From “Deep” to “Dark”: The Revision of the Anthropological Foundations of an Environmental Entity

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Abstract. The paper focuses on the philosophical foundations of the problem of the relationship between humans and the environment. The authors analyze the interpretations existing in the contemporary intellectual discourse. The authors search for an adequate concept of a current ecological subject. Based on the study of the principles of “deep ecology” by A. Naess and the main provisions of the “dark ecology” project by T. Morton, the authors reveal the critical aspects of the criticism of ecological egocentrism. It consists in the fact that humanity always thought of themselves as the center and the highest link in the evolutionary development of the Universe, not recognizing the autonomy of nature. Moreover, all values projected onto nature are initially anthropocentric and presuppose an orientation towards serving people’s interests. The authors argue that a complimentary program of approaches is the call for the transformation of ecological thinking and its ethical reorientation. However, these approaches have fundamental differences. “Deep ecology” focuses on recognizing the intrinsic value of all life forms on the Earth and proposes a strategy of active, responsible attitude to the ecosystem. In turn, “dark ecology” removes the concept of “nature” from the ecological discourse and orientates a person to the praxis of non-interference and passive, contemplative existence in the world of complex “strange” objects.

Keywords: Deep ecology · Ecosophy · Dark ecology · Timothy Morton · Subject · Ethics · Actor-network theory · Environmental pollution

1. Introduction

In recent decades, a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between humanity and nature was carried out in philosophical discourse. This process is associated with developing current global problems and the ontological request to reassemble the subject and deconstruct its relationship with the environment.

In the 21st century, a person finds himself in the world of complex and ambiguous objects – dark matter, world crisis, global market, shadow economy, pandemic, etc. Each process has a reverse side hidden from the usual optics of the observer. Hence, the “horror” and “weirdness” of the surrounding world almost become the critical focus of philosophical reflection.

According to E. Tucker, a modern American philosopher, horror is “a way of understanding the world as unthinkable. It is the limit of our location in this world” [6]. In this context, the basis of horror is, oddly enough, not death as an end to life, but life itself. Horror undermines the concept of human exceptionalism, and, sometimes, biological life becomes the main enemy. According to E. Tucker, this thesis is confirmed by the action of epidemics of infectious diseases, which are not perceived as an external natural disaster. An epidemic is what passes through people, “inside bodies, between bodies, and through the networks of global transit and exchange” [6]. Life seems to oppose energy, creating an Angst atmosphere to the biosphere and the others.
Tucker also points out that premodern interpretations of epidemics (plague or pestilence) in terms of pollution, infection, damage, and punishment contribute to the convergence of biological and theological discourses. Nowadays, the mediator between theology and horror is the concept of life, interpreted dialectically as the interconnection and transition from the living to the inanimate. Hence, according to Tucker, the purpose of the “living weapon” is an inanimate anthropological object called necros [6].

In turn, the project proposed by “dark ecology” [3] proclaims that “being environmentally friendly” means a fundamental openness to everything strange that makes up the surrounding reality, and, secondly, awareness of the inclusive experience of the environment. Once faced with the world’s complexity and strangeness, it is no longer possible to return to the usual somnambulistic existence.

The analysis of the effects of horror and strangeness experienced by a modern person regarding existence allows philosophers to formulate new provisions of the ontology. This ontology is mainly marked with aesthetic optics. On the other hand, it possesses the absence of a theory of action and an orientation towards passive coexistence with objects of the surrounding world. However, is not such a view just a fragile metaphor that deprives a person of the subject’s status? In our opinion, to resolve this issue, it is necessary to study the critical foundations of egocentrism and intersubjectivity in the relationship between man and the environment developed in ecosophy.

2. Materials and Methods
This paper is based on the analysis of modern domestic and foreign studies focused on the philosophical foundations of the relationship between man and the environment and the search for an adequate interpretation of the contemporary ecological subject.

