

# On “Self-Realization” – The Ultimate Norm of Arne Naess’s Ecosophy T

Md. Munir Hossain Talukder

**Abstract:** This paper considers the foundation of self-realization and the sense of morality that could justify Arne Naess’s claim ‘Self-realization is morally neutral,’ by focusing on the recent debate among deep ecologists. Self-realization, the ultimate norm of Naess’s ecosophy T, is the *realization* of the maxim ‘everything is interrelated.’ This norm seems to be based on two basic principles: the diminishing of narrow ego, and the integrity between the human and non-human worlds. The paper argues that the former is an extension of Plato’s idea of self-development or self-mastery while the latter is implicit in Aristotle’s holism. It defends that Self-realization is morally neutral only if the term ‘moral’ is considered in the Kantian sense. However, Naess reluctantly distinguishes between ethics and morality, which makes his approach less credible. The paper concludes that Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia* supports Self-realization to qualify as a virtue.

**Keywords:** deep ecology, environmental ethics and philosophy, morally neutral, principle of integrity, self-development, Self-realization

## 1. Introduction

Deep ecology as an environmental movement emphasizes Self-realization, ecological wisdom, and asking of deeper questions. Instead of dominating moral norms, such as the Categorical Imperative, Self-realization is the essence of deep ecology. Arne Naess, the pioneer of this movement, believes that a radical change in our present ideology, attitudes, and values toward environment can solve the environmental crisis. Environmental philosophers and ethicists have also suggested this change and recommended various sets of rules. Contrary to them, Naess argues for ‘no moralizing.’ He thinks that all we need is ‘Self-realization.’

Naess takes the term ‘Self-realization’ in a comprehensive sense. His procedure first distinguishes between the two selves, Self (with a capital S) with a meaning to the Indian *atman* and self (with a small s), meaning individual self. The individual self should achieve the universal Self through the diminishing of ego or through the narrow self. In other words, through realizing the maxim ‘everything is interrelated.’ Naess argues that once the individual self attains Self-realization, her behavior ‘naturally’ and ‘joyfully’ follows the norms of environmental ethics. Some important questions then arise: Is Self-realization a moral term? Or is it a virtue that the self needs to be habituated to?

Thus, two basic principles – the diminishing of ego and the integrity between the human and the non-human world – constitute Naess’s ultimate

norm of Self-realization. By the diminishing of ego he means the gradual reduction of our hedonistic attitude, the diminishment of our Western isolated ego. The integrity principle says that everything in this biosphere is internally connected, all organisms are parts of an integrated whole. That is, if we harm any elements in this nature, then eventually we harm ourselves. I will argue that the first principle is an extension of Plato's self-development or self-mastery while the second is an extension of Aristotle's biocentric holism.

This paper starts with an explanation of the term Self-realization. It then focuses on Plato's and Aristotle's views. After briefly reviewing Gandhi's non-violence theory and Buddhism, I will support Naess's claim that Self-realization is a morally neutral phenomenon. At the end, I will show that although Self-realization is, in essence, non-moral, Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* provides enough ground for it to qualify as a virtue.

## 2. Self-Realization as the Ultimate Norm of Ecosophy T

Self-realization is the norm which connects all life forms through the ultimate principle "life is fundamentally one." Rothenberg has identified three main features of this norm: firstly, Self-realization does not mean self-centeredness because the individual self cannot be isolated from, as well as dissolved into the greater Self. Secondly, Self-realization is a process of expanding oneself to realize that she is a part of nature and others' interest should be her own interests. Finally, since Self-realization is an active condition, or a process, or a way of life, nobody can ever reach Self-realization. Like *Nirvana* in Buddhism, Self-realization is unreachable. Self-realization provides us a direction to move towards the Self (Rothenberg 1986, 9).

But what does the Self exactly mean in Naess's ecosophy? What are its special characteristics? In one sense, the Self includes all life forms in the world. That is, it is the symbol of organic Oneness. Naess writes, "the Self in question is a symbol of identification with an absolute maximum range of beings" (quoted in Fox 1990, 99). He also adds, "This large comprehensive Self (with a capital 'S') embraces all the life forms on the planet" (Naess 1986, 80). However, I think these words may not present his whole idea of the Self. The Self can also be seen as an extended manifestation of the self. In other words, the Self is a mature position of the self.

The Self represents unselfishness, totality, and is beyond narrowness. It is unselfish in the sense that it considers the potentiality and the life of other non-human beings. Narrow human dominance dissolves into the Self. So, the Self, in another sense, refers to the wider, broadened, matured, refined, examined, and developed self. If we accept both these characteristics, Self-realization then denotes the realization of the 'organic wholeness' as well as some sort of 'rectification' of our selves.

