



A Journal of Ecological Spirituality

Quarterly  
Vol. 11, No. 3

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR READERS

We editors of Ecospirit endeavor to publish articles that come primarily from our own readers. You are the ones who help determine the direction and content of our quarterly. Ecospirit provides you with a forum for discussion of ecological attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices--in short, of ecological spirituality. There are many of you, however, that we have never heard from, either through letters or by means of more formal compositions. We realize that some of you haven't the time or desire to write a formal paper.

Therefore, we have decided to set aside at least one issue in which you can express yourself in a less formal and lengthy way. WE URGE YOU TO CONTRIBUTE SOMETHING TO THIS READERS FORUM and suggest some appropriate but not exclusive means: a short statement of how ecological issues have influenced your thinking/acting; a statement of your own philosophy; a list of books you found valuable in these matters; a short book review; a poem or prose-poem; a short essay or reflective piece; other (no photographs of your cat or child as adorable as either or both might be). Please try to keep your written works to a couple of paragraphs (150-200 words). We, of course, reserve the right to edit entries for grammar, spelling, length, appropriateness and context. PLEASE HAVE YOUR MATERIAL TO US BY JANUARY 31, 1987.

We devote this present issue to a single article written by an ecophilosopher and longtime supporter of our enterprise, Professor Henryk Skolimowski of the University of Michigan. In his article, Dr. Skolimowski discusses how ecological values, such as cooperation, symbiosis, interdependence, reverence for life and each other, can become the foundation for global peace. Ecological values belong to us all as a species and hence can enable us to create a new social contract which will be cooperative and symbiotic. Since ecological values are trans-ideological they "can become the spine of a new world order," asserts Professor Skolimowski.

Certainly, after the disappointment at Reykjavik, Iceland, efforts for peace must only be intensified. An end to nuclear weapons would be a tremendous achievement, but the question of the positive base for a global community where peace reigns among humans and between us and other species still needs answering. Skolimowski's article invites those in the ecological movement to think deeply on matters of peace. His article was prepared for the Conference on Ecology and Peace, held in Varna, Bulgaria, August 25-27, 1986.

Paul Larson  
Don St. John

ECOLOGICAL VALUES AS THE FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

by Professor Henryk Skolimowski

1. The Ecological Values as a New Synthesis

We are divided by different languages. We are divided by different ideologies. We are divided by our respective cultures which are often possessive and exclusive, and want to separate us from each other.

Yet what we have in common far outweighs the divisions which we ourselves have created, sometimes inadvertently, sometimes deliberately. What we all have in common is the heritage of life, the planet earth itself, the desire to live in peace and harmony and have a life endowed with meaning.

We are all aware of our common biological heritage, namely that all forms of life are built of the same building blocks, so that the life of a mosquito and the life of a lion (and to a lesser degree the life of a blade of grass) pulsate with the same rhythm of life. We are less aware of our ecological heritage, although of late the ecological consciousness has been gradually arising.

What is the difference between our biological heritage and our ecological heritage? The difference is subtle but important. The biological heritage accentuates the material aspects of life -- the building blocks of life which are necessary for life to survive. Biology treats forms of life as energy machines. The ecological heritage, on the other hand, accentuates the conditions of the well-being of life, analyzes the underlying matrix, the deeper structures which enable life to thrive and blossom.

The laws of biology are concerned with the survivability of particular individuals or particular species. The laws of ecology are concerned with the quality of life and with the maintenance of healthy diversity across various forms of life; are concerned with optimal conditions for various forms of life to live together.

