natural resources and environmental pollution on the other. These results remind us of the Buddhist teachings in the suttas discussed above, which maintain that the moral degeneration of man leads to the decrease of his life-span and the depletion of natural resources.

Moral degeneration is a double-edged weapon, it exercises adverse effects on man's psycho-physical well being as well as on nature. Already killer diseases such as heart ailments, cancer, diabetes, AIDS, etc., are claiming victims on an unprecedented scale. In the final analysis these can all be traced to man's moral deterioration. Depletion of vast resources of fossil fuels and forests has given rise to a very severe energy crisis. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that such rapid depletion of non-renewable natural resources within less than two centuries, an infinitesimal fraction of the millions of years taken for them to form, is due to modern man's inordinate greed and acquisitiveness. A number of simple ancient societies had advanced technological skills, as is evident by their vast sophisticated irrigation schemes designed to feed the fundamental needs of several millions. Yet they survived in some countries over 2000 years without such problems as environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources. This was no

doubt due to the validity of the philosophy which inspired and formed the basis of these civilizations.

In the present ecocrisis man has to look for radical solutions.

“Pollution cannot be dealt with in the long term on a remedial or cosmetic basis or by tackling symptoms: all measures should deal with basic causes. These are determined largely by our values, priorities and choices.” [66] Man must reappraise his value system. The materialism that has guided his lifestyle has landed him in very severe problems. Buddhism teaches that mind is the forerunner of all things, mind is supreme. If one acts with an impure mind, i.e. a mind sullied with greed, hatred and delusion, suffering is the inevitable result. If one acts with a pure mind, i.e. with the opposite qualities of contentment, compassion and wisdom, happiness will follow like a shadow. [67] Man has to understand that pollution in the environment has been caused because there has been psychological pollution within himself. If he wants a clean environment he has to adopt a lifestyle that springs from a moral and spiritual dimension.

Buddhism offers man a simple moderate lifestyle eschewing both extremes of self-deprivation and self-indulgence. Satisfaction of basic human necessities, reduction of wants to the minimum, frugality and contentment are its important characteristics. Each man has to order his life on normal principles, exercise self-control in the enjoyment of the senses, discharge his duties in his various social roles, and conduct himself with wisdom and self-awareness in all

activities. It is only when each man adopts a simple moderate lifestyle that mankind as a whole will stop polluting the environment. This seems to be the only way of overcoming the present ecocrisis and the problem of alienation. With such a lifestyle, man will adopt a non-exploitative, non-aggressive, gentle attitude towards nature. He can then live in harmony with nature, utilising its resources for the satisfaction of his basic needs. The Buddhist admonition is to utilise nature in the same way as a bee collects pollen from the flower, neither polluting its beauty nor depleting its fragrance. Just as the bee manufactures honey out of pollen, so man should be able to find happiness and fulfilment in life without harming the natural world in which he lives.

Buddhist Philosophy as Inspiration to Ecodevelopment

Klas Sandell

“We need to reassess our attitudes towards the natural world on which our technology intrudes.”

—Barry Commoner

Ecocodevelopment [68]

Ecocodevelopment should be seen as an integral part of the pursuit of an “alternative” or “another” development. It involves a search for alternatives to the predominant concepts of modernization and industrialization that have been the guiding influences during the postwar era.

According to McNerfin an ideal development should have the following characteristics: it should be need-oriented, endogenous, self-reliant, ecologically sound, and based on structural transformations. [69] A stable, long-term relationship with nature should, therefore, be regarded as an essential basis for all efforts towards alternative development. When ecological awareness and man’s relationship with nature are stressed in such development, the term “ecocodevelopment” is often applied. [70]

The term “ecocodevelopment” can be divided into two parts, “eco” and “development,” in reference to which I would like to apply the key concepts “sustainability” and “self-reliance,” respectively. Sustainability expresses the need for an approach (inclusive of technology) which does not endanger the long-term fertility of ecosystems. The concept of self-reliance indicates the wish to pursue a course of development originating in a specific natural and cultural

environment. In this connection terms like “appropriate technology,” “people’s participation” and “diversity” are applied. [71]

Buddhist Inspiration

What, then, does all this have to do with Buddhist philosophy? Though Buddhism does not advocate specific political forms or propose specific economic programmes, it is my strong belief that in the perspective of the ecocrisis we should scrutinise, in terms of both philosophy and practice, different sources of inspiration for a sustainable development. This is why the title of this chapter deals with Buddhism as an inspiration to ecodevelopment. Padmasiri de Silva writes: “There are two possible approaches to nature within the Buddhist tradition: mastering and harnessing the natural resources for man’s use, and the adoption of the contemplative attitude where we discern in nature our own images of peace and tranquillity. Both these attitudes can be brought together and contrasted with the aggressive and violent attitude towards nature.”

I would like to arrange my thinking about Buddhism and ecodevelopment under the following four headings: (i) Man’s mortality, which primarily concerns his approach to matter and natural laws; (ii) The significance of spiritual development, especially as a counterpoint to short-sightedness and materialism; (iii) The difference between attached and detached love, which involves the ability to

appreciate and develop a non-demanding, non-attached relationship; (iv) The possibility of a harmonious relationship between man and nature, based on man's unique position in relation to other physical and biological elements.

Man's Mortality

Buddhism places a great deal of emphasis on the need to see things as they really are. It is only through the attainment of individual insight into the true nature of the world that man is able to dissociate himself from the perpetual cycle of insatiable needs and his attempts to fulfil them.

Man is a part of nature and no sharp distinctions can be drawn between him and his surroundings, as everything is impermanent and subject to the same natural laws. "For according to Buddhism the factors of existence are interconnected by laws of causality. Although the factors are not fractions of a whole, yet they are interconnected and interdependent. [72] Lily de Silva writes that as "man and nature are mutually related to one another, a change in one is apt to bring about a change in the other." [73]

These views on action and reaction in man's relationship with nature seem to come very close to certain modern scientific concepts. It is above all ecology and human ecology that have observed how various elements in nature are interconnected and how human encroachment in one way or another leads to repercussions in time and space. A

further parallel between Buddhism and modern science can be found in the concept of evolution, which emphasises man's role as an impermanent component in an ever-changing situation: "According to Buddhism the world we live in has come to be what it is as the result of a gradual process of evolution spreads out over a vast period of time. [74]

Man's perception of the world around him and the feelings that result from this give rise to the illusion of a "self." This, in its turn, results in the need to protect that self, the pursuit of pleasures, the urge to possess, and the attempt to avoid all forms of insecurity. Considering the above statement that everything is impermanent, as a consequence a constant sense of unsatisfactoriness arises. Man's only hope of deliverance from this condition lies in his awareness and acceptance of the impermanence and inconstancy of himself and everything around him.

This awareness of the fact that everything, including man himself, is impermanent, and that man is subject to the laws of causality, must be seen as an important basis for a proper understanding of man's role in nature. Such an awareness promotes humility and thoughtfulness.

The Significance of Spiritual Development

Buddhism emphasises the need for every human being to attain a greater understanding of the nature of the world via spiritual development, and in this way become aware of his

short-sighted, insatiable needs. Moreover, in various ways the Buddha has stressed the need for close contact with nature and pointed out how advancement of mind leads to a greater appreciation of nature.

Delightful are the forests Where ordinary people find
no pleasure. There the passionless will rejoice, For they
seek no sensual pleasures.

Dhammapada v. 99

It would seem, then, obvious that a greater sense of proportion is needed between things spiritual and material, especially in our modern consumer society where a closer contact with nature may be regarded as an important foundation for the pursuit of spiritual development. A better sense of proportion and a withdrawal from exaggerated material needs should be regarded as essential ingredients to ecocodevelopment. The earth will never be able to satisfy man's apparently insatiable longing for material things. Spiritual development, on the other hand, can serve both as an aim and as a means for achieving a greater sense of proportion in development.

