



Joanna Nowakowska

What Do Arne Naess and Charles Taylor Have in Common, or About Ecosophy as Strong Evaluations

Introduction

What do strong evaluations by Charles Taylor and the theory of ecosophy outlined by Arne Naess have in common? The following article is dedicated to precisely these two categories proposed by contemporary philosophers. Taylor and Naess have spent their careers identifying seemingly disparate topics. In their research, however, both of them often contemplated ideas of value, and in particular paid attention to the values of the modern human being in Western civilization. That aspect is exactly what I am trying to show as connecting the two researchers and their ideas.

Known as an explorer of the modern human condition, Taylor established himself as a philosopher also on the grounds of his non-radical approach to the world. He speaks openly about his Christian point of view of the world, while not closing himself off to what the current laicizing world brings. Analyzing human subjectivity, for

Joanna Nowakowska, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
joanna.zu.nowakowska@gmail.com • ORCID: 0009-0007-2127-2063



example, in his perhaps most popular publication, *Sources of the Self*, he examines the history of human values, beliefs, and desires through the centuries up to the 20th century.¹ His insightful, realistic glimpse of society enables readers to formulate their own thoughts about both the predispositions of today's modern Western civilization and its advantages and disadvantages. Among the most pressing problems with which Western society is currently struggling, the philosopher identifies three issues: individualism, leading to the vanishing "moral horizons,"² the primacy of instrumental reason, and the loss of real freedom. He points to the lack of definite action to restore environmental sustainability as one of their consequences. What is more, in the *Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor shows the ineffectiveness in dealing with the climate crisis as an implication of many broader issues that are considered harmful to postmodern society.³

Naess's ecosophy, which is the second key component of this paper alongside strong evaluations, is outlined as a personal philosophy of ecology, or an individual value system that places the deep reflection on the human role in environment high in the hierarchy. Naess, constructing the idea of ecosophy, understood its task as achieving harmony between human and nature, and leading one's life so as to obtain ecological wisdom.⁴ Ecosophy is also interpreted as a way of life or a

¹ See: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991), 10.

³ In order not to delve into specific problems related to the state of the planet, I will use popular expressions such as "environmental crisis," "environmental problems," etc. to refer to the totality of environmental issues we have been facing in recent decades, i.e. air pollution, deforestation, exploitation of non-renewable natural resources, factory farming of animals on a massive scale, etc.

⁴ Bill Devall, Alan Drengson, "Preface," in Arne Naess, *Deep Ecology of Wisdom. Explorations in Unities of Nature and Cultures. Selected Papers. The Selected Works of*

lifestyle driven by the slogan “simple in means, rich in ends.”⁵ A significant feature of ecosophy is the fact that everyone can have their own, there is no universal one. Ecosophy T, that is, the one Naess adapted for himself, is thoroughly discussed in his texts, so one can derive for oneself examples and possible understandings of ecosophy, as well as inspirations.

In the following article, I pay some attention to ecophilosophy itself, sometimes referred to as environmental ethics, as a field that is broader than and includes ecosophy.⁶ However, this text does not consider the rationale behind either side of major ecophilosophical issues, such as the naturalistic vision of the human being or the anthropocentrism of the world.⁷ For the sake of clarity, I adopt the concepts of applied sciences suggested by Naess and the claims of the need to change value judgments in order to preserve the balance of the environment presented by Taylor.

In the subsequent text, I explain why I have judged it legitimate to view ecosophy through the prism of strong evaluations. I mainly justify this by the ways in which both researchers understood values and the hierarchy of values. That is why the specific features of the two ideas are

Arne Naess, vol. X, ed. Harold Glasser, Alan Drengson (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), LXXV–LXXI.

⁵ Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88.

⁶ Luca Valera and Gabriel Vidal, “Pantheism, Panentheism, and ecosophy: getting back to Spinoza?” *Journal of Religion & Science* 57, no. 3 (September 2022): 546.

⁷ For example, George Sessions, Rolston Holmes III, and Freya Mathews have written about the most pressing issues in the philosophy of ecology (See, respectively: George Sessions, “Ecocentrism, Wilderness, and Global System Protection,” in *Environmental Philosophy: from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, 245–261; Rolston Holmes III, *Environmental Ethics. Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Freya Mathews, “Environmental Philosophy” in Graham Oppy, N. N. Trakakis, *History of Philosophy in Australia and New Zealand* (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, London: Springer Reference, 2014), 543–591.).

being compared to illustrate that even if they are not identical, it is still possible to adapt an ecosophy as a part of strong evaluations. I focus on showing Naess's and Taylor's theories as praxeological ideas, as their basis is the contemplation and assimilation of a certain value system for subsequent actions dictated by this reflection and systematization.

