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THE STOIC NOTION OF *COSMIC SYMPATHY* IN CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Abstract: The later Stoics, especially – and most notably – Posidonius of Apamea, allegedly the greatest polymath of his age and the last in a celebrated line of great philosophers of the ancient world, gradually developed the belief that all parts of the universe, either ensouled or not, were actually interconnected due to the omnipresent, corporeal, primordial *kosmikon pyr* which, according to Stoicism, pervades each being as the honey pervades the honeycomb. As for reasonable beings, in particular, *kosmikon pyr* takes the form of *logos*. Due to that power, Posidonius believes, the phases of moon, for instance, can affect the succession of tides and ebb–tides; on the same grounds, the signs can have major effect on the course of events and, therefore, allow for divination. That kind of interconnectedness, apart from justifying the interdependentness of all beings to each other, testifies for an utter kinship between them, for *sympatheia*. In this short paper I intent to show that Posidonius’s approach has been promptly adopted and utilized by modern holistic theories concerning Environmental Ethics, especially by Arne Naess’s Deep Ecology and Ecosophy T, in the context of which notions such as kinship, interconnectedness, interdependentness and identification of all beings are key parameters for the articulation of their argumentation. I also intent to outline some essential – in my opinion – differences in the way Posidonius and Naess make use of the notion of interconnectedness, together with some inconsistencies which can be potentially fatal, at least as far as a system of ethics is concerned. This is because notions such as *cosmic sympathy* may possibly establish an interesting, even charming and influential cosmology or metaphysics, but when it comes to ethics, in my opinion, they can only provide shaky grounds for establishing a firm one, since they allow for deterministic views, which more or less leave no room for personal responsibility, to wit for personal praise or blame.

Keywords: Posidonius, Naess, sympathy, identification, Stoicism, Deep Ecology, Ecosophy T, self-realization, *kosmikon pyr*, *logos*, *pnoue*, ethics.

It is neither odd nor unlawful for philosophers to look back and receive inspiration from the past, especially if this past is a glorified and influential one. It only gets peculiar when thinkers of our time resort to past theories that at first glance seem barren, inhospitable for – and incompatible with – their objectives. This could not be more manifest than with regard to contemporary Environmental Ethics, especially when more than often avowed bio-centricists and eco-centricists articulate their moral approaches based on notions derived from clearly anthropocentric or ego-centric moral systems, such as the Stoics' one.¹ In this short essay I intent to exhibit the close affinities there exist between the most influential moral system of our times regarding environmental philosophy, namely Arne Naess's Ecosophy T, and the Stoic cosmology and metaphysics.² In my opinion, the grounds for this intrinsic relation is the way both systems understand and make use of the notion of *universal* – or *cosmic* – *sympathy*, by means of which they both bolster up a fascinating and inspiring cosmology. When they have to move from cosmology to ethics, however, their ways become not only separate, but also diverging³; that diverging in fact, that one might be justified in wondering whether there once actually was a common starting gate or not. I will also argue that resorting to the notion of *cosmic sympathy* is no safe ground for a consistent and functional Environmental Ethics, for, in my opinion, it is no safe ground for any kind of ethics in general, and that it therefore should be abandoned.

Stoicism and Ecosophy T share an almost identical historical background, in the sense that both systems were delivered in times of rapid and drastic change, with the spectrum of the all-encompassing globalization hastily approaching. Another common feature of theirs is that they were both triggered as a reaction to the dominant philosophical doctrines of their era: Stoicism was initially launched as a stern rejection of the Platonic theory of forms,⁴ while Ecosophy T and its twin, Deep Ecology,⁵ was

¹ As for the incompatibility of Stoicism and bio/eco-centricism, see William Stephens, "Stoic Naturalism, Rationalism and Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1994): 281-283.

² See Jim Cheney, "The Neostoicism of Radical Environmentalism," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 293-326.

³ For an excellent analysis of the essential differences between Stoicism and Deep Ecology with regard to the moral status of humans and other beings, see Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "The Universal Nature and the Human Being in Marcus Auerlius' Stoicism, from the Point of View of Ecoethics," in *Environment, Society, Ethics*, ed. Elena Papanikolaou (Athens: Aiforia, 2010), 36ff.

