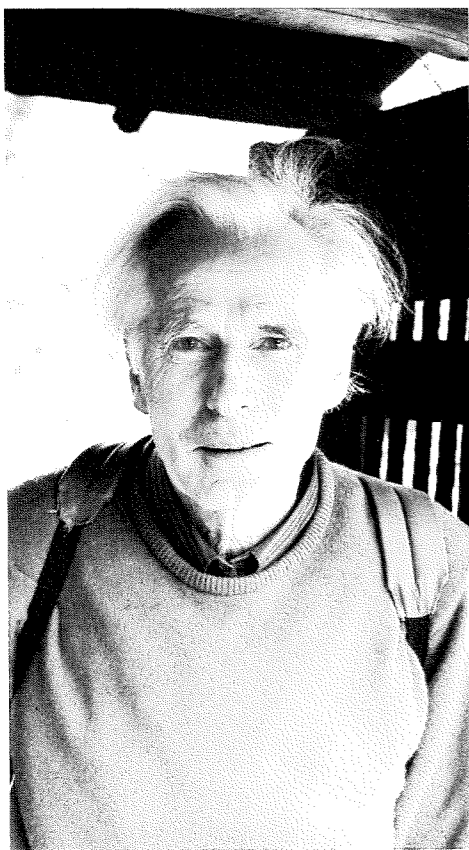


# ECOSOPHY

BEYOND • EAST • AND • WEST •

by Richard Evanoff



DEEP • ECOLOGIST  
ARNE • NAESS

*NORWEGIAN PHILOSOPHER Arne Naess is one of the pioneering figures of the deep ecology movement, which grew out of the political and environmental concerns of the '60's. Ecosophy — an ecological worldview first mapped out by Naess — provides the philosophical underpinnings for the movement through a wholistic synthesis of spiritual, political, and environmental perspectives.*

*The deep ecology movement has been part of, and influential in, the various Green movements which have been burgeoning around the globe. Green parties in Japan have been active for several years now and efforts are currently underway in the United States to organize local Green groups, which are loosely federated in a national organization and committed to "ten key values": ecological wisdom, grassroots democracy, personal and social responsibility, non-violence, decentralization, community-based economics, postpatriarchal values, respect for diversity, global responsibility, and future focus/sustainability.*

*Critical of the materialistic, bureaucratic, and increasingly unsound environmental practices of both capitalism and socialism, the Green vision allows scope for personal initiative, freedom, and spirituality, while striving to foster responsible, non-hierarchical relationships between people economically, socially, and politically. The Green emphasis on open discussion and respect for individual opinions has generated much debate and has allowed people from left to right on the political spectrum to forge new and sometimes unexpected alliances.*

*One current debate is between supporters of the deep ecology movement, as exemplified by Naess, and those of social ecology, whose most articulate spokesperson has been the social philosopher Murray Bookchin. The debate involves whether top priority should be placed on environmental problems or on issues of social justice. Deep ecologists are concerned that too much of an emphasis on issues of social justice will lead the movement back to an "anthropocentric" world view, while social ecologists fear that a "biocentric" outlook could result in a misanthropic attitude toward humans. As the interview shows, Naess sees both sides as having important contributions to make to the ecology movement as a whole — if extremes can be avoided.*

*The interview was conducted at a Buddhist temple in Enoshima this past spring, toward the end of Naess's trip to Japan. His visit included a stop at the Shiraho coral reef in Ishigaki, and numerous discussions with scientists, environmentalists and political groups in Japan.*

*RICHARD EVANOFF, active in the international Green movement, is also the editor of Edge, a literary quarterly published in Japan.*

*You've been credited with having coined the expression "deep ecology." How exactly did the idea originate?*

Well, I did not coin the term "deep ecology." I coined two terms. One is "supporter of the deep ecology movement" — a fairly long expression. And the other is "ecosophy." But this term "supporter of the deep ecology movement" was very soon abbreviated to "deep ecology" and supporters were called "deep ecologists."

*How does "deep" ecology differ from "shallow" ecology?*

Movements are always changing and one should be cautious in saying what strictly separates two movements, like the deep and the shallow. One marked difference is that the total argumentations of those who support the shallow movement are anthropocentric, in the sense that everything done to protect and restore nature is seen as having benefit for future human generations. In deep ecology, future generations means future generations of all living beings, including rivers for example.