Strong evaluations vs. Taylor's approach to ecology

As an introduction to the study of strong evaluations and Charles Taylor's approach to the ecology issue, an important point should be noted. Despite his evident interest in the issue of ecology and locating it among the potential, even preferable, values for modern humanity, Taylor does not consider it at all on the philosophical level. He keeps bringing up ecology as an example of the problems or effects of the problems faced by economically developed areas. That said, Taylor does not define ecology, nor does he point to an aspect of human life which it is or could be associated with. At the same time, one of the most important Taylorian ideas is the notion of strong evaluations—an individual system of moral values. The researcher, however, doesn't suggest that one of them could be to live in a way that is consistent with the ideals of the environmental movements (sustainable use of natural resources, the assumption that not only people, but also flora and fauna have their rights, etc.). However, my goal in preparing this text is not to attempt to systematize the issue of ecology in the context of Taylor's philosophy, which would require a separate paper. Instead, the objective is to compare his strong evaluations to the concept of ecosophy—to indicate that the phenomenon of ecosophy may in fact be a part of strong evaluations or a form of their application.

In order to address the relationship between strong evaluations and understanding of environmental actions in Taylor's works, it is neces-

sary to begin with the very notion of strong evaluations and a strong evaluator. The philosopher creates both terms on the assumption that the morality generally accepted in a given circle of civilization is a certain guideline, a base, allowing a person to build their own hierarchy of values, characteristic only for that particular person. With that being said, every person has a certain depth and ability to reflect on their life and the capability to form themselves—Taylor calls this process self-definition.⁸ Thus, finding one's own value system means the need for deep self-reflection and consideration of one's moral views. The researcher recognizes finding one's own value system as reaching a state of authenticity, as this phenomenon is about self-insight and self-understanding (here, a problematic phrase is used—"being themselves"⁹), whereby the very process of reaching authenticity Taylor views positively, and the achievement of authenticity—perfection.¹⁰ The outcome of self-insight, i.e., a well-structured, preferably for a lifetime, value system, constitutes Taylor's strong evaluations.

It should be noticed that the very existence of an individual moral system calls into question the adaptation of universal ethical principles. Despite culture-specific norms that are considered appropriate to follow to some extent, in today's world it is acceptable to set one's own goals rather than fulfill the only appropriate path suitable for one's gender, social class, etc.¹¹ Taylor stipulates that even similar moral principles come from different sources, although such pluralism of moral sources is sometimes being questioned. Yet, if one accepts the

⁸ Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 54.

⁹ This issue is addressed, for example, by T. Scarlet Jory (T. Scarlet Jory, "Living a Re-Enchanted Life: Contemporary Paganism and Re-Enchantment," *Secular Ethics* 632 (June 2016), 9–11.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 15–29.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, "Ethics and Ontology," *The Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 6 (June 2003): 305.

Canadian researcher's premise, it should be noted in doing so that he simultaneously strongly opposes the relativization of values and he criticizes the increasingly common attempts to subjectivize significant things.¹² He urges attention to the importance of the issue at hand—it is the significance of the problem that is supposed to draw the line. If the issue is of minor importance, if it depends on people's preferences, it can be subjective and relative. On the other hand, when a matter is significant, it cannot be relativized, but it should be considered within the objective circumstances, without taking into account someone's opinions. At the same time, he recognizes that

[t]here is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's.¹³

The question of the scope of strong evaluations is often posed by scholars studying Taylor's works. Some concerns arise over the development of the idea of strong evaluations between the first records of them and more recent publications.¹⁴ Researchers are not united in their interpretation of Taylor's statements. In addition, in a side-by-side discussion of what the concept's author sees among the strong evaluations, there is also an exchange of opinions about what Taylor's audience would like to include in the strong evaluations. The philosopher himself characterizes strong evaluations through the figure of a strong evaluator, for example, as follows:

¹² Arto Laitinen, "A Critique of Charles Taylor's Notions of 'Moral Sources' and 'Constitutive Goods'," in *Moral realism*, ed. Jussi Kotkavirta, Michael Quante, *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 76 (2004), 84–86.

¹³ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 28–29.

¹⁴ See: Jane Forsey, "Creative Expression and Human Agency: A Critique of the Taylorian Self," *Symposium* vol. 9, issue 2 (Fall 2005): 289–312.

The strong evaluator envisages his alternatives through a richer language. The desirable is not only defined for him by what he desires, or what he desires plus a calculation of consequences; it is also defined by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base, and so on. Reflection is not just a matter, where it is not calculation of consequences, of registering the conclusion that alternative A is more attractive to me, or draws me more than B. Rather the higher desirability of A over B is something I can articulate if I am reflecting as a strong evaluator. I have a vocabulary of worth.¹⁵

One of the broader definitions, based on Taylor's texts, came from Arto Laitinen, who has worked on Taylor's ideas more than once, and he puts the issue as follows:

First, strong evaluation covers moral but also other values; second, it covers categorical but also optional values; third, strong evaluation refers both to one's views of what is good in general (the moral map) and to one's own particular commitments (orientation on the map).¹⁶

In the very words of both Taylor and Laitinen above, one can see the similarity of Taylor's strong evaluations and Naess's ecosophy: self-reflection about desires and needs, self-consciousness and the ability to name values and moral considerations, obligations next to opinions. Moreover, both ecosophy and strong evaluations are rooted in reflections of a moral nature, and both concern the wholeness of human life, all its aspects.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 23–24.

