Spinoza, Deep Ecology, and Human Diversity—Schizophrenics and Others Who Could Heal the Earth If Society Realized Eco-Literacy

November 2010 revision

Within its metaphysics of "Nature," and with its approach to emotional bondage and self-realization, Spinoza's *Ethics* can be read as a manual for psychological coherence, a state marked by the stable expression of innate freedoms and the flourishing of mental life beyond imaginative fancy. In the twentieth century, Spinoza's work provides a robust philosophical foundation for deep ecological thinking, because of its influence upon and comparison with contemporary systems theory, holistic and multidisciplinary approaches, integrative scientific reasoning, and methods toward reaching productive and beneficial realizations of the relation of self to nature. Spinoza spoke with the *Ethics* to his time and social context, but glimmers of contemporary contentions, arguments, and conceptual systems can be glimpsed today in his articulation of the human path to emotional and cognitive self-realization. He referred to an active love of "Nature or God", two words overtly interchangeable in the text, and in this respect compares to new age environmentalism, which sometimes ponders that all life and creation is part of a natural yet sacred unity. At the same time, uniquely, Spinoza and contemporary thinkers support the pursuit of active freedom in emotional expression and a disposition to intuitive, conscious interrelation of the self with other entities inside nature. Spinoza associated these virtues of sustained, positive relations with the development of "adequate ideas" or the reasonably and reliably ascertained knowledge of the constitution of the self and nature, and they are increasingly needed for humanity.

At this juncture of human development, in this world with its issues, the words of a preeminent ecological writer hold so much weight: "the transition to a sustainable future is no longer a technical nor a conceptual problem. It is a problem of values and political will."[1] In Spinozist language, it is a problem of "passive emotions": of endeavouring to fulfil desires that are based in inadequate imaginings and a lack of interconnected, well rooted, or conscious values. In *The Hidden Connections*, Director for the Centre of eco-literacy Fritjof Capra extends an emerging contemporary theory of life systems "to the social domain" by presenting "a conceptual framework that integrates life's biological, cognitive and social dimensions".[2] The framework constitutes a systems-oriented, interconnectionist, holistic, and ecological

---

1   Capra, Fritjof, *The Hidden Connections—A Science for Sustainable Living*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 257.

2   Capra, *The Hidden Connections,* xv.

perspective of biological life, consciousness, and the feedback between these two. Capra's framework has several implications for "the social domain," and thus implications for the feedback between ecosystems of human ideas and the ecosystems of biological Earth.

One set of strong claims Capra makes is about "the profound impact of the machine metaphor on the theory and practice of management," indirectly speaking of general cultural organization.[3] In its more extreme forms, the machine metaphor regards all systems, including the living, as fundamentally mechanical, or dynamically contingent only on forces and conditions of an external and causally complete and causally isolated extended nature. The penultimate mechanical theory is the observer-independence or fundamental blindness of basic physical structure, which, as Capra argues, speaks also to automaton theories of cellular biology, theoretical presuppositions about organismal consciousness, and then further on to theories of social organization that give among other dubious conclusions "a view of [personnel and resource] management as engineering, based on precise technical design".[4]

When one takes "the view of organizations as living systems," however, including the conception of a healthy, life-filled planet as a complex arch-system of many subsystems of biological and psychological expression and interaction, one can "realize that [social organization] is capable of regenerating itself and that it will naturally change and evolve".[5] The tendency over time when inhabiting fortunate environments, of course, has been for living systems to grow ever more diverse and thus more dynamically expressive of bio-psychological powers. Capra endorses a view holding that social systems are part of the world's ecology and that human action enters into complex feedback mechanisms that in general will entail the successful adaptation and refinement of those social systems, or their failure and the way of the Dodo. One worrisome implication of Capra's theory about life and the machine metaphor is that certain cultural projects can stifle and homogenize otherwise adaptive, diverse systems. Many deem our age of consumerist modernity to result in economic and cultural monotony and lifestyle compulsion, like we're just part of some economic/ideological machine.[6]

---

3 Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 103.

4 Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 103.

5 Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 104.

