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Between Beautiful and Moral Action: Immanuel Kant and Arne Næss

SUMMARY

In this paper, the author reflects on Immanuel Kant's distinction between beautiful and moral action, and its influence on Arne Næss's ecological thought. By referring to Næss's interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy, and especially his lesser-known writing *An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism* (German: *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus*, 1759), the author presents the thesis that Kant – although it does not seem so at first glance – plays an important role in Næss's environmental philosophy (i.e., Ecosophy T) and that his moral philosophy represents solid foundations for articulating one's own ecosophies. This prompted the author to ponder about (I) the depth of Kant's influence on Næss, (II) Kantian roots of deep ecology, and (III) Kantian contributions to deep-ecological thinking. In doing so, the author also outlined a Kantian ecosophy – by using some of the most important concepts of Kant's moral philosophy (e.g., duty, intrinsic value, categorical imperative, moral law, moral autonomy, moral development, and humanity as an end in itself). Finally, as a result of this discussion, the author concluded that Kant's and Næss's philosophical theories and worldviews – regardless of their differences – agree at least on one point: human beings *could* and *should* make a difference by acting *morally* and/or *beautifully*.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Arne Næss, ethics, animal ethics, environmental ethics, deep ecology, moral, beauty.

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more frequently and persistently one's meditation deals with them: *the starry sky above me and the moral law within me.*”

– Immanuel Kant

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“From dwelling on your tininess, from concentrating on the immeasurable greatness of the universe, you get even greater, not smaller than you were. You get some of the properties of the starry heavens.”

– Arne Næss

1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of Western philosophy, there are not many names that have left such an indelible mark on almost all fundamental areas of philosophical study, and especially on metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, and aesthetics, as Immanuel Kant did with his philosophical writings in the 18th century (and onwards). Here, of course, we are primarily referring to his three *Critiques*, but also to his other writings that are receiving more and more attention in the 20th and 21st centuries. Thus, Kant’s name can often be found in various philosophical debates – from those dealing with problems from the register of philosophy of mind and philosophy of language, through those discussing the possibility of establishing a new metaphysics and ontology, all the way to those dealing with various issues of environmental aesthetics and ethics (cf. Guyer, 1999, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Here, we will precisely focus on the latter – that is, on Kant’s influence in contemporary ethics and moral philosophy, and especially on his influence on Arne Næss and deep ecology.¹ After briefly discussing Kant’s moral philosophy in the context of environmental ethics and animal ethics, we will focus on Kant’s potential “hidden connection” to deep ecology. In this paper, we will present the thesis that Kant – although it does not seem so at first glance – plays an important role in Næss’s ecological thought and that his moral philosophy also represents solid foundations for articulating one’s ecosophies. We will defend the thesis by referring to Næss’s interpretation of Kant’s works, especially his lesser-known writing *An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism* (German: *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus*, 1759) which, as we shall see later, will prove to be of crucial importance both for Næss’s environmental philosophy and the deep ecology movement in general. But let’s paint the bigger picture first – let’s start with Kant and his influence on contemporary moral philosophy (i.e., environmental ethics and animal ethics debates), in which Næss’s deep ecological voice can also be heard (cf. Næss, 1979, 2008, 2021).

¹ For more about Arne Næss, his life, philosophy and works, see: Næss, 2002, 2005, 2008; Rothenberg, 1993; Witoszek, 1997; Witoszek and Brennan, 1999; Chapman, 2011; Uebel, 2011; Glasser, 2011; Vetlesen, 2017. For more about deep ecology, key deep-ecological thinkers and texts, see: Deval and Sessions, 1985; Sessions, 1995; Deval 2020.

2. IMMANUEL KANT AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is best known for his “deontological theory of ethics”, which emphasizes duty, rules, and the intrinsic value of rational beings. His influence on contemporary moral philosophy is profound and far-reaching – shaping the field in multiple ways through his rigorous and systematic approach to moral action and ethical thinking (cf. Guyer, 1999, 2006a, 2006b). Kant’s moral philosophy and his “deontological framework” introduced numerous concepts and principles that continue to be central to ethical theory and practice today. Moreover, in the 20th and 21st centuries, one can also notice an increase in the number of thinkers who in one way or another deal with Kant’s (moral) philosophy, and to whom we often refer to as “neo-Kantian thinkers” and “contemporary deontologists”. Although there are also those who critically and vigorously questioned Kant’s ethical theory (cf. Fieldhouse, 2004), it is not surprising that Kant’s moral philosophy (and its central concepts) found its rightful place in contemporary ethical debates (cf. Guyer, 1999, 2006a, 2006b; Lucht, 2007; Vereb, 2021). That is why, for example, we can also discern Kant’s theoretical presence in contemporary bioethical debates on various issues: from medical and environmental problems to legal and socio-political ones (cf. Eterović, 2017; Lucht, 2007; Breitenbach, 2009; Altman, 2011; Vereb, 2021). That being said, let’s take a brief look at Kant’s “moral concepts” that can be found at the very centre of some contemporary ethical debates.