During the study, the authors turned to the ideas of the ecosophy of A. Naess [5] about nature as an equal participant in environmental relations and the “dark ecology” of T. Morton [2], which excludes the concept of nature from ecological problems.

The research’s theoretical framework is also a combination of the actor-network theory [ANT] and the provisions of the modern paradigm of “environmental studies” in the aspect of criticism of human ecological egocentrism.

3. Results
The concept of ecosophy or “deep ecology” first appeared in 1973 in the works of the Norwegian philosopher and eco-activist, A. Naess [4]. His concept shifts the research focus from the problems of the natural history of life on the Earth towards ethics. Simultaneously, the critical points of ecological discourse are the concepts of responsibility, self-worth, and respect, which are usually used in describing relationships between people.

Developing his theory in the mid-1980s, Naess formulated eight theses that correspond to the basic principles of “deep ecology”:

- The welfare and prosperity of human and non-human forms of life have an independent value that does not depend on the latter’s usefulness for man.
- The wealth and diversity of life forms are valuable in themselves.
- People have no right to diminish this wealth and diversity unless it serves to meet vital needs.
- A significant population reduction is necessary for humanity’s flourishing as a biological species and its culture, which would help develop non-human forms of life.
- The current scale of human intervention in non-human life forms is excessive and provokes the depletion of the ecosystem’s safety margin.
- Therefore, the situation requires a change in policy that determines social life’s leading economic, technological, and ideological aspects. As a result of the changes, the state of affairs will significantly differ from the current one.
- The transformation of ideology consists of searching for a higher quality of life (value experience of the ecological situation), not in the desire to establish an overestimated standard of living. It is
necessary to realize the fundamental difference between “big” and “great.”

- Those accepting the above provisions also commit themselves to directly or indirectly implementing necessary social change [4].

A. Naess insists that the environment should remain natural. These eight principles should be extended to the entire bio-, or rather ecosphere, including individuals, species, populations, and habitats of human and non-human species.

The Norwegian philosopher opposes his approach to the so-called “shallow ecology” – superficial reasoning about nature’s technological influence from civilization, especially industrial pollution. In turn, the priority of “deep ecology” is the fight against the fundamental causes of corruption and not so much the assistance to eliminate their consequences. Additionally, if a simple approach demonstrates a tendency to perceive an ecosystem as a set of fragmentary natural objects considered as the property (resources) of individuals or individual organizations, then “deep ecology” insists that the Earth does not belong only to people. People only live on the Earth, using its resources to meet their vital needs. If the excessive needs of humankind hinder further development of non-human forms of life, then it is people who must give in.

The main reproach against humankind is that we always thought of ourselves as the center and the highest link in the evolutionary development of the Universe or, in the logic of divine design, the crown of creation. Hence, the autonomy of nature and all values projected onto nature were recognized in an anthropocentric way, assuming an orientation towards serving the people’s interests.

The researcher P. Curry, in his book “Environmental Ethics,” defines ecological anthropocentrism as follows: “It is an unfair privilege that a human being as such alone acquires for himself at the expense of other forms of life, a privilege similar to such prejudices as racism or sexism” [1].

Thus, the meaning of “deep ecology” lies in the fact that it is a theory and a form of collective action, capable of realizing the importance and questioning any issues of current economic policy. “Deep ecology” seeks to clarify the fundamental premises that underlie the global economy in terms of value, priority, philosophy, and religion. This is an environmental movement that raises questions much “deeper.”

Comparing himself to Socrates, A. Naess sees his task in posing provocative environmental questions to various “experts,” the answer to which ultimately touches upon life and death problems. The study of “ecosophy” asks as many critical questions as possible in search of the best responses [4].