6 If in need of examples, refer to any issue of Adbusters.org magazine, based in Vancouver, BC, Canada, for rich and dedicated perspectives on the issues of this essay).

Capra advises us to become " 'ecologically literate,' i.e., to understand the principles of organization, common to all living systems, that ecosystems have evolved to sustain the web of life".[7] Efforts to inspire eco-literacy, an adequate understanding of the general principles of life's organization, complement the related yet independent efforts of Deep Ecological thinkers to ground an ethical orientation to Nature in Spinoza's philosophy of the imaginative and of the active love. If we understand life adequately then we will aspire to love it, and a greater love of life will foster understanding. It even seems implicitly essential within the concepts of Deep Ecology that the relation within the preceding claim must have existence. In "Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement," a lecture delivered by Arne Naess at Katwijk in 1991, one ground for Deep Ecological thought emerges in Spinoza's figure of *amor intellectualis Dei*, or the intellectual love of God. Spinoza is very careful with what he takes to be the 'definitions' of concepts, because as a rationalist philosopher he builds upward from small, important beginnings to larger ideas and implications. God, to Spinoza according to Naess, is the immanent, eternal substance of all individual things, or simply Nature, but The *Ethics* furnishes no basis for assuming that the immanent God expresses its nature, essence, or power, in any other way than through each existent being. Therefore *amor intellectualis Dei* must *somehow* [by being a special kind] be a love of these existent particular beings of our everyday life —parts of the total richness and diversity of life forms on Earth.[8]

What Spinoza and Naess talked about could be expressed simply as mindfully loving Nature. More complexly, it is the understanding and love, for any living entity, as having an inherent capacity and potential to explore its birth right. By birth right I refer to the inherent features of life such as self-organization and homeostasis, to name a few, which life forms naturally express and in so doing evolve into beings of higher complexity.[9] Naess calls the intellectual love of God "more specifically a manifestation of love" or "a special kind of intuitive understanding of a particular thing which involves an internal love relation"[10] between oneself and every being in relationship with him or her. Spinoza aims to bring to his readers' lives active love over passive and imaginary love, which is ephemeral, fleeting, and fanciful rather

---

7 Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 230.

8 Naess, Arne, *Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement*, (Delft: Eburon, 1992), 5, his emphasis.

9 I am reminded of the Aristotelian principle of an entity's inherent virtue being the entity's pursuit of its own naturalistically understood conditions of excellence. A conscious entity's natural condition of excellence might be most simply conceived as its emotional love of Nature and an active pursuit of expressing itself.

10 Naess, *Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement*, 6.

than based in intuiting the deep relation of self to God/Nature and in participating in 'direct action' to express that relation. As Spinoza seems to have it, intuiting the relation of self to God invigorates the activity of the feelings and reasoning we have about life's personal and practical realities, by virtue of an ever-developing and loving connection between our human being, and the immanence of life—being an expression and pursuit of itself.

The active love of God/Nature that a human being should aspire to could be considered deeply as a brilliant expression of a human being's 'human nature,' such as intelligent understanding of ecosystems and the stewardship of them. We might be capable of it and it would be a pursuit of our ecological conditions of excellence. What Capra calls Nature's "principles of organization," Spinoza might think of as the "definite and determined expression of God's infinite power," to paraphrase the often used terminology in Part 1 of *Ethics*. I agree along the lines of Naess and Capra that Spinoza's "God" is no more and no less than the ecological totality of existing systems of beings, or what Spinoza called *Natura Naturans*, or Nature Naturing, and *Natura Naturata*, or Nature Natured. We should live in a deep, visceral, and intellectual communion with Nature. As the biological integrity of our world's history demonstrates, life systems can naturally flow toward the powerful expression of biological diversity and, we hope, into thriving, ecologically literate, and loving societies.