Attached and Detached Love

In the section above I discussed the need to deal with the "urge to possess." It is not uncommon when discussing environmental degradation and nature preservation, to

comment on the necessity of a deeper appreciation and love of nature. One important aspect of this is the way in which concepts such as love and appreciation acquire a new connotation when applied to “development of mind,” and it is my belief that one of Buddhism’s most important contributions to the concept of ecodevelopment lies here.

Buddhism points to the difference between unselfish love and the kind of love that is linked to attachment and the urge to possess. It stresses the need to learn how to appreciate someone or something without a feeling of attachment. Douglas M Burns writes: “Persons who have attained Nirvāna can fully admire beauty, but they do not cling to it. It is said that they appreciate without attachment.” [75]

Naturally it is extremely difficult for most of us to come anywhere near a relationship in which we are able to appreciate somebody or something without feeling any attachment or any urge to possess or exploit. We have only to consider this in relation to people we love: how difficult it is to think of them without becoming attached and without experiencing grief when they die.

But this does not mean that the cultivation of detachment is of no great significance to developing an approach to nature that favours a stable long-term interrelation, one that encourages an unselfish appreciation and enjoyment of nature without the thought of profit or exploitation.

We can also describe the contrast between attached and

detached love as the difference between greed and need. It is quite obvious that a large proportion of the production that today leads to an intensification of environmental problems and to the impoverishing of the earth comes under the category of greed, e.g. several cars per family, home computers, expendable packaging, not to mention armaments and the space race. Serious debate and a greater awareness of the difference between greed and need must be seen as a basis for the future utilisation of nature.

Harmonious Man-Nature Relationship

It is obvious that man has a capability to manipulate his environment far exceeding that of all other species. Despite what has been said above regarding natural laws and impermanence, Buddhism still holds that man's position in nature is a unique one. Padmasiri de Silva says of man that "he has the freedom to mould his natural world as well as the moral and spiritual life in accordance with the laws of causality." [76]

But how are we to avoid a situation in which man's unique position leads to an attempt to dominate nature? Here, following the above discussion on impermanence, etc., the concept of loving kindness (*metta*) comes in. This should be seen as an element in the Buddhist philosophy of non-violence, which, however, goes further than the ideas usually associated with non-violence.

Metta is the first of four contemplations termed the "Divine

Abidings,” which are intended to develop a peaceful relationship to other living beings. The other three are *karuṇā* (compassion), *mudita* (gladness at others’ success), and *upekkha* (equanimity).

In the *Karaṇīyametta Sutta* from the Suttanipāta, the following can be read:

May creatures all be of a blissful heart. Whatever
breathing beings there may be, No matter whether they
are frail or firm, With none excepted, be they long or
big Or middle-sized, or be they short or small Or thick,
as well as those seen or unseen, Or whether they are
dwelling far or near, Existing or yet seeking to exist,
May creatures all be of a blissful heart. [77]

This philosophy of non-violence should, therefore, be seen as an approach to life rooted in a feeling of tender affection towards everything around us and without the urge to get something in return.

This combination—the recognition of man’s unique position in nature together with the ideal of spiritual development and humility towards nature—gives support to the achievement of a harmonious relationship between man and nature. This implies the possibility of a withdrawal from the usual ways of thinking, ranging from man’s submission to nature to his domination of nature. A harmonious relationship with nature leading to cooperation with it should, therefore, be seen as a “third alternative”

and not as a compromise between submission and domination. In the search for such a cooperative attitude towards nature Buddhist philosophy can be an important source of inspiration.

In Search of a Buddhist Environmental Ethics

Padmasiri de Silva

“I believe that only a religious ethic (towards nature) will serve to protect us, an ethic that regards man as the trustee of nature for the welfare of all people now and into the remote future.”

Bentley Class [78]

The term “ethics” may be used in three different but related senses:

- i. a general pattern or way of life;
- ii. a set of rules or a moral code;

- iii. an inquiry about ways of life, rules of conduct and basic terms used in the evaluation of human behaviour, such as good and bad, right and wrong, etc.

In more recent times, the study of ethics has by sheer necessity expanded into the arena where we deal with the encounter between traditional ethical systems and changing social conditions, where the focus is on the application of moral principles to practical situations, and some of these situations are of a very complex and even dilemmatic nature.

In this context, like most religious and ethical systems, the Buddha presents a way of life which includes a moral code for the layman as well as the monk. But both these aspects are deeply rooted in a reflective inquiry about the basis of this way of life and rules of conduct. The Buddha, where necessary, also clarifies the concepts and terms he uses for evaluating behaviour and he discusses the diverse types of reasons offered for beliefs in ethical contexts. The application of the principles of ethics to specific contexts has to be gleaned from his discourses. The clarification of the logic and usage of moral terms is a central dimension of modern ethics, referred to as “metaethics,” and while this perspective has its uses, the complexity of the modern situation has generated a great interest in what may be called “applied-ethics.”

Today, there is no consistent ethical perspective to deal with the issues thrust on us by new advances in biological and

medical sciences like the questions of genetic engineering or those pertaining to the terminal patient who does not want to live; the case of armaments being used for self-defence and nuclear warfare; or the problem of handling sporadic forms of terrorism. As science and technology develop, traditional values are undergoing a great deal of strain in this call to adjust to new situations. Though questions pertaining to the ethics of conservation are not as sharply dilemmatic as some of the issues cited, they still belong to the technological and socio-economic setting in the modern world and call for a new orientation in values. It is in the need for a new value orientation that a Buddhist contribution appears to be relevant. While we have explored some general Buddhist perspectives regarding the overall disturbing condition elsewhere, [79] this short analysis will explore Buddhist reflections on the ecocrisis in relation to ethical issues.

World-View Orientation and Ecological Values

What we need is not merely a discovery of certain Buddhist values but the integration of values, a certain holistic perspective which reverberates through most of our activities. Today the natural and social environment has been integrated into “one universe.”

Environmentalists point out that today, more than ever, the earth has become a delicately balanced system of interdependent parts—an “ecosystem.” If a person is

considerate and generous in social services and community work but in his work is callous and aggressive towards the natural environment, there is a note of deep discordance. If one is callous towards the natural environment, then one is creating problems for others and for generations to come.

In the past people were not concerned with the environment; it was something given and to be used. If it was coal we needed, then the land was there to be stripped of its hidden treasure. If industrial waste had to be removed, then nature had conveniently supplied us with rivers for this very purpose. Nature existed as a system of inexhaustible and ever-renewable resources. [80] Today we possess a great deal of information about our natural environment and its relation to the quality of life as well as the duration of life. Issues like the pollution of our air, water and food, overcrowding, the depletion of natural resources, aesthetically deteriorating landscapes, etc. figure prominently in our concern with the natural environment. In the words of Barbara Ward: "Wasted, polluted, corrupted earth, filled with junked cars and old iron, is more than just sloppy and ugly. It spells indifference to human need, a wanton neglect of fundamental decencies." [81] But when far reaching issues like nuclear experiments and cancer or food poisoning emerge, we find that whether we like it or not we are deeply embedded in the natural world. It is by human intervention that man has polluted the natural environment and again it is by human intervention and a new sense of responsibility to our fellow beings and to generations to

come that our natural environment can be changed. A critique of the ecosystem involves, from the Buddhist standpoint, a critique of one's sense of the self. The world-view orientation which can feed a Buddhist environmental ethics is this critique of one's sense of the self.

If nature becomes the object of our greed and avarice, and the victim of our acquisitive instinct, a gentle and non-violent man-nature orientation is not possible. Schumacher has admirably pointed out that a non-violent and gentle attitude to nature is the ecological stance of Buddhism. [82] The violent and aggressive approach to the natural world is fed by man's greed for short-term spectacular success without care for the long-term ill-effects on another generation. As Roderick Nash points out, if we have a proper environmental ethic, the "raping of nature" can be as morally repulsive as the raping of a woman. A healthy achievement motivation can promote economic growth, but uncontrolled greed and avarice are as detrimental as laziness and apathy.

