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## Robinson Jeffers' Poetry – from Deep Experience to Deep Ecology

The 2001 Stanford University Press publication of Robinson Jeffers' *Collected Poems* seems to be emblematic of the end of almost half a century of critical neglect and disfavour from which the poet suffered largely due to his staunch opposition to the United States involvement in World War II. Curiously enough, while Jeffers was cast into oblivion for having taken the stance of Cummings' "Olaf glad and big," the "conscientious object-or," his reinstatement into the canon of American poetry had nothing to do with the recurrent anti-war waves rising as a result of the American military engagement in Vietnam, Kuwait, Afghanistan or Iraq. His pacifist sympathies could not possibly have won him back a broad critical acclaim in the face of the growing threat of world terrorism that culminated in the events of September the 11<sup>th</sup>. His poems of ecological commitment, however, have restored his writing to prominence and made of the author a major icon of the environmental movement.

The aim of the present paper is to present Robinson Jeffers as a literary precursor of deep ecology. His metaphysical and ecological position reflected in his verse will be viewed as compatible with the four level apron diagram developed by Arne Naess, one of the founders of the deep ecology movement.

Following a lecture he gave in Bucharest at the Third World Future Research Conference, the following year 1973 Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosophy professor and mountaineer, introduced into environmental language the term 'deep ecology' which he distinguished from 'shallow ecology.' As Alan Drengson remarks in his article "The Deep Ecology Movement:"

Both historically and in the contemporary movement Naess saw two different forms of environmentalism, not incompatible with one another. One he called the "long-range deep ecology movement" and the other, the "shallow ecology movement." The word "deep" in part referred to the level of questioning of our purposes and values, when arguing in environmental conflicts. The "deep" movement involves deep questioning, down to fundamentals. The shallow stops before the ultimate level. (1995)

In 1984 Naess and the American philosopher George Sessions formulated a set of eight principles that constitute the platform of deep ecology:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values & are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes. (Drengson 1995)

What the platform principles amount to is a radical doctrine which claims that “that humans need to regain a “spiritual” relationship with nonhuman nature” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Social ecology and deep ecology”). By understanding the interconnectedness of all organisms, it is believed, humans can develop an ecological awareness. This biocentric orientation was further “developed by British environmentalist James Lovelock, who postulated in *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979) that the planet is a single living, self-regulating entity capable of reestablishing an ecological equilibrium, even without the existence of human life” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Social ecology and deep ecology”).

Referring to Naess’ ideas in his paper “What is Deep Ecology,” Stephen Harding writes: “Through deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment emerges deep ecology” (1997). As Naess suggests, individual deep experience of oneness with the non-human universe (identified with the acceptance of the eight platform principles) leads to deep questioning of one’s ideological premises. For a broader understanding of deep ecology, the Norwegian philosopher developed the four-level system he called the apron diagram.

Everyone who subscribes to the platform principles (Level II of the apron diagram), thereby enlisting as a supporter of deep ecology, proceeds to articulate their ecophilosophies “which might be grounded in some major worldview or religion, such as Pantheism or Christianity.” This level of philosophies, religions and ideologies is termed Level I. From the level of deep ecology platform principles (Level II) “we can develop specific policy recommendations and formulations, or Level III. From Level III application leads us to practical actions, Level IV” (Drengson 1997).

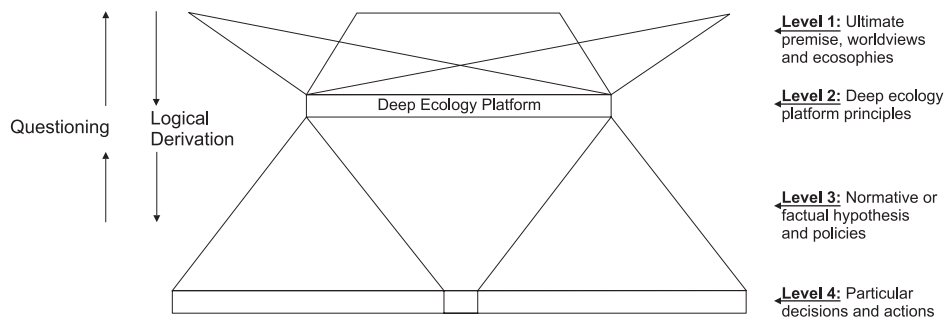


Fig. 1. Arne Naess' apron diagram (Naess 2005: 63)