¹⁶ Arto Laitinen, *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources: on Charles Taylor's Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 34.

Although there are no direct references to ecosophy or a more in-depth analysis of the relationship with the environment in Taylor's works, Taylor's keen interest in the issue of ecology is one of the main reasons for this paper. The scholar, as I mentioned earlier, assumes that the environmental crisis we are currently facing is caused by human egoism. This egoism drove us away from living in harmony with nature and, as a result, we began to exploit nature for our own needs beyond any measure, and now when knowledge about the state of the environment is widely available, the individualistic attitude in people is so deep that we are unable to go beyond our own and our loved ones' needs and desires in order to unite in counteracting the crisis.

The essence of ecosophy

To characterize the nature of ecosophy, I will start from Naess's distinction between shallow and deep ecology. The Norwegian researcher stresses that deep ecology is not intended to be a philosophical concept, a concept that has the characteristics of science, but it is meant to be a social movement. In accordance with this intention, he therefore avoids giving a definition of deep ecology, and rather aims to convey the goals that should guide the movement's members. However, in the simplest terms, shallow ecology is the mere act of working towards the improvement of the environment (mainly to make people's lives better/healthier/longer), while deep ecology also implies giving thought to these actions and their sensibility. At the same time, it does not recognize the supremacy of mankind in the world, so it embraces concern for the planet for its own sake and for the sake of other creatures living on it.¹⁷

¹⁷ Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," in *Environmental Philosophy: from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 193–211.

Keeping in mind that ecosophy is built in the spirit of the social movement of deep ecology, both of them can be even more systematized. That is because both categories created by Naess have their roots in ecophilosophy, known interchangeably as the philosophy of ecology. Nevertheless, the philosopher claims that ecosophy is only inspired by ecology itself, and does not necessarily derive from it.¹⁸ Naess calls ecology an eco-science, while he names ecosophy an eco-wisdom, thus declaring ecosophy more important than ecology itself.¹⁹ At the same time, ecosophy, in a way, is contained in ecophilosophy, because while ecophilosophy in Naess's understanding deals with issues on the borderline between ecology and philosophy (issues that connect the two fields), ecosophy analyzes the human being among these issues.²⁰ Although, we may encounter numerous versions of ecophilosophy depending on whether we take the common Western definition or one of the European ones, the reason for the birth of ecophilosophy in different parts of the world was the reflection on the early destruction of the environment and the increased human sensitivity. From concerns about massive deforestation and resource exhaustion, through research on the ozone hole and the human impact on climate change, to the latest calculations illustrating how much mankind and the Earth could gain if people switched to veganism—nowadays, philosophers interested in the state of the planet and in the status of humans in the perspective of the climate threat accompany all these reports. They wonder not so much what we should do as a soci-

¹⁸ Arne Naess, "How My Philosophy Seemed to Develop," in: *Arne Naess, Reason, Democracy, and Science. Understanding Among Conflicting Worldviews. Selected Papers. The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, vol. IX, ed. Harold Glasser, Alan Drengson (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 315.

¹⁹ Arne Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy, from Science to Wisdom," *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research*, vol. 27, no. 2–4 (1989): 185.

²⁰ Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, 36–40.

ety, but why we have found ourselves in this situation, and how these conditions affect the understanding of the person in the world.

The origins of the philosophy of ecology are not clear, but some scholars nevertheless undertake a search for the first mentions of the field. Thus, based for example on the output of Luc Ferry, we can assume that ecophilosophy is already at least several decades old. With that said, hesitations about the anthropocentric vision of the world can be found as early as Rousseau,²¹ whereas George Sessions signals the emergence of the ecological revolution in the 1960s, which was supposed to be one of the reasons for philosophers' increased interest in the subject.²²

While the above paragraph brings to mind primarily the ethical aspect of ecology, Naess, the founder of ecosophy, assumes that ethics is not the main pillar on which his theory is based. He indicates that in his view, at its very roots, ecosophy is primarily an ontological rather than an ethical issue.²³ Naess stresses that the philosophy of ecology is really not about ethics, i.e., what actions are good and what are bad, but about the very understanding of what role the human being plays in the world. The ontological reflection here is that: rather than talking about reality or the world, eco-philosophical thinking proceeds in

²¹ Luc Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique – l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1998).

²² George Sessions, "Introduction," in *Environmental Philosophy. From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1993): 165–182.