We have pointed out elsewhere that two possible approaches to nature are found within the Buddhist tradition: one is the mastering and harnessing of the natural resources for man's use done by humanising the habitat; the other is the contemplative attitude by which we discern in nature our own image of peace and tranquillity. These attitudes can be integrated and blended to form a viable Buddhist stance on nature, one which can be contrasted with the current aggressive, dominating and violent attitude

towards nature. [83]

Springing from this contemplative attitude, there is an interesting aesthetic dimension which stabilises our move towards conservation. There are many references in the Buddhist texts to instances where men of great spiritual heights appreciated scenic beauty. The Buddhist is able to look at the mirror of nature without attachment, and with a mind of equanimity he can discern the most profound truths in this mirror. He is able to see the nature of transience in the very rhythms of nature, in the falling of flowers, the decay of leaves and the change of seasons. All this is significant because it reveals an attunement with nature as well as an acute sensitivity towards nature. It is also important because we extend these attitudes to people and animals. Today there is a spell of impersonality in the way we handle people, animals and trees; we have become used to handling them in the way we handle machines and tractors. We have lost that touch of gentleness, care and concern—the non-violent and compassionate element which goes to generate creative human relations. We develop mechanistic, instrumental and impersonal attitudes to fellow humans, animals and nature.

A profound man-nature orientation also pervades the Buddhist exploration of the correct environment for the practice of meditation. The Buddhist monk is a lover of solitude and seeks out the empty places (*suññagāra*) of nature. The open, empty and tranquil woods provide the ideal environment for one in search of spiritual solace.

World-View Orientation And Human Needs

While the most significant aspect of the world-view orientation in the context of ecological issues is its man-nature relationship, a second aspect, equally important, is the Buddhist lifestyle. The economic needs of man have created pressing problems today because a simple way of life does not satisfy man and he longs for diverse types of goods and services. A modest concept of living, simplicity, frugality, and emphasis on essential goods, cutting down wastage and a basic ethic of restraint can supplement the Buddhist man-nature orientation. In the West, public discussion has been more concerned with the adequacy of resources than with the viability of human needs and lifestyles. Exceptions to this attitude in the West may be found in William Leiss's *The Limits to Satisfaction* [84] and Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*. [85]

R. M Salas, a UN expert on population studies who delivered the Colombo University Special Convocation Lecture in 1979, made the following observations: "But I believe that what is more important than all these, is that the people of this country are blessed by one other resource that stands above all others—the ethic of restraint. Development in its broadest integration demands the consciousness of limits to enable people to act without degrading themselves and their environment." [86] He concludes by saying that the Buddha's attempt to overcome man's basic unruly craving provides an ethic for the next

century. But we are caught up between, on the one hand, a dynamic and vibrant drive for development and, on the other, the besetting attractions of the high-intensity market setting and the lifestyles of the affluent coming from the West. We lack a clear self-critical tone in our attempts to integrate these oncoming development models. This is a common issue for Third World countries and these realities have to be consistently kept in mind when we explore our traditional heritage to find answers for modern issues. Today, we are not only threatened by the pollution of the environment but by an insidious pollution of the mind, which has already affected the youth in the form of drug addiction. Thus in this context, today more than ever, the pollution of the environment and the pollution of the mind have to be dealt with as facets of the same problem.

Ecology and Psychology

If we accept the thesis that the pollution of nature and the pollution of the mind are facets of one problem, exploring a viable “environmental psychology” becomes a significant venture for the ecologist. Though environmental psychology, like environmental ethics, is a relatively new discipline, it helps us to get a more holistic vision of environmental problems and does so admirably in the Buddhist context.

The new environmental psychology is examining the links and the inter-relations between the psychological aspects of

man and his physical environment. As the old balance and equilibrium between man and nature have broken down in the face of the new technologies, an attempt has to be made to restore this balance. Sometimes it is wrongly held that environmental psychology is a narrow discipline merely concerned with issues like the impact of a skyscraper building on its inhabitants, the effect of metal on people who are involved in the manufacture of cars, the effect of industrial smoke on workers, etc. These issues are important, but in a deeper sense environmental psychology is concerned with people searching for a more comprehensive meaning in the man-nature relationship: "In this sense, not only the environment but an ethos is preserved. For the extent to which we achieve an identity in the environment is not simply in the prudent use we make of it, but in the human values we express through our willingness to shape it to an ethical end Environmental man is not only critical in relation to the ecosystem but to his own sense of self." [87]

In searching for a place to live in, man is not only concerned with comfort and shelter, for he does create something more than a mere physical environment. In planning the structure of the physical space, he instils it with meaning and symbols which give a sense of life and expression to his values. Thus the new environmental psychology has to be linked to this search for an environmental ethics. Erich Fromm has recently shown an interesting relation between personality types and ecology. [88] In a work entitled To Have or To Be?

he says that there are two modes of existence, the “having mode” and the “being mode.” The “having mode” expresses man’s basic acquisitiveness, his desire for power and aggressiveness, and generates greed, envy and violence; the “being mode” is an expression of man’s desire to care for others, to give to others, to share and sacrifice. The latter mode encourages conservation of resources, while the former mode can lead to ecological disaster. Fromm sees in the teaching of the Buddha as well as some other religions an explication of the idea that the “having mode” leads to a callous and irresponsible attitude towards nature as well as towards other persons.

In general the Buddhist sees greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) as the roots of the acquisitive, destructive and confused lifestyles. Excessive greed finds expression in diffused life orientations bound to sensuality and hedonism in the form of *kāmatanḥā* (sensuous gratification); greed also manifests in limitless expansion and a possessive stance bound to *bhava-tanḥā* (craving for selfish pursuits); a destructive and violent attitude to oneself, others and the natural world finds a point of anchorage in the root hatred, manifesting sometimes as a annihilistic instinct or *vibhava-tanḥā*. The false and destructive pattern of consumption generates an unending cycle of desires and satisfactions. The psychological roots of ecological disaster and recovery are factors very much related in the Buddhist context to the search for an environmental ethic.

Ecology and Ethics

Now we should return to the original question we raised about environment and ethics in the introductory section of this essay. Ethics is concerned with the evaluation of human behaviour in terms of concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, etc. A major dimension of the study of ethics is to focus attention on the kind of moral principles and core values which guide decision-making.

(i) The concept of the “value of life” is a concept which takes a central place in recent discussions of environmental ethics. In the evolution of ethical reflections attention was focused on the individual and family, tribes, regions, nations, and so on to include all humankind. Now this is being extended to non-human forms of life, especially animals and the natural environment. In the case of the natural environment, as vegetables are used for human consumption, the emphasis is on avoiding the callous destruction of nature and the pollution of the natural environment, rather than the destruction of life. Albert Schweitzer is one of those philosophers who have emphasised the philosophy of reverence for life including all non-human forms of life. A more recent philosophical work in this vein is the book by Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*. [89]

(ii) The second important principle which regulates ecological ethics is the principle of reciprocity. The day-to-day maintenance of the life support system is dependent on a functional interaction of countless interdependent biotic

and physiochemical factors. In the way that the value of life is a “core value” in Buddhist ethical codes, the notion of reciprocity and interdependence fits in with the Buddhist notion of a causal system. A living entity cannot isolate itself from this causal nexus and it has no essence of its own. Reciprocity also conveys the idea of mutual obligation, between nature and man and between man and man.

(iii) The third is a commitment to the future survival and development of mankind. Apart from promoting conservation, remedial action to improve the present position is a fundamental premise. The ethical concept involved here is the concept of responsibility to society and future generations, a premise which fits into the Buddhist ethical framework. People should not engage in activities detrimental to the environment and they should generate positive programmes for ecological education.

(iv) The fourth principle is the primacy of the value factors over the technological. The concern with the environment has to be placed in the proper context of ecological ethics as being just as much a matter of ethics as of technology, economics, law, the fear of survival, etc. Is it not possible to consider the need to preserve the environment as a biological need and cannot technology be considered as the means to redress nature’s imbalance? Biology is important, technology may be useful to counteract the ill-effects of pollution, but the ethical claims have an independent appeal to human dignity and responsibility. In fact, the term “bio-ethics” is being used to convey the important notion of an

ethics fed by biology -- useful ecological information.