⁴ Bertrand Russel, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 254ff.

⁵ Kevin Doak, *Dreams of Difference: the Japan romantic school and the crisis of modernity* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 17.

meant to be a negation of the anthropocentric ethics which had for ages been dominating Western philosophy. Both systems also share a quite similar structure: they are more or less eclectic,⁶ comprehensive and, in some degree, open systems, while their ethics is grossly based upon – if not deduced from – their ontology. From all other aspects, though, Stoicism and Ecosophy T are essentially different. While, for instance, Stoicism seems to be satisfied with the achievement of a self-content inner tranquility based on the attainment of virtue, Ecosophy T promises a radical change in the way we understand our world, and interact with our environment. If Stoicism is revolutionary in any way, this revolution is an inward one. For Ecosophy T and Deep Ecology, on the contrary, transforming oneself is only the first step towards altering our overall interaction with the environment, to wit towards changing the world.

Both theories perceive each being not as an isolated entity, but mainly as a part of a broader system, as large as the entire world. From the Stoic point of view each being is associated with the rest of the world in the way the limbs and parts of the body are associated with the whole body⁷: they belong to it, and everything the body suffers has effect on the part, and *vice versa*.⁸ Hence, private interests can only coincide with the common one⁹; *bonum singulorum* overlaps with *bonum omnium*.¹⁰ In the context of Stoic ontology all things are interconnected due to the existence of some kind of primordial fire, one that the Stoics refer to as *technikon pyr*, a mixture of fire and air actually, that permeates the entire world as its soul, sustaining everything.¹¹ The soul pervades all beings like the honey pervades the honeycomb, in the words of Tertullian,¹² not in the form of an intangible soul, but as a solid, material substance.¹³ The whole world has been actually created by – and from – it, in order to be inhabited by it

⁷ Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), II.86, 77.

⁸ See Katerina Ierodiakonou, "The Greek Concept of Sympatheia and its Byzantine Appropriation in Michael Psellos," in *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, eds. Paul Magdalino and Sofia Mavroudi (Geneva: La Pomme d'ore, 2006), 99ff.

⁹ Dragona-Monachou, *op. cit.*, 34.

¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius, *Ad Se Ipsum*, trans. Joachim Dalfen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 10.6.

¹¹ Ierodiakonou, *op. cit.*, 101.

¹² "Stoici enim volunt deum sic per materiam decucurrisse quomodo mel per fauos, at tu 'Non', inquis, 'pertransiens illam facit mundum, sed solummodo apparens et adpropinquans ei, sicut facit quid decor solummodo apparens et magnes lapis solummodo adpropinquans." Tertullian, *Liber Adversus Hermogenem*, trans. Jan Hendrik Waszink (London: Newman Press / Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), XLIV.

¹³ Gilbert Murray, *The Stoic Philosophy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1915), 25.

right after. When partaking to a sentient, rational being, to wit a human one, this substance takes the form of *logos*. Due to the omnipresent *pyr* – or *pneuma*¹⁴ – all beings are inextricably linked to each other,¹⁵ while rational ones share a much closer relationship,¹⁶ due to which they are able to feel an inner kinship (*oikeiosis*) to each other,¹⁷ as well as to develop mutual collaboration, *synergian* in the words of Marcus Aurelius.¹⁸

Though it is was by no means strange to the early Stoics and especially to Chrysippus,¹⁹ nor is it alien to the overall attitude of Stoicism in general,²⁰ the notion of *cosmic sympathy* is being usually credited to Posidonius, the pupil of Panaetius, an once ignored philosopher of the early 1st century BCE, who now is considered to be the last great Greek philosopher²¹ before the beginning of that epoch during which Greek and Oriental thought were united.²² Having more or less departed from Heraclitus's sway and – under the influence of his teacher – moved closer to Plato and Aristotle,²³ Posidonius gave fresh emphasis to the belief that the whole of reality is knit together by natural *sympathy* between all its parts.²⁴ Initially he developed an interest for the effect of the moon on tides, which led him to Cadiz to investigate the phenomenon.²⁵ Seeing the effect of the sun and the moon on the sequence of tides and ebb-tides, Posidonius considered affinities among things of the earth, due to which he supposed the existence of *sympathetic relations* between all parts of the world, a mutual affecting among them.²⁶ Hence he moved on to distin-

¹⁴ Cicero, op. cit., II.19, 54.