2.1. Some Characteristics of Kant’s Moral Philosophy

The cornerstone of Kant’s moral philosophy is the concept of “categorical imperative” – that is, a “moral law” that “commands unconditionally” and “applies universally” to all rational living beings. In his writing *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, Kant proposed several formulations of this “moral law”, including the following:

1. First Formulation – *The Formula of Universal Law*:

“Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” (Kant, 2002a, p. 37)

2. Variant of the First Formulation – *The Formula of the Law of Nature*:

“So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.” (Kant, 2002a, p. 38)

3. Second Formulation – *The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself*:

“Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means.” (Kant, 2002a, pp. 46–47)

4. Third Formulation – *The Formula of Autonomy*:

“Not to choose otherwise than so that the maxims of one’s choice are at the same time comprehended with it in the same volition as universal law.” (Kant, 2002a, p. 58)

5. Variant of the Third Formulation – *The Formula of the Realm of Ends*:

“Act in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends.” (Kant, 2002a, p. 56)

Today, most researchers of Kant’s philosophical legacy agree that these three formulations (and their variants) are crucial for understanding his moral philosophy. Although his reflections on morality are formalized and strict, with detailed argumentation and different formulations, which together form a coherent whole, a philosophical system (of moral action), some characteristics of his moral philosophy can still be discerned as the basis of this grandiose thought. Besides the “moral law” / “categorical imperative”, concepts such as “autonomy”, “rationality”, “moral duty”, and “good will” are also at the very basis of his moral philosophy (cf. Caygill, 1995).

Kant, namely, placed a significant emphasis on autonomy and rationality as the “foundations of moral agency” (Kant, 2002a, pp. 51–54, 58 ff). Moral agents are autonomous, Kant argues, only when they act according to laws they give themselves – that is, when they are free from external influences or inclinations (Kant, 2002a, p. 51). Rationality, on the contrary, enables human beings to recognize and act upon moral law (Kant, 2002a, pp. 51–52). On the other hand, Kant also argued that the only thing that is good without qualification is a “good will” – the will to act according to moral duty for its own sake (Kant, 2002a, pp. 55, 57). This focus on rationality and autonomy, accompanied by the Kantian concepts of good will and moral duty, has sparked numerous ethical debates on various issues, such as personal rights, respect, and moral responsibility. On that note, in the upcoming chapters, we will focus on one such debate – on Kant’s moral philosophy in the context of environmental and animal ethics, and particularly on his influence on Arne Næss and deep ecology.

2.2. Non-Human Animals and Kantian Animal Ethics

Although Kant’s moral philosophy does not directly address the ethical treatment of animals, and even though his moral framework is anthropocentric (meaning: it places human beings at the very centre of moral consideration due to their capacity for rationality and autonomy), his deontological ethics had a profound impact on animal ethics debates (cf. Korsgaard, 2005). By adapting and interpreting his ideas, numerous scholars have attempted to use his ideas to develop a “moral compass” in

animal ethics. Here are just a few ways in which Kantian principles might inform animal ethics:

1. *Indirect Duties*: Kant argues that we have “indirect duties” to animals (meaning: our treatment of non-human animals may have implications for our duties to other human beings). For example, cruelty towards non-human animals is morally wrong because it can desensitize individuals to suffering and make them more likely to act cruelly towards human beings. On the other hand, treating animals with kindness fosters compassionate and empathetic traits in humans (i.e., moral agents), which are beneficial in human moral development and interpersonal relationships (cf. Regan, 2004; Korsgaard, 2005).
2. *Compassion and Empathy*: While Kant’s moral philosophy primarily focuses on rationality and duty, some scholars argue that his emphasis on the intrinsic value of (human) beings could extend to (non-human) animals. Even though non-human animals may not possess rationality or autonomy in the same way human animals do, they may still have intrinsic value as sentient beings capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. Thus, Kantian deontological ethics could encourage compassion and empathy towards non-human animals based on their capacity to suffer and feel pain (cf. Midgley, 1983, 2021; Nussbaum, 2022).
3. *Consistency with Moral Principles*: With some interpretation and adaptation, Kant’s principle of universalizability and treating human beings as “ends in themselves” could be applied to non-human animals by arguing that consistent application of moral principles (i.e., categorical imperative) requires treating non-human animals with respect and avoiding their unnecessary suffering. This would entail refraining from actions that exploit or harm non-human animals merely for human benefit (cf. Regan, 2004; Korsgaard, 2005; Midgley, 1983, 2021; Nussbaum, 2022).