In the final analysis, as Klas Sandell says in the introduction to this work, the ecocrisis is not solely a technological problem.

Norwegian Ecophilosophy and Ecopolitics and Their Influence from Buddhism

Sigmund Kvaloy

My point of departure is Norwegian ecophilosophy and ecopolitics, with reference mainly to the work of the Ecophilosophy Group, which I have worked with since its start in 1969. I can here give only a few glimpses of what we have been doing during those years, and I will partly focus on my own contribution, since that materialised gradually, as an attempt to combine Western ideas with Buddhism and Gandhian action philosophy-which I also interpret in a

Buddhist direction (that is easily done, since the Buddhist influence on Gandhi was strong).

The themes I am going to focus on are mainly two: time (or process) and what I call “radical human/environmental complexity.” These two themes are interrelated. They were not only developed philosophically, but evolved as centrally related to ecopolitical activity. We have had a tendency here to combine theory and practice-in keeping with both the Buddha and Gandhi-that is, to be interested in theory only in so far as it is useful for practice. We were quite conscious in letting this South Asian attitude influence us, but it came easily, since there is also a Norwegian precedent for it-one going counter to Western-learned neutrality and detachment. It has been an attempt to weave thought and action into a single multi-coloured fabric. Furthermore, ecophilosophy in our mode presupposes no definite beginning nor any climactic conclusion, as it is supposed to reflect life more than logic. My glimpses are of an ongoing spiritual-material activity.

Several of the group members had a university background, but we learned quickly that going into ecophilosophy required of us that we spend much time talking and listening to people with no academic training. But to have fruitful exchanges in this direction it proved necessary for us, the “academically prepared” group members, to spend several years de-learning our “off-the-ground” language. As part of that, I gradually came to use a lot of visual illustrations, like cartoons telling stories, and as symbols,

also under inspiration from Buddhist culture. If we are looking for a new, universal paradigm, a new basic pattern for understanding, new glasses to reveal a new “reality,” something that will replace the mechanistic, analytical approach—still the vehicle in which the West travels—it is essential to speak a language so that the effort, step by step, is shared by the world community at large.

Along that way, visual elements are useful in engaging people’s imagination and recollection of personally experienced situations. I will, however, hasten to say that there is one danger in using pictures—at least when your location is the academic milieu. This is that pictures tend to arrest in time the onlooker more than words do, to fix him in space, while I mentioned before that time or flow or process is one central message of ecophilosophy—process in our conception is something eminently available as the generator of a new paradigm. My thinking here may have a counterpart in very early Buddhism, as expressed through its total avoidance of any visualisation of the figure of the *Tathāgata*. [90] Later paintings and statues may be a Western influence, e.g. through Gandhāra, the north-western province in old India where Greek influence was strong.

As a starting point, I will go back sixteen years when we were more academic than we are now, and I will just state the definition of “ecophilosopher” that we made at that time. It runs as follows:

An ecophilosopher is one who occupies himself or herself

with the following four kinds of pursuit, never forgetting their inter-relatedness:

(A) Studies of the global ecosocial system and local subsystems and of man and human groups as dynamic entities at various depths of complex integration with that system; the latter conceived of as a self-regulating macro-organism in inter-play with matter and energy, awareness focused particularly upon relationships of process, communication and structural shifts.

(B) In this study it is attempted to use all human faculties-of intellect, sensitivity, feeling, intuition and practical experience-to grasp and integrate consciously as much as possible of the total network of interdependencies and the dynamisms of the life process, so that these insights and sensibilities are, among other things, directed towards:

(C) A critical evaluation of relevant scientific, technological and economic-political views and regimes, their basic assumptions and their impact on human attitudes and activities as well as on their relation to nature and to human society; and towards:

(D) The formulation of values, norms and strategies pertinent to human activities aiming at the strengthening of the dynamic steady state or “homeorhesis” [91] of the life process as well as the continuing growth of the “organic complexity” of that process and the formulation of criticism of values, norms and procedures that tend to weaken homeorhesis and to stunt that growth.

To this definition we added a commentary from which I will just quote a part:

Ecophilosophy is here conceived of as something more than an academic discipline in the traditional sense. It is thought of as a total engagement. It should strive to be as wide in scope as the attack upon the life-strength of the ecosystem and of human society as today. Ecophilosophy is a form of activity and a direction of thought that appears as something not freely chosen but as a necessity—a response required by the total system crisis we are experiencing in the world, challenging us to attempt a deep level revision of the basic notions of our Euro-American civilization. In such an extraordinary situation, the limitations of the academic tradition—values-neutral and strictly intellectual— must, at least for the present, be broken out of...

This was our starting point, and it was not just a definition, but a programme that we subsequently tried to follow as a gradually expanding string of groups. But of course we did not start in an historical vacuum. It has been said that the movement got off the ground earlier in Norway than elsewhere in Europe. In some respect I think that observation is correct, and one hypothesis to explain that is the very late industrialization of Norway, coupled with the fact that Norwegians were always travelling around the world like mad, eagerly gaping at what people elsewhere

were doing; and that again coupled with a strange labour movement, where half its members were small farmers. Then, when industrialization finally came, it happened as an explosion, but was met with quite a bit of awareness and suspicion. It actually all occurred during my lifetime. I grew up on a mountain farm, with practices still but little removed from the Middle Ages, and at twenty-two I was an electric systems specialist on jet fighters in the Norwegian air force!

