Ten years ago it was fairly common to express astonishment that people with very different philosophical and religious backgrounds could be supporters of the deep ecology movement. What did they have in common? Or, how could they have anything in common? How would they define what deep ecology really is?

The first question seemed to me the most important. It was important to emphasize that supporters of the deep ecology movement need not hold basic philosophical or religious premises in common. They should have, and use, such premises, but the premises would not all be of the same kind because of cultural differences. The deeper the differences, the better, because of the value of deep differences in cultural backgrounds.

At that time (in the early 1980s) it was important to point to views held in common. There were at least two ways in which things were clearly held in common: personal sorrow or despair was felt when environmental battles ended in defeat, and there was a corresponding feeling of joy when at least a partial victory was achieved. There was also a high degree of agreement about the need for, and acceptance of, “direct actions” of some sort, and (what to me was a great thing) a clear consciousness about the limitations of the means to be used: nonviolence. Typically, supporters had been active in the peace movement before becoming environmental activists. Reference to nonviolence should perhaps be included in the Eight Points.

This article was reprinted with permission from Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism, edited by George Sessions (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1995), 213–21.
Less clearly, the supporters had some fairly general and abstract views in common, or nearly in common. What the critics and doubters needed was a not too complex and detailed survey of such views, which should be put forth tentatively. The formulation of the Eight Points was the result. That these short points were called principles, or expressions of a “platform,” was perhaps unfortunate. A longer name for the Eight Points is indispensible, for example: “a set of fairly general and abstract statements that seem to be accepted by nearly all supporters of the deep ecology movement.”

The term seem is included because what is meant is not only acceptance of the Eight Points as an articulate answer to a question, but acceptance in a wider, somewhat vague sense, as in a sentence such as “Mr. A accepted Mr. B’s leadership,” or “In the ashram they accepted the situation that snakes and scorpions were permitted to stay in their sleeping quarters during the night.” The chance might be that an ashram member, if asked, would object to allowing certain snakes to come into the room, but so far there have been no such members. It has been encouraging how people say, “Yes, of course I accept those Eight Points, but so far I have not had the words to express my attitudes.” What the Eight Points have offered is mainly putting words to views that people have “always” had but have not expressed, at least not in public.

The reception of the set of eight formulations by supporters has been encouraging: from this I conclude that there is a broad similarity of views on the fairly general and abstract level. A further conclusion: the usefulness of the Eight Points as a convenient reference point suggests that alternative analogous sets should be developed. It is unnatural that only one formulation could be convenient.

The Eight Points are, of course, not intended to function as a definition of the deep ecology movement: neither as a rule-given definition of the term, nor as a plain description of how the expression “deep ecology movement” is actually used, nor as an expression of the essence of the deep ecology movement. I do not know of any satisfactory definitions at the dictionary level. For example, I do not think a dictionary entry like the following is very helpful: “deep ecology movement: a movement within environmentalism that is activist, ecocentric rather than anthropocentric, and based on nonviolent philosophical or religious views.”
Looking back, I am glad to have the opportunity to make some comments about the Eight Point list, not all of which are critical:

1. It has been suggested that the Eight Points should include reference to the “all things hang together” theme. The best way of including this seems to me to be the formulation of Fritjof Capra. He suggests the following alternative formulation of point 2: “The fundamental interdependence, richness, and diversity contribute to the flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth.”

This alternative formulation is important to me mainly because the three factors mentioned are presented as instrumental, not as values in themselves. Such a presentation does not, of course, rule out the inherent value of richness and diversity, but I have thought that inherent value must be declared explicitly in the formulation of that point. Why “must”? Conclusion: the suggestion by Capra adds to the set of alternative formulations of the Eight Points. (I myself have not found it possible to stick to only one way of formulating the points.)

Of course, to “hang together” as a kind of interdependence may be taken by some as a kind of threat. One hears such warnings: Remember that human beings are unfortunately dependent upon the health of the ecosystems. Therefore respect nature or you invite disaster!