¹⁵ Marcus Aurelius refers to a “common nature,” to a “*ton olon physis*.” For an excellent account see Dragona-Monachou, op. cit., 32ff.

¹⁶ Marcus Aurelius, op. cit., 7.5; 7.22; 8.26; in 7.13 he explicitly stresses rationality as a property by means of which beings that are endowed with it, although still a part of the all-encompassing system of nature or *physis*, are also members of a narrower subsystem, namely that of rational beings.

¹⁷ Dragona-Monachou, op. cit., 37.

¹⁸ Marcus Aurelius, op. cit., 7.13.

¹⁹ P. A. Meijer, *Stoic Theology: Proofs for the Existence of the Cosmic God and of the Traditional Gods* (Delft: Eburon, 2007), 86.

²⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 362.

²¹ Ludwig Edelstein, “The Philosophical System of Posidonius,” *The American Journal of Philology* 57 (1936): 324.

²² K. Reinhardt, *Poseidonios* (München: Oskar Beck, 1921), 3-18 [as cited in Edelstein, op. cit., 287].

²³ Edelstein, op. cit., 286.

²⁴ Edwin Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 114.

²⁵ Ferguson, op. cit., 362.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

guish between two kinds of this omnipresent sympathy: one that exists between all separate beings in the world, and another which runs through different levels of being. In its first form sympathy permeates all parts of the cosmos, in a way that it results to some kind of *unity* among them. This unity may, according to Posidonius, be of three kinds: i. that of an army: individual soldiers harmonically functioning together; ii. that of a building: all its parts are adjusted to each other; iii. the kind a living being has, to wit of mutual influence and interplay of its members. The unity of cosmos in Posidonius's view is of the third kind, as the effect of sun and moon on the earth clearly indicates.²⁷ Sympathy between different levels of existence is the one that connects the known with the unknown, the gods – Posidonius considers the sun and the moon as well as the stars and the heavens in general to be gods²⁸ – with the earthly world.²⁹ Due to that second kind of sympathy Posidonius believes that signs may have influence on the course of events. The whole of reality for Posidonius is contained within the envelope of fiery ether,³⁰ and it constitutes one world³¹ that is animated³² and held together³³ due to the existence of an omnipresent soul.³⁴ Edelstein correctly emphasizes that where others recognize the effects of nature, Posidonius recognizes the effects of soul,³⁵ which unifies all beings and renders them a whole. The soul, as Posidonius suggests, is an omnipresent intellect that he calls God.³⁶ God has no form, but can be changed into everything; he can take any form and become equal to what he wants.³⁷ Still this all pervasive soul is nothing distinct or separate from nature, but just *nature endowed with sensation*.³⁸ Thus the whole world is considered to be the substance of God,³⁹ direct-

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. R. D. Hicks (Loeb Classical Library, 1925), VII, 148.

²⁹ Ferguson, op. cit., 363.

³⁰ Diogenes Laertius, op. cit., VII, 157.

³¹ Bevan, op. cit., 114.

³² R. E. Witt, "Plotinus and Posidonius," *The Classical Quarterly* 24 (1930): 205.

³³ Achilles Tattius, *Isagoge in Arati Phaenomena*, trans. Denis Petau (Paris: Lutetia Parisiorum, 1630), chapter 13.

³⁴ Diogenes Laertius, op. cit., VII, 157.

³⁵ Edelstein, op. cit., 300.

³⁶ H. Usener, ed., *Commenta Lucani* (Leipzig, 1869), 305: "ait enim Posidonius: deus est spiritus rationalis per omnem diffusus materiam."

³⁷ Hermann Diels, ed., *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin : G. Reimer, 1879), 302b 22.

³⁸ Diogenes Laertius, op. cit., VII, 156.