Although Kant’s views on non-human animals have often been criticized by contemporary animal ethicists who argue for the intrinsic values of non-human animals (cf. Fieldhouse, 2004), his ideas have still influenced the field in several ways. In particular, his deontological framework has been adapted by numerous modern philosophers who argue for the recognition of animal rights. For example, Tom Regan’s rights-based approach to animal ethics, which posits that animals have inherent value as “subjects-of-a-life”, can be seen as an extension or modification of Kantian ethics (cf. Regan, 2004). On the other hand, Kant’s idea that how we treat non-human animals can reflect and shape human moral character has influenced numerous scholars. Philosophers like Mary Midgley and Martha Nussbaum have built on this notion as well, arguing that human treatment of non-human animals is a critical aspect of our moral and ethical lives (cf. Midgley, 1983, 2021; Nussbaum, 2022). But Christine Korsgaard took it one step further. She advocated for extending

Kantian ethical principles to include not only non-human animals but also the environment and the natural world in general. She interpreted his idea of treating rational beings “as ends in themselves” to include sentient beings, thus broadening the scope of moral consideration. Moreover, her approach suggests that our duties to non-human animals (and the environment) are not merely “indirect” but involve recognizing their intrinsic value and moral standing (cf. Korsgaard, 2005).

However, it’s important to note that developing a “Kantian animal ethics” requires creative interpretation and adaptation of Kant’s ideas to address the unique ethical considerations posed by our treatment of non-human animals. And how about “Kantian environmental ethics”, one might ask referring to Korsgaard’s approach. Does Kant’s moral philosophy offer sufficient conceptual foundations for ethical reflection and moral action towards nature and the environment? We will try to provide a preliminary answer to the latter question in the next chapter.

2.3. Nature and Kantian Environmental Ethics

As with animal ethics, Kant’s moral philosophy does not directly address environmental ethics or the ethical treatment of the environment and the natural world. However, although it requires some adaptation and interpretation of his ideas, numerous scholars have attempted to use Kantian principles to tackle various environmental issues (cf. Ginsborg, 2001; Breitenbach, 2009; Eterović, 2017). Here are some ways in which Kantian principles might inform environmental ethics:

1. *Respect for Nature*: Kant’s principle of treating rational beings as “ends in themselves”, rather than as “mere means to an end”, could be extended to the environment and the natural world as a whole. For example, advocates of Kantian environmental ethics argue that nature has “intrinsic value” and that the environment deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, rather than merely exploited for human benefit (cf. Taylor, 1986; Breitenbach, 2009). This would entail recognizing the value of nature (beyond its usefulness to humans) and refraining from actions that degrade or harm the environment (i.e., exploitation of natural resources).
2. *Principle of Universalizability*: With some adaptation, the Kantian principle of universalizability, which requires that moral principles apply to all rational beings without exception (i.e., human beings as moral agents), could be applied to various environmental issues by considering the terrifying impact of human actions on the global ecosystem. Consistent with this principle, Kantian environmental ethics might argue for adopting “green practices” and moral actions that promote sustainability and ecological balance, as well as minimizing activities that contribute to environmental degradation (cf. Taylor, 1986; Breitenberg, 2009; Rolston, 2012).

3. *Responsibility and Future Generations*: Kant's emphasis on human autonomy and rationality could be used to argue that humans have a moral duty to act as responsible stewards of the environment and the natural world. On that note, a Kantian deontological framework might also argue for the rights of future generations to a healthy and sustainable environment. This aligns with the principle of treating humanity "as an end in itself", ensuring that our practices and actions do not compromise the ability of future generations (of human and non-human animals) to live dignified lives (cf. Rolston, 2012).

