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Greening our Lifestyles: The Demise Of The Ecology  
Movement?

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*LIFESTYLE IS A LOADED WORD LIKE SO* many of the words we use these days. On one hand, it means, a conscious sense of creating who we want to be. We make choices about our appearances, about the impressions we want to make on other people. During the 1970s, some sociologists used the term *lifestyle* to indicate the conscious effort by a group of people to create a "scene" as a focus for their lives. Sociologists wrote about lifestyles in the surfer "scene" or the hippie "scene" or the skiing "scene." Lifestyle is a conscious creation of habits and ways of being in the world. A brief examination of the archaeology of this concept may help to illuminate a fuller understanding.

Lifestyle is a very modern concept. In most cultures, for most of human history, people did what they had to do because of custom, tradition, or social expectations, and if they deviated from expected behavior based on their social identity, their sex, status, rank or other criteria, strong measures of social control were directed against them.

Lifestyle in modern society means, in part, conscious creation of our social identity. It also means mindful attention to the source of our philosophy, our understanding of our emotions and philosophical approach to life. Making our behavior conform to our philosophy is frequently difficult. As Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher who coined the term *deep ecology* reminds us that, "many philosophers build castles in the mind, but live in doghouses."

The German psychologist Alfred Adler argued that adults can never erase the hurts of infancy and toddlerhood - child abuse, rape, incest, neglect, negative labeling by peers, or alienation from nature. Adults can develop values, passions, insights, and commitments that comprise a person's vision of how to make peace in an intransigent world and how to do the real work.

Lifestyle means the total approach that adults take to the problems and dilemmas of living based on conscious decisions. To a certain extent, lifestyles are voluntary. We can make choices in our attitudes, in our approach to life and death, in our attempts to change our habits. However, there are certain conditions that limit lifestyle choices and certain cultural and political situations in which we play out decisions made from philosophical principles. We are limited by our physical conditions, that is all of us are differently able. Our reflections on gender and gender roles play an important role in lifestyle choices. We are also constrained by the historical situation of our society, by our age, and by

our cultural and community affiliations.

The ecosophical poet Robinson Jeffers suggested that, in the post-exuberant era, we learn to "fall in love outward," with the great beingness of life. Lovers who fall in love outward do not "harvest" their love of a forest, a seashore, or nature. They participate with it, grow with it, suffer with it, engender with it.

*Greenness* is a metaphor for consciousness practice. Falling in love outward, we become more mindful of the ways our actions influence the world around us, and we enrich our experiences without impoverishing the natural world. Greenness means more than supporting a "green" political party or supporting the platform of a "green" political candidate. In the choices we make - considering our position in life, age, gender, education, religious and ethnic group identification - we can see greenness as a continuum. There are many aspects of our mindful awareness of our actions.

Light green choices might include the decision to recycle more regularly or the decision to consciously work to reduce the amount of energy we use in our daily round of life - heating our living space, fossil fuel for our vehicles, turning off the lights when we leave the office. It might include the decision to develop a six-month plan to reduce the waste our household generates by a certain amount - say 30 percent.

Darker green means taking on additional responsibility, such as caring for some of the wastes generated by other people. For example, the Nuclear Guardianship Project is an example of a visionary approach to deep greenness. Deep greenness can mean engaging in various educational efforts, or participating in experiential workshops that are designed to open up participants to their connections to the long evolutionary journey of life on Earth. Deep greenness means coming home to our broader self, to what ecologist Aldo Leopold called "thinking like a mountain" in his book *Sand County Almanac*.

Recognizing the importance of the green metaphor in a society where literal language is frequently taken as the most realistic, but least evocative, form of discourse, Australian philosopher Warwick Fox suggests that the *Tree of Life* is a most appropriate metaphor for greening our lifestyles. As a metaphor, the Tree of Life evokes meaning on many levels of understanding. It represents all living beings as they evolve through time and can represent our connections as humans with the rest of creation.

The Tree of Life "fits the facts" as explained by evolutionary biologists and conservation ecologists. Sprouting from a "seed of life," the evolutionary tree continues to grow through time, branch, change, move without purposeful direction, without any "higher" or "lower" aspects. Furthermore, Fox says, "The image of leaves on a tree clearly suggests the existence of an entity that must be nurtured in all its aspects if all its aspects are to flourish. Damage a leaf badly enough and it will die; damage a branch and all the leaves on that branch

will die." Visualizing the leaves on the Tree of Life we clearly "see" how all leaves (entities, species, beings) are interconnected because they are part of the same tree. At the same time the leaves (entities, our individuated selves as we experience ourselves during our lifetime) have some autonomy. Each leaf has some degree of "freedom," movement in relation to the wind, for example. The amount of sunlight that one leaf has during the day versus the amount of sunlight another leaf has because it is shaded by other leaves gives us an image of differences due to situation and experiences. While recognizing distinctiveness, individuation of different entities (individuated human individuals, for example, as seen as leaves on the Tree of Life), the metaphor of the Tree of Life also calls us to recognize impermanence, change over time. "Leaves come and go - and so does the tree itself (the cosmos), but over a much greater time span."

By recovering our connection to the Tree of Life, we can possibly reconnect, in our recovery process, with the roots of life, with our sense of place in the biosphere, in the cosmos. Reflecting on our connection, as humans, with the green Tree of Life, we see, in an ecological sense, that humans are an interesting (at least to us) variation (leaf) on the Tree. Humans are creative, have big brains during this phase of their evolutionary change, show warmth and sometimes compassion toward some other humans, and sometimes toward nonhuman entities, but they are no more vital or important to the Tree (or to the forest, the ecosystem, or the biosphere) than other variations, for example the mycorrhizal fungi in the soil of the forest. Indeed, recent research indicates that the forest would wither and possibly die without the mycorrhizal fungi (Maser, *Global Imperative*, 1992).

In reflecting on greening our lifestyles, we see that reduction means reducing our sense of importance, our pridefulness and hubris. It means seeing ourselves within a nonanthropocentric or ecocentric perspective. As Christopher Manes, author of *Green Rage*, writes, a new language of nonanthropocentric perception may develop in us when we are "able to learn that language of ecological humility by responding to the insights of ecology and evolutionary theory, which means metaphorically learning the language of the winds, the frogs, the waterfalls, the earthworms."

This search for our ecocentric connections takes us far deeper than conventional therapeutic exercises that ask us to explore who we are in terms of family dynamics during our childhood or even our gender roles. The epistemologist and anthropologist Gregory Bateson, in his book *Mind and Nature*, summarized our dilemma when he wrote, "Most of us have lost that sense of unity of biosphere and humanity which would bind and reassure us all with an affirmation of beauty." This historical loss, "was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake" (*Mind and Nature*, 1980, p. 19). When we ask, then, how we can dig deeper into our consciousness, to explore our interconnectedness with the Tree of Life, and how we can recover our rootedness in the "harmony of nature," we are asking for ways to see across boundaries.

Recognizing our connections with the Tree of Life, we also recognize that our actions as individuals - in households, communities, and societies - are restrained. Our freedom is limited by the laws of ecology. In order to cultivate deep green lifestyles, we need to understand the laws of ecology and the implications of these laws in framing our conscious choices for lifestyle.

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