So? Connecting theory to practice has been a contentious issue in relation to Deep Ecological values and perspectives, such as the "Platform Principle" of Naess and George Sessions that the flourishing of non-human life is compatible with a significant decrease in the human population. Such an ethical concept makes sense to most reasonable debaters in terms of skyrocketing human population, dwindling biological resources, and a risk of intense climate and soil change; however, I have been routinely amazed in my experience of informal, somewhat heated arguments with people out there in the real world who are like me genuine agents of our social situation and its impact upon the ecosystem. The most common notions I encounter in certain sectors of the general public claim something along the following lines: 1) "They," my respondent says about everyone in general, "are going to do whatever they want no matter what they know." 2) "You," and my respondent really seems to mean me in particular, "cannot do anything about it." Just as Capra said, it is a matter of political value and will, and machine metaphors, and not at all a matter of adequate concepts or action plans. It is fundamentally a matter of psychological coherence whether people en masse can eventually make choices which defer what they want and reflect the reasoning and action they know is adequate and responsible. Spinoza would consider such a position the result of passive imagination that disregards the

exerting and expression of a growing and diversifying social reality compared to the one we presently manifest.

As I see it, Deep Ecologists may need a more fertile ground than purely physical-environmental philosophical and ethical arguments, which my above example illustrates, for leading people to check their fanciful values and passive actions.   Solidly, most people can immediately understand and accept the reasoning that ecosystems have creative powers and needs, and can accept that the health of the world's ecosystems actually provide the basis of our very survival. The passivity that treats Nature as an unwieldy machine of exploitative forces leads to the view that "no one can control or direct the necessary changes" as my passive interloper might have said. Since we understand perfectly the solution—unifying information, awareness, and involvement with the only reasonable actions that remain—the only way to lead people to correct their behaviour may be to stoke people to realize more about, and become more involved, with their inherent powers of emotion and intellect within Nature, rather than point to the world and to others, commonly considered distant, alien, and unimportant.

However, this understanding of self and God/Nature may have to be prodded forcefully, consistently, or at an early age in order to trip the switch in the brain that orients one with emotional love toward Nature and promote an interest in contributing to healthy ecosystems. I think of Gregory Bateson's warning that humans "are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself," in the essay "Pathologies of Epistemology," read at the Second Conference on Mental Health in Asia and the Pacific, 1969.[11]   It is "epistemological lunacy" that provides the "massive aggregation of threats to man and his ecological systems".[12] Bateson is speaking to therapists at a conference on mental health and is addressing the need to overcome "errors in our habits of thought at deep and partly unconscious levels" which affect individuals, cultures, and ecosystems.[13] Most poignantly to where I am taking this essay, the final remark of Bateson's essay states that "there are patches of sanity still surviving in the world[;]… some of the inarticulate efforts of our own young people are more sane than the conventions of the establishment".[14]

---

11 Gregory Bateson, ed. "Pathologies of Epistemology" from *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, (New York: Ballantine, 1972), 483.

12 Gregory Bateson, "Pathologies of Epistemology", 487.

13 Gregory Bateson, "Pathologies of Epistemology", 487.

14 Gregory Bateson, "Pathologies of Epistemology", 487.

I remember when I was freshly diagnosed by a psychiatrist as schizophrenic, and when I still didn't know it during my first hospitalization in the fall following high school, and my topmost priorities included picking up garbage and cigarette butts from the outside smoking area and discussing the ecological need of Earth for our growing responsible action and sentiment. I was also very concerned about the suffering I conceived in the destination of every siren that left the hospital, and I also wanted to focus on interpersonal connections between myself and others around me. For hours on the grass I cried with my mom, while reflecting on ethically problematic interactions and relations between myself and figures of my past. My mom tells me the reaction of every nurse who dealt with me was to acclaim my shining spirit of compassion and my respect for nature and the well-being of others. I didn't really know where I was, or where I had been the previous weeks, and I certainly didn't have a sense at all of my extreme emotions and severe disconnect from certain relevant, socially shared realities.