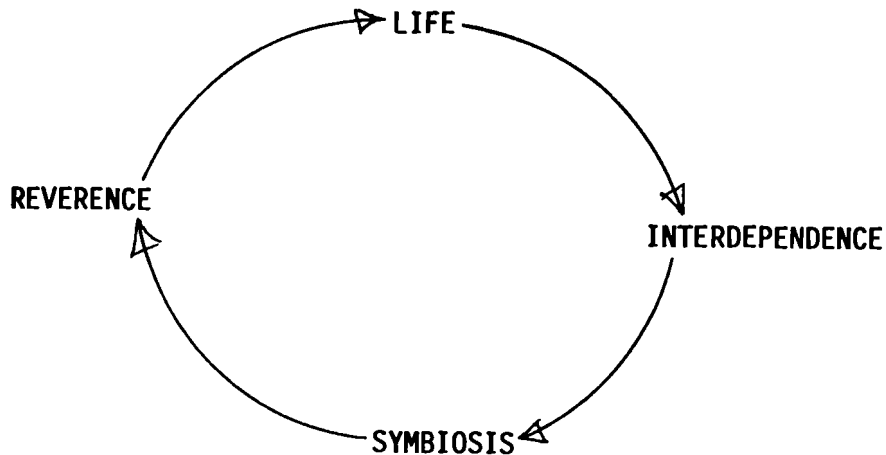
The laws of biology are quantitative and expressed in chemical (or physical) terms. The laws of ecology are qualitative and expressed in teleological terms -- the design of life and its purpose must be taken into account while studying the ecological heritage. Now let us unfold some of the hidden layers of the ecological heritage.

The heritage of . . . . . LIFE  
is the heritage of . . . . . INTERDEPENDENCE  
The modus of interdependence is a creative . . . . . SYMBIOSIS  
The raison d'etre for genuine symbiosis is . . . . . REVERENCE

Thus the very understanding of the complexity of life implies and necessitates the understanding of not only biological processes, but also deeper interconnecting structures which regulate and assure the well-being of larger habitats. In the final analysis we should understand that these deeper interconnecting structures are laden with values.

Ecological values arise at this juncture of human history when understanding of life cannot be confined to the biological matrix only. Ecological values represent our understanding of those normative processes, within larger ecological habitats, which are responsible for the well-being of organisms; or, in more general terms, for optimal conditions of diverse ecological habitats.

The four basic components of the ecological heritage: Life Interdependence Symbiosis Reverence, can be presented in a mandala form:



A deeper reading of the mandala should make us aware that 'interdependence' and 'symbiosis' are not only descriptive terms. They are also value terms; at least value-laden terms. Why should we care about many forms of life and not just only one, our own? Why should we care about symbiosis rather than allow one cancerous form of life to eat other forms of life? Because we are partial to the whole heritage of life! This partiality does not represent a scientific attitude but represents our value stand, our deepest commitment to the beauty and mystery of life.

It should be emphasized that science, and its value-free descriptions of the world, cannot take any stand on the issue of value, on the importance of life, on the importance of the diversity of life.

Diversity itself is an important concept. For (again) it is not only a descriptive but also a normative one. We value symbiosis and diversity as vehicles assuring the vibrancy and resilience of life.

This analysis attempts to show that behind the idea of optimal conditions of ecological habitats there lies a set of ecological values which life has re-enacted over and again. My overall argument is simple, and it is the following: the underlying matrix of the ecological heritage of life, and values embedded in it, is the one that can assure and provide the conditions of peace among people. Ecology and peace are united on this level of analysis when we understand the laws of the quality of life.

Obviously human societies are more complex than ecological habitats; at any rate contain some layers of complexity which nature does not contain. I am not advocating a blind transplant of the laws and structures regulating the well-being of eco-habitats onto the present human world but am rather maintaining that the implementation of the laws of the ecological heritage may be an important step to lasting peace. It is such an important step, in my opinion, that we cannot not take it.

One of the specific and important values of the ecological heritage, and the one which is of crucial importance is REVERENCE -- reverence for life in general, for all life. Indeed a deeper justification of the concepts of 'symbiosis', 'interconnectedness', and 'diversity' are hardly possible without the idea of reverence as being their anchor. We have to learn not only to think about reverence, but to think reverentially. We have to teach reverential thinking to children and students. Reverential thinking is not the usual objective thinking plus a bit of piety. Reverential thinking is a new kind of

thinking whereby the objects of our understanding and thinking are embraced by our mind in the framework of empathy. The act of reverential thinking helps life to grow, helps us to be inwardly connected.