## On “Self-Realization” – The Ultimate Norm of Arne Naess’s Ecosophy T

As I have just mentioned, Self-realization conceives a view of totality which is the ultimate goal of life. To reach this goal one has to go through several stages:

“T0-self-realisation

T1-ego-realisation

T2-self-realisation (with lower case s)

T3-Self-realisation (with capital S).” (Naess 1989, 84-85)

The last stage, i.e. T3 should be the ultimate goal. In the Western philosophical tradition we find only T0 which Naess calls isolated or egoistic. However, T3 is similar to the ‘Universal Self’ or to the ‘Absolute,’ in this tradition. Now, how can we reach T3 from T0? In other words, do we need any moral norm to reach T3? According to Naess, we need ‘inclination’ rather than ‘morality’ to get T3, a joyful inclination with nature (Naess 1989, 86).

The norm of Self-realization plays a central role in distinguishing between ‘Shallow’ and ‘Deep’ ecology. In the shallow ecology movement, Self-realization seems less important because the movement aims only to fight against pollution and protect human beings. By contrast, in deep ecology, Self-realization is extremely crucial. Deep ecology considers all organisms, plants, and so forth, as a ‘total-field image.’ So, deep ecology dissolves the ‘man-in-environment’ concept and establishes a more symbiotic relationship; a relationship which is intrinsically valuable and based on an enlightened principle “the equal right to live and blossom” (Naess 1973, 152).

Thus, Naess’s ‘Self-realization’ dismisses any hierarchical chain among human beings, animals, and plants. It favors the principle of integrity to draw a normative conclusion. Self-realization, therefore, is neither a purely ecological nor a logical conception. It is an ecosophy of equilibrium and harmony.

By means of this norm Naess argues against the ‘survival for the fittest’ theory. As Darwin’s theory undermines co-existence and co-operational relations in the biosphere and advocates an ‘either you or me’ sentiment, Naess rejects it. As an alternative to the evolutionary thesis, Naess’s maxim is “Live and let live,” a class-free society in the whole ecosphere. He writes: “By identifying with greater wholes, we partake in the creation and maintenance of this whole” (Naess 1989, 173).

So, the question is: how does the process of identification stem “Live and let live?” Naess mentions that we the human beings cannot help animals, plants, and other species, and even landscapes, but we can only *identify* ourselves with them. Identification is a situation which, he says, “elicits intense empathy” (Naess 1986, 227). One example of identification is that once Naess saw a dying flea that had suddenly jumped into acid. Though he was not able to save the flea from dying, he felt deeply its painful suffering. Naess says, “Naturally, what I felt was a painful sense of compassion and empathy” (Naess 1986, 227). Hence,

psychologically, Naess realized the similar pain of death and felt deep compassion and empathy by identifying with the flea. Identification means not to *alienate* from others.

According to Naess, self-love is a pre-condition for identification. He understands self-love not in an egoistic sense, but rather in a deep and wide sense that promotes others' interest. The being's interest, therefore, makes a bridge to reach Self-realization from self-love. Inspired by Spinoza and William James, Naess maintains that human beings have the interest of preserving their existence. But this interest is basically the realization of their 'inherent potentialities.' Naess believes that other animals and plants have the same interest of realizing their own 'inherent potentialities.' Only through identification we can realize them (Naess 1986, 229).

So, existence appears as a necessary condition rather than a sufficient condition for Self-realization. Another point is that the self develops into *ecological Self* when human beings realize their own self-interests and have genuine self-love.

The ecological Self feels a strong bond with the natural setting around her. She has deep identification with it, and finds herself as a part of it. Naess expresses the feelings of the ecological Self as: "My relation to this place is part of myself;" "If this place is destroyed something in me is destroyed" (Naess 1986, 231). Naess seems to say, unlike the Western philosophical trend, that the self is not merely something which exists inside the body and has consciousness. The self has a major role in the identification and, finally, the realization of our relationship with Nature. It contributes significantly to realize how we should live, and how we should treat ourselves as self-interested and self-loving beings.

Clearly, Self-realization inspires us to think beyond humanity. That is, we should realize our intimacy with the non-human world. This realization, as deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions say, displays the maxim "No one is saved until we are all saved." Here, the word 'one' refers to each and every elements of the ecosphere contributing to its existence, such as bears, mountains, rivers, and even the microscopic lives in the soil (Devall and Sessions 1985, 222).

In the next two successive sections, I argue that the foundation of the Self-realization norm can be found in Plato's view of self-development and in Aristotle's holism.

### 3. Plato's View of Self-Development

Plato developed Socrates' idea of 'know thyself' in his view of self-development. Although Plato did not take 'Self-realization' as the ultimate norm, 'self' was the central moral source in his thinking. From this perspective, Plato's view of self-development could be the beginning of the norm of Self-realization. According to Socrates, "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Des Jardins 1997, 212). The inner message of this statement is that the good life must involve a process of

self-understanding, self-examination, self-interpretation, and so forth – which is also the aim of Self-realization.