Basically, I had betrayed several cultural expectations for an appropriately functioning human individual. I was disorganized and distraught, but really, I was closer to expressing my most innate desires than when I was in high school, deteriorating into alienated angst and preoccupation about what Bateson would call pathologies of my culture's epistemology. I didn't like that "garbage duty" existed as a punishment for students who would come to tell me "someone gets paid for that" when I would spend my lunch hours cleaning the school yard. One intense moment was when a few students laughed at the sound of the accent of an elderly Jewish woman who was describing in a video interview how her parents were murdered in front of her as a child. That happened the day I 'dropped out' of classes and left a note saying I'd rather be dead than experiencing my socially shared reality, which my principal interpreted as a suicide note. To me, it was quite the release to get away from 'those people' and climb to the top of that hill and scream before the surging Pacific and the wind-swept rainforest. In the light of Bateson's perspective, I had a rough patch of ecstatic, compulsive sanity.

By no means was I in a state of mental order, but surely, I wasn't in any moral wrong to have the perception and desire that I did to find an escape, release, or difference from my social surround, or at least what my perspective held of it and emotionally generated in me. I feel it was healthy to have that specific visceral aversion to such terrible laughter, as those boys in History 12 had produced, but I want to explore my outburst intellectually from a systems-oriented perspective. As James Lovelock expresses in *The Revenge of Gaia*, "the biosphere [is] an active, adaptive control system able

to maintain the Earth in homeostasis".[15] It seems to me that my reaction to my teenage angst, particularly the outburst surrounding History class, was something like an "adaptive control" mechanism. My ideational structure dealt by erupting forcefully against the intense cognitive dissonance of keeping quiet in face of my perception of incredibly reprehensible apathy.

In his essay "Double Bind, 1969," Gregory Bateson explores potential reasons for the genesis of schizophrenia. To briefly explore Bateson's sophisticated theory of schizophrenia, he has a highly ecological perspective of it. During the exploration, think about the first severe symptom I remember in my case: I felt a lot of social angst growing in later high school, and to deal with it I laid the seeds for auditory hallucination by going into the woods and pacing while I would speak my mind and then imagine the responses. This symptom grew as my angst grew in feeling and intellectual complexity, partially through hashing out my issues with imaginary friends, and the pace of my mind sped up and new, aberrant forms of thought developed across my late high school experience and afterwards.

First of all, Bateson claims that "[a]ll biological systems (organisms and social or ecological organizations of organisms) are capable of adaptive change [that] takes many forms, such as response, learning, ecological succession, biological evolution, cultural evolution, etc., according to the size and complexity of the system which we choose to consider". Further, "[w]hatever the system, adaptive change depends upon *feedback loops*, be it those provided by natural selection or those of individual reinforcement". In the interaction of feedback between physiology, environment, and ideational structure, "we" or biological systems in general "not only solve particular problems but also form *habits* which we apply to the solution of *classes* of problems".[16]   For schizophrenics, the healthy mind becoming ill has the experience of a shifting to aberrant habits of meaning, idea, and mental capacity. This shift to full-blown schizophrenia is characterized by disconnect from various classes of established social contexts, such as quiet on my lips with a talking storm in my head when the subjects were present.

To Bateson it is a shifting likely to occur not only in terms of some gene's random expression, but in terms of adaptations of the organism, within certain internal and external environmental feedback. In addition, the feedback occurs to and within the same system that we find aberrant meanings, ideas, and mental capacities. That is, the shifts in psychological

---

15 James Lovelock, "What is Gaia?" in *The Revenge of Gaia*, (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2007), 22.

16 Gregory Bateson, "Double Bind, 1969" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, pp. 273-4, his emphasis.

function occur partly because of the impact and feedback of other psychological contexts. Specifically, Bateson writes that "experienced breaches in the weave of contextual structure are in fact 'double binds' and must necessarily (if they contribute to the… processes of learning and adaptation) promote what I am calling transcontextual syndromes".[17] In the essay "Minimal Requirements for a Theory of Schizophrenia", Bateson refers to the "schizophrenogenic" environment, an environment whose feedback loops have a potential to exert and maintain double binds.[18] For instance, the kids laughing in History 12 were merely laughing at the accent and not paying any attention at all, emotionally or intellectually, to other contexts of meaning. I, however, perceived that laughter as a breach of the appropriate context of a History class, especially in 2002 as the 'War on Terror' had just begun, as my grade 12 classes began, which being a world-scaled instance of war had basically set in flesh the context of my already developing social angst and intellectual anxieties, my talking storm and other growing numbers of symptoms. It simply hurt, in a deeply personally resonant manner, that just hours after those fateful planes hit those towers, already a few peers had complained "Stop talking about it, I've heard too much already." Such "experienced breaches in the weave of contextual structure" led me to all sorts of augmented behaviours and distorted ideas and feelings, which increased until I was a blubbering boy who could not care for anything except cleaning cigarette butts and negotiating diligent eco-literacy. I became utterly unable to sort out my thoughts and became a confusion of impulses, across a span of gradual deterioration and encounters with double binds.