²³ Naess's strong opinion on the ontological aspect of ecosophy is often discussed. Although some agree with this standpoint, many scholars argue that even though Naess have been insisted on it, it does not always mirror the reality of his ecosophical theory. For example Teea Kortemäki supports Naess's claim (T. Kortemäki, "Is Broad the New Deep in Environmental Ethics? A Comparison of Broad Ecological Justice and Deep Ecology." *Ethics & The Environment*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016), 103.), while Val Plumwood opposes it (Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism." *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1991), 23).

terms of nature, and humanity's relation to nature.²⁴ At the same time, Naess sees ecology's links to every aspect of life and to politics. With a simple example, he shows that each of our actions in today's world has an impact on politics, and this, after all, can result in a turn to nature or vice versa. As he states:

Ecopolitics is concerned not only with specifically ecological activity, but with every aspect of life.²⁵

He suggests that, ideally, every ecologically engaged person should also have to deal with politics—which shows the theoretical dimension of Naess' ecological outlook, that is, going beyond individual pro-environmental actions. This premise is reflected in Taylor's philosophy, as he believes that everyone should get involved in society, even if only locally, such as a neighborhood council or neighborly concern for the condition of the street where one lives.

Therefore, Naess coined a new term—ecosophy—intended to be a philosophy of the ecology of a single person. The concept still does not seem to be particularly popular, but it has managed to win supporters as well as attract critics (who believe, for example, that ecology should not be associated with philosophy at all, but even replace the latter as it is capable of forging a new relationship between human beings and the world).²⁶ Ecosophy is the human relationship to the environment, taking into account its nature, needs and rights—starting from the conviction that it is possible to speak about the rights of nature. It also assumes that a person, guided by their own ecosophy, ranks nature in their hierarchy of values no lower than their short-term needs and

²⁴ Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, 35.

²⁵ Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, 130.

²⁶ François Laruelle, *The Last Humanity: The New Ecological Science* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 65–88.

desires. The essence of ecosophy is an individual relation to nature, one's own reflection on it, at the same time not confined to the theoretical sphere. Its value manifests itself only in the practical sphere, just like any moral indicator, although ecosophy is not one-dimensional and happens to be problematic.²⁷ Ecosophy, as its name implies, emerged from the combination of two terms: ecology and philosophy—philosophy defined as

one's own personal code of values and a view of the world which guides one's own decisions.²⁸

Ecosophy as a part of strong evaluations

A holistic approach to environmental protection is becoming a necessity. So-called “green solutions” no longer characterize single sectors but are becoming part of our everyday lives. The necessity of implementing “green changes” is no longer caused only by top-down directives of international organizations or by government resolutions, but also, to a large extent, thanks to social pressure, which was already described three decades ago by Luc Ferry.²⁹ The efforts of organizations and individuals who have decided to fight for the environment have already gone beyond small street demonstrations. The worldwide web has made it possible to access and share information like never before, providing an opportunity for environmentally engaged people to interact with each other. This has resulted in boycotts of products or

²⁷ Ambra Troiano has written on the non-obvious nature of practical ecosophy (Ambra Troiano, “Arne Naess: un'ecosofia tragica” [Arne Naess: A tragic ecosophy] *Ethics in Progress* 10, no. 1 (2019): 142–152).

²⁸ Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, 36.

²⁹ Luc Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique – l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme*, 140–144.

companies that do not incorporate the new standards, or petitions to governments signed by tens of thousands of people. Such social mobilizations seem to strengthen human bonds and even cause human beings to find themselves renewed in “something greater,” in Taylor’s words, “as part of a larger order.”³⁰ This broader order would also imply the existence “of a higher purpose, of something worth dying for,”³¹ which we lost with the disenchantment of the world (belief in some cosmic order, in supernatural powers ruling the world). It is difficult to speak of environmental priority as a value for which one sacrifices one’s life, but it is certainly a certain effort and a relinquishment of many goods and comforts of the 21st century. The postulate of a convergence between ecosophy and strong evaluations is reflected in the way the creator of the term refers to ecosophy. He calls ecosophy a “personal matter” and explains:

If you listen to your nature and essence as a human being you will find that nature or essence of the human being is such that joy elicits joy and sorrow elicits sorrow. After birth, things can go very wrong so that you can have what Spinoza called slave and passive affects, that is to say affects that are not developing human nature but are developing other affects like hatred and envy. Passive affects are in the sense that they don’t develop human nature. Instead of “negative” the term “passive” is used, which is a very curious choice. There, in light of Spinoza, I think I am an optimist about human nature and essence. It is after birth that something happens to get people to be hateful. [...] in an Ecosophy, you start with norms that indicate where you stand and these norms are imperatives yet they are worked on a personal level.³²

³⁰ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 3.

³¹ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 4.

³² Arne Naess, “Arne Naess on Deep Ecology and Ethics” (Interview), *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 36 (2002), 114.