In the *Republic*, Plato's moral thinking is directed in a similar sense: "We are good when reason rules, and bad when we are dominated by our desires" (Taylor 1989, 115). That is, the good man is he who is dominated by reason, not by desires. Arne Naess says: "To identify self-realization with ego-trips manifests a vast underestimation of the human self" (Naess 1986, 234). Devall and Sessions illustrate this idea in the following manner: "... self-realization goes beyond the modern Western *self* which is defined as an isolated ego striving primarily for hedonistic gratification or for a narrow sense of individual salvation in this life or the next" (Devall and Sessions 1985, 222).

Both Plato and Naess argued against allowing our narrow egos or hedonistic desires to dominate. They hold that our reason should dominate our soul or our thought, not those anthropocentric desires which direct human beings to fulfill their needs and wants by any means. Someone could argue here that Plato is more concerned with 'self-control' while Naess with the 'diminishing of ego.' Even though to some extent it is acceptable, their ultimate goals both seem to show that egoistic desire should not control a good human being. Morally good human beings have the natural capacity to control or to rectify their selves.

Plato's notion of self-development harmonizes three concepts: unity, calm, and self-possession, which Taylor calls 'self-mastery.' To be ruled by reason it is necessary to have correct understanding or correct ordering. According to Plato, correct ordering establishes "priorities among our different appetites and activities, distinguishes between necessary and unnecessary desires" (Taylor 1989, 121). Nevertheless, without self-examination, the capacity for correct understanding of appetites, activities and desires is not possible. As Naess says, without developing capacities, the ultimate goal of Self-realization is not achievable (Naess 1986, 233). Broadly, these capacities may include identifying with the non-human world.

Beyond this similarity there are a number of methodological differences between Plato and Naess. Plato did not consider the 'Self' in his philosophy as an organic wholeness or an organic Oneness. Nor did he take it as an expanded wider pattern of the self. Plato's self seems centered on morality, when he distinguishes between the higher part and the lower part of the human soul. The dominance of the higher part implies that we should be ruled by reason. Naess, by contrast, believes that inclination rather than morals can change our behavior.

Rationality is a key feature of Platonic philosophy. Plato divides our souls into three aspects based on our mental states and activities. The appetitive part, the spirited part, and the rational part make a harmony or balance among our desires and wills. However, only the rational part has the ability to desire what is best for the individual. Rational desire does not rely on the strength of desires. Reason is thus a condition for self-mastery or self-possession. Naess believes

that to act always by reason or by duty is a 'painful toil.' A process of identification and joy can help us end this painful situation. The concept of identification is completely absent in Plato's thought.

Indeed, of these differences, I believe Plato's metaphysics and ethics exhibit a way of governing human beings' behavior that relies on reason, but not necessarily on moral principles, like Kant. Plato's vision was to create craftsmen instead of Kantian moral agents. Craftsmen who can lead their lives by art, beauty, and knowledge. As Carone rightly mentions, "craftsmen of goodness in their own lives" (Carone 2005, 123). This noble idea can make a closer link with Naess's thought.

In the great Allegory of the Cave, Plato argues that through education we can move from 'illusion to wisdom.' Illusion prevents us from attaining the right desire, true happiness, while wisdom is the achievement of real knowledge, and correct reason, in order to live a good life. Plato says that this improvement is a turn from 'darkness to brightness.' Taylor's response to this analogy reflects the motto of 'Self-realization.' He writes, "For Plato the key issue is what the soul is directed towards... the possible directions of our awareness and desire" (Taylor 1989, 123-124). Similarly, Naess's norm of Self-realization at the end creates 'awareness' of identification, diminishment of ego, holistic and harmonious living, joyful co-existence, and broadening of self to the Self.

Thus, we can say that Plato's view of self-development primarily focuses on self-awareness. This awareness corrects our desire, guides our reason, and clarifies our vision of the good life. As a whole, his account centers on how moral development can be achieved through the rectification of the soul. We have already discussed that Naess's Self-realization is a process of enlightened self-interest, and of recognizing the potentiality of all elements in the ecosphere. Therefore, although Plato did not use the term 'Self-realization,' the norm seems implicit in his view of self-development.

#### **4. Aristotle on Biocentric Holism**

Aristotle blended ethics and biology, and thought that biology should be the essential part of ethics (Des Jardins 1997, 20). Deep ecologist Arne Naess also presented a similar view by mixing ecology and ethics as an alternative to solve the environmental crisis. It is therefore not surprising that Naess and Aristotle both share the same integrity principle to construct a holistic approach to Nature. The integrity principle as outlined by Aldo Leopold states that "[a] thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (quoted in Des Jardins 1997, 176). Thus, integrity has also a moral dimension. Westra develops a more precise version of integrity in environmental context. She writes, "... the 'principle of integrity' is an imperative which must be obeyed *before* other human moral considerations are taken into account. Just as... the *basis* for all life is a holistic value" (Westra 1994, 6). So, roughly, the principle of integrity is the

(moral) basis of biocentric holism. Now we have to show how Aristotle’s view conceives of this principle.