In Robinson Jeffers' life and poetic career, all of Naess' three stages leading to deep ecology, namely deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment, which correspond respectively with Level II, Level I and combined Levels III and IV of the apron diagram, can be traced. His deep experience of environmental identification started when he moved with his wife Una to Carmel on the Monterey coast of California in 1914. Having completed his thorough European education in Switzerland – he was versed in Latin, French and German, as well as in European literatures – Jeffers settled on a wild, wind and storm swept coast of the Pacific. For the next five years he watched the old civilizations slaughter each other. While the Lost Generation writers expressed their profound feeling of disillusionment in acts of expatriation, Jeffers abandoned his European themes for his new concern with pristine wilderness. As Loren Eiseley, the writer-naturalist, put it:

Something utterly wild had crept into his mind and marked his features. I cannot imagine him as having arisen unchanged in another countryside. The sea-beaten coast, the fierce freedom of its hunting hawks, possessed and spoke through him. It was one of the most uncanny and complete relationships between a man and his natural background that I know in literature. (qtd in Karman 1995: 43)

Jeffers' experience of the wild resulted in his growing environmental awareness. His poetry from the 1920s onwards was fully expressive of his new attitude to the world of nature and man's civilization, an attitude that anticipated the major tenets of Naess' Level II platform principles. Having "paid [his] birth-dues," he was "quits with the people" (Jeffers 2001, "Birth-Dues," 159) and thus free to view the world of life at large anew as the ultimate reality of which humanity is but a redundant, ephemeral phenomenon. In "De Rerum Virtute" he suggests:

One light is left us: the beauty of things, not men;  
 The immense beauty of the world, not the human world  
 Look – and without imagination, desire nor dream – directly  
 At the mountains and sea. Are they not beautiful? (2001: 677)

The same idea is voiced in “The Eye” where the Pacific, the eye of the earth remains peacefully unconcerned with humanity:

but here the Pacific--

Our ships, planes, wars are perfectly irrelevant.  
 Neither our present blood-feud with the brave dwarfs  
 Nor any future world-quarrel of westering  
 And eastering man, the bloody migrations, greed of power, clash of  
 Faiths--

Is a speck of dust on the great scale-pan.  
 .....

it is half the

planet:  
 this dome, this half-globe, this bulging  
 Eyeball of water,  
 .....

this is the staring unsleeping  
 Eye of the earth; and what it watches is not our wars.

(2004)

In striking anticipation of Naess’ principles, Jeffers regards the world of nature as having an intrinsic value of its own. If he ever considers man, it is never apart from the organic wholeness of life that exists independently of any human judgment. Nature’s beauty is not man’s beauty and nature’s economy is not man’s economy. In his poem “Fire on the Hills,” the poet depicts the roaring waves of the brush fire, the deer bounding in terror and the smaller lives caught in blazing flames. What overwhelms the beholder is not a feeling of horror but of natural beauty which is “not always lovely.” To an ‘inhuman,’ impassionate observer “the fire was beautiful, the terror/Of the deer was beautiful” (2001: 394). Surprisingly, the devastating and, in human terms, evidently wasteful phenomenon, turns out to be a gift of plenty. In the following lines Jeffers makes it clear that a human measure of a gain or a loss does not apply to the world at large:

Down the back slopes after the fire had gone by, an eagle  
 Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,  
 Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his shoulders  
 He had come from far off for the good hunting  
 With fire for his beater to drive the game; the sky was merciless  
 .....

I thought, painfully, but the whole mind,  
 The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is better than men.