As per strong evaluations here is a passus from Taylor's work:

To be a strong evaluator is thus to be capable of a reflection which is more articulate. But it is also in an important sense deeper. A strong evaluator, by which we mean a subject who strongly evaluates desires, goes deeper, because he characterizes his motivation at greater depth. [...] Motivations or desires do not only count in virtue of the attraction of the consummations but also in virtue of the kind of life and kind of subject that these desires properly belong to.³³

Although Taylor does not unambiguously declare that a human being is intrinsically a good being, and such a tendency can be seen in Naess, a great role is played in the Canadian philosopher's work by an understanding of the true self, and this cognition is supposed to be the condition for discovering one's morality—through an authentic approach to oneself. Thus, by glorifying a certain figure of the "true self," he approaches Naess's optimistic view of a human being.

Moreover, Naess's ecological self seems to coincide with Taylor's authentic self. Just as the Canadian philosopher sees the achievement of a state of authenticity as a process to understand one's self, reflect on one's own moral system, aspirations and conditions of one's self, for Naess the ecological self is the result of a journey of maturation and total openness to the other, which process he calls *self-realization*—the ultimate principle of ecosophy. "Self-realization involves a rich and joyful experience of reality,"³⁴ comments Ambra Troiano. In doing so, she highlights the positive connotations associated with self-realization and self-discovery. What becomes problematic in the confrontation of these two concepts is only the usage of the term

³³ Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 25.

³⁴ Ambra Troiano, "Arne Naess: un'ecosofia tragica," 148. [my translation]

self-realization, which in Taylor's case is seen more as the selfish fulfillment of desires, related to a career or private life (he calls suicidal that variety of "mode of fulfillment that denies our ties to others"³⁵). Naess, however, regards self-realization as self-awareness, a state akin to Taylorian authenticity, rather than a blind pursuit of fame, career, or material things. The nature of self-realization in Naess's works is explained by Chia-Ling Wang, emphasizing that this process, according to the philosopher, is equivalent to the path of identification, i.e. understanding oneself—which would almost put an equal sign with authenticity.³⁶

We should recall that strong evaluations are based on generally accepted moral norms, but each person on their own should consider what is a priority for them. At this point, I would like to introduce the next concepts used by Taylor—hypergood and ordinary/common good.³⁷ The distinction between the two terms lies in the importance we place on the issue at hand. In case we consider several activities as morally good and worth pursuing, one of them will be superior to us and will guide all our other choices. Hypergood thus takes place when speaking about

goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about.³⁸

Other goods are naturally not a top priority in that case. Sometimes this means less effort put into "ordinary goods" than into hypergoods,

³⁵ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 41.

³⁶ Chia-Ling Wang, "Towards Self Realisation: Exploring the ecological self for education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 12 (2016), 1259.

³⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 62–75.

³⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, 63.

but the contribution is still significant. In other cases, setting such a clear priority results in only minimal action to realize lower-level goods, or no effort at all. Yet, at the same time, because these things are important to us in some way, even in the absence of action, it is possible to speak of the realization of common good by respecting and supporting others in their efforts to achieve this particular good. The already mentioned Laitinen explains these issues using the example of ecology, which makes this illustration very functional for the topic of this paper. Namely, he explains that

[...] some people have dedicated their lives to a fight for ecological reformation, and their hypergood is related to environmental values. Certain other people pursue these values in various aspects of their lives, but subordinate these goals to family life or their career. Yet others do not really pursue environmental values, but try to respect them, making it possible for others to pursue such values. And the rest may still answer, when asked, that in principle they find environmental values important, although their way of life attests to the contrary.³⁹

Strong evaluations thus take into account both hypergoods and ordinary goods. Ecosophy clearly puts the environment first in the hierarchy of values, so if one were to adapt ecosophy as one's strong evaluations, then nature would be absolutely hypergood. However, ecosophy is a whole complex system, a heterogeneous system, within which one can independently designate the primary matters and those that we care about but do not prioritize. Although the whole of ecosophy must be based on a deep consideration of human beings in nature, it is still up to the person adapting ecosophy to determine the essentials—the hypergoods.

³⁹ Arto Laitinen, *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources: on Charles Taylor's Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics*, 43.

At the same time, let's remember that within the framework of strong evaluations, both "ordinary" goods and hypergoods are constituted by the weight of the good. Not every choice, not every decision, even with ethical consequences afterwards, has a real impact on the formation of personality, but only the one concerning some important matter.⁴⁰

The other side of the coin is doing something because "it's the right thing to do." Taylor believes that just acting, whether for the sake of applause or acting with full knowledge that it will bring some good, is not *de facto* being good. Only the love for that thing to which we dedicate our good actions entitles us to be good ("being good involved loving something and not just doing something"⁴¹). This is also what ecosophy is about—not the action itself, aimed at protecting nature, as that is what all ecology is about, but changing one's attitude and deriving goodness and satisfaction from it:

Without a change in consciousness, the ecological movement is experienced as a never-ending list of reminders: "shame, you mustn't do that" and "remember, you're not allowed to...". With a change in mentality we can say "think how wonderful it will be, if and when...", "look there! What a pity that we haven't enjoyed that before..." If we can clean up a little internally as well as externally, we can hope that the ecological movement will be more of a renewing and joy-creating movement.⁴²

What distinguishes ecosophy from other pro-environmental movements is that it is simply not a call to action. Instead, it is a way of thinking about the world, taking into account the beauty, goodness and value

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 31–41.