Aristotle’s works *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *De Anima*, and *Nicomachean Ethics* reflected on the principle of integrity. All natural objects, according to Aristotle, are distinguishable into two classes: living and non-living. The living things comprise the ‘principle of life itself’ or ‘psyche,’ meaning ‘soul’ (Des Jardins 1997, 21). However, movable things move by ‘qualitative potentials’ and ‘locomotive natures’ toward ‘mature state’ (*akme*). In practice, he uses *eidos* (species or form) as a unified norm for biology, ethics, and metaphysics (Westra 1994, 135).

Aristotle’s view of natural integrity is teleological because the aim of all living things is to achieve *telos*, meaning purpose or function. As Westra argues, this activity involves some sort of ‘self-maintenance.’ Like *telos*, self-maintenance then also exhibits a positive value. Therefore, she claims that the self-maintenance capacity of an organic ecosystem should be considered an ‘indisputable value’ (Westra 1994, 135).

Lennox points out similar findings and writes: “[Aristotle] claims to be arguing for the extension of teleology to nature, not, or not merely, to plants and animals. And yet the examples he uses to illustrate the teleology of nature are all organic” (Lennox 2006, 294). Aristotle, therefore, includes human beings, plants and animals as integrated parts of an organic system. Biocentric holism also appears in his book *Progression of Animals*: “... nature never produces in vain, but always produces *the best among the possibilities for the being of each kind of animal*” (quoted in Lennox 1985, 72).

However, Aristotle differs from Naess in some important points. Firstly, Aristotle holds a teleological view of nature. All entities in the natural world have instrumental value, as according to Aristotle they are resources for human beings, but at the same time they have intrinsic value because their end is to attain excellence. For example, a tree has an instrumental value as human beings may use it for several purposes, but the end of the tree is functioning well. In this sense, the tree has intrinsic value. By contrast, Naess holds that all natural elements are intrinsically valuable. They are valuable for themselves. Thus, their values do not depend on their usefulness. Secondly, unlike Naess, Aristotle holds that only human beings have moral status – a strong anthropocentric view towards Nature. He writes, “plants exist for the sake of animals... all other animals exist for the sake of man” (quoted in Des Jardins 1997, 91). Since Aristotle believes that only human beings can possess *psyche* or soul, which is the prime criterion of morality, only they can claim moral standing. Thirdly, as human beings possess the hierarchical top position, their interests and needs are very important for Aristotle. In contrast, Naess aims to eliminate such hierarchy and argues that human beings have no right to dominate nature. Fourthly, the integrity principle of Aristotle contributes to attain a purpose: that of achieving excellence or functioning well. Later, Thomas Aquinas developed Aristotle’s idea

of *telos* to argue for the existence of God. By contrast, Naess's holistic view does not have any such purpose.

Therefore, Aristotle and Naess's positions are completely opposite in some contexts. But Aristotle obviously has developed an integrated view, a holistic system of Nature. Some environmental thinkers (e.g. Westra) explained the ethical implication of this integrity principle and argued that Nature is intrinsically valuable. Even if Arne Naess himself writes: "An ecosophy, however, is more like a system of the kind constructed by Aristotle or Spinoza" (Naess 1973, 155). So, despite their fundamental difference, Naess and Aristotle hold that the system of Nature is holistic.

## 5. Is Self-Realization a Moral Phenomenon?

Naess's ecosophy is primarily about widening of one's self to Nature through identification. In his view, ecosophy can be taken as an alternative to environmental ethics. That is, when the self perceives everything in this Nature as her own part, such a self should naturally be an ethical person. The norm of Self-realization, therefore, is a non-moral phenomenon and the act of Self-realization is morally neutral. Naess himself believes that 'inclinations' rather than 'morals' could be the solution of the present environmental crisis. So, there seems to be a contrast between Naess's ecosophy and environmental ethics.

Eric Reitan argues that, from the perspectives of Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian morality, Self-realization cannot be treated as morally neutral because the value of Self-realization resides in how one identifies with nature. The act of Self-realization, thus, cannot be value neutral. Mathew I. Humphrey supports Naess's view and claims that Self-realization should be morally neutral. By highlighting Kant's notion of respect he argues that ecosophy T is *ontologically prior* to any moral law.

In this section, I will focus on this debate and argue that Naess seems correct in taking Self-realization as morally neutral. I will briefly discuss Gandhi's non-violence theory and Buddhism to support my claim. Let us first see how Naess perceives morality.

### a. What is Morality According to Naess?

Naess writes,

Our self-realization is hindered if the self-realization of others, with whom we identify, is hindered... Thus, everything that can be achieved by altruism – the *dutiful, moral* consideration for others – can be achieved, and much more, by the process of widening and deepening ourselves. Following Kant, we then act *beautifully*, but neither morally nor immorally. (Naess 1986, 226)

Thus, Naess's Self-realization is a replacement or an alternative to moralization. But he never explicitly mentions which sense of morality he is considering. As we know, the concept of morality changes during time and



customs, there are different standards of morality. For example, happiness is the sole criterion of morality to utilitarians, rules – for Kantians, elimination of class difference – for Marxists, and religion – for religious moralists. Naess, greatly influenced by Kant, seems to have taken moral rules, or duty, as the hallmark of morality.