*Japanese are often thought of in the West and sometimes by Japanese themselves as seeking "harmony with nature." Now that you've seen a bit of Japan, how do you feel about this characterization?*

My trip to Japan has been organized so as to focus on some of the worst things happening here, and I must say I am deeply depressed about what's going on in many ways. Companies have been allowed to destroy so much nature without any interference. At Ishigaki, 200 companies are working to change the island and I feel very sorry about the consequences this will have for the local people. The local population, the majority, do not accept this development. But 200 companies on a tiny island are digging, making a great number of dams, and letting the soil disappear into the sea. So I've seen many things which are very depressing in Japan at the moment. But I'm confident that in the long run, there will be a strong reaction against this kind of development.

*Many Westerners have picked up on the idea which they identify with the Orient, of the "oneness" of humankind with nature. How does this "oneness" relate to the diversity which deep ecology emphasizes?*

Well, you have in Buddhism and Taoism a lot



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of what they would call nearness to nature and humbleness toward nature, so that you do not feel superior, as a kind of *ubermensch*. There is nothing in those traditions where humans are looked upon as masters. But you have that also in the Western countries, not only in the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese cultures. You have wonderful expressions of nearness to nature [in the West]. The deep ecology movement has profited immensely from Buddhism, Taoism, and Gandhism, and I hope that it will continue to. On the other hand, we in the West are never going to be Buddhist or Taoist. We have to find roots in our own traditions. In the last couple of years we've had a revival of old Christian thinking, and not only the St. Francis of Assisi movement. But within Catholicism and the many groups of Christians there is now a saying that we have sinned against the creation and that we must change society and ourselves, our way of living — everything — in order to make good again what we have sinned against.

*You've written a lot about self-realization and the larger dimensions of the self — seeing the self with respect to its relationships with others and with the environment. Could you elaborate on that?*

Well, in the first year of your life, and even more in the second year of your life, you relate intimately to your parents, but also you relate intimately to things you have around you — around your organism — such as the home and the house, the grass and the animals. Your self, which you tend to identify with your organism or with your ego, is already then what I call an "ecological self," which includes your parents, your kin, your home, animals, and other creatures nearby. This is different from the tradition begun by Aristotle, namely to define humans as social beings. It's artificial to think of humans having identities only as social entities. That's a great difference. It is also understandable, then, that social scientists find it very difficult to cooperate with deep ecologists. I feel this undermines the specificity of the social point of view. So I introduce the term "ecological

self," but the concept and the thinking are in fact very old.

*What type of transformation of consciousness should be taking place in the individual?*

Transformation is going on in a way that's very hard to trace. But to be with people who are thinking and aware makes the consciousness for others change. When a teacher takes a walk with his children, how he looks at things and how he handles things has direct influence on the children, immediately. And that changes their consciousness. Whereas the way you handle things in biology class takes you even further away from life. Consciousness cannot be handled, so to speak. You can handle your own behavior. And if you start behaving differently, then your consciousness also will be different. Eventually it comes full circle and if your consciousness is different, your behavior also will be different.

*How do these transformations of consciousness translate into social relationships? And from there how do they translate into something such as the political reorganization of society?*

As soon as you feel that you are not only a functionary or a specialist in your life — that you are also a total personality — then you see that total personalities have not only personal relations, but are also part of a community and a society. There you are drawn into politics, or at least you see the importance of people who are willing to do politics. It must be admitted that most supporters of the deep ecology movement don't feel well in the political party business. But you cannot, either today or in the future, eliminate the tactical and strategic thinking of good politicians. So I say never talk down about politicians. You get the politicians you deserve.

*Is there a tendency in the deep ecology movement to privatize environmental problems, to see them as problems of individual lifestyles?*

Those individuals I call the "spirituals" tend to privatize and say you must start with yourself. Of course for many people this is a good slogan. But for many others it's not a good slogan because you can go around idolizing your own behavior without having as much influence as you could if you also exposed yourself socially and politically. So I think we cannot say such-and-such is politically the most important and that the individual transforming himself is of no importance. You have to see the aspects of life as individual, social, political, and of course global. They all go together. Your influence is global.