(2001: 394)

Acceptance of the fact that all life, regardless of its usefulness to man, has inherent value is accompanied in Jeffers’ poetry by a corollary conviction that man is not the crown of creation. With this belief, the Californian poet gets ahead not only of Arne Naess, but also of Aldo Leopold, one of the patron-founders of en-

vironmentalism and “one of the first important voices to oppose the philosophical presumptions of anthropocentrism in modern civilization” (Ferré 1996: 298). In his essay “The Land Ethic” of 1949, Leopold emphasized the ecological necessity of the extension of human ethics to the land and all life that it sustains (1966: 239). As Ferré observes “Leopold was actually urging more than a simple ‘extension’ of ethics” (1996: 298), which undoubtedly would be a step in the right direction for it would mean giving up the position of the masters of the earth and assuming that of her stewards. He understood that although stewardship, unlike mastership, entails responsibility, it is no less anthropocentric as both attitudes presuppose superiority of the human species over the rest of nature. Actually, what he was proposing was a revolution for he formulated an entirely new biocentric standard of ethics according to which “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” (Leopold 1966: 262). “In judging the very meaning of *right* and *wrong*, he said, we should put the living world at the center” (Ferré 1996: 298). Accordingly, instead of being just a considerate caretaker of the earth (Naess’ concept of “shallow ecology”), we should assume our place of a “plain member and citizen” (Leopold 1966: 219), a species among other species (Naess’ concept of “deep ecology”).

The ideas voiced by Leopold in 1949 had been implicit in Jeffers’ work since “Tamar” (1917–1923) or at least since “Roan Stallion” (1924–1925), claims Arthur Coffin. In the preface to *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1948), the critic states, “Jeffers explicitly described ‘a philosophical attitude’ he named Inhumanism” (1999) as

a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to notman; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence... This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist... It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy... it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty. (Jeffers qtd in Coffin 1999)

As Waggoner puts it “Jeffers worked out a thoroughgoing denial of the significance... of all humanity... His reality is defined by its power to obliterate all merely human knowledge and desire, and all *personal* experience” (1968: 471). What remains is the ultimate nonhuman world, exuberantly rich, indifferently independent and wildly magnificent.

What Jeffers extols is not the arguable triumphs of man’s civilization – though he admits that “Our people are clever and masterful,/They have power in the mass, they accomplish marvels” (2004, “Contrast”) – but the splendor of the natural reality. He points to the mountain redwoods like red towers up the Kaweah valley about whose bases grew “a bushery of Christmas green,/Firs and pines to be monuments for pilgrimage/In Europe,” that here are “only a shrubbery/about the boles of the trees” (2004, “Contrast”). In the “storm-dances of gulls, the barking game of seals,/Over and under the ocean” he sees “Divinely superfluous beauty” (2001,

“Divinely superfluous beauty,” 17) of which one can never tire. “The things that one gets tired of – O, be sure,” he writes in one of his early poems “Wonder and Joy,” “They are only foolish artificial things!” but never

...the recurrence of the springs,  
Of the gray dawns, the gracious evenings,  
The infinite wheeling stars...  
...or great Orion, whose belt  
Is studded with three nails of burning gold  
(1916)

In contrast to the pristine beauty of natural things that “Lives in the very grain of the granite” (2001, “Carmel Point,” 676), human civilization appears as a spoiler responsible for the broken balance. Under man’s rule “The world sickens with change, rain becomes poison,/The earth is a pit” (2001, “The Broken Balance,” 160). Man has enslaved the whole continent that is now but

...a tamed ox, with all its mountains,  
Powerful and servile; here is for plowland, here is  
for park and playground, this helpless  
Cataract for power; it lies behind us at heel  
All docile between this ocean and the other.  
(2004, “July Fourth By The Ocean”)

Had Jeffers been following the ideas of “shallow ecology,” he would have merely lamented “the broken balance, the hopeless prostration of the earth/Under men’s hands and their minds” mourning “The beautiful places killed like rabbits to make a city” (2001, “The Broken Balance,” 160). Being oriented toward what Naess defined as “deep ecology,” though, he identified with the world, neither astonished nor in awe, dispassionately witnessing “the last man dying/Without succession under the confident eyes of the stars” (2001, “The Broken Balance,” 160). Viewed from this perspective, humanity is “only a moment’s accident;” once it passes away into oblivion, the world will resume “the old lonely immortal/Splendor” of “the beautiful enormous dawns of time” (2001, “The Broken Balance,” 160).