In short, I have so far not found sufficient reason to include in the Eight Points a reference to the “all things hang together” theme. It should not be necessary to add that “nature mysticism” (the ultimate unity of all living beings) and similar level-1 views have no place among views that supporters may have in common. Views about, and feelings of, the intimacy and “hanging together” of everything may, of course, differ in terms of degree of tightness. The interdependence referred to in the alternative formulation is of the kind that supporters do, in fact, talk about.¹

I find it regrettable, however, that J. Baird Callicott, a supporter of the deep ecology movement as far as I can understand, believes that some kind of nature mysticism is implied in being a deep ecology supporter. Callicott (1993: 330) writes that “indeed [deep ecologists] argue that ecology teaches us that the whole of nature is the true Self.” This is a strange formulation. Supporters of the movement have total views inspired in part by reactions to the ecological crisis. Such total views I have called ecosophies—I call my own Ecosophy T. Fortunately, other supporters have different ecosophies.
One thing we have in common is that the articulation of our views is, and must be, fragmentary.) In the premise-conclusion systematization of Ecosophy T, “Self-Realization!” is designated as the one ultimate premise. Some feel at home with this, others do not. The Eight Points could not possibly contain that norm.

I do not feel bad when Professor Callicott mistakenly seems to identify my opinions with those of Mahatma Gandhi. He quotes from a section of my “Self-realization” paper (1986 [chapter 45 of this volume]), which I introduce by writing: “I do not defend all the views presented here: rather I primarily wish to inform you about them.” Later in the section I write: “Gandhi says: ‘I believe in advaita (non-duality). I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spirituality, the whole world gains with him and, if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent.’” The quotation from Gandhi reminds me of his (and my) belief in the individual. It shook the world when, as the accused before the judge, Gandhi uttered, “The individual is the supreme concern.”

Professor Callicott also writes that “scientific ecology will not support the claim that the self is in reality the Self, that the individual is identical with the world.” I might join him in saying that support of that claim could mean the end of scientific ecology. At any rate, no one has, to my knowledge, found that the Eight Points imply a kind of nature mysticism, although many supporters show varying degrees of affinity with it.

Points 3 and 8 are the ones that most clearly belong to a (normative) ethic covering actions related to the ecological crisis. An announcement of an obligation is made in point 8, and an ethical prohibition is expressed in point 3. Both belong as part of an ethic of vast scope covering our relations to nonhuman beings. The search for an environmental ethic is, as I see it, a laudable undertaking from the point of view of the deep ecology movement. Some supporters would disagree, I suppose, but I am not sure that I know of any. Professor Callicott writes, “Deep ecology . . . rejects ethics outright” (1993: 325), but his four supporting quotations (three from texts by Warwick Fox and one from me) do not justify his claim. Like many others, I distinguish between an ethic as a normative system (in Professor Callicott’s terminology “a conceptual system”; ibid., p. 338) and acts of moralizing—that is, when one individual or group admonishes others to follow certain moral precepts. “We certainly need to hear
about our ethical shortcomings,” I write in the article quoted by Callicott, but I have emphasized, and continue to emphasize, the rather limited motivational force of moralizing. The Kantian distinction between “beautiful acts” and “moral acts” is convenient here (see Naess 1993). Beautiful acts are compared with policies facilitating attitude changes in the direction of ecologically responsible behavior. Moreover, Warwick Fox certainly does not hold, as Callicott seems to suggest, that ethical norms having the structure of points 3 and 8 involve “narrow, atomistic, or particle-like conceptions of self.”

2. In recent years considerable efforts have been made to distinguish two concepts; one is expressed by the term *intrinsic value* and the other by the term *inherent value* or *inherent worth*. What I intend to express by use of the term *intrinsic value* in the Eight Points is perhaps better conveyed by the term *inherent value*.

Some critics tell me that I must enter the professional philosophical debate about what exactly might be meant by terms like *intrinsic value*, *inherent value*, and *value in itself* (which I use in my book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* [1989]), but even in my comments on the Eight Points (which consist of about 400 words), entering this discussion would be misplaced. The Eight Points formulations admit of various interpretations, but they are interpretations with reasonably small differences. Although the level of vagueness and ambiguity must be within tolerable limits, professionalism would undermine the aim of the Eight Points.

3. I try in my ecosophy to be consistent in my view that individual beings, and only individual beings, can have inherent value, and not classes of individuals as such. (The term *intellectualis amor* in Spinoza’s *Ethics* I likewise take to be the loving understanding of individuals.) Point 2 (which discusses diversity) makes this difficult unless landscapes, or the whole Earth, are taken to be individual beings, not classes of individual beings. If taken otherwise, I would be attributing value to some kind of mere multiplicity. I do not attach inherent value to species or families (as classes or sets of beings with more than one individual or element), but to diversity itself. From the “diversity norm,” plus various hypotheses, I derive norms of priorities: the defense, for example, of threatened orders or families should have higher priority than that of species or subspecies, if there are no special reasons not to attach higher priorities to...
the latter (for example, to families of insects as compared to species of mammals).