*What types of changes of lifestyle might take place, though? For example, how effective is it if I as an individual start using biodegradable laundry soap when at the same time no effective restraints are being put on multinational corporations to prevent them from polluting the environment? Do the incremental changes I make in my own personal lifestyle really have an influence?*

Oh yes, it's proven. For instance, those few people who were using recycled paper — they seemed a few years ago to have no effect. Then all of a sudden there was a change. For instance, in Norway all government institutions are now going to be using recycled paper. And if the government institutions are now going to be using recycled paper then it's not so difficult to increase the use of recycled paper everywhere and to change national and international policies in relation to forests. There may be a minority doing things more ecologically and suddenly the idea is grasped by a greater community.

*There have been perhaps misconceptions of the meaning of deep ecology. Some have said, for example, that deep ecology is a kind of mysticism identifying humankind with nature.*

That's one misunderstanding — and there are about five or six others — due to a complication in the concepts of deep ecology and ecosophy. I distinguish different levels in human thinking and talk about ultimate



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premises in human thinking. Ultimate premises are either philosophical or religious, or a combination. The supporters of the deep ecology movement ultimately reason on the basis of these fundamentals. But the fundamentals may be of very different kinds. From the radically deepest premises, then, they derive a common stand as supporters of the deep ecology movement. So the common stand of the deep ecology supporters is not to be found in the ultimate premises, but in the next-ultimate: the penultimate. In ultimate premises you find various kinds of mysticism represented, one of which is that individuals are, so to say, soaked up into the unity of nature or the unity of the universe; there's also mysticism where you retain a concept of individuality. You could say, for instance, ultimately all living beings are one — ultimately there's a oneness of living beings.

*About another misunderstanding: what is your feeling about those who have used deep ecology to defend social Darwinism or Malthusianism? For example, David Foreman of Earth First! has been quoted as saying with regard to the Ethiopian famine, "The best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve."*

Dave Foreman sometimes seems to speak without much carefulness and sometimes he's then quoted even less carefully making these statements. The only thing I can find there which can be said to be a supportable view is the opinion of many doctors who are treating Ethiopian starving children, when they say — not publicly — but when they say that the best thing for many of these children would

be to die. But of course we cannot let them die. We have to, as physicians, try to heal them. Also because of the parents, we cannot let children die. Dave Foreman may have the opinion that it would be best for starving people to die, but ecological humanitarian norms among humans are such that we are extremely concerned about starvation. We have more responsibility toward humans than we do toward animals. If someone had to choose between saving a starving child and the possibility of killing the last rhinoceros, if there were no other means of saving the child, he should kill the rhinoceros and we would all think that correct. But it would be a scandal, especially among rich nations, not to help the poorer nations let living beings continue to live. In short, we are not social Darwinists.

*The expression "anthropocentric" is frequently heard. Would you define deep ecology as being "biocentric" as opposed to "anthropocentric"?*

Yes, but I don't like those Latinized words because it's generally supposed that they stand for very exact concepts, whereas mostly they are more ambiguous and vague than ordinary language. To say biocentric could of course then be interpreted as saying that we have equal responsibility in relation to flies and children, or some stupid kind of implication like that. As soon as we use a difficult Latinized word, it's possible for it to be interpreted in an unfavorable way by those who are suspicious of us. So I'll stop using words like "biocentric," "anthropocentric," "biocentric egalitarianism," and so on. I suppose we could speak of "dualcentricism," in the sense that our attention is not only

toward human beings, but all living beings, including such things as landscapes and rivers, and that we consequently don't like the distinction between humans and the environment. We do not recognize that as a valid distinction. We take the ecological view where you are in a network in which you cannot single out anything, an interrelated network which is intrinsic. You cannot isolate any of the points which are interrelating.

*So using the words "biocentric" and "anthropocentric" would simply perpetuate the dualistic, bifurcated point of view.*

What I would say is that the distinction between humans and the environment tends to perpetuate this homocentric view, where you see yourself inside something and then nature as outside yourself. Your self is an ecological self. It's not an isolated self which can look at something outside of that self, namely the environment. So environmentalism is a bad word. It perpetuates the idea that the human organism or human society can really be separated from the ecosystem.