Naess intends to outline a system of inclination rather than an ethics in ecological thinking. He emphasizes Kant’s distinction between a moral and a beautiful act and holds that a beautiful act could be an alternative to duty in ecological context. His article on this issue is “Beautiful Action. Its Function in the Ecological Crisis,” where he explores superficially the notion of morality. He says, “... you do it simply because it is your duty. There is no other motive. Presumably a factual mistake would not spoil the *morality* of an action – if you have done your duty *trying* to find out the facts of the case” (Naess 1993, 67).

Naess insists that moral acts must follow moral laws. Morality seems like some sort of sacrifice, according to him, and fully against our inclination because when we obey any moral law we give up our pleasure, joy, and happiness. Like Kant, he believes that moral acts should follow moral laws ‘at whatever cost.’ So, moral acts are against inclination. Naess writes, “Inspired by Kant... Moral actions are motivated by acceptance of a moral law, and manifest themselves clearly when acting against inclination” (Naess 1989, 85). Environmental ethics sometimes suggests that we change our behavior, for example, reducing excessive consumption, or giving up a luxurious lifestyle, otherwise Global Warming will continue. A lot of people are inclined to live in luxury. So, in this case, following environmental ethics would be a sacrifice for them. However, if we act rightly towards the environment by inclination and joy we do not need to follow ethics, or precisely environmental ethics. For instance, if people find that it is joyful to live in no luxury at all, then their behavior naturally follows from the norms of environmental ethics. As he says, “... what I am suggesting is the supremacy of environmental ontology and realism over environmental ethics...our behavior *naturally* and beautifully follows strict norms of environmental ethics” (Naess 1986, 236).

So, following Kant, morality to Naess is to act according to a duty that is motivated by the moral law. However, eventually, he rejects the concept of morality as it is too narrow. Narrow in the sense that it does not value beautiful act. Beautiful acts, to him, have to be performed by inclination, not by duty. He writes, “Moralizing is too narrow, too patronizing, and too open” (Naess 1993, 71). In the similar way, he rejects the role of environmental ethics to solve environmental problems.

#### b. Self-Realization, Morality and Ethics:

My observation is that Kant’s distinction between a beautiful act and a moral act, which is the basis of Naess’s claim, cannot establish the norm of Self-realization as morally neutral. One could argue that moral acts are also beautiful acts. For

instance, sometimes we act by duty without distinguishing between duty and beauty. Mothers care for their children with great love not because it is only a moral duty, but because it is joyful. So, a mother's care could also be a beautiful act.

However, Kant intended to construct his supreme principle of morality beyond inclination. In other words, Kant thought that inclination is troublesome for morality because it derives from the 'propensities of feeling,' not from the will of the moral agent, and conflict between these feelings is not unlikely. Thus, he emphasized duty, and wrote: "For the maxim lacks the moral import, namely, that such actions be done *from duty*, not from inclination" (Kant 1999, 26). His distinction between duty and inclination in morality is crucial.

One example may clarify my point. Suppose there is a war in some part of the world. One feels deep sorrow for the dying people, including children, there, and is inclined to help them. Naess would say this inclination is much more important than morals. However, Kant would say anybody who does not have such an inclination but is able to save lives has a duty to save them. As he says: "Now an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination... objectively the *law*, and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, and consequently the maxim that I should follow this law..." (Kant 1999, 26). Now, what will happen if the person feels deeply the suffering of the victims and helps them to survive without considering it as a duty? According to Kant, since the act was not done from duty, such an act would not be moral; but would it be immoral? Surely not, because it is not a violation of any moral law. The act then would be morally neutral.

So, I believe that the distinction between inclination and duty, rather than that between a beautiful act and a moral act, can establish Self-realization as morally neutral.

Beyond this, a serious shortcoming in the deep ecology approach is that it does not distinguish between morality and ethics. According to Bernard Williams, people generally make this mistake when they consider morality in a narrow sense. For example, they may believe that morality stands for obligation without considering that this would be "just one type of ethical consideration" (Williams 1985, 196). They mistake morality with ethics. Williams refers to "morality as a special system, a particular variety of ethical thought" (Williams 1985, 174). He also says: "Morality is not one determinate set of ethical thoughts" (Williams 1985, 174). For instance, Kant's conception of morality is based on obligation and duty. Or, more precisely, Kant "claimed that the fundamental principle of morality was a Categorical Imperative" (Williams 1985, 189). However, if one claims that the Categorical Imperative is the *only* fundamental criterion of morality, such a claim would be a mistake, as Naess maintains, because for utilitarians maximization of welfare or self benefit is the criterion of morality.

Ethics, on the other hand, is a much broader concept than morality. Williams claims that "it is possible to use the word 'ethical' of any scheme for

living that would provide an intelligible answer to Socrates’ question [‘how should one live?’]”(Williams 1985, 12). According to him, we should not limit ethics by duty, obligation, good state of affairs, and so forth (Williams 1985, 17).