Profoundly aware of the permanence of nature and the inevitable demise of our race, Jeffers does not narrow-mindedly criticize humanity for its environmental abuses. Instead, he keeps exploring the question of how we could develop a qualitatively new relationship with the universe. The prime condition of this new bond, in Jeffers’ understanding, is resignation from our innate egocentrism. Though it might seem

A little too abstract, a little too wise,  
It is time for us to kiss the earth again,  
It is time to let the leaves rain from the skies,  
Let the rich life run to the roots again.  
(2001, “Return,” 499)

But, he realizes, the return to the biotic community will not be possible unless we change our intellectual habits. As the poet writes in "Carmel Point" in concord with later Naess' anti-anthropological principle

We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;  
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident  
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.

(2001: 676)

If we can do that we will be able to rejoin the earth, ending our artificial and unjustifiably presumptuous separation. Paraphrasing Jeffers' lines from "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," we can enter the forest and feel the changes "in the veins/in the throat of the mountain" and be the stream, and be the stag drinking and be the stars, and be "the darkness outside the stars" and eventually be "mankind also, a moving lichen on the cheek of the round stone" (Jeffers 1988). It is then, Jeffers states in "Sign-Post," that

...At length

You will look back along the star's rays and see that even  
The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.  
Its qualities repair their mosaic around you, the chips of strength  
And sickness; but now you are free, even to be human,  
But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman.

(2004)

Jeffers' sense of humbleness in the face of the vast, inhuman universe, which results from a growing consciousness of one's being not a species apart but part and parcel of the natural world, is a realization of what Naess called Level 2 of his apron diagram. If, according to Naess, the mark of deep ecology is deep experience leading to deep questioning of the ultimate reality (Level 1), then Jeffers is a deep ecologist for his poetry not only testifies to the author's deep ecological experience that is manifested in the writer's anticipation of Naess' platform principles of "deep ecology," but also reveals his "ecosophy," the philosophical and religious position underlying his life and art following his ecological awakening.

Jeffers' "inhuman" deep ecology perspective is founded on a similarly "inhuman" metaphysics of ontological realism that downplays the role of human consciousness in determining the essence of reality. As a philosophical description of what exists in the material universe, ontological realism maintains that absolute reality is "out there," independently of any human mind that experiences it and that it is directly accessible to human perception. While Wallace Stevens' poetry, in such pieces as "The Idea of Order at Key West" or "Anecdote of the Jar," addresses the epistemological *how* of "reality," Jeffers' focuses on the ontological *what*. Jeffers' world is of the stark reality of *things* that just *are* regardless of any human mental speculation. "Science and mathematics," both mental and largely abstract human activities, will not reveal the world to us for they

Run parallel to reality, they symbolize it, they squint at it,  
They never touch it

(2004, "The Silent Shepherds")

The "real" escapes those who spin ideas, but manifests itself to those who can watch, who can feel oneness with "This gray rock, standing tall" on whose peak

A falcon has perched.

.....

Life with calm death; the falcon's

Realist eyes and act

Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone

(2004, "Rock and Hawk")

Out of the two, animate and inanimate, live and dead, the latter is more real. As Waggoner writes about Jeffers

With his training as a medical student interpreted through his reading of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, he came to feel that the cadaver in the dissection room was more real than the living person it had been... "Nature" was all, and man was clearly in many respects – the peculiar *human* respects – a most "unnatural" being. Consciousness, he decided, was a temporary and inexplicable accident, perhaps a kind of "sickness," or at any rate an aberration, of matter. Thus hawks were more real than people, and stones than hawks. (1968: 470)

Such understanding of the "real" obviously runs counter to the Cartesian tradition in Western philosophy that gives priority to thought over matter. Having set himself to doubt everything that could not be unquestionably proved, Descartes "arrived at the conclusion that the only fact that he could be sure of was that because he could think he could be sure of his existence," and thus established an "absolute disjunction between an immaterial, thinking *I* inside and the world of physical objects outside" (Horton, Edwards 1974: 487). In the next century Berkeley, Hume and Kant, each in his particular way, upheld the Cartesian skepticism about our being able to reach the "real." Claiming that individuals cannot directly know "matter" because it is accessible to them only in sensations and ideas, they pointed to man's epistemological limitations that result in his never being able to transcend the bounds of his own mind. However untenable his position of a naïve realist epistemology might be for modern post-Kantian philosophy, in his environmentally committed poetry, Jeffers apparently ignores the fairly widely accepted tenets of the epistemological skepticism. What he calls for is a return to the ontology of things themselves but without Husserl's uncomfortable dependence on intentional consciousness that is always aware of something, consciousness *toward* an object, but never reaching the object itself.