Another important ecological value is that of RESPONSIBILITY. Although not immediately obvious as a value of the ecological heritage, this value is very important for our times and for the state of the present world: the responsibility which exceeds one's own ego, the responsibility for the environment, for the whole planet, for other human beings, for other living beings, for the cosmos at large. Yes, responsibility for all. This form of responsibility is a part of the ecological consciousness. If one is truly aware of the interconnectedness of all things, particularly in the organic universe one cannot shrug off one's responsibility for the well-being of other forms of life, and other human beings. Let me emphasize: responsibility for the well-being of the planet is one of the ethical imperatives of our times. Responsibility conceived in this sense is also one of the cornerstones of peace among nations. It takes a momentary reflection to realize that the well-being of the planet equals peace; peace is a precondition of the well-being of the planet.

In between responsibility and reverence, and connecting them in the ethical space, is COMPASSION. Compassion is a mode of understanding, and an ecological value at the same time. It informs us that in the interconnected universe, in which reverence for life is a real force, compassion is this vehicle through which reverence expresses itself in daily life. Compassion, also, is a form of responsibility. And conversely, genuine responsibility for the well-being of others must express itself, at times, through compassion. We can see that the three concepts, reverence, responsibility and compassion co-define each other and depend on each other's meaning.

Yet another ecological value must be discerned and analyzed. If we live in the world of limited resources, and if we wish to live responsibly, then our life style must not impinge on the life style of others; our consumption, or over-consumption (in this interconnected world) must not lead to the impoverishment of others in other parts of the globe. In short, wholeness of life and reverence for it, implies FRUGALITY, which is another of our ecological values. Yet we must think about frugality in appropriate terms, for it is not a form of poverty, self-denial or abnegation, but a positive value: doing more with less -- something that nature does so beautifully so often. In the human universe frugality can be defined as grace without waste. At the basis of the idea of frugality is our sense of responsibility, also our awareness that in order to live in the universe of symbiosis, we cannot live at the expense of others, indeed we must help the universe through our acts of sharing. In this context frugality is an important modus of sharing and of solidarity.

Solidarity is a potent concept. It holds much promise for the understanding of ecological values. For solidarity is an expression of the bond of human unity; ultimately the bond of unity with all creatures. We often do not readily respond, at least at a deep emotional level, to such concepts as reverence and responsibility. Yet we respond to the call of solidarity for it reverberates within us with the cords of common heritage of life. Yet solidarity analyzed in depth spells out compassion and responsibility; and reverence when we are not afraid to embrace the spiritual context of life.

All ecological values are interconnected and they support each other, so that symbiosis can be seen as implying frugality and frugality can be seen as a mode of creative symbiosis. Already Aristotle was aware of the idea of frugality when he asserted that the rich are not only those who own much but also those who need little.

If we compare ecological values with the two other sets of values: Religious, of the pre-Renaissance Western culture, and secular or scientific values, of the present technological era, then we obtain the following picture.

Religious Values	Scientific/Technological values	Ecological Values
Worship	Mastery	Reverence
Obedience	Control	Responsibility
Grace	Power over things	Frugality
Unity with God	Separation/atomization	Interconnectedness/symbiosis
Submission	Objectivity	Compassion

Let us underscore some main points. Religious values are God-centered. They regulate man's relationships to God; and to other human beings.

Scientific-technological values on the other hand are object-centered. Let us emphasize this point: the values which are most cherished in the advanced technological societies: control, manipulation, power, objectivity, atomization and analysis have little to do with other human beings or with God. They simply regulate man's relationships with objects. It is but dimly realized that scientific values have detached us from the human context and from the sacred universe. These values continually reify us and firmly attach us to objects.