In the brief comments on the third of the Eight Points, it is not made sufficiently clear that the use of the expression “no right to” is an everyday use of right, as in “You have no right to eat your little sister’s food!” It is not meant to be identical in meaning with “You ought not to eat . . . .” It does not imply an affirmative answer to the question of the existence of the “rights of man” or the “rights of animals.” Because of vast controversies in professional philosophy about the concept of “rights,” it may be unwise to use the expression “no right to” in point 3. I am not convinced about that, and the use of it opens up the good question “Why can’t animals have rights?” If the answer is “Because they can have no obligations,” this leads to the question “What about babies? the mentally ill?” Such discussions tend to lead people in the direction of softening their rigid views about human beings existing apart from nonhuman nature.

Concerning the term vital needs, several comments are readily at hand. What you need in your life is a small fraction of what you are led to desire in the rich countries, whereas in regions of desperate poverty the vital needs of the majority of people go unsatisfied regardless of whether or not they reduce the richness and diversity of life-forms.

4. In the 1984 formulation, population was discussed in point 5. The contents of points 4 and 5 suggest that, in terms of logical order, the population issue should be discussed in point 4 rather than point 5.

5. Many supporters of the deep ecology movement believe that a reduction in human population would, of course, be a great gain both for humanity and for nonhuman life, but they do not see how it could happen within the scope of a decent ethics. Some are willing to see reduction occur within a couple of centuries. What seems a little odd to me is that, at the same time, they can envision population stabilization (zero growth) occurring (without “nature taking over” in the sense of catastrophic wars or massive famines, or both). If transition to zero growth is thought to be practicable, why could there not also occur a population reduction of, say, one-quarter of a percent per year? Within several centuries that would make a lot of difference. A firm acceptance of the population-reduction point does not oblige one to speculate concerning how great a reduction one has in mind. That is a different question.
I seriously think that the Eight Points (or corresponding sets of points provided by other supporters) should be acceptable without hesitation to nearly all supporters of the deep ecology movement. I have found, therefore, that point 4 might be “softened,” perhaps in the direction of formulations like the following: “It would be better for human beings to be fewer, and much better for nonhuman life-forms.”

If the “decrease” or “reduction” terminology is retained in point 4, then comments should include these two points: The process of a slow but adequate reduction naturally will take more than a couple of centuries. The situation in some rich countries, where zero growth has been reached (or nearly reached), makes it important for governments to declare that nothing will be done to counteract a process of reduction in the next century. Those economists (and others) will be consulted who can show how a satisfactory economic situation can be maintained during the difficult transition period.

In a process of slow decrease of the population, there will be a slight increase in the percentage of people over the age of retirement. This could be partly alleviated by motivating a slight increase in the age of retirement. The amount of capital per person will increase slightly, as well as the availability of resources in general. The chances of significant unemployment will also be slightly reduced, and so on.

An adequate discussion of the economics of population reduction cannot be the aim of my remarks here. Both strategically and tactically, it is of central importance, in my view, that more people outside the economically richest countries realize that population reduction is compatible with maintaining, or increasing, the overall quality of life. Point 7 is meant to be relevant here. One cannot expect people in the poorer countries to believe in this point if very few people in the richest countries do.

The argument is often heard in rich countries that many sons are necessary in poor countries to provide security for one’s old age. Actually, a substantial minority of people in the poor countries do not think this way (if four sons need sixteen sons, who need sixty-four, what happens then?).

Clearly, many people do not consider it possible that adults can have a close, warm relationship with small children they have not themselves produced. In many cultures, though, architecture and the use of space make it possible for small children to walk around safely and to be taken care of by
neighbors and friends. In such situations, young parents do not have to worry when they go to work, and the children might have close relationships, and even stay overnight, with “uncles” and “aunts.” Adults who wish to have small children around them, and like to spend a lot of time with them, are highly esteemed and form an indispensable part of the community. Under such conditions, one may have closer and more durable relations with small children than do parents in rich countries who have produced as many as four or five children.

I have used so much space talking about the population issue because I think that, in some countries, now is the time to reconsider the design of cities, and policies of spacing, so as to anticipate a slow decrease of population that may begin in the near future in some countries—say, within a couple of generations, or even sooner.