³⁹ Ibid., 148.

ed by reason (*nous*) and providence (*pronia*),⁴⁰ a fact that eventually allows for divination.⁴¹ If we accepted Posidonius's physics as a sound one and abided by it, then we would have to admit also that all beings are interdependent and, in a way, united as well as reciprocal. For it is impossible to affect the whole without affecting the part, and *vice versa*.⁴² Every modification concerning the status of a part directly reflects on the whole, since the unity of the cosmos is of the kind that exists between the members of the body. Reversely, we could infer that the status of each part depends on the overall condition of the body, for it is not possible for the part to prosper if the body suffers. To realize the fact that every single human being is just a part of the whole, together with every other, organic or not, and to be mindful that all beings equally partake in a rationally ordered universe – though not necessarily rational in itself –, to the Stoics is tantamount to rational human happiness, *eudaimonia*.⁴³ From the Stoic point of view only humans and gods may count as rational beings, but the whole of the world is organized according to reason, a fact that can be unveiled to the human intellect.⁴⁴ It is up to each rational individual to become aware of that fact, and at the same time to realize which is its exact place in the rationally ordered context of reality. That kind of awareness would only lead to willingly living in accordance with reason, to wit with nature. And it is precisely this awareness that, as far as the Stoics are concerned, outlines the definition of virtue. For, as A. A. Long argues, from the Stoic point of view only that which is in accordance with nature can be deemed as morally valuable, and is worth acquiring for its own sake, while the opposite is to be rejected.⁴⁵ Being virtuous, from the point of view of the Stoics, is being happy.

These last inferences outline an ethics directly deduced from the Stoics' ontology, and could well have been drawn by the Norwegian Arne Naess, one of the most eminent and influential philosophers of our times. His Ecosophy T, after all, bears extremely close similarities with Posido-

⁴⁰ Edelstein, *op. cit.*, 293.

⁴¹ Diogenes Laertius, *op. cit.*, VII, 143; cf. Cicero, *De divinatione* I, 6; II, 35.

⁴² Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos*, trans. D. L. Blank (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), IX, 78-81.

⁴³ Arthur Pomeroy, *Arius Didymus, Epitome of Stoic Ethics* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 1999), 30.

⁴⁴ Bartolomiej Lenart, "Enlightened Self-Interest: In Search of the Ecological Self," *Praxis* 2 (2010): 30.

⁴⁵ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (California: University of California Press, 1986), 187.

nius's ontology.⁴⁶ Naess defines his ecosophy as "a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of *sofia* (or) wisdom, [which] is openly normative, [and] it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction".⁴⁷ This kind of wisdom, according to Naess, calls for a certain approach towards the spectrum of existence: the universe is a whole that is being substantiated in every single being, irrespective of whether the latter is rational or not. Every being is a knot in the vast net of reality, and between them there exist bonds, due to which all beings are indissolubly connected to each other. By picturing all beings as "knots," Naess suggests that there exist no isolated entities, but only coexistent ones, which could no otherwise have existed if not related to every other. He "rejects the human-in-environment image in favor of the relational, total field image: organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations".⁴⁸ One of the most eminent Deep Ecologists, Warwick Fox, in an early paper of his explains this tenet further: "...there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence. In other words, the world simply is not divided up into independently existing subjects and objects, nor is there any bifurcation in reality between human and non-human realms. Rather all entities are constituted by their relationships. To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness".⁴⁹ Fox's clarification is crucial in order to fully grasp Naess's argument: the bonds that constitute all beings are not mere attributes or properties, but they form the very essence of all beings in a way that, if any of these bonds are modified, the very being is essentially altered; if, again, broken or vanished, the very being entirely ceases to exist as such. Therefore the relational net is ontologically prior to the individual, since each individual is constantly formed into what it actually each moment is only due to the intrinsic relations that are being formed with other knots of the web.⁵⁰ The reality is one and unified, and can be

⁴⁶ I avoid referring to the Stoics in general, since Posidonius's approaches are original with regard to many issues. For an excellent account concerning the originality of Posidonius's ontology and its differences to the traditional Stoic system, see Edelstein, op. cit., especially 291, 292 and 305.