Anti-Cartesian and anti-phenomenological, the Californian seems to agree with Aquinas' metaphysical conviction that truth is "adaequatio rei et intellectus" when he literally states in his poem "Return"



I will touch things and things and no more thoughts,  
 That breed like mouthless May-flies darkening the sky,  
 The insect clouds that blind our passionate hawks  
 So that they cannot strike, hardly can fly.  
 Things are the hawk's food and noble is the mountain...  
 (2004)

The things one perceives are unfiltered by consciousness. Nature, however devastated by our civilization, persists in its primordial state, unaffected by our cognition which is a temporal, because a purely human, faculty that will go extinct with the species one day. Against the vogue of philosophies that view reality as a human construct, Jeffers blatantly views the visible world as objectively true, professing thus an ontology that is naïve and scholarly passé, but which constitutes a coherent framework for his pro-ecological bias. It comes as no surprise that Arne Naess, a recognized philosopher and deep ecologist, speaks about his own metaphysical convictions in a way reminiscent of Jeffers'. "My gestalt ontology is a sort of ontological realism in the sense that we have direct access to the contents of reality in our spontaneous experiences. These are not mere appearances or phenomena" he wrote in his paper "Heidegger, Postmodern Theory and Deep Ecology." Continuing further, Naess develops his philosophical position, which is also obviously Jeffers', when he claims "I say that in spontaneous experiences we have direct access to what is real. We experience some things as solid, fairly isolatable and closely related to others. But I like to talk about things or items rather than 'phenomena' (ontological realism of sorts?)" (1997).

While on the philosophical plane the ecological deep questioning led Jeffers to ontological realism with its stress on the objective reality of the world present to the senses, on the religious one it led him to the Spinozian monistic pantheism. He admits this ideological allegiance in *Themes in My Poems* where he writes

Another theme that has much engaged my verses is the expression of a religious feeling, that perhaps must be called pantheism, though I hate to type it with a name. It is the feeling ... I will say the certitude ... that the world, the universe, is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and revered; and in moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it. This is, in a way, the exact opposite of Oriental pantheism. The Hindu mystic finds God in his own soul, and all the outer world is illusion. To this other way of feeling, the outer world is real and divine; one's own soul might be called an illusion, it is so slight and so transitory. (1956)

Jeffers elaborates on his spiritual belief in another statement bearing a heavy influence of Spinoza's thought:

I believe that the Universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. This whole is in all its parts so beautiful, and is felt by me to be so intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it and to think of it as divine. It seems to me that this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love and there is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation, in turning one's affections outward

toward this one God, rather than inwards on one's self, or on humanity, or on human imaginations and abstractions – the world of the spirits. (qtd in Courtney 2000)

In a time when much of Christianity still claimed Christians must harness nature and bring it under submission, Jeffers, “Spinoza’s twentieth-century evangelist” (Sessions 1977: 509), found in the Dutch philosopher’s description of the physical universe as immanently divine an ideological empowerment for his newly acquired position of spiritual environmentalism. His, what Neass would later call, “deep ecological awareness” required a religious conviction that would deny man’s right to take dominion of the earth granted the Christian civilization in the Biblical passage from the *Book of Genesis*:

027: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 028: And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (1: 27, 28)

Instead of the Christian God, in His caring love privileging humanity over the rest of creation, Jeffers adopts in his poetry the Spinozian immanent God-Nature as the only existing, unlimited substance of which humans are but a part comparable in importance with rock or insects. This concept of divinity is originally stated by Spinoza in his *Ethics*:

God is one, that is, only one substance can be granted in the universe. [I.14]

Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived. [I.15]

God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things. All things which are, are in God.

Besides God there can be no substance, that is, nothing in itself external to God. [I.17]

(2005, I.14, 15, 17)

God so conceived cannot be a personal deity for He would endorse the aberration of anthropocentrism. The God of Spinoza’s pantheism is impersonal and so is Jeffers’s in “Sign-Post”

Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity,...

Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity

Make your veins cold, look at the silent stars, let your eyes

Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.

Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;

Things are the God, you will love God, and not in vain,

(2004)

Human egocentrism expressed in the belief that humanity is separate from and superior to the world of nature loses any justification in the face of a God that is equal to all Nature. The “inhuman God” is “very beautiful and too secure to want worshippers,”

And includes indeed the sheep with the wolves,...

He includes the flaming stars and the pitiable flesh,

And what we call things and what we call nothing.

(“Intellectuals” qtd in Courtney 2000)

The hitherto prevailing vision of the relationship of the loving God, worshipful man and the subservient world fails viewed against the Spinozian pantheism which does away with the Christian absolutes of merciful love and divine beauty. The deep ecological dimension of Spinoza's immanentism amounts to the fact that God-Nature is the only and ultimate value, an impersonal entity whose existence is a gestalt mindless of the individual parts. The God who is not a person but substance neither takes a fancy to any of His elects nor shows wrath at their transgressions. Thus, love is not His attribute. As Spinoza says:

God is without passions, neither is he affected by any emotion of pleasure or pain ... Strictly speaking, God does not love anyone. (2005, V.17)

He who loves God cannot endeavour that God should love him in return. (2005, V.19)

Consequently, there is no absolute good and evil, nor beauty and ugliness for these values are all of man's making and are entirely indifferent to the cosmic nonhuman entity. Spinoza says in *Ethics*:

The perfection of things is to be reckoned only from their own nature and power; things are not more or less perfect, according as they delight or offend human senses, or according as they are serviceable or repugnant to mankind. (2005, I. Appendix)

Jeffers conceives of his pantheistic God in the very same manner for as he writes in "The Great Explosion"

He is no God of love, no justice of a little city like Dante's  
 Florence, no anthropoid God  
 Making commandments; this is the God who does not care  
 (2004)

Instead, He is the God of violence. In "Hurt Hawks" Jeffers depicts Him as "The wild God of the world" whom "you communal people" do not know or "have forgotten." He is "Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him" (2004). He crushes "man without hating him" and "often save[s] without love" (2004, "Time of Disturbance"). The pantheistic God is beautiful with the terrible beauty of the explosions of novas. To know Him is, in Jeffers' words, to

know that however ugly the parts appear  
 the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand  
 Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth and stars  
 and his history... for contemplation or in fact...  
 Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,  
 the greatest beauty is  
 Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty  
 of the universe.

(2004, "The Answer")

Both ontological realism and the Spinozian pantheism constitute the Naess "deep questioning" level of Jeffers' environmentalism, underlying his life of celebration of tough, tangible existence best expressed in his metaphor of rock and

hawk. Spinoza was particularly relevant to his pro-ecological thought and poetry, for his philosophy combined metaphysical and ecological strains. Only Spinoza's God could bring man closer to an understanding of ecological balance. In the face of such God that is creation itself, that is "impersonal and transtheological – an indefinable power which is the source, purpose and supporting ground of all life and being" – we can realize "our own insignificant position in the universe" (Courtney 2000). With that realization, Jeffers suggested in his poems, we are finally able to transcend the implications of Christian belief and human egoism that suggest that our existence is somehow central to the purposes of a God or of the Universe. With the help of Spinoza, the Californian poet has replaced human ethics with environmental ethics – by dethroning man, he has enthroned nature.

Created way before Naess' and Sessions' formulation of the deep ecology principles, Jeffers' poetry might serve as a thematic model for Naess' apron diagram. The particular stages in the author's life and literature uncannily follow the course from deep experience, through deep questioning to deep ecological commitment (Naess' diagram Levels 3 and 4). Jeffers translated his experience of empathic identification with the wilderness into a coherent ideological framework and then into a lifestyle involving choices and action. Living in a relative seclusion in his stone "Tor House" erected on a rocky outcropping at Carmel, on the Monterey coast of California, Jeffers championed unspoiled nature. His personal reverence for the wild and his poetry of "inhumanity" forestalled the philosophy of "deep ecology." At present, alongside Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Aldo Leopold, Alan Watts and Gary Snyder, Jeffers occupies a place of prominence in the pantheon of the most eminent antecedents of the movement.

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