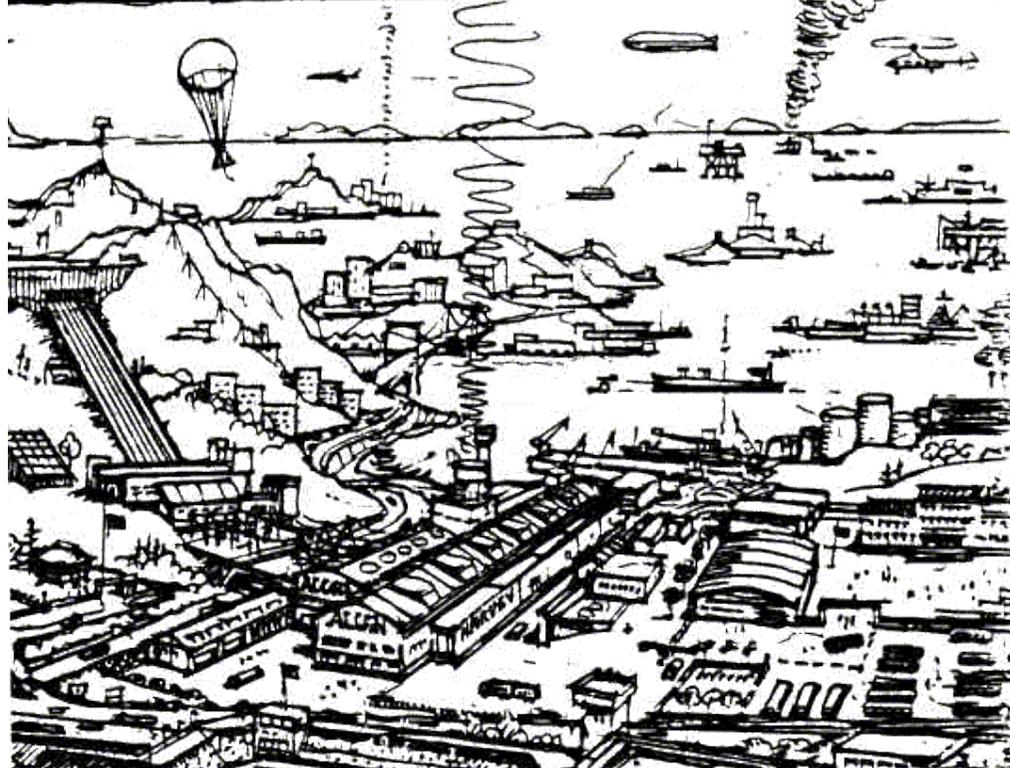
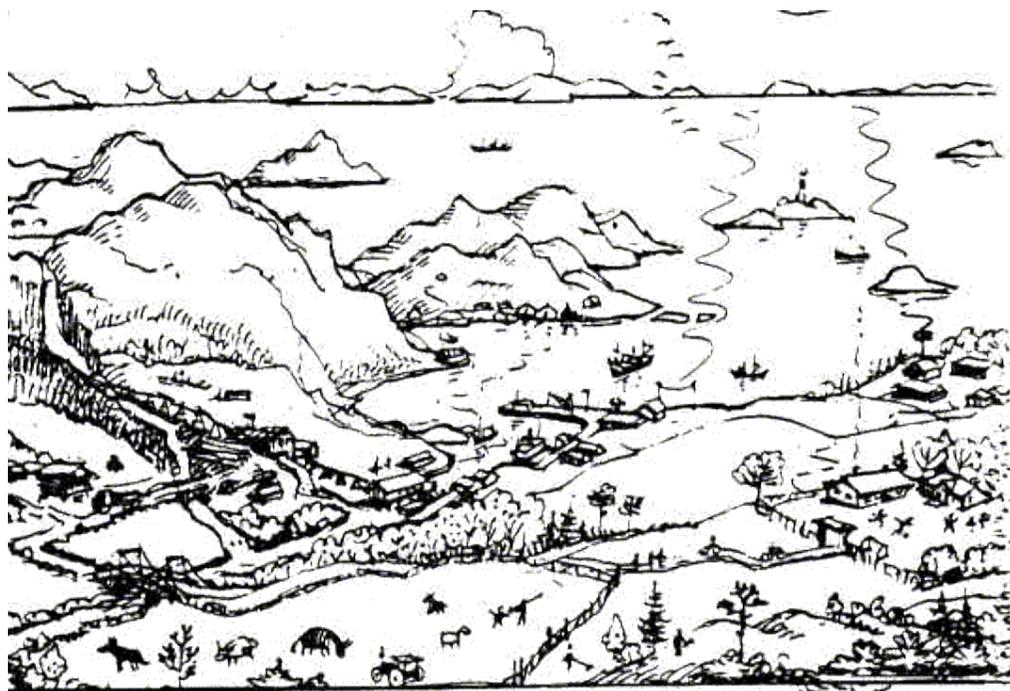
That collision between the old and the new cultures and its endless range of interdependent effects has gradually occupied more and more of my attention since the founding of the ecophilosophy group. It has structured a lot of projects. Right now, for instance, I have a Buddhist Sherpa friend—Tashi Tsangbo, from a remote Himalayan village—visiting at my farm in Norway. Together we are comparing the Sherpa tradition of semi-nomadic farming and cattle-herding and the similar tradition in Norway, and we are finding that these traditions are so close in vital human and social aspects that the difference is greater between my little Norwegian mountain community and Oslo, than between that community and Tashi's village!

This situation underlines the fact that industrialization and commercialization have not, so far, led to a homogeneous, uniform transition in my society. Instead, a high and hard barrier has been thrown up right through it as a whole, and due to ecopolitical activity, "green activism" and the like, that barrier has grown and is quite a bit more pronounced

today than, say, fifteen years ago. And the comparison we are doing between Norway and the Buddhist Himalayas illustrates a further discovery: that this barrier is a global one and that it divides both the Third World and our own. Norwegian mountain farmers are part of a struggle that today engages “green Indians” all over the world in confrontation with industrio-competitive “pale-face” forces. [92] In our modern European predicament, we have actually been looking to South Asia and her “experiments with Truth” for help. That illustrates not only the industrialization of the world, but the parallel globalisation of the green movement as a common and unifying response.

So many of my people learn at school and through the mass media that “natural,” pre-industrialised Norway offers a standardised environment, where children are bored, forced to engage in daily dreary work routines, given no room for play, etc., while our modern industrial society is the complex one. It has become a part of the Norwegian ecophilosophical/ecopolitical project to show that a closer look reveals the opposite

I have often used one specific pair of drawings to illustrate the transition, both of them referring to one typical Norwegian fjord landscape (figure 1).



Norwegian Landscape: Two Views

The first, depicting a situation with industrialization still under control (in its mild 1930–1950 version), I call “Life Necessities Society” (LNS); it represents a somewhat modernised sub-class under that category, while the other one represents “Industrial Growth Society” (IGS). Among various items in the IGS picture, the new large centralised school is an important seminal object, with its attached phalanx of school buses. The portrayed institution immediately signals to you, since it is a contemporary worldwide phenomenon, that the pictured IGS-town has created a large periphery of communities that are being emptied of human activity, and finally, of people too. In this typical Norwegian case, what we observe is an effect of the transformation of the natural river system into an industriocentralized resource, serving some power-consuming world market production. It indicates the creation of a world dependency, a consequent vulnerability, and a loss of economic democracy. Jobs are specialised and standardised; the loss of self-reliance is directly reflected in a loss of existential meaning. Disney-landish weekend diversions do not compensate for that.

This kind of reflection got us started in 1969, after a couple of years of loose discussions. That summer, just after the founding of the organisation, we made the decision that all the members of the ecophilosophy group also should be members of one of the ecopolitical groups, and we took this very seriously. We read Gandhi, who says that the most

important source of vital knowledge for a human being is to be had not: at a seminar room, nor at some political convention, but right in the centre of social conflict, in non-violent struggle for Truth through Satyagraha. I do not want to go into a discussion about “Truth” here, but most-maybe all-of my readers should be acquainted with Gandhi and his use of the word “Truth.” Particularly important to us became his (and the Bhagavad Gita’s) “norm of selfless action” and its Buddhist counterparts, given in many versions throughout Buddhist literature. I would say striving to understand and to follow that norm gradually gave us a strength that we otherwise would have lacked.

We also read about and were inspired by Buddhist “non-attachment” and the “homeless life.” Being fond of aimless wandering in the mountains, we were of course happy to find a 2500 years-old support, when the Buddha says: “I thought that life was oppressive in a house full of dust. Living in a house it is not easy to lead a full, pure and polished spiritual life, but the open air is better.” (Majjhima Nikāya) So we thought: “Let us use our love for the open air and for wild nature, and go up into the mountains and do politics there!”

So that is part of the background for the decision both to philosophise and be politically active simultaneously and to fight for nature in nature. Actually, quite a bit of our ecophilosophy was conceptualised during direct, non-violent actions in the mountains, the forests, the fields, along the coast, in the villages, and on the streets of the