⁴⁷ As cited in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, eds. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Publishers, 1995), 8.

⁴⁸ Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary," *Inquiry* 16 (1991): 95.

⁴⁹ Warwick Fox, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time?" in *Environmental Ethics*, eds. Andrea Light and Holmes Rolston III (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 255.

⁵⁰ Evangelos Protopapadakis, *Environmental Ethics: Arne Naess's Deep Ecology* (Athens: Sakkoulas, 2006), 50ff, 136ff.

shaped into any form in direct dependence to the surrounding circumstances.⁵¹ The individual, on the other hand, only seemingly is a separate, isolated existence; rather it is a *locus* for relational intersection,⁵² more a crowded meeting place than a sanctuary for the being. Due to that vast relational web or net, all beings are akin to each other, as well as interdependent. Cutting one of the threads means damaging the whole net and directly affecting each individual knot. There is no existence *in vacuum*, or in isolation; the total-field view calls for ontological unity. To Bill Devall dualism – the dominant theme of Western philosophy – should be rejected in favor of unity.⁵³ If we perceive the reality as consistent of knots, which are more or less *loca* where intrinsic relations are substantiated,⁵⁴ and if “an intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things”,⁵⁵ then it is nonsensical to talk of *beings* – “except when are talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication”⁵⁶; we should rather talk of *one extended all-encompassing organism*. In a word, everything hangs together.⁵⁷ As Devall puts it, “although we may feel subjectively separate from nature and each other, we are actually interdependent and interconnected with the whole fabric of reality”.⁵⁸ It is obvious that the way we perceive ourselves has to be essentially altered. There is no such a thing as an isolated self, one that is confined by – and restricted to – our skin. On the contrary, there are parts of our self that lay outside these boundaries; as a matter of fact, from the point of view of Ecosophy T, everything seemingly external to us is actually a part of our self. All other beings, since they are devoid of rationality, are *vi naturae* part of this reality. Humans, on the other hand, have to intellectually grasp this ultimate truth in order to fulfill their potential, to meet with their *entelecheia* in Aristotelian terms. In case they succeed, they achieve “self realization”, and acquire what Naess calls “an

⁵¹ For a detailed account see my “Supernatural Will and Organic Unity in Process: From Spinoza’s Naturalistic Pantheism to Arne Naess’s Ecosophy T and Environmental Ethics,” in *Studies on Supernaturalism*, ed. George Arabatzis (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2009), 189ff.

⁵² Freya Mathews, “Relating to Nature: Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism,” *The Trumpeter* 11 (1994): 159.

⁵³ Bill Devall, “The Deep Ecology Movement,” *Natural Resources Journal* 20 (1989): 309.

⁵⁴ Mathews, *op. cit.*, 159.

⁵⁵ Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary,” *Inquiry* 16 (1991): 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Lenart, *op. cit.*, 31.

⁵⁸ Bill Devall, “The Ecological Self,” in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, eds. A. Drengson and Y. Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 103.

extended Self". It is almost obvious that to him both these constitute the tasks of a proper Ecosophy. The first step to self-realization is identification with every other being,⁵⁹ a notion very much resembling Stoic sympathy. Fox may be of help again concerning the exact import of the term: identification is "the experience not simply of a sense of similarity with an entity, but of a sense of commonality".⁶⁰ Diehm explains identification further as a "sense of *belonging to* or *community with* the other-than-human world".⁶¹ The role of identification is crucial for Ecosophy T, since it proves Naess's ontology and metaphysics right: if all things were not constituted by their relations to other things,⁶² identification could not be possible or achievable. Furthermore, identification allows for an utter recognition on behalf of the rational being, to wit of the fact that humans are a part of nature, and nature is a part of them; who they are cannot be described without reference to the all encompassing natural community.⁶³ Apart from the fact that Naess – unlike Posidonius – directly extends this interconnectedness and consequent identification to all natural beings, and not only to rational ones, his reasoning looks like a legitimate development or furtherance of the Stoic ontology and metaphysics: all are one, no matter whether this is due to *logos* – which orders all natural beings and is embedded into rational ones –, or due to this all encompassing relational net. In both cases, reality is substantiated and formed by virtue of a single primordial entity or power, and it seems entirely immaterial if we call it this or that. As far as ontology and metaphysics are concerned, one would be justified to assume that Naess, if born two thousand years before, is likely to have been frequenting the *Pikili Stoa*,⁶⁴ while, respectively, Posidonius would be likely to publish his essays with *The Trumpeter*.⁶⁵