*Would deep ecology preclude concern for the issues of social justice, which have become part of the agenda of left Greens?*

No, I think that in this century we have three great grassroots movements: that of social justice, that of peace, and that of the deep ecology movement. Those three have to cooperate intimately. It's quite clear that the ecological crisis cannot be solved in isolation from social justice — for instance, to try to conserve rainforests without at the same time taking up the tremendous problem of what to do with relations between North and South. We have to take those problems — all of them — at once, and not say that one is more important than the others. So it's extremely important that the social justice movement is always taken into consideration. The peace movement is too obvious to talk about at all. The military — 900 billion dollars used every year for militarism — is one of the greatest polluters in the present day. Also any kind of warlike situation immediately tends to negate every kind of concern not only for civilians but for all living beings whatsoever. So those three movements must cooperate. What distinguishes the deep ecology movement is that it is practically 100% a grassroots movement, whereas the other two have some support among the governments.

*In the March 1989 issue of Green Synthesis you mentioned three types of individuals who are attracted to the international Green movement: the "naturals," who are most concerned with environmental issues and saving the earth; the "spirituals," who are interested in the implications for self-realization; and the "socials," who emphasize the issues related to social justice. How can these various tendencies learn to work together within the context of the organized Green movement?*

By means of a lot of personal contact. Those who always speak as if they were only concerned with one of these three core problems should not look down upon or exclude the two others. Some people are so eager in their own specialty that they

practically never mention other issues than what they themselves consider most important. There's no reason to say to them it's not most important. There's only reason to say, please mention us others also, so that the public does not get the wrong impression that there's antagonism.

*Is there antagonism?*

I don't think so. There are great differences of opinion, as should be in any living movement, but I don't think we can talk about real antagonisms. In the mass media, if any rude or violent words are used, they will be quoted, whereas the media practically never quote the clarifying discussions which are also going on. It isn't "good" news. If there's no violence — either verbal or, best of all, physical violence — the journalists don't have much space. It's easy for the public to get the impression that there are antagonisms when actually there are few.

*You've mentioned frequently in your writings about people connected with the Green movement having a lot of common ground. Do you feel the so-called debate between deep ecology and social ecology, as represented by Murray Bookchin, is a real debate involving real substantive issues or is it simply contrived?*

There are a great number of people who associate themselves with the term "social ecology." Many of them have also published articles relating to deep ecology, but they are writing in a way that's not most interesting for mass communication, whereas Murray Bookchin writes in an excellent way to carry a message far out. So there's no use, I think, to agree or disagree with Murray Bookchin. There are also others associated with social ecology who write in a way that is very fruitful and instructive to the discussion. Personally I have worked together with social ecologists in South America whose specialty is ecological questions in the poor countries of South America, where you have to approach the population in very different ways than the populations in rich countries and where all these questions of economic development have to be combined with the question of solving the ecological crisis. We need many social ecologists around to take up those problems in all their seriousness.

*There's a Green slogan "We are neither left nor right, but straight ahead." The Green movement draws ideas from capitalism and from socialism; how at the same time is it distinguished from both of those? What's the territory that the Green movement is carving out for itself, so to speak?*

From my point of view supporters of the deep ecology movement have a lot to learn both from the left and from the right in politics. From the left it's most obvious: solidarity, compassion for the underprivileged. But on the right, what we call the "blue" in Europe (the blue, red, and green — there's a triangle there) — from the blue I learn very much about personal initiative. Not about private initiative for one's own gain, but personal initiative even in public institutions such as universities. The right is also good at looking for ways of simplifying organizations and organizational structures, simplifying administration, simplifying bureaucracy.



*How does centralization/decentralization fit into this?*

Well, in business, at some times and in some places it's very important to have small business and at other times and other places, big business. But what is ecologically dangerous is, of course, to have corporations which are much more powerful than Sweden or Norway are as states, for instance. The corporations can then drag out their own ecological policies much longer than a nation can. A mixture of big organization and government, as in Japan, must, I think, be the most dangerous in all the world today.