In the article for the Norwegian newspaper “Dagbladet,” A. Naess defined “deep ecology” as “a future way of thinking that will help us find alternatives to what today appears to be life-threatening and non-binding frivolity” [5]. This thesis about the need to establish the identity of being and thinking in the ecological aspect also exposes that many of us are losing the idea of what it means to be human. A person closes himself inside an artificial form of life, where social principles play out, and where there is no place for his neighbors: “We become non-humans and inhuman because of our ability to perceive our humanity and the humanity of other people decreases” [5].

T. Morton, the British philosopher, undertook an attempt to rethink the dialectic of human and non-human and build ecology without the concept of nature.

He points to the essential contradiction of modern ecological discourse, which consists of the fact that ecologists, who have chosen the impact of man on the environment as the object of their criticism, cannot overcome their anthropocentricity [2]. That is, every ecologist, as it was, arrogates the right to speak on behalf of nature to himself.

Based on the analysis of the art and literature of British Romanticism, T. Morton formulated the concept of “ecomimesis” – natural or ecological writing. This concept reflects the process of mimicking the Anthropocene in nature. He interprets the Anthropocene as a geological epoch in which the influence of man on the Earth’s geosphere became noticeable and irreversible.

The problem with ecological writing is that it implies a distinction between internal (human) and external (natural), making ecology impossible since it means establishing a person’s distance from
nature. That is, speaking of nature as a kingdom of savagery that has not experienced the influence of human contact, ecomimesis establishes the very division that seeks to eliminate [2].

According to the British philosopher, such a “romantic” attitude to nature was formed in the 19th century in the upper strata of the society, who actively participated in industrialization and economic expansion. Hence, the destruction of ecological writing acts as an initial, hostile program of “dark ecology” developed by Morton, the essence of a new perception of the world around us. Morton argues that nature does not exist as such and the man always deals with specific objects and even hyperobjects (e.g., global warming). “To achieve complete environmental consciousness, we need to abandon the term “Nature,” which is written with a capital letter to emphasize the “unnaturalness” and artificiality of this concept. I do not encounter Nature anywhere in my phenomenal experience. I see rabbits, I watch thunderstorms, I hear a cat’s meow, but I do not see Nature and in no way can I feel it” [3]. Hence, the main task of ecological thinking is not to preserve the existing state of the environment but to revise the very attitude of man to the world as a hyperobject.

A. Voronkov, a researcher of Morton’s works, points out that “at the conceptual level, “dark ecology” differs from ecomimesis in its ethical attitude to otherness, expressed in the refusal to colonize nature, in which strange monsters can now exist” [7]. “Dark ecology,” in contrast to “deep ecology” or ecosophy, is more of an aesthetic praxis rather than a strategy followed by eco-activists. After all, if the usual ecological action practices have reached a dead end, art is a real alternative.

4. Discussion
T. Morton calls his vitalist project “dark ecology” by analogy with such modern concepts as dark ontology, dark matter, or dark enlightenment. However, he is talking rather about a previously unknown side of environmental problems, which can be studied only using a different formulation of the question.

It should be noted that a mystical halo has developed around Morton’s project. “Dark ecology” is not so much a concept as a productive metaphor referring to the idea of the presence in our perception of something that eludes the final definition.

5. Conclusion
Summing up the reasoning about the change in the paradigm of human relations with the environment, which is reflected in modern philosophical concepts of “deep” and “dark” ecology, it seems possible to conclude the following. The common feature of theories is a consistent criticism of anthropocentrism and modern ecological discourse, designated as “shallow” (surface) ecology and ecomimesis by Naess and Morton. Both authors also declare the need to transform ecological thinking and its orientation to the world’s fundamental ontological foundations. However, if ecosophy proposes a strategy of the subject’s active, responsible attitude to the ecosystem, then “dark ecology,” on the contrary, focuses on the praxis of non-interference and passive, contemplative existence in the world of alien and “strange” hyperobjects. Thus, ethical and ecological reflection makes us see ourselves in a new light, not as masters, but in the role of creatures capable of entering into a dialogue with the surrounding reality on an equal footing.

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