Finally, ecological values are the universe-centered, and life-centered. They reconnect us with all forms of life in the universe. They empower us and trust upon us responsibility for all. For we are a part of this grand sacred tapestry called the cosmos. We are minute particles of this tapestry yet terribly important as conscious weavers of this tapestry.

Seen amidst the spectacle of chaos of our times, and amidst the indifference if not brutality of our behavior and thinking (which are justified by what we perceive as greed, competitiveness and aggression of others), ecological values may seem too idealistic, particularly the value of the reverence for life. Yet upon a deeper reflection we may have to come to the conclusion that it is precisely REVERENCE -- for other people, for other cultures, for life at large -- that may become the most important vehicle for establishing a universal concord for all living beings, for establishing peace on earth for all nations.

Amidst the forces of chaos and disintegration, we cannot bring sanity and harmony by employing the same forces, but by seeking different strategies and forces. What unites us is the bond of solidarity, the understanding of compassion, the courage of reverence.

## 2. The Need for a New Social Contract

We shall readily acknowledge that the dialectics of social life is complex and full of tensions. Yet these tensions must not lead to destruction for then we are confronted not with the dialectical process but with the destructive one. We must acknowledge, above all, that as in nature, so in human society the basic

mode of interaction is that of symbiosis and cooperation not one of annihilation and destruction. Throughout many millenia the underlying social contract of enduring societies has been one of cooperation, interdependence and symbiosis.

Jean Jacques Rousseau expressed these very ideas eloquently and forcefully in his Social Contract. Man is a social animal. He craves individuality and independence but his stature as a human being and his status as a civilized being totally depend on his capacity to accept social good. If a human being is to live up to his potential, of necessity he must accept and use all the glorious achievements that society and culture have accumulated. The give and take is the essence of social life. Therefore a sane and enduring social contract is a symbiotic one.

Yet Rousseau was already swimming against the current. A century before him, Thomas Hobbes announced the idea that Homo Homini Lupus Est (Man is Wolf to a Man). Hobbes' idea has been accepted and taken much too seriously. The empiricists, and then the Neo-Darwinians, have misread the behavior of nature as basically ruthless and aggressive. In fact, we have created a new social world in the image of his Homo Homini Lupus Est. Our war against nature is an extension of this idea. Our inability to come to terms with nature and with different cultures, indeed with the cosmos at large is the result of pursuing a mistaken social philosophy within which the social contract is nullified.

In this context the legacy of Karl Marx and of Marxism at large must be re-examined. We know that as the world changes our thinking about it changes. This much is obvious to anybody who possesses an iota of dialectical understanding. What we must employ are not dogmas but creative dialectical thinking.

Marx was much inspired by Rousseau. Indeed his moral indignation, while witnessing social injustices and the plight of human beings, was very Rousseauian. Yet ultimately Marx chose to follow Hobbes rather than Rousseau. Marx's idea of society, namely, that it is an organism in the state of continuous warfare is very close to Hobbes'. The class warfare is the basic modus of history, that is, according to Marx. In a sense, Marx institutionalized conflict and class warfare as legitimate and, indeed, indispensable vehicles of social progress and of understanding of history.

It can be of course argued that Marx did not invent conflict as the underlying force of social life but merely observed it. Yet the issue is not that simple. Within the social realm what is observed and what is invented are not so easily separable. Let us be quite clear: every social structure is a human invention. Every deep interpretation of society is an inventive act. To the degree that Marx was an original social thinker, he was an inventor, a great inventor in the social realm indeed.

Now, even if it were true that all past societies can be best understood through struggle and class warfare as their basic modus operandi (which I myself doubt), we are now living in a new social reality. This reality requires new forms of social thinking. We are so interconnected on this Globe nowadays that we simply cannot afford the social philosophy based on the idea of Homo Homini Lupus Est. The nuclear threat, and the threat of the environmental destruction make it imperative that we live in some form of symbiosis -- this is our only chance of survival. We live in unprecedented historical times in which old ideologies based on the assumption of inexhaustiveness of nature and of indestructibility of the world no longer apply. Our new ideology must be so conceived that it assures the survival of the human race, and not just one social class or another. Marxist teaching which emphasizes class warfare as all-pervading does not help us in this matter.