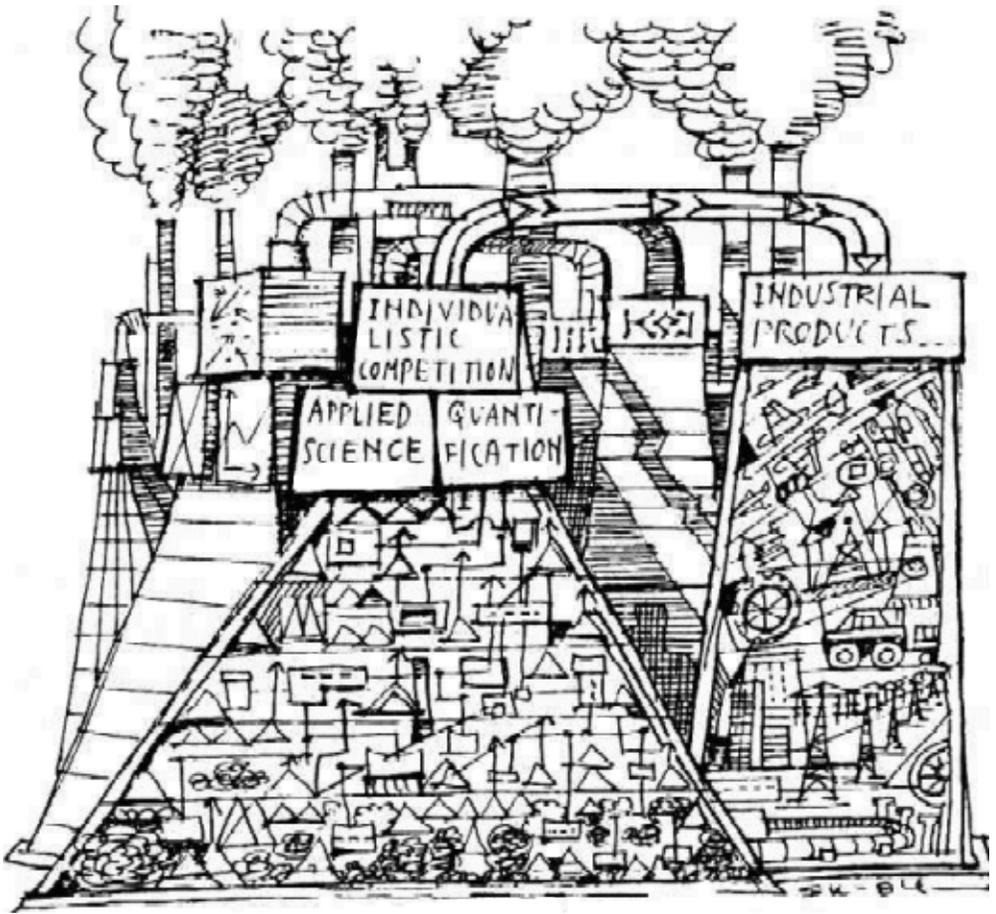
cities. Throughout, we were trying to protect rivers, fertile soil, fishing grounds, open-air kindergartens, etc. against heedless onslaughts by single-minded industrialism. And, as it turned out, our most successful campaigns were those in which we were able to go beyond just protesting and to build positive, constructive actions in the classical Gandhian sense, i.e. actions by which we were able to demonstrate our alternative, the kind of society we wanted instead of the disintegrated state resulting from competitive industrial growth.

First and foremost, the Bhagavad Gita's "norm of selfless action" was our guiding star. The norm says: "Act, but do not strive for the fruit of the action!" This sounds crazy to the West, attached as it is to results that enhance individual permanency, but our step-by-step discovery was that this is the central key to everything. The norm says that the road is important, not your personal reaping of the harvest of your toil. And it is an illusion that the road has an end. At the deepest level, Buddhism teaches us that even our own toiling selves are illusory. Accepting this means a complete turn-about of lifestyle compared to the normal "means-to-end" practices of the West. And following the norm, we experienced something unexpected—invulnerability! Even if we lost a kindergarten to a four-lane road or a fishing ground to oil drilling, we didn't feel beaten down and we didn't stop acting. Having acted—with all our care and strength—was our success! And slowly the politicians and the broader public began seeing the light.

Through this, we have been able at least to begin to show the strength of Buddhism, that the individual's "reaping of fruit" is an expression of egotistical desire (*taṇhā*), which is not only something morally negative, but represents a misconception of reality. Reality is process, and that turns out to be the full logical consequence of the ecological perspective. A lifestyle based on this is invulnerable—because your antagonist finds nothing to hit! And the final outcome of our campaigns has actually been a substantial change of attitudes and practices towards the environment in Norway—even new laws passed recently by our Parliament. Compared to that, the loss of some individual objects is not all-important.

In this way, we were testing the East in practice in the modern West, Gandhi was a child of two worlds. That is why, with him as a bridge, we may—in a non-romantic way—gain access to Buddhism and other resources of the East, a priceless asset in an epoch when our Western resources have run dry.

A central part of our ecophilosophical activity—actually the starting point that we have kept coming back to all along—is the analysis of Industrial Growth Society. Our model has generally been a pyramidal structure (figure 2) tapered towards four governing principles:



Industrial Growth Society

1. IGS is tending automatically towards an accelerating expansion of the production of industrial commodities and services (and this is its recurring measure of success) and the use of industrial methods: standardised mass-production, concentrated in a few, urbanised centres and carried out by specialists on all levels.

2. It is based on individual competition, in every human field of endeavour.
3. Its main resource for expansion is applied science.
4. Its main device for registering, analysing and responding to troubles is quantification.

These four principles should be seen as always interdependent, the way they have developed historically. Each one of them is in operation fortifying the others. Our Western society, is not, as yet, perfectly governed by this foursome (it could never reach that stage and survive), but it is tending towards that and it is doing it through various sorts of positive feedback. (It is mending its cracks by adding new ones deeper down.) The development in question is one that presupposes two specific conditions to be fulfilled: (a) that the earth's resources are unlimited, and (b) that human society and nature are machine-like in form. Both are untenable assumptions—I should think we are all agreed on that. So, what I am describing is a self-destructive social organism. What we today talk about as “the global socio-ecological crisis” is—that has been our contention—a direct and inevitable outcome of IGS in operation, i.e. a social system tending, characteristically, to fulfil the described model. IGS-managers—top to bottom—try to run society as if it were a machine, as if it were complicated, a structure reducible to elementary logical and mathematical entities and operations. Quality and novelty do not enter this picture and any development is in principle treated as

reversible, the way it is in a machine.

In the Norwegian ecophilosophy group we reserved the word “complex” for natural and social processes, generally conceived of as contrasting with machine operations in being irreversible, qualitative and dialectical, tending to produce novelty-gradually or in unpredictable leaps, developments that are surprising even if rhythmical (an important notion when dealing with homeorhetic living processes), sometimes chaotic. So this became a pair of contrasting concepts to us: “complicated” versus “complex.” It is a characteristic feature of IGS that it thrives (the organisational system, not its human members) as long as complication is spreading throughout society, replacing complexity.

The top of the IGS pyramid, seen as a centralised social organisation, may also be compared to the governing station of a machine—the single position from which you start and stop it and control all its functions. It is a basic characteristic of a machine to have just one such control centre, while a living, organic process has many, or you might say, none: the whole is governing itself. But if you are looking for governing centres to explain various functions, you will see several (never one that dominates all) and these may even be in conflict with each other. While in a machine—even in an advanced computer—if there were independent governing centres, you would have to scrap it. It would be unreliable, even self-destructive, because a machine is strictly and unidirectionally dichotomous in all

its operations; it lacks completely the qualitative process-character of organic entities. The latter thrive on certain varieties of uncertainty and conflict, even need them for their continuous existence.

The all-quantifying, complicated control scheme characteristic of IGS is a spatializing system—it tends to reduce all time processes to space parameters—and I will just in passing refer to Henri Bergson here and recommend his contribution, a unique one on the European stage. As regards the Norwegian ecophilosophy group, however, we received our main ideas in this direction from Buddhism and Gandhi. Bergson has been so effectively repressed by European space-bound philosophy that his relevance was revealed to us only recently. Since that has happened, I am ready to name him as Europe's first ecophilosopher.

Buddhism, however, as it is interpreted in some of the branches of its gigantic historical-cultural tree, constitutes the most radical process philosophy the world has seen. Since it goes back two and a half millennia, that is remarkable indeed, considering the modernity of process thinking as brought about by ecology and the new physics. Whitehead should also be mentioned here (William James and James Joyce are also relevant). In view of what's happening, I predict an imminent widespread recognition of both Bergson and Whitehead, and that their contributions this time will be discussed in conjunction with Buddhism. That did not happen before, since Western philosophers were largely ignorant of the East (and even to the

Buddhologists the process character of Buddhism was not clear until the works of Stcherbatsky and Rosenberg in the twenties). The time has now come.

Our analysis of IGS led us to the conclusion that it is a socio-political and socio-mental system that cannot survive beyond a few decades; you cannot mend its ways for the better, since it is a characteristic of the system that it thrives on or exists through an accelerated depletion of resources and an expanding simplification and standardisation of global process complexity. For that reason, after a few years, we stopped having as our aim the diversion of IGS onto a socio-ecologically sound track. Instead, we started investing our activist energy into inspiring as many people as possible to experiment with a basis for a viable society to replace the one that is now step by step cracking up at its base. I will also say this, however, that the Industrial Growth Civilisation may be utilised as mankind's most effective teacher so far. In that way we have started to look upon it not as something purely negative. It demonstrates to us, by extreme contrasts, what man is, what his potentialities are, as well as his limitations. It offers us many perspectives, mutually superimposed, because it attacks all cultures globally with one and the same standardised set of methods. At a level that perhaps is the deepest of all, it presents to us the ultimate experiment to see how far society may be pushed in spatializing time before all ends in chaos.