One might object on grounds of Posidonius's metaphysics being a theocratic one, while Naess's is not. He might further focus on the fact that sympathy for Posidonius is limited to rational beings only, to wit humans, gods and stars (which he calls *daemons*), while identification for Naess is

⁵⁹ Christian Diehm, "Identification With Nature: What It Is and Why It Matters," *Nature and the Environment* 12 (2007): 2.

⁶⁰ Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 231.

⁶¹ Diehm, op. cit., 3.

⁶² Freya Mathews, "Conservation and Self-Realization: A Deep Ecology Perspective," *Environmental Ethics* 10 (1988): 349.

⁶³ Diehm, op. cit., 4.

⁶⁴ An archway in the *agora* of Athens, meeting place for the early Stoics, and the only reason we still call them that way.

⁶⁵ The emblematic journal of Deep Ecology and Ecosophy T.

extended to all beings, irrespective of whether they are rational or irrational, organic or not. In my opinion these differences, although actual ones, are of no essential importance. As to the first objection, suppose that Naess had been thinking of this relational net as of a god. Would his overall approach be essentially altered? In fact, it is not quite clear what exactly this net is for Naess, but it is no doubt a primordial substance and a creative power at the same time, in fact the only possible one. The essence, the attributes and the form of the reality are only due to its existence and actions. The net substantiates all beings. It is imminent in the world; in fact it is the world we perceive. It is omnipresent and, in a not farfetched sense of the terms, omnipotent and omniscient. It is of the same essence with the world. It has limits, exactly as the Posidonian universe does, and its limits are tantamount to the limits of reality. If Naess called it *pnoe*, *pneuma* or *technikon pyr*, would it make any difference?

As to the second objection, the one concerning the limits of sympathy on the one hand, and those of identification on the other, one could reasonably argue that differences as such are more than expected: offspring take after their forefathers and usually are a better, more advanced version of theirs, but rarely are identical, nor they have to. Extending the ability of rational beings to identify themselves with all other beings instead of limiting it to only some of them could well count as theoretical progress. The fact that, from the point of view of Stoics, irrational nature is actually rationally ordered, leaves ample room for such a perspective. I do not mean to imply that Naess is a modern Stoic or anything like that, only that his views are not a far cry from Posidonius's ones, and in many aspects he seems to draw from the latter's way of reasoning.

For both philosophers cosmic sympathy between beings does exist, irrespective of whether one realizes its existence or not. If he does, from the Stoic point of view, he will be able to live in accordance to nature – viz. according to reason, since *logos* pervades the whole natural world; and that, for the Stoics, is the quintessence of virtue, which brings about inner happiness, *eudaimonia*.⁶⁶ Knowing his place in the world is the trait of the wise and virtuous man, and renders him capable to opt for the right actions, those that are in accordance with the natural order of beings. According to Naess, however, the ability a rational being has to become conscious of the fact that all beings are constituted solely by their relations to other beings, and thus to achieve this sort of deep understanding – which eventually facilitates self-realization, to wit the broadening of the Self –,

⁶⁶ Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting, eds., *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 73ff.