Because of mixing morality and ethics, three problems occur in deep ecology. Firstly, it is obscure whether Self-realization is morally neutral by Kantian morality or Kantian ethics. The principle of Kantian morality is the Categorical Imperative, i.e. the moral law, but moral law itself is not morality. Laws only provide the justification for morality. Secondly, if Self-realization is morally neutral, what type of norm it is? Is it a norm of logic or a norm of beauty or some other norm? Thirdly, Self-realization focuses only on the development of the self which is, from an ethical point of view, a form of self-centeredness or selfishness.

Therefore, we should keep in mind these limitations while commenting on Self-realization. I point out that the distinction between inclination and duty rather than between a beautiful act and a moral act can establish Self-realization as morally neutral. However, such moral neutrality is possible only if we take ‘moral’ in the Kantian sense. But Reitan argues that even Kantian morality in a broad sense can allow Self-realization as a moral term.

#### c. The Debate Whether Self-Realization Is Moral or Morally Neutral:

According to Reitan, deep ecologists’ understanding, including Naess’s, of Kant’s distinction between a moral act and a beautiful act is ‘too narrow’ and gives too much weight to it. Moreover, their narrow understanding “ignores certain other critically important traditions”, such as Aristotelian virtue ethics (Reitan 1996, 413). He claims that if we take Kantian and Aristotelian ethics in ‘wider scope,’ then Self-realization cannot be an alternative to traditional morality, and fits fully into these traditions (Reitan 1996, 413). Reitan’s argument is based on the process of identification, a core concept in Self-realization. As it is a way of realizing interconnectedness, realizing that plants, animals, and landscapes are our parts, i.e. a diminishment of narrow ego, identification involves an ‘act of will,’ a ‘choice’ that is totally relational in nature. Self-realization, therefore, must be a rational choice, not a feeling or an instinct.

Reitan maintains that Naess’s ‘narrow reading’ of Kant fails to grasp what moral acts are. According to this reading, acts that are performed by ‘pure practical reason’ without personal feelings, desires, and so forth, are moral acts. But this does not mean that such acts must be ‘against one’s inclinations’; rather it means only an ‘indifferent’ position. He points out that “one of the elements of Kant’s philosophy that is overlooked in the narrow reading is the centrality of respect” (Reitan 1996, 419). He advances: respect obviously involves certain inclinations, such as emotion. So, Kant uses ‘respect’ in the same sense as Naess uses ‘identification.’ Respecting cannot be just a physical act. Rather, as Reitan puts it, a ‘mental act’ or an ‘act of will.’ In the process of respecting we recognize

and affirm the character as we do in the process of identification. Following Kant, he concludes: it is possible to say that Self-realization is a moral term.

In response to Reitan, Humphrey challenges his understanding of the Self-realization thesis and claims that for several 'disanalogies' it would be unconvincing to fit Self-realization in the Kantian notion of respect. Like Naess, he believes Self-realization is, after all, morally neutral. The main problem in Reitan's analysis, that Humphrey raises, is the problem of not recognizing 'ontological priority.'

Kant's notion of respect has application in two perspectives: first, we should show respect for 'the moral law' and second, to respect 'rational agents' is a duty for us. In the first case, there must be a moral law *before* we show respect for it. Humphrey says, "Thus, the moral law has to exist before respect can be given to it, and so moral law is ontologically prior to respect for such law" (Humphrey 1999, 77).

In the second case, according to Kant, we should never treat rational beings as means but as ends in themselves. Obviously, before respecting them, we must know the nature of rational beings. For Kant, having reason is the criterion to be treated as rational beings. Thus, the sense of morality develops in rational human beings before their disposition of respect. Humphrey concludes that Self-realization or the process of identification is *ontologically prior* to any deviation of the moral law, and therefore, Self-realization remains neither moral nor immoral (Humphrey 1999, 77-78).

The above analysis shows that it is debatable to say that Kant's distinction between a beautiful act and a moral act can establish Self-realization as a non-moral term. Probably, the difficulty arises for Naess himself who takes this distinction seriously without grasping Kant's whole idea. But there might be another way to show that Self-realization is morally neutral.

Naess's ultimate norm of Self-realization primarily refers to a system of identification or realizing the Self, which says 'life is fundamentally one.' Famous deep ecologist Warwick Fox has distinguished two different directions in this formulation. First, an axiological direction (or an intrinsic value direction) that says the process of Self-realization is intrinsically valuable. In other words, "the process of Self-realization is valuable in and of itself" (Fox 1990, 99). Second, a psychological-cosmological direction (or an identification direction) that says all entities are interrelated. In other words, "all entities are aspects of a single, unfolding process" (Fox 1990, 99).