I will, presently, try to elucidate somewhat our notion of time. Due to my ecopolitical context, my concern here lies,

of course, not so much in the infra or ultra domains—although I share with others the inspiration from the “new physics” and contemporary cosmology—as in the middle domain, in the range of human life. Let us go a little further into how one culture may be mainly time-based in the sense mentioned earlier, while another—our own—has this strong spatial bias. Let us look at a Sherpa village in Nepalese Himalaya. Westerners passing by tend to say “How primitive!” and “We cannot possibly have anything to learn here!”

Let us take a look at a traditional Sherpa house (figure 3). There is not one perfectly straight line in it, not one perfect right angle, the walls lack any semblance of standardised smoothness. No two buildings are the same, however each one expresses the safety of shared requirements. After having pondered over these structures and how they are somehow never completed, contrasting them with European architecture today, I have come to the conclusion that even the word “architecture” is inappropriate as applied to this building culture. It just leads us to judge it within a frame of concepts that is foreign to the builders themselves, and we miss their intentions, their aims. We might instead talk of their way of “living with a building,” or how buildings are part of a household.



Invading Army of “Spatialists”

A Western method that might help in giving us a local frame of reference is the following: Place a movie camera in front of the Sherpa building and let one single frame of the film be exposed each day and keep doing that for fifty years. Then develop the film and let it run at normal speed. What would then be revealed to us is a house that is never a fixed structure; it is a process having a flowing “amoebic” pattern, shifting functions around—we might even be tempted to drop the very word “structure.” Stones are moved in the walls, the roof planking is constantly being shifted about, new parts are being added to the house, old parts removed, lichens grow on the walls, maybe a little tree on the roof, a different species of plant is coming up alongside the wall to the southwest, animals—domestic during the day, wild during the night—are flowing in and out and around, children and adults likewise (*yetis* at night!), etc. What we see is something rhythmic, something organic, a living, pulsating duration-time being created. Mind you, not something happening in time: thinking that way we would be back in a spatializing frame of ideas. Living with this “house” as the Sherpa does, we are part of time.

As for aesthetics: whether the building is beautiful or not has to be discovered through watching—or better, by being part of—the movement that was just revealed to us. You

have to stop and stay and even work with the Sherpas. Here, you cannot isolate aesthetics from any other area of human concern, as little as you may isolate the Sherpa building from its many functional aspects that characterise the wholeness of Sherpa life and Himalayan nature. The house is an extension—temporary like everything else—of the human beings who built it and keep building it every day. The Buddhist process paradigm works perfectly as a reference pattern for this society, and any aid to the Sherpas today should spring out of a strengthening of that tradition. A “modernization” within that framework would strengthen their own identity, instead of undermining it, as is happening now.

So this is an illustration of two different world paradigms, as represented by two different cultures through their building traditions, and in the old Norwegian mountain farms I now see reflected the same process-character as the one I have found with the Sherpas. The “Greek” tradition with its technological successes reached the cities of Norway some time ago, but the remote rural areas only superficially. So there are unexpected allies to be found around the globe for an international “green” process movement. Of course, I am not here just talking about buildings and technology, but about a whole outlook on life. Neither am I talking about a reversal of history; a process cannot be reversed anyway.

One word I have used for this time-oriented ontology, ethics and aesthetics is “the philosophy of positive decay.” In order to have continuous growth, where continuous

withering is the daily reminder, unbroken human creativity is needed. In this perspective—again using the building as a symbol—you cannot just leave the design of your house to an architect, then stay in it for a brief spell leaving the repairs to others, then go off to some other place. That would be tantamount to leaving your own body.

I was a research fellow in human ecology and environmental philosophy for five years at the Oslo School of Architecture, and during that time I had fruitful exchanges with architects on these matters, and I brought four of them with me to Nepal. We started to call the contemporary Western house (in the double sense) a “paper structure,” referring back to its inception on the designer’s perfectly white paper sheet with its thin, ruler-drawn lines. Let’s say we have a less-than-perfect architect smoking a pipe as I do, one day by mishap leaving a sooty fingerprint on the just completed drawing. All of a sudden it has lost all value, except for the trash collector. But not only the drawing, but also the finished building is treated this way! A little crack in its smooth wall, and it looks terrible. It is a kind of structure that cannot bear the “tooth of time.” If the crack is not patched up in a week or two, passers-by will start thinking something is wrong with the economy of the company or the city or whatever owns the building (still using the double sense).

But the Sherpa house is made to be cracked! It is not a paper structure. Of course I am not here speaking about the virtue of having a house that cracks. I am trying to elucidate, in

contemporary terms, the contrast between a Buddhist world conception and lifestyle and the West, where clinging to individuality and permanence is the very basis for society. And I am saying that the might of our modern West is built on illusion in Buddhist terms, and it must therefore be self-destructive. And the Buddhist attitude is well represented in other, non-Western cultures, in relation to which Buddhist philosophy may well serve as a tool for clarification and as a key to a united effort against Western destructiveness.

All pyramidal societies have been short-lived and all grand-scale efforts at fortified permanency have led to grand-scale devastations. Our Western society is imbued with internal psychic and social contradictions, expressive of how we are forced to live as atomised individuals, on a map, while by nature we are eddies in the stream! There never was a better illustration of the Buddhist *dukkha*—and how it propagates—than the West today!

I have a tendency to think that the West and the East have been moving away from each other, starting with those Greek philosophers who based their philosophy on permanency and perfection as the marks of reality itself. Heraclitus, with his “everything flows” (*panta rhei*), represented a potential in the opposite direction, but it came to nothing. It had no impact to speak of on later European philosophy and religion, since it offered no basis for technological and economic growth!

Mathematizing, spatializing and individualising the world were fortified through material success, and finally today we are in this position from which I think it is nearly impossible for a Westerner to bridge over into, say, the Hindu identification with Brahman, or—even more radical—the Buddhist way of dissolving everything into emptiness, shunyata.

Buddhism developed, in certain aspects, in the opposite direction from the West. The various branches of the gigantic religio-cultural tree of Buddhism that grew and matured through the centuries present to us a multitude of philosophical viewpoints in spirited but tolerant discussion with each other. What strikes me, looking at this tree from the West, is that throughout this differentiation, a basic unity is preserved, revealed as a unanimous negation of the spatializing and individualising tendency that characterises Western philosophy. All of it may be seen as attempts at a purification and radicalisation of process thinking. One illustration of the width of this gap between Eastern and Western thought is given by the Bodhisattva ideal as it evolved in certain branches of Mahayana, where finalising the time stream in Nirvana has almost been pushed out of view, and where even conflict and pain is something one returns to, because escaping complex time as an individual is seen as an illusion. Whether this is a deviation from the Buddha's basic intuitions is a matter of controversy, but it serves well as an example of a manner of thinking that is as far away from the Western Christian and scientific approach

as it is possible to get. It represents one way of taking the ultimate logical step towards a complete eradication of permanence and clinging.

The Buddha's disintegration of the self left us with the five aggregates (*skandhas*): groups of functionally united "existence factors," namely, body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Between the composite individual and the Whole, modern organic systems theory today teaches us to find layer upon layer of hierarchically ordered, system-seeking organ-entities. On top of that, Hegel and Marx have given us the idea of dialectical breakthroughs. Attempting to combine these various ideas, I have ventured the thought that the human being, when born, potentially has an extra level of complexity beyond what has been conceived by Western anthropology and psychology. That extra level is one where capacity is given to grow more than one person-stream, or "personality." Let me just use this latter term without defining it, since I am short of space. I am not talking about playing different roles. If you have the opportunity during your lifetime to become immersed in or integrated with more than one distinct environment, you have the endowment to develop one personality for each, as distinctive as its corresponding environment. In each case "your" (meaning "your person-manifold's") system-seeking tendency should be in operation.