has quite different implications with regard to ethics. As a matter of fact, in my opinion, it leaves no place for ethics at all. This is because this new, extended *Self*, having already grasped the total-field view and the fact that its existence is being substantiated by its relations to all other beings – which, in turn, are external parts of its very essence –, can develop the tendency to identify with them. This tendency is not the outcome of some moral principle; rather it is an intrinsic ability of the human being, due to which his consciousness is being elaborated. By virtue of identification moral agents understand the interests of the environment as their own.⁶⁷ Hence they deliberately and spontaneously champion these interests, without having to resort to any moral theory, or to some norm of any kind. As John Seed puts it, the statement “I am protecting the rainforest” develops to “I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking”.⁶⁸ For when one’s identity is interconnected with the identity of other beings, then his experience and his existence depends on theirs. Their interests become his interests.⁶⁹ According to Naess, identification results in a process “through which the interest or interests of another being are reacted to as our own interest or interests”.⁷⁰ Therefore, acting on behalf of other beings requires no moralizing,⁷¹ “just as we don’t need morals to make us breathe”,⁷² since when we are destroying our environment we are destroying in fact what is our larger self.⁷³ Hence, when acting in nature’s defense “we are defending our vital interests.... We are engaged in self defense”.⁷⁴ In other words, rather than feeling morally compelled, we act due to an embedded to us inclination to care for some external part of ours, which, though, is still a part of our extended self. In my opinion this line of reasoning, irrespective of whether it is sound or not, constitutes nothing more than a sophisticated way of referring to an elaborated version of the instinct of self-preservation.

⁶⁷ Alan Drengrson, “An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement, and Diverse Ecosophies,” *The Trumpeter* 14 (1997): 111.

⁶⁸ John Seed, “Anthropocentrism,” in *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered*, eds. B. Devall and G. Sessions (Layton: Gibbs Smith, 2001), 199.

⁶⁹ Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1988), 69.

⁷⁰ Arne Naess, “Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes,” in *Deep Ecology*, ed. Michael Tobias (San Diego: Avant Books, 1985), 261.

⁷¹ Diehm, op. cit., 5.

⁷² Arne Naess, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being-in-the-World,” in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, ed. George Sessions (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 233.

⁷³ Mathews, op. cit., 354.

⁷⁴ Naess, “Identification,” 232.

While for the later Stoics – and for Posidonius in particular – the notion of cosmic sympathy remains a key tenet only concerning their cosmology, for Naess the very same cosmological approach – even under a slightly different terminology – serves as a basis for an unusual ethics. If there is such a thing as moral value, and if this value is inherent in even *one* being, then it should be inherent to *every* other; if this value is considered to be absolute, then it should be considered such for the whole of creation. From the point of view of a cosmology that accepts the holistic, total-field view, this is the only way to come to terms with moral evaluation. It would be nonsensical to argue on the one hand that all beings are inextricably linked to each other as parts of an extended, all-encompassing organism, and on the other to discriminate between these parts on grounds of their moral value. That, of course, when one chooses to make use of the cosmological principle of sympathy or interconnectedness in the context of some moral theory. The Stoics, it is true, did not indulge in this temptation. To them ethics is restricted to rational beings and moral agents alone, despite the fact that moral agents may be intrinsically related by virtue of cosmic sympathy to other, non human beings. Stoic ethics – if such an anachronism may be excused – is strictly *anthropocentric*, and its value theory is restricted only to the moral community of rational beings, depriving thus non-human beings from intrinsic moral value,⁷⁵ a fact that to Stephens seems to suggest a kind of speciesism⁷⁶ – as it becomes clearly manifest in Marcus Aurelius’s statement that all other beings are created for the sake of rational ones⁷⁷ –, due to which Stoicism seems totally incompatible with Arne Naess’s views, and closer to Murray Bookchin’s Social Ecology.⁷⁸ As to Ecosophy T and Deep Ecology, however, interconnectedness becomes the stable ground for ascribing equal moral value to all beings, irrespective of whether they belong to the moral community or not,⁷⁹ while resultant identification makes it only senseless to turn to moral evaluation at all. True, in a world that human beings have finally achieved self-realization, as Naess suggests, ethics is no longer necessary,

⁷⁵ Dragona-Monachou, op. cit., 27.

⁷⁶ “Epictetus holds that animals are born to serve humans; they are not born for their own sake.” William Stephens, “Stoic Naturalism, Rationalism and Ecology,” *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1995): 278.

⁷⁷ Marcus Aurelius, op. cit., 7.55:2.

⁷⁸ Stephens, op. cit., 283.