6. The deep ecology terminology was introduced, during the late 1960s, in a highly politicized environment. “Every question is a political question” was a slogan you might have heard repeated every other day in Europe during this period. The very able students of neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School knew very well that slogans and repetitions are indispensable in a social movement. When the Green movement suddenly surfaced in European cities (in Norway with the astonishing slogan “Green Grass!”), it was laudable, in my view, that activism and the necessity of social and political change was made a central point. Economics, technology, and politics must be a subject of teaching and discussion in any “environmental” movement. The combination of points 6 and 8 is supposed to express the seriousness of this insight. That does not mean, of course, that all supporters of deep ecology must specialize in party politics or related activities.

Supporters of the deep ecology movement naturally work within the horizon of the “alternative future” movements. More specifically, they work with supporters of the Green movement (which may roughly be said to require of a society that it has largely solved the peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability problems). The intimate cooperation and mutual respect among people (whose activism is quite naturally focused on one, but not all, of these three problem areas) is excellent, and does not exclude strong utterances in favor of their own specialties. Such utterances strengthen our motivation.
Because the main work of supporters of the deep ecology movement concerns only a part of what is required of a Green society, there can be no such thing as a “deep ecology society.” The deep ecological requirement of “wide” ecological sustainability (protecting the full richness and diversity of life on Earth), however, limits the kinds of Green societies that would be acceptable. Because (in accordance with points 1 and 2) deep ecologists view the intrinsic value, respect for, and support of deep cultural differences on a par with attitudes toward richness and diversity of nonhuman life-forms, any social or political trends of the fascist or Nazi kind run counter to the requirement of full ecological sustainability.

In Germany, some people become worried when they hear about deep ecology: “Sacredness of the soil? I remember Himmler, the terrible Himmler, talking and talking about that!” But acquaintance with the movement dispels the worries.

Critics have deplored the lack of an authoritative deep ecology blueprint for a society satisfying the requirements of the Eight Points—they are apparently looking for texts like Edward Goldsmith’s *Blueprint for Survival* (1972), but updated. More or less broad visions of future green societies are expressed within the Green movement, of which the deep ecology movement is only a part. Visions are needed, but scarcely blueprints.

Personally, I envision deep cultural differences existing among green societies in different parts of the world. Valuable suggestions have been made since the 1960s, but they do not so far show, in my opinion, how diversity of thinking, acting, and cultural priorities may be normalized among future societies that satisfy the three requirements of peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability.

In any case, point 6 is not the place to go into specific requirements of social change. A vague, general suggestion along these lines is made in point 7, but I am not sure that it is a good idea to have even a point like that. It only vaguely suggests something about the general direction of the political changes needed. At any rate, it has been a great satisfaction to note that no supporters have indicated that I overrate the importance of political change as a necessary condition of surmounting the ecological crisis.

There are supporters who think that the formulation of the Eight Points has been overrated, that they do not deserve the position of importance they are sometimes accorded. If the points were taken to express the
philosophy characteristic of the deep ecology movement, or even the principles of deep ecology, that would be, in a sense, a grave misinterpretation of those approximately 200 words used to express those points. Maybe it should be repeated more often that they only present an attempt to formulate what might be accepted by the great majority of the supporters of the movement at a fairly general and abstract level. Different sets of formulations are needed to express something similar, but in the language of supporters in the nonindustrialized parts of the world. As formulated, the Eight Points are in a sense provincial—adapted primarily to discussions among formally well educated people in rich countries.

When introducing the Eight Points in nonindustrialized societies, I use very different formulations—sometimes, for example, not speaking about the Earth at all—and I limit the intended validity of point 7 to the rich countries. It is a curious phenomenon that some people in the West think that poor people don’t fight for the preservation of nonhuman beings for their own sake. In 1973 the families of a poor village in Nepal voted 46 to 0 to send their headman with a petition to protect their sacred mountain Tseringma (Gauri Shankar) from tourism—forsaking the vast income they might have gained. (Incidentally, the name Tseringma means “the mother of the good long life.”) Without having seen such phenomena, I would not talk about the broad international deep ecology movement.

In conclusion, I would like to ask forbearance for talking so much about such a small set of formulations, and only because they have so far been helpful in fostering feelings of being closely together in an immense task of supreme value.