This capacity that a human being has is not allowed to flourish in a pyramidal society, such as Industrial Growth

Society, because that is a structure which needs a base of small human “pyramids,” organisational copies of the large one. You have once again the old mechanistic model of the universe; you need a definite governing station (the pyramid’s top) from which the structure of this system is controlled, and you need ultimate, hard building blocks, or atoms, to be able to monitor and operate the complete structure efficiently, e.g. to reverse processes if they go wrong. But natural processes can never be reversed, since they are in fact not pyramidal. Breaking with this kind of rationality is a necessity that Industrial Growth Society teaches us when it reveals its oppressive character, and this is where my “middle domain” ties in with the “infra” and “ultra” domains of the new physics and cosmology, and where Buddhist concepts and modern variations on them are becoming vitally relevant. There are common conceptual forms here, inspirational takeoff points to be shared.

Well, if you have understood me correctly so far in these few pages, you are also ready to understand—if not to accept—that the individual human person process can be active in several different places simultaneously. For instance, mentioning “myself,” “I” have another personality that right now is active at home on the farm because personality is not bounded by the skin of a body; in my paradigm or ontology it defines itself through activity and through intimate interaction with people, nature and landscape. Reasoning along the same line, it is not limited by death either—and here is again one point where these

ideas tie in with Buddhism.

Let me round this off by just mentioning the reactions of some young people after one of our recent nature-protective campaigns—a constructive campaign in the sense mentioned, where the campaign’s meaningful function completely depended upon the participants’ identification with nature and humankind’s future generations. [93] These youngsters came to me and said that for the first time in their life they had experienced meaningful existence. My first thought was that this is certainly a revealing comment on the normal existence that modern Western society offers young people. Further inquiry convinced me that their feeling of having lived through something deeply meaningful sprang from a positive loss of their ego’s significance. Later on, it dawned on me that this campaign, the way it finally found its relaxed, resilient but insistent “middle way” form, had functioned to many as a modern Western version of Buddhist insight meditation. After all, meditation in this sense may employ any method that leads the seeker onward to enlightenment, i.e. Nibbāna.

Here, as at several of our earlier campaigns, we were decisively influenced by what in our situation are the two most relevant well-springs of the East, Buddhism’s way of liberation from the ego and the Bhagavadgīta’s action gospel, easily combined! And we are today just one little member of a rapidly growing global community of practical activist groups that draw inspiration from these same sources in their struggle for a green world. My experience

during the last fifteen years tells me that it is this practical struggle that will gradually give birth to the much sought-for “New Paradigm,” the paradigm of resilient, creative, limitless life.

The Buddhist Perception of Nature Project

Nancy Nash

“The world grows smaller and smaller, more and more interdependent. Today more than ever before life must be characterised by a sense of Universal Responsibility, not only nation to nation and human to human, but also human to other forms of life.”

—H. H. the Dalai Lama

Buddhist Perception of Nature, a project created to improve awareness, attitudes, and actions concerning the natural environment, took root with this statement by His Holiness

the Dalai Lama during the course of an interview in 1979, and has been nurtured at every step with inspiration and support from the world's foremost Buddhist leader.

Our work involves researching, assembling, and putting to use as educational tools, Buddhist teachings about man's responsibilities to the natural world and all living beings. Many of the lessons from Buddhist literature and art date back more than 2,500 years, but they are as valid today as they have ever been, and capable of reaching out in many modern forms in contemporary society. Buddhism, in fact, was selected for the pilot project in new perspectives for environmental education because it is an ancient, enduring philosophy, embodying strongly themes of awareness and compassion for all life.

The faith is also influential in many parts of Asia that have unique and endangered species of animals, plants and habitats, and has been demonstrated to have a direct, beneficial effect in saving some species of wildlife and threatened habitats.

The conservation effect for the most part may be described as passive protection. Animals inhabiting the grounds of temples, for example, have automatic sanctuary for Buddhist faithful; in Thailand rules for monks living in forest monasteries are so strict that their areas are naturally well cared for. Tibet, by all accounts, was until the culture was disrupted by the Chinese takeover in 1950, a land where people and wildlife lived together in extraordinary

harmony.

The environmental crisis we face today, however, needs active help, and the world's estimated 500 million Buddhists can make a major, positive impact by becoming active conservationists.

A focus on human, spiritual and cultural values in no way ignores the role of science, which itself is also part of the human cultural world. Our project recognises that science is essential, first to set priorities for the work, and to persuade educated leaders and decision-makers. Then our best scientific minds are needed to help rectify the ecological disasters we face resulting from ignorance, greed, and lack of respect for the earth.

Objective scientists are the first professionals to point out and prove that the earth's capacity to support life is clearly being reduced at the time it is needed most-as rising human numbers, expectations, and consumption make increasingly heavy demands. But science outlines the state of the earth. Religion and cultural traditions are the repositories of human values, and many people today feel it is only with aroused personal and social values that we may begin to deal with our current problems in a way which will benefit life on earth now, and in the future.

The importance of excellence in scholarship cannot be over-estimated in a project of this kind, and we are fortunate that from the commencement of work, research has been under the direction of highly respected institutions, and carried

out by superb scholars.

The Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs and the Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama have provided direction for Mahayana studies. For Theravada traditions, work has been guided by wildlife Fund Thailand in association with experts from the Thai Ministry of Education and Thammasat University. Our chief scholars—Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh in Bangkok, and Venerable Karma Gelek Yuthok in Dharamsala, India—and their colleagues assisting with research, compiling and translating, have done a remarkable job involving a vast literature and history, in a very short space of time.

Deputy Minister for Education in His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Kashag (Cabinet), Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari, is Buddhist Perception of Nature's Tibetan Coordinator, and our Thai Coordinator is Mr. Sirajit Waramontri, Member of the Board of Trustees of Wildlife Fund Thailand. Both have given this project valuable time, energy, and creative talent to launch the work, and keep it going.

Tibetan and Thai Buddhists have undertaken the initial work for the simple reason that they were sympathetic and influential individuals willing to take on the burden of the tasks. Contacts with other Buddhist communities and countries have come about in the normal course of events and all are welcome to participate.

Because of the global concerns of conservation, this project from the beginning was envisioned as important, first

among Buddhists, but also as an adaptable blueprint for research and achievement for similar projects involving other faiths and cultural traditions. Buddhist Perception of Nature aims to provide samples of the project design and educational materials to all groups, governmental and private, Buddhist and other faiths, wishing to study and use them. All of us involved with the work are therefore touched, and inspired by the interest already shown by individuals and groups from many different parts of the world, and different religions and cultural traditions, who find the project not only a viable response to the ecological problems today, but also an element in a much-needed renaissance of environmental ethics.

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For Further Reading from BPS

Buddha the Healer: The Mind and its Place in Buddhism;
Essays ed. by Dr. A. Nimalasuria WH 22

Buddhism and Peace; K. N. Jayatilleke WH 41

*Knowledge and Conduct: Buddhist Contributions to Philosophy
and Ethics;* Essays by O. H. de A. Wijesekera, K. N.

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88. Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York, 1976).
89. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York, 1975).
90. "The One who, like the many previous Enlightened Ones, has come to direct us and then passed away." Several of the various translations of this old designation of the Buddha seem to me to underline the process perspective.
91. We prefer the latter term, which denotes a concept invented by the British geneticist C. H. Waddington, as being more in keeping with our process philosophy. A homeorhetic system does not swing around a fixed time trajectory. It never returns to a previous state; instead, even its "centre of balance" is on the move, changing. Homeorhesis is "inventive", but orderly. Homeostasis, in contradistinction, is the balancing of a system around a fixed time trajectory.
92. I mean here: American Indians, who have become an important inspiration to the North American and European green movement. "Pale-face" was the North American Indian name for "white" European intruders.

93. A detailed description of these campaigns and a discussion of their relationship to Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path may be obtained through the following address: The Ring of Ecopolitical Cooperation, Saetereng, 7496 Kotsoy, Norway

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