Thus a new social contract must be created and implemented. This social contract has to be based on values of cooperation, symbiosis and interdependence; and ultimately reverence for life; and reverence for each other, regardless of the political system we live in and regardless of the social class to which we belong. The perceptive reader will recognize at once that the new social contract must be based on a set of ecological values, or some similar sort of values.

This analysis reveals further why ecological values can be seen as the foundation for peace: in enabling us to create a new social contract -- which will be cooperative and symbiotic -- ecological values pave the way to lasting and just peace. In this sense, ecological values can become the spine of a new world order. If so, then they are of importance second to none.

The heritage of life is immense and we need not apologize to learn from it, especially learn from those structures and underlying grids of life which assure its diversity and richness over the billions of years. In promoting and articulating ecological values we are not inventing new fictitious philosophical entities but only unearthing the principles and structures which have proved life-enhancing in complex ecological habitats.

All life is a unity; we are a part of it. Since social life is a part of life in general, it must be governed by life-enhancing laws and principles. A new symbiotic social contract is an imperative of social life threatened by the nuclear and environmental destructions.

The point of this paper was not to dwell on the exclusiveness of ideologies that divide us and set us apart but to emphasize our essential unity as a species and as intelligent and sensitive beings craving for and deserving of life endowed with meaning and a modicum of grace. Ecological values are trans-ideological, just as oxygen we breathe. Ecological values may be viewed as a part of a new unifying philosophy which we wish to implement in order to survive.

Ecological values should not be viewed as a separate and independent set but rather should be viewed as a part of a larger structure, a part of a new philosophy -- for our times do require a new philosophy which would be global and universal, wholistic and healing, generous and humane, morally responsible and intellectually coherent. I call this new philosophy ecological philosophy or Eco-philosophy. Under the auspices of empiricism and other similar philosophies, we have created, in the past, a deficient code for reading nature and a deficient matrix for interacting with other beings. The time has come to create a new philosophy which corrects these deficiencies and provides a framework for unity and symbiosis.

---

NOTES:

1. For further discussion of these points and other points raised in this paper, see: Henryk Skolimowski, ECO-PHILOSOPHY, DESIGNING NEW TACTICS FOR LIVING, 1981; ECO-THEOLOGY, Eco-philosophy Publications, 1002 Granger, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104, 1985.

This paper was prepared for the Conference on Ecology and Peace which was held in Varna, Bulgaria, August 25-27, 1986.

THE INSTITUTE FOR ECOSOPHICAL STUDIES

Board of Directors

Donald P. St. John, Executive Director;  
Assistant Professor of Religion, Moravian  
College

Paul Larson, Treasurer; Assistant Professor  
of Music, Moravian College

Stephen Cutcliffe, Secretary; Director of  
the Technolgy Studies Resource Center at  
Lehigh University

Kathleen Liebhardt, Assistant to the  
Provost, Lehigh University

Ed Moran, Free-Lance Writer,  
Preservationist, Jim Thorpe, Pa.

Harry Newman, Attorney-At-Law, Bethlehem,  
Pa.

Jean Pearson, Eco-poet, Author, Animal  
Advocate, Bethlehem, Pa.

Dale Prinkey, Director, Jacobsburg  
Environmental Education Center

Julie Wagner, Mellon Fellow, Cornell  
University

---

Editors: Paul Larson  
Don St. John

Logo: Rudy Hilt  
Typing: Jean Siska

The Institute for Ecosophical Studies is an  
educational non-profit organization located  
at but independent from Moravian College.

Ecospirit was printed with the aid of a  
grant from the Lehigh Valley Association of  
Independent Colleges.

---

INSTITUTE FOR ECOSOPHICAL STUDIES  
c/o Donald P. St. John, Ph.D.  
Moravian College  
Bethlehem, PA 18018