⁴¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 534.

⁴² Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, 91.

of the environment. Taylor through his strong evaluations also does not call for specific actions, although he has an opinion on what could improve the condition of modern society. Instead, he points to deep self-reflection in order to know oneself and determine the important things.

Application of ecosophy within a framework of strong evaluations

Taylor clearly understands ecological issues differently from Naess, as he starts from a different base assumption. However, ecology is important to the Canadian researcher, and he repeatedly refers in his writings to the natural and environmental problems we currently face as a result of decades of neglect. This situation is supposed to be the result of broader human frailties: selfishness, inability to see long-term consequences, materialism. That said, Taylor is convinced that a change in the perception of the world—also through reflection and the development of one’s own strong evaluations—entailing the healing of the three maladies of today’s human beings (individualism, the primacy of instrumental reason, and the loss of real freedom) and the finding of one’s own strong evaluations through deep self-reflection, would result in the very improvement of the planet’s condition.

The novelty of the confluence of the two theories under discussion lies in the attempt to modify the direction in which Taylor’s thinking about ecology goes, and to show that treating the issue of care for the planet (understood as a reflection on the use of nature’s goods) as a value in itself, fits in with the idea of strong evaluations. Although Taylor emphasizes the flaws of modern society, he understands the current reality, sometimes even accepts it. He does not try to bring back the past, but rather draw on former good practices. At the same time, he speaks with sentiment about the “enchanted” times. He uses here Weber’s term for an era in which

the world was full of ghosts, demons and moral forces.⁴³

He is somewhat nostalgic about the times (he cites the 1500s as an example) when, in the West, belief in the Christian God was taken for granted and morality was almost the same for the entire community. At the time, people saw themselves in a certain cosmic order, they felt they were just a part of the great divine image, he says.⁴⁴ My hypothesis, which I only want to hint at in this paper, is that adopting ecosophy into one's value system can bring back some of the "enchanted" times, as it gives a sense of a definite place in the world and of rights and duties to the nature that surrounds human beings, and removes the burden of focusing on individualism of the person, which Taylor condemns, and shifts it to communal living among other living beings and inanimate nature.

Ecosophy is not only theoretical. Although the basis of this "life philosophy" is the axiological dimension adopted for one's own life, it should be reflected in actual actions. The praxeological dimension of adopting ecology into one's moral code also lies in the actual possibility of improving the living conditions of a person and their offspring, thereby gaining a relatively near-term benefit. Such a view of ecosophy is not entirely reflected in the theory of strong evaluations, since by definition they should be concerning something "above us," but it seems that the potential benefit to me and my loved ones achieved in a few decades does not necessarily contradict the assumption of strong evaluations, since it is not a short-term effect, while bringing later—after the immediate benefit—harm. Alongside this, it is worth emphasizing again that ecosophy is an individual value system, and Naess speaks in the

⁴³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap University Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 26.

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25–89.

plural when referring to the ecosophy of different people: he has his ecosophy T, I may have a separate ecosophy e.g. ecosophy J.⁴⁵ However, the multitude of ecosophy assumes, of course, that the universal, supreme value is the recognition of the equality of human beings with the rest of the Earth's inhabitants according to each ecosophy. This individual nature of ecosophy makes it seem as if the adoption of ecosophy belongs to the rights of modern man—rights that Taylor observes:

We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn't control.⁴⁶

At the same time, he identifies negative issues in this freedom of choice, because amid such widespread individualism there is a lack of ideas worth living and dying for. For Taylor, today's world lacks transcendence, exceeding the here and now, while comprehending itself as a whole. Joanna Hładynowicz captures this longing of the Canadian philosopher in the following way:

Taylor identifies morality and community as two dimensions that enable people to constitute their own subjectivity, as they lead to self-determination. These dimensions, along with the language inherent in the community, are transcendental conditions (conditions of possibility) for the construction and integration of identity.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Naess explains the details of his own ecosophy, among other places, here: Arne Naess, "Paul Fayerabend—a green hero?" in: Arne Naess, *Deep Ecology of Wisdom. Explorations in Unities of Nature and Cultures. Selected Papers. The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, vol. X, edited by Harold Glasser and Alan Dregson, (Netherlands: Springer 2005), 505–507.

⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 2.