*There seems to be a renewed interest in anarchism as a political philosophy. What connections do you see between anarchism*

*and the Green movement?*

Personally I am much inspired by Kropotkin and anarchist ideas in the Gandhian movement. So I think this is a source of inspiration that will continue. In the 1960's and the beginning of the '70's we had much more optimism in anarchist thinking. Now we are so tremendously concerned with global development that you must in your own community, whether anarchist or other kind of local community, regard every kind of environmental problem as a global problem. If you have a lot of free nature around yourself it doesn't mean that you then can treat this area of free nature in a less careful way than if you had practically no free nature. We have in arctic Norway great areas of free nature and the local people of course mainly

say, "Why shouldn't we develop this part of the country as much as you have developed the south?" Then we must say, well, it's global thinking and global thinking makes you an active part of tremendous importance for the globe as it is, as a whole. And if you have special or difficult economic problems, then we in the south and the rest of the world have an obligation to help you and to cooperate with you in solving those economic problems. No local community or nation owns any hectare or any square kilometer of the surface of the globe. I am just as much owner of the coral reefs on Ishigaki island as are people in Tokyo. And the people of Ishigaki are just as much the owners of arctic Norway as Norwegians are. So we have to think globally in a radical way and that makes the pure kind of anarchism obsolete as a complete ideal.

*Thoreau sharply distinguished between human society and nature in an almost dualistic way. Would you support planning which would preserve vast areas of free nature and correspondingly concentrate human populations more and more into urban centers with the idea of preserving nature?*

Certainly I'm now talking about a future which is near from a geological point of view, but very far from a political point of view, namely the question of what might happen in the 22nd and 23rd centuries and the next thousand years. That would involve a concentration of areas of fairly dense population, but with access to lots of free nature to work and play in, and then areas of more or less limited access by humans. For instance, the Antarctic could still be such an area, but we need many more big ecosystems where humans do not dominate, where the atmosphere is fairly pure, the rivers fairly pure, where the evolution of the earth could continue and the richness and diversity of life forms could continue at extremely high levels.

*Going back to the global emphasis you were talking about before, what place do local cultures have in relationship to that global awareness?*

I think the richness and diversity of deep cultural differences are a very important part of the global richness and diversity of life. How we can protect and preserve some of the deep differences in culture is a major problem. In the middle of the 60s, the strength of the movement to preserve cultures was rather suddenly increased, maybe because of the Vietnam war, when Americans were not so tremendously proud of being Americans — if their parents came from Poland they would say, "Oh, I'm from Poland." So cultural anthropology has become of great importance at universities, that is to say, learning from different cultures. The Japanese cultural tradition is one of the great cultures, which I hope will stay fairly deeply different from any others on this earth.

*At the same time many people in Japan now tend to emphasize their uniqueness. Do you see uniqueness in Japanese culture?*

Oh yes, there's lots of uniqueness but maybe not always where the Japanese see it themselves. I see from the pictures in advertisements, and so on, that the Japanese

have a strong sense for nature. But they have not yet become aware of the importance of great areas of free nature or wilderness. They are not yet accustomed to the sensibility of the deep ecology movement, which came from the United States and went into Europe but not into Japan. Japan had no great student movement, probably because of the authoritarian character of its education. You couldn't, as in the United States, have thousands of young people making a lot of noise on behalf of the earth. Nothing happened in Japan. When I say nothing happened, I mean on a significant scale, in terms of population. In Japan you have tremendous small units doing things but it's not on a large scale. Grassroots movements must have great scale.

*How do you compare the garden variety of nature so appreciated in Japan with the wild nature which can be experienced in the northern part of Norway?*

Well, what we look forward to is to having every type of landscape, including landscapes with a lot of temples and with good access for people who want to walk around, even if it involves a certain amount of asphalt and cement. The richness and diversity of life is what's important. The Japanese garden is part of deep ecology and a deep cultural difference from Norway. Especially the stone gardens of Japan are unique, absolutely unique — a great treasure, and a great treasure for us Norwegians as well!

*Science presumes to be "objective" in its analysis and presentation of facts. But you've considerably emphasized the importance of values and norms. Is it time for the so-called detached, objective scientist to become an engaged political activist?*

At least it's time for social scientists and ecological scientists to be activists, and they are being more activist. For instance, the top organization of this kind is the conservation biology movement, which has a journal called *Conservation Biology*, and which has definite value declarations at its basis, just like those who are fighting AIDS or cancer. Conservation biology is a science based on explicit values. Then, more generally I would say that every kind of clear thinking is value thinking because you cannot start from facts, deriving any conclusion whatsoever. You must have rules of inference. But basic rules of inference have no factual status — you cannot prove that they are valid at all. You must jump into those rules, using them, without confirming their validity. So even in mathematics, logic, and the exact sciences, you have a value foundation. There has never been a science without a value foundation; it is only that the value foundation is not always explicit.