⁷⁹ As right from the first premise made clear in the platform of Deep Ecology: “The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.” See George Sessions and Bill Devall, *Deep Ecology* (Layton: Gibbs Smith, 1985), 70ff.

for one will be able to spontaneously opt for the beautiful act instead of the dutiful one.⁸⁰ Exactly as parents do not have to resort to fancy and sophisticated moral reasoning in order to come to the aid of their children, when the latter are in danger, rational beings in Naess's new brave world will unprompted and spontaneously revere all other natural beings, for, since these are only external parts of their extended self – as their broadened consciousness can now clearly grasp –, revering and protecting them is revering and protecting their very own self.⁸¹

It is also true, however, that in a world of interconnected, interdependent and interacting entities, there is not much room left for moral blame or praise. A knot in the vast relational net has no autonomous existence, as well as no individual responsibility. No knot can be a better, a more just one than any other. Mother Teresa, the benefactor of thousands in India, and Ed Gain, the notorious serial killer of the 60s – who murdered and skinned more than fifteen women just to decorate his house and upholster his furniture –, are both merely accidental knots in the relational net; they both existed the way they did only due to a fortuitous intersection of countless vague and fuzzy relations. Then why the former and blame the latter? Where exactly is ethics in the wide, total-field image? Why should we hold one morally responsible for his deeds, since his demeanor is only due to something which is accidental and totally external to him? And why any single act may be deemed morally superior or inferior to any other, since in this vast net of intersecting relations every entity directly owes its mode of existence – and, consequently, its behaviour – to every other, to billions of others actually? Is that not an impossible ethics? It seems that Naess's environmental ethics, while surely environmental, is barely an ethics.

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⁸¹ Naess, "Self-Realization," 17.

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LA NOTION STOÏQUE DE LA COMPASSION MONDAINE
(SYMPATHIE COSMIQUE) DANS L'ETHIQUE
ENVIRONNEMENTALE CONTEMPORAINE

Résumé

Les derniers Stoïciens et spécialement Posidonius de l'Apamea, le plus grand érudit de son époque et le dernier d'une série des philosophes marquants du monde ancien, ont développé graduellement le croire que toutes les parties de l'univers, animées ou non, se trouvent actuellement en connexion grâce au *feu mondain* (*kosmikon pyr*) omniprésent, corporel, primordial qui, d'après les Stoïciens, pénètre chaque être comme le miel pénètre le rayon. En ce qui concerne les êtres raisonnables, *kosmikon pyr* prend la forme de la *raison* (*logos*). Grâce à ce pouvoir, Posidonius croit que les phases de la lune, par exemple, peuvent affecter la succession de la marée et du reflux; Parallèlement, les signes peuvent sérieusement influencer le cours des événements et, par conséquent, ils permettent les divinations. Ce genre d'interconnexion, ne justifie pas seulement l'interdépendance de tous les êtres, mais aussi leur affinité parfaite, la *compassion* (*sympatheia*). Dans ce texte je veux montrer que l'approche de Posidonius a été adoptée et utilisée par les théories contemporaines holistiques qui concernent l'éthique environnementale, plus particulièrement par l'Écologie Profonde et l'Écosophie T d'Arne Naess, où des notions comme l'affinité, l'interconnexion, l'interdépendance et l'identification de tous les être sont des paramètres-clés pour l'articulation de leur argumentation. De plus, je vise à esquisser quelques différences essentielles - à mon avis - en ce qui concerne la manière avec laquelle Posidonius and Naess utilisent la notion de l'interconnexion, et aussi quelques obscurités qui pourraient être fatales, au moins en ce qui concerne un système d'éthique. Ça se passe parce que des notions comme la compassion mondaine peuvent peut-être établir une cosmologie ou une métaphysique intéressante, même charmante et influente, mais quand il s'agit de l'éthique, elles peuvent seulement, à mon avis, offrir une terre faible où il est impossible à établir une éthique ferme, lorsque elles permettent des optiques déterministes, qui plus ou moins ne laissent pas des marges à la responsabilité personnelle, c'est-à-dire à l'éloge ou au blâme personnel.

Mots-clés: Posidonius, Naess, compassion, identification, stoïque, Écologie Profonde, Écosophie T, *kosmikon pyr*, *logos*, éthique



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