Of course, Bateson's approach would probably find itself in much disrepute in our age of the pharmacopeia and so-called "medical model" of psychiatric illness. But even in the 60's Bateson knew enough about the inherently systemic nature of mind-body-environment that any proposed genomic or physiological/chemical disposition affirmed as the cause of schizophrenia still needed interconnection with and provocation by "internal" and "external" environments. Bateson's metaphysical assumptions are close to Spinoza's: anything which happens in the body is in some way identical with what happens in the mind. The mind and body are both aspects of a deeply and complexly organized life pattern. The medical model tends to represent schizophrenia as a brain disease, pure and simple, but I have to debate that. My own perspective and the testimony of countless 'survivors' of schizophrenia regard the obstacles and perseverance differently. Just as it makes sense to many schizophrenics to frame their symptoms in a context with meaning to the self, it is straightforward, given my particular

---

17 Gregory Bateson, "Double Bind, 1969" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 276.

18 Gregory Bateson, "Minimal Requirements for a Theory of Schizophrenia" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*.

interpretation and understanding of my experiences, to directly frame my illness in social and ecological terms.

Some of us tend to view our psychological symptoms as important parts of ourselves, even when we know there are forces, at odds within, which put us at a level of risk. Some of us tend to be proud of our perseverance, against those risks, and tend to relentlessly keep interpreting our symptoms, and engaging them. We might avoid developing the medical model's method of isolating proper functioning behaviours from dysfunctional behaviour, as though it were simple to do so, and viewing any deviance from normal and prescribed patterns as a potential reason to up the dose. Especially, it seems that the brain disease theories block out all potential for saying these psychological disturbances are in some cases an ecological adaptation within socially disturbed societies where abnormal psychological capabilities arise whose role to play and diversity in our species are inherently valuable.[19] The shape of the role of abnormal psychology is manifold, as successful as reactions to it can happen to integrate with the situation and resolve some contextual breach. Of course, there may be some cases when genes conspire and a child is simply born and will simply grow up autistic, but still the ecological perspective tells me to seek a way to include such a person and ennoble such a person, and see what such people can contribute, to self and to friend alike, through their innate being and their innate experiential capacity.[20]

Diversity is the positive expression of healthy ecosystems, be they ideational or metabolic in character. The present analysis not only defends the view of human minds and societies as inherently ecological systems, but also corroborates with the Deep Ecological perspective on the present ecological crisis. Opening their book *Hope's Edge* with a chapter titled "Maps of the Mind," Frances and Anna Lappé employ the example of realizing the need to expose their daughter to the hunger myth: "if we look at food, *really look*, our world can shift: We might just not only grasp for the first time the biggest ideas limiting our lives, but also discover for the first time whole new ways of seeing the world that release us from our march toward planetary

---

19 I know most ethnographic studies show that schizophrenia in some cultures is integrated in a different way so that the individual sensitive to double binds is healthier. There may be lower incidence of extreme forms.

20 The autistic 'savants' who have learned to type essays and produce popular YouTube videos support such a claim that even when one perspective says the entity is closed and sick to the world, it is so open, and so profoundly brilliant in the world. In simplest terms, everyone's inborn way of being has an inherent value, and having diversity in our ways of psychological being is healthy for us. Healthy integration and constructive habits become key for both the individual with the deviance and those who may learn something and grow healthier.

destruction".[21] As 1 out of 2 people may be statistically likely to face a bout of clinical strength depression and 1 out of 4 another mental illness at some point in their life, which I convey by report of my friend who is in a psychology program,[22] I am tempted to consider that certain myths limit our views of and responses to psychological nature, in a similar way as certain myths limit our view of and responses to our biological predicament, especially in light of the need to develop adequate eco-literacy for solving social and environmental problems.