*What role should science play in environmental issues? On the one hand, there's the notion that science has created a lot of the environmental problems we are now experiencing. On the other hand, there's increasing doubt that technofix solutions are going to work.*

We must distinguish between "the scientific enterprise" and "science." The scientific

enterprise is simply one kind of enterprise in a big society. And just like war and other enterprises, there can be mainly negative or mainly positive forces from a philosophical point of view. Science has been used, as in the Minamata case, for the sabotage of important reforms of industry. And it is used like that mainly today. Science has at least as much negative as positive value for the deep ecology movement, because you can always find researchers who will say we don't know enough to do anything. Here in Japan, science has even more prestige than in Norway or the United States and it can be used as pure ecology or pure marine biology or pure this or that. There are people who could be immensely important in the deep ecology movement if they talked publicly, but they mostly see themselves as specialists. There are of course fabulous counter-examples of this.

*Doesn't pure intellectual knowledge and active participation come together in your conception of ecology?*

Yes, because we have great respect for diversity. So for instance here in Japan it's a great joy to see insects — there are few — but insects which are new to me, which I've never seen before. It's important to have thousands of people who are purely intellectually interested in, let's say, insects. Life forms in rain forests should be described not only biologically, but also behaviorally, before they disappear. We must reckon with many more species of animals and plants which will be exterminated within thirty years. But the lack of trained people who can classify and describe life forms is terrifying. Every day, probably, there is a species destroyed in Brazil and the universities of the world are more or less completely indifferent toward the question of educating taxonomists. About 20,000 taxonomists are immediately needed, but the tremendously rich universities of the world are incapable of delivering them.

*What do you think are our realistic prospects for the future — for humankind?*

There will be no ultimate catastrophe involving all humanity or involving all higher organisms on the earth. But there may be a deterioration in the quality of life both in and outside cities. And there will be hundreds of catastrophes on the order of Chernobyl. I look forward to this trend changing in the 22nd Century, at the earliest.