⁴⁷ Joanna Hładynowicz, "Mojość, Inny, Świat. Analiza porównawcza filozofii Charles'a Taylora oraz Martina Heideggera [Self, Other, World. A comparative analysis

In a way, Naess responds to this need for transcendence in Taylor's terms, despite his clearly individualistic understanding of value, pointing out that understanding nature, becoming one with nature in a way bears the hallmarks of mysticism and exceeds human interest itself.⁴⁸

At this point it is yet essential to mention the phenomenon that Taylor calls qualitative distinctions. It has already been said that strong evaluations are about moral choices, and not about the whole authentic personality, discovered in the process of self-understanding. Simultaneously, the researcher also signals that not every choice is relevant. Thus, qualitative distinctions suggest the importance of a given problem and are used to indicate which decision counts in the moral equation. While strong evaluations allow us to set a goal, qualitative distinctions are responsible for prioritizing the problems around us.⁴⁹ In this perspective, each should answer individually whether ecology is important in relation to such guidelines as: being a good person in general, caring for one's homeland, defending one's faith, etc. On the premise that environmental action is about sacrificing something for the greater good (for the peaceful lives of future generations, for the preservation of the Earth we walk on, or for other beings in the world), we can consider that the criterion of qualitative distinctions tells us that environmental choices are important in their entirety—if one unrecycled bottle doesn't tip the scales, the daily, multi-year choice of consuming tap water instead of bottled water already matters. In this perspective, this one bottle is insignificant, and with the ability to make qualitative distinctions we are able to adjudicate this, but the same element repeated daily throughout life acquires significance through a scale of frequency.

of the philosophy of Charles Taylor and Martin Heidegger]", *Hybris* 55 (2021), 47 [my translation].

⁴⁸ Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*, 173–177.

⁴⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 19–24.

Conclusion

Taylor's strong evaluations are a well-known idea that has been described many times—in the several decades since it was presented, it continues to inspire appreciation as well as criticism at times—and it seems to contain material for further consideration, perhaps, as in this case, for showing new possible meanings and applications. On the other hand, the issue of ecosophy is known almost exclusively in the field of ecophilosophy or deep ecology and is not addressed in other branches of philosophy.⁵⁰ I do believe that more interest in the topic could be beneficial because of how the importance and popularity of living in a so-called ecologically sustainable way is growing, and because of the multidimensionality of ecosophy—after all, it is concerned with human moral values, which are pondered by many areas of philosophy. With that said, although ecosophy is primarily about putting the environment high in the hierarchy of values, the actual actions that flow from being guided not only by the immediate well-being of humans have their origins in the natural sciences. It is thanks to physics, biology or geosciences that we are aware of the human impact on the state of the planet and have the knowledge of how to improve the situation. As Harold Glasser says about the creator of the concept of ecosophy:

Naess's mature philosophical approach and contribution are shaped by full engagement with a relational reality.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The basic premises of the deep ecology movement are briefly presented by Lesley Le Grange (Lesley La Grange, "Ubuntu/Gotho as Ecophilosophy and Ecosophy," *Journal of Human Ecology*, 49 no. 3 (2015), 303–304).

⁵¹ Harold Glasser, *Series Editor's Introduction*, in Arne Naess, ed. Harold Glasser, *Communication and Argument. Elements of Applied Semantics. The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, vol VII, (Netherlands: Springer 2005), XV.

Naess derived his reflections on ecophilosophy from observations of reality, but on the other hand, he worked to put these reflections into practice.

I consider the possibility of adopting one's own ecosophy within the framework of strong evaluations legitimate for reasons of convergence of key elements of both ideas and the real possibility of including ecosophy among strong evaluations. One of them is Naess' and Taylor's common assumption about the frailty of modern society and the positive effects on nature (and ourselves at the same time) in case of a radical change in the hierarchy of values and approach to the world. The next point is about deep reflection on oneself, on oneself in the world around us, and on one's values. Both researchers advocate looking into oneself and understanding what kind of person one is and what kind of person one wants to be. Despite their different understanding of the terms they use, such as self-realization, they similarly grasp the importance of self-reflection, which is of great importance to both ideas. In addition, in general, they tend to coincide in their perception of "self." In the text, I compared Naess's "ecological self" with Taylor's "authentic self." These are not the same concepts, naturally, but both authors value in their definitions of the self the truthfulness of the person, their self-understanding and following a thoughtful path that is good for themselves and those around them. On top of that, there are such elements as the applicability of the gradability of values (hyper-good and ordinary good) in ecosophy, the categorization of important and unimportant things (qualitative distinctions) in building a value system, and individualism in constructing one's own hierarchy. Perhaps the most important clue associating ecosophy with strong evaluations is the aspect of values.