In my mind for a long time growing, there has been the impulse to conflate social predicaments of the human self and mind with ecological action and crisis. I mentioned, earlier, forces of cultural homogenization. In this capitalist civilization of explicit commercialization and making uniform of life style, economy, public discourse, and media content, it is a living hell for the psychologically deviant, especially when one reflects on the subtle-to-not-so-subtle paradigms of life achievement as the right career choices and of luxury and time off work as the appropriate fields of behaviour to reserve for our experience of meaningfulness. It is a hell for them because of the imaginative paradigms of intellect which socially dislocate them. As David Abram put it in "The Spell of the Sensuous," the "alphabetized intellect stakes its claim to the earth by *staking it down*, extends its dominion by drawing a grid of straight lines and right angles… according to a calculative logic utterly oblivious to the life of the land" or the curved minds which inhabit its oblong societies.[23]

If "there is no free lunch," do autistics waste their support group's time in preparing the food that the sun and living Earth have always freely and abundantly provided in their natural self-expression? I certainly think not, but instead of appreciating our differences and sharing the world's bounty, we ignore or "have forgotten the poise that comes from living in storied relation and reciprocity with the myriad things, the myriad *beings*, that perpetually surround us".[24] It seems to me the aspects of our civilization that render so many of us ecologically illiterate may also lead many of us to socio-psychological stigma and inadequate ideas about those of us who just aren't

---

21 Anna and Frances Lappé, "Maps of the Mind" from *Hope's Edge*, (Penguin, 2003), 14, their emphasis.

22 I believe they are World Health Organization statistics from some study, actually.

23 David Abrams, "The Spell of the Sensuous" from *Time, Space, and the Eclipse of the Earth*, (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 267, his emphasis.

24 David Abrams, "The Spell of the Sensuous", 270, his emphasis.

the same or the sane or however it is that dominant paradigms conceive our useful and beautiful differences.[25]

I think respect for psychological diversity constitutes a radically potent force to put toward respect for, and preservation of, Gaia's biological diversity. Deep Ecologists note the need for bridging the gap between Gaian needs and human activity, and global ecological flourishing could well begin with communal realization of the value of human psychological diversity, as well as with the integration of alternate forms of consciousness and understanding, and hence culture and economy. Our diversity is currently under diminution from forces of irrational stigma, anti-social paradigms, and imperial motivations. I am talking from a perspective of "deep social ecology," which sees how psychological, cultural, and thoughtful diversity addresses our ecological and social predicaments. Murray Bookchin in "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology" makes an argument along the same lines as my argument from Bateson which conceives my experience of schizophrenia as a unified deep social experience. He advises Deep Ecologists "to fully anchor ecological dislocations in social dislocations…to give the human species and mind their due in natural evolution, rather than regard them as 'cancers' in the biosphere".[26] He doesn't like the tendency of some Deep Ecological thinkers to chastise humanity for its ecological impact; more importantly, it seems Bookchin is suggesting that human social systems are sick and out of touch with their own "richness of potentialities", not just out of touch with Nature's.[27] He recommends in conclusion that "what we must 'enchant' is not only an abstract image of 'Nature' *that often reflects our own systems of power, hierarchy, and domination*—but rather human beings, the human mind, and the human spirit".[28]

Of course, human nature is manifold in its expression and possesses an indefinite array of cognitive, emotional, and intellectual powers. I have experiential and theoretical grounds for rationalizing the bio-psychological dislocations of my schizophrenia in my experience of ecological, social dislocation, but if we listen to Bookchin, the links only really go back and forth, continuously, between the world's principle patterns of life and the human patterns of idea and behaviour. To echo, extend, and integrate all the

---

25 That "rehabilitate" instead of "integrate" is the most common language actually scares me sometimes.

26 Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology" in *Environmental Ethics—Concepts, Policy, Theory.* Ed. Joseph DesJardins, (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing, 1999), 540.