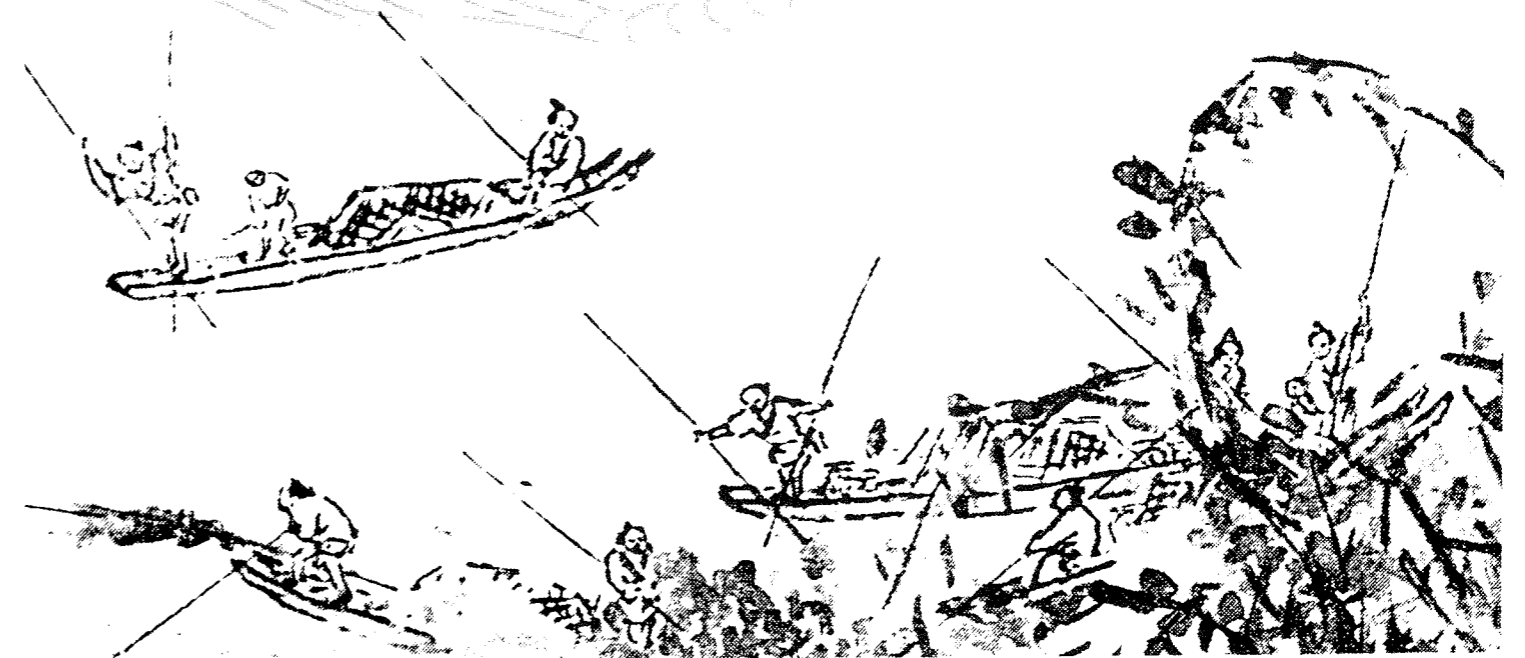
*The 22nd Century?*

The next century — the 21st — I'm afraid won't see any great social and ecological progress. ■

Information about the Green movement in Japan can be obtained from The Japan Green Federation, 1-20-7 Honkomagome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113 Japan. People wishing more information about the U.S. Green movement can write to Committees of Correspondence Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 30208, Kansas City, MO 64112 U.S.A.

# THE NAGARAGAWA

## LAST STAND FOR JAPAN'S RIVERS



SIDNEY ATKINS

ON MAY 5th this year a flotilla of three hundred and fifty kayaks, canoes and foldboats manned by dam-protesting paddlers from all over Japan formed a barrier across the lower reaches of the Nagara River where it flows into Ise Bay. As the last boats maneuvered into position, fighting the incoming tide, flares were fired on shore, a phalanx of paddles shot into the air, and a resounding shout of 'NO!' echoed across the estuary, over the buzz of news helicopters and the applause of supporters and onlookers lining the high dykes above the river.

Hopefully someone in Tokyo will hear that shout. Japan's first mass demonstration by canoeists was held in conjunction with a two-day symposium in Gujō Hachiman on the fate of the Nagara River. Both events were organized to draw attention to the construction of an enormous 660-meter long tidal barrier lock dam that will mean curtains for Japan's last relatively healthy and undammed river.

The purpose of the dam, whose construction began last year, is to prevent salt water from moving up the estuary at high tide. This would allow large-scale dredging of the riverbed to build a concrete encased reservoir that would become Japan's fifth largest lake, backing fresh water 30 km upstream to

meet nonexistent 'needs' for industrial and urban water supplies.

This will certainly cause a decline in the natural *ayu* (sweetfish) population for which the Nagara River is famous, and the extinction of another delicious and unique fish called *satsukimatsu*, a type of warm water salmon that lives only in the Nagara River. Both are highly prized by the large numbers of enthusiastic fishermen who live along the Nagara's 165 km length. The dam will also spell doom to other rich and varied fish life, and tidewater creatures dependent on exchanges of salt and fresh water, such as loaches and *Yamato shijimi* — an edible clam harvested commercially by fishermen and for recreation by families on holiday. Another result, undoubtedly, will be the pollution of the standing water impounded behind the dam, through eutrophication.



This isn't the first such river mouth dam project in Japan. A similar dam of comparable size is already in place on the Tone River in Kanto, and smaller versions exist on several other rivers. But what makes the Nagara not just another dam story is simply that it's the last chance to let a Japanese river live. Of 109 river systems in Japan classified as 'first rank' by the Ministry of Construction, the Nagara is the only river remaining on Honshū with no dam on the main channel.

The Nagara River is special for another reason: it is a superb example of an environment where large numbers of people live in close and harmonious contact with nature. Look at Gujō Hachiman, for example, the site of the Golden Week symposium. This small upstream town of 18,000 in Gifu Prefecture is nestled around the Yoshida River where it flows into the Nagara in the mountainous upper basin. Springs gush from every hillside in town. The most famous is Sogisui, a sacred spring that provides what is reputedly Japan's best water. Suntory contracts for Hachiman water and trucks it out to use for distilling. Around town and in front of the town hall are mineral springs that invite passersby to drink. Even the children of Hachiman, who swim in the river in summer, are acutely aware of the blessings good water brings.