Thus, it seems that if one looks at ecosophy through the lens of strong evaluations and considers the application of ecosophy among strong evaluations, such a prospect can benefit the development of both these important contemporary concepts. It was Taylor who,

describing the roots of ethics of authenticity, wrote that morality “has in a sense, a voice within” and, in order to understand it, it is not enough to carry out a profit and loss analysis, because it is feelings that often dictate certain moral behavior.⁵²



What Do Arne Naess and Charles Taylor Have in Common, or About Ecosophy as Strong Evaluations

SUMMARY

Ecological life choices, influenced by the individual morality-driven reflection on nature, ecosophy, seems to be a perfect embodiment of Charles Taylor’s strong evaluations. The purpose of the following text is to establish the linkage between these two, seemingly entirely separate concepts, which have never before been brought side by side. The article portrays ecosophy as a possible part of the strong evaluations. It also indicates the relationship between the theoretical and practical dimension of the two concepts, which not only have the possibility of coexisting within the same person, but also mutually reinforce each other’s realizations. To explore the issue, I primarily used selected publications by the authors mentioned in the title: Arne Naess and Charles Taylor. It was the analysis of these works that led me to the thesis of the application of one term in the other and to the final conclusions and doubts. The latter, concerning, among other things, the differences in the understanding of particular words used by the two contemporary philosophers, will become a trigger for further consideration of the applications of strong evaluations. These doubts will also open the door to a discussion of ecosophy on a different ground than up until now.

Keywords: strong evaluations, ecosophy, values, authenticity, morality, Charles Taylor, Arne Naess, deep ecology, ecophilosophy

⁵² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 26.

REFERENCES

- FERRY, Luc. *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique – l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme* [The New Ecological Order]. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1998.
- FORSEY, Jane. "Creative Expression and Human Agency: A Critique of the Taylorian Self." *Symposium*, vol. 9, issue 2 (Fall 2005): 289–312.
- GLASSER, Harold. "Series Editor's Introduction, in Arne Naess." In *Communication and Argument. Elements of Applied Semantics. The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, vol VII, edited by Harold Glasser, XI–LV. Netherlands: Springer, 2005.
- HŁADYNOWICZ, Joanna. "Mojość, Inny, Świat. Analiza porównawcza filozofii Charles'a Taylora oraz Martina Heideggera" [Self, Other, World. A comparative analysis of the philosophy of Charles Taylor and Martin Heidegger], *Hybris* 55 (2021): 45–61.
- HOLMES III, Rolston. *Environmental Ethics. Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.
- JORY, T. Scarlet. "Living a Re-Enchanted Life: Contemporary Paganism and Re-Enchantment." *Secular Ethics* 632 (June 2016): 9–11.
- KORTEMÄKI, Teea. "Is Broad the New Deep in Environmental Ethics? A Comparison of Broad Ecological Justice and Deep Ecology." *Ethics & The Environment*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016), 89–108.
- LAITINEN, Arto. "A Critique of Charles Taylor's Notions of 'Moral Sources' and 'Constitutive Goods'." In *Moral Realism*, edited by Jussi Kotkavirta and Michael Quante. *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 76 (2004): 74–104.
- . *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources: On Charles Taylor's Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter (2008).
- LARUELLE, François. *The Last Humanity: The New Ecological Science*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.
- LA GRANGE, Leslie. "Ubuntu/Gotho as Ecophilosophy and Ecosophy." *Journal of Human Ecology* 49, no. 3 (2015): 301–308.
- MATHEWS, Freya. "Environmental Philosophy" In Graham Oppy, N. N. Trakakis, *History of Philosophy in Australia and New Zealand* (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, London: Springer Reference, 2014), 543–591.

- NAESS, Arne. *Ecology, community and lifestyle. Outline of an ecosophy*. Translated by David Rothenberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- . “From Ecology to Ecosophy, from Science to Wisdom.” *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research*, vol. 27, no. 2–4 (1989): 185–190.
- . “How My Philosophy Seemed to Develop.” In: Arne Naess, *Reason, Democracy, and Science. Understanding Among Conflicting Worldviews. Selected Papers. The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, vol. IX, edited by Harold Glasser, Alan Dregson. Netherlands: Springer 2005.
- . “Paul Fayerabend—a green hero?” In Arne Naess, *Deep Ecology of Wisdom. Explorations in Unities of Nature and Cultures. Selected Papers. The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, vol. X, edited by Harold Glasser and Alan Dregson, 449–511. Netherlands: Springer, 2005.
- . “The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects.” In *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, edited by Michael E. Zimmerman, 193–211. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (1993).
- PLUMWOOD, Val. “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism.” *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1991): 3–27.
- SESSIONS, George. “Ecocentrism, Wilderness, and Global System Protection,” In *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, edited by Michael E. Zimmerman, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (1993): 245–261.
- . “Introduction.” In *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, edited by Michael E. Zimmerman, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (1993): 165–182.
- TAYLOR, Charles. *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap University Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- . “Ethics and Ontology.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 6 (June 2003): 305–320.
- . *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

-
- . *Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- . *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- . *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- TROIANO, Ambra. “Arne Naess: un’ecosofia tragica” [Arne Naess: A tragic ecosophy]. *Ethics in Progress* 10, no. 1 (2019):142–152.
- VALERA, Luca, and Gabriel Vidal. “Pantheism, Panentheism and Ecosophy: getting back to Spinoza?” *Journal of Religion & Science* 57, no. 3 (September 2022): 545–563.
- WANG, Chia-Ling. “Towards Self Realisation: Exploring the ecological self for education.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 12 (2016): 1256–1265.