27 Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology", 540.

28 Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology", 540, his emphasis.

thinkers I have included in my analysis, I recommend that Deep Ecological thinkers ever-comprehensively explore the causal relationship between ecological and social dislocation, and that they explore the interconnecting effects on the cognitive, emotional, and intellectual well-being of individuals as well as the feedback effect unique individuals can have on those causes.

By promoting a deep and social eco-literacy, Deep Ecological thinkers have a hope of leading individuals to self-realization of their life in Nature and their life with Gaia. We must learn about how life actually operates, and slowly dissolve our fanciful imaginings into wild, well-ordered involvement and enchantment, with the myriad beings that share and make complex our nature and our knowledge of our nature. I am reminded most poignantly of Spinoza's discussion in the *Ethics* concerning the genesis of our knowledge of emotions. If it is indeed true like Spinoza holds that any interaction with a thing which affects us tells us more about our own constitution and susceptibility to modifications then it does about what externally affects us, then it seems also true that to reach understanding about and respect for life external to us, it will be most doable if we first inspire an understanding about and respect for our own inherent human nature and potential.

The basic claim here is that the spirited understanding and active love toward life, which our ecological and social crises call for, takes the form of appreciation of life's diversity and to the recognition that humanity is in need of, or the throes of, adaptive responses to shifting experiential contexts. Facilitating adaptation may represent a deep aim of direct action. If we understand life adequately then we will aspire to love it, and a greater love of life will foster understanding. Absolute stasis of Nature seems impossible, and as Spinoza held in the sole axiom of part IV of the *Ethics,* there is always a more powerful entity than any single and particular individual. Therefore, we must globally admit that our planet's biological complexity and our social systems are interrelated, and that we are deeply systemically threatened by self-destructive emotional and intellectual habits.

Whatsoever the outcome, there is only waiting for our civilization to pull up or crash on its own.[29] If all else fails—in that state of waiting—there is then committing relentlessly to the efforts implied by the issues of this paper. We might ensure that the feedback in this complex system, goes the way of

---

29   I think of the metaphor of testing-the-airplane-by-running-it-off-a-cliff, a powerful image in Daniel Quinn's ecological fiction masterpieces *Ishmael* and *The Story of B*; the image brilliantly surmises the potential bristly outcome of human actions evolved out of reckless motives based in groundless imaginings about reality. When it comes to global deforestation and desertification, to the spilling, leaking, and dwindling of oil reserves, and to the seeping into arable land of heavy and radioactive compounds—for example—it is quite the plane-off-the-cliff test of the experimental craft called modern humanity. Will human biology endure?

reinforcing beneficial relations with ourselves and with nature, to get all of us collected, inspired, and focused on enriching the patterns of biological and cognitive diversity among the myriad beings surrounding us. In sum, Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei* is very close to Capra's idea of ecological literacy. Diverse forms of perception and consciousness have a unique capacity to sustain and provoke beneficially responsive feedback in our societies. We need to actively build on the urge in people to understand and love themselves and Nature, in order to realize our expressive potency.

Works Cited

Abram, David. "The Spell of the Sensuous." *Time, Space, and the Eclipse of the Earth*. Pantheon, 1996.

Bateson, Gregory, ed. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1972.

Bateson, Gregory. "Double Bind, 1969." *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. 271-278.

Bateson, Gregory. "Minimal Requirements for a Theory of Schizophrenia." *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. 244-270.

Bateson, Gregory. "Pathologies of Epistemology." *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. 478-487.

Bookchin, Murray. "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology." *Environmental Ethics—Concepts, Policy, Theory*. Ed. Joseph DesJardins. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999.

Capra, Fritjof. *The Hidden Connections—A Science for Sustainable Living*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

Lappé, Frances and Anna. "Maps of the Mind." *Hope's Edge*. Penguin, 2003.

Lovelock, James. "What is Gaia?" in *The Revenge of Gaia*. Perseus Books Group, 2007.

Naess, Arne. "Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement." Lecture. Delft: Eburon, 1992.

Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.