If we take 'Self-realization' in the axiological direction, then Naess's theory would not add any new ideas because most ecocentric theories, including the Gaia hypothesis, have the same philosophy. But if we take it in the identification direction, only then we can have a wider, deepen, and total view of the self. Surely, Naess takes the second direction. As Fox writes, "Naess consistently explicates the meaning of his term 'Self-realization' in terms of the psychological-cosmological framework of wide and deep identification" (Fox 1990, 99). Since

the psychological-cosmological direction does not involve morality or intrinsic value, the term Self-realization is morally neutral.

As both thinkers, Gandhi and Buddha, took ‘self-realization’ with similar importance and Naess himself was inspired by them, I will discuss briefly their thought to strengthen my position.

## 6. Gandhi’s Thought

Naess’s claim that we do not need moralization but only cultivation of our insight, i.e. Self-realization, has a metaphysical similarity with Gandhi’s non-violence theory. They both believe that if we diminish the dominance of our narrow ego or self, then we can achieve Self-realization, the ultimate norm of ecosophy or *Moksha* (Liberation). Although Naess and Gandhi have different processes in mind, i.e. identification and non-violence, their goal is the same: to achieve Self-realization. Gandhi says, “What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha* (Liberation)” (Naess 1986, 233).

Gandhi’s non-violent actions were against human mastery. His personal life style, such as carrying a goat for milk, living with snakes and scorpions, shows his inclination for non-human beings. He believes that harmonious coexistence, non-violent living, could be an alternative to moralization. His non-violent life style recognizes the equal right of non-human beings. According to Naess, “Gandhi recognized a basic common right to live and blossom, to self-realization in a wide sense applicable to any being that can be said to have interests or needs” (Naess 1986, 234).

## 7. Buddhism

In Buddhist thought, Self-realization is also seen as a process of *Nirvana* (Liberation) without taking it as a moral norm. Naess mentions that particularly Buddhist theories of reverence for life, non-injury, and non-violence make for an intimate relationship with deep ecology. In Buddhism, the non-killing of animals is a fundamental norm. Waldu writes: “There is in Buddhism more sense of kinship with the animal world, a more intimate feeling of community with all that lives... animals are always treated with great sympathy and understanding” (Waldau 2000, 86). He also mentions: “The healthy rapport between plants, animals and humans, underlined by boundless compassion, was the basis of Buddhist life” (Waldau 2000, 86).

Naess shares this spirit of Buddhism in his view of Self-realization. One of the teachings of Buddha to his disciples was that human beings should care for all living entities like mothers care for their children. For Salvation, this realization is a prime condition. In fact, Buddha thought that true Salvation comes only when we overcome the surroundings of *dukkha* (unsatisfactory).

Trying to fulfill unlimited wants and desires is the source of all dissatisfaction. But how can we separate ourselves from dissatisfaction?

Buddhism persistently emphasizes meditative awareness about the interconnectedness of all life forms. Buddha's threefold learning or *trisiṅga*, which says cultivation, meditation, and insight, is the root of enlightenment (Sponberg 1997, 369). These threefold learnings significantly develop an ultimate awareness of realizing the Self. Although Buddha did not hold such activities as joyful, his enlightenment certainly involved a transformation of consciousness from self to the Self. As Sponberg writes, "This development of consciousness in Buddhism is expressed practically as an ever greater sense of responsibility to act compassionately for the benefit of all forms of life" (Sponberg 1997, 372).

To conclude this section, I have tried to show that Self-realization may not necessarily be a moral term. Other traditions, for example Buddhism and Gandhism, have considered Self-realization as morally neutral. So, I am supporting Naess' and Humphrey's views. However, Reitan seems correct to hint that Self-realization possesses some sort of *value*. The next section will focus on whether Self-realization can qualify as a virtue.

## 8. Is Self-Realization a Virtue?

Arne Naess has not rejected the possibility of qualifying Self-realization as a virtue, though it is morally neutral. We have seen in the earlier discussion that Self-realization demonstrates enlightenment, and may involve some sort of practical wisdom. Joyful co-existence, association with the non-human world, and recognition of their potentialities, are the functional values of Self-realization that have to be achieved through long time practice. Self-realization is, therefore, not an overnight achievement.

Additionally, according to Naess, Self-realization is the "ultimate goal of life" (Naess 1986a, 237). It is a lifestyle which has simple means but rich ends (Naess 1986b, 82). These relate Naess's view to virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, in particular Aristotle's virtue ethics, are concerned with the characteristics of a person. According to Aristotle, a virtuous person is the one "who does the right thing joyfully and spontaneously out of a firm state of character" (Reitan 1996, 423). Alternatively, a virtuous person does the right thing from the love of virtue, not from the moral law.

Reitan writes: "The ecological Self is one which has acquired a certain kind of virtue" (Reitan 1996, 424). I should note here that his remark does not tell us the *name* of that virtue. Since the distinguishing characteristic of an ecological Self seems to be having Self-realization, by referring to Aristotle and to contemporary virtue ethicist Rosalind Hursthouse, I will argue that Self-realization is a certain kind of virtue.

Aristotle stated that if "virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be *states of character*" (Aristotle 2003, 17). If virtues

are states of character, do they arise in us naturally or by practice? Aristotle’s reply is that we can only receive them by adaptation and make them “perfect by habit” (Aristotle 2003, 12). Later, Aristotle says that when someone achieves a virtuous character she has the capacity to act according to the right rule. To Aristotle, “the right rule is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom” (Aristotle 2003, 49).

The highest value, according to Aristotle, is *eudaimonia* which Aristotelian virtue ethicist Hursthouse translates as ‘human well-being.’ She explores the notion of *eudaimonia* to construct an environmental virtue ethics, and argues that *eudaimonia* can never be grasped within individual happiness, in other words, within human-centredness. Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* requires ‘a complete life,’ and therefore she maintains, “it is nonsense to call someone *eudaimon*, however virtuous, if they are being broken on the wheel or surrounded by great disasters” (Hursthouse 2007, 169).

The above discussion shows that if we consider Self-realization as a state of character, since it is functional and achievable by habit, then it fulfills the criteria of practical wisdom. Such a piece of practical wisdom inspires us to live a complete life, a life which realizes the principle ‘everything hangs together.’ Therefore, Aristotle’s own writings and his commentators’ clarification provide enough ground to consider Self-realization as an excellence of human character, or in other words, a constituent of *eudaimonia*.

## 9. Conclusion

Arne Naess’s ecosophy T has as its ultimate norm Self-realization, a norm that holds that all entities in Nature are interrelated. Human beings can only achieve this ecological consciousness through the process of identification. Once identified with Nature they can feel the ecological wholeness, the interconnectedness of animals, plants, and even landscapes. A more deepened, rather than alienated view of empathy and compassion for other biological entities, as they also have potentialities, is the goal of such realization. I argued here that Self-realization is an extension of Plato’s view of self-development and Aristotle’s biocentric holism. By exploring Gandhi’s non-violence theory and Buddhism, I then defended Naess’s claim that Self-realization is morally neutral, if we take ‘moral’ in the Kantian sense. Finally, it seems to me that Aristotle’s virtue ethics advocates Self-realization as a virtue.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I express my deep gratitude to Associate Professor Cecilia Lim, Department of Philosophy at the National University of Singapore, Singapore for her many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I must thank Lee Webb, Canada for his passionate linguistic review of this paper.

## References:

- Aristotle. 2003. "The Nicomachean Ethics." In *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Darwell Stephen, 7- 50. Blackwell Publishing Company.
- Carone, Gabriela Roxana. 2005. *Plato's Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Des Jardins, Joseph. E. 1997. *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Devall, Bill and George Sessions. 1985. "Deep Ecology." Reprinted in *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book: Philosophy, Ecology, Economics*, ed. Donald VanDe Veer and Christine Pierce. 1998, 221-226. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Fox, Warwick. 1990. "On the Interpretation of Naess's Central Term 'Self-realization'." *Trumpeter* 7 no. 2: 98-101.
- Humphrey, Mathew. 1999. "Deep Ecology and the Irrelevance of Morality: A Response." *Environmental Ethics* Vol. 21 (Spring): 75-79.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. 2007. "Environmental Virtue Ethics." In *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. Rebecca L. Walker & Philip J. Ivanhoe, 155-171. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1999. "The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals." In *Morality and Moral Controversies*, ed. John Arthur, 24-33. 5<sup>th</sup> edn. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Lennox, James G. 1985. "Are Aristotelian Species Eternal?" In *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Allan Gotthelf, 67-99. Pennsylvania: Mathesis Publications.
- Lennox, James H. 2006. "Aristotle's Biology and Aristotle's Philosophy." In *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Mary Louse Gill and Pierre Pellegrin, 292-315. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Naess, Arne. 1973. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary." Reprinted in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. George Sessions. 1995, 151-155. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Naess, Arne. 1986a. "Self-realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World." Reprinted in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. George Sessions. 1995, 225-239. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Naess, Arne. 1986b. "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects." Reprinted in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. George Sessions. 1995, 68-84. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Naess, Arne. 1989. *Ecology, Community and Life Style: Outline of an Ecosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Naess, Arne. 1993. "Beautiful Action. Its Function in the Ecological Crisis." *Environmental Values* 2 (1): 67-71
- Reitan, Eric H. 1996. "Deep Ecology and the Irrelevance of Morality." *Environmental Ethics* 18 (Winter): 411-424.



- Rothenberg, David. 1986. "Ecosophy T: From Intuition to System." Reprinted in *Ecology, Community and Life Style: Outline of an Ecosophy*, ed Arne Naess. 1989, 1-22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sponberg, Alan. 1997. "Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion." In *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, 351-376. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Waldau, Paul. 2000. "Buddhism and Animal Rights." In *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, ed. Damien Keown, 81-112. Surrey: Routledge Curzon.
- Westra, Laura. 1994. *An Environmental Proposal for Ethics: The Principle of Integrity*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Williams, Bernard. 1985. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London: Fontana Press, Collings.