While Kant did not explicitly reflect upon the moral treatment of the environment and the natural world (or the "more-than-human world" in general), his moral philosophy has influenced several contemporary philosophers who have adapted his principles to address various environmental issues. For example, in his groundbreaking book *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Charles Taylor developed a biocentric perspective, suggesting that all living things have intrinsic value (cf. Taylor, 1986). While Taylor's approach is more aligned with biocentrism (and not anthropocentrism as Kant's theory), it can be seen as an extension of Kantian respect for intrinsic value. Furthermore, Holmes Rolston argued in favour of the intrinsic value of the environment and the natural world, and the moral duty to protect it. He utilized Kantian concepts, such as "respect for nature" and the "intrinsic value of natural entities", to advocate for a broader moral consideration that includes ecosystems, species, and natural processes (cf. Rolston, 2012). In that sense, one might say that Rolston's philosophy emphasized the need for a more just and moral relationship with the natural world, rooted in respect and duty, which is closely aligned with Kantian environmental ethics.

However, as with "Kantian animal ethics", developing a "Kantian environmental ethics" often requires creative interpretation and adaptation of Kant's ideas to address the unique ethical considerations posed by our relationship with the environment and the natural world. In the following chapters, we will deal in more detail with one such "creative interpretation" and "adaptation" of Kant's moral philosophy. More precisely, we will focus on Kant's potential hidden connection to deep ecology, which is revealed – as we shall see later – in his not-so-evident influence on Arne Næss, the co-founder of the deep ecology movement. Namely, in the upcoming chapters, we will argue that Kant – although it does not seem so at first glance – plays an important role in Næss's ecological thought and that his moral philosophy represents solid foundations for articulating one's ecosophies. So, let's start with Næss's ecological thought and the depth of Kant's influence on his ideas.

3. ARNE NÆSS'S ECOSOPHY T

Arne Næss's ecological thought is synonymous with the phrase "Ecosophy T". Næss himself gave this name to his "personal environmental philosophy" or "life's philosophy", which was largely inspired by the glades of Mt. Hallingskarvet, where he has built the Tvergastein hut – a small wooden cabin where he would stay for several months per year and where he wrote a great number of books and articles – hence the letter T. His ecological wisdom (or ecosophy) is mostly inspired by Baruch de Spinoza's monistic philosophy, Mahatma Gandhi's ethics of non-violent resistance, and Rachel Carson's research in biology and ecology. Therefore, in a large variety of his books and articles, one can find lengthy paragraphs about their influence explained in great detail (cf. Næss, 2008, p. 207 ff, 1989a, pp. 64, 165, 203–204, 210, 1979, p. 236 ff). However, what is not entirely evident from his writings, as well as from a large number of secondary literature, is the fact that Kant also had a significant influence on his ecological thought. This is probably so because Næss's attitude towards Kant is both critical and respectful at the same time. We will return to this shortly, but let us first briefly consider the main characteristics of Ecosophy T – which will consequently help us to better understand the intricate relationship between Immanuel Kant and Arne Næss.

Ecosophy T is a personal and comprehensive philosophical system that integrates ecological wisdom and personal values. Næss developed this system as a way to articulate and promote an "ecological worldview" that emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and the interdependence of all living beings (cf. Næss, 1979, 1989a, pp. 202–203). Here we will list some key aspects of Ecosophy T:

1. *Personal Philosophy*: Ecosophy T is deeply personal and subjective, reflecting Næss's personal beliefs, values, and experiences. It underscores the idea that everyone should develop their ecosophy – that is, a personal philosophy that is in harmony with ecological principles (cf. Næss, 1973, 1989a, p 35 ff).
2. *Ecological Harmony*: The idea that human beings should live in a way – or as Næss puts it: have a lifestyle – that promotes ecological balance is central to Ecosophy T (cf. Næss, 1989b, 2008, p. 81 ff). This also implies recognizing the intrinsic value of all life forms and the interconnectedness of human and non-human animals (and their worlds).
3. *Relational and Gestalt Ontology*: Ecosophy T promotes a relational and gestalt understanding of existence, where the identity and well-being of moral agents are seen as inherently linked to the health of the ecological systems they are part of. For example, a field biologist may feel and behave differently when he realizes that

he is in fact in “the heart of the forest” (cf. SWAN, pp. 551–553, Næss, 1989a, pp. 6–7, 79–80, 163, 195).

4. *Normative Guidelines*: Næss outlined a set of moral principles and ethical norms within Ecosophy T to guide deep-ecological lifestyles and living. Among others, these include: (a) *self-realization* – the fundamental belief that personal growth and fulfillment are achieved through identification with other living beings and larger ecological wholes (such as non-human animals, ecosystems, and the Earth itself); (b) *biocentric equality* – the fundamental view that all living beings have intrinsic value and an equal right to live and flourish; and (c) *reduction of human impact* – the fundamental stance that advocates a reduction in human interference with the non-human world, promoting sustainable living, as well as green practices and policies (cf. Næss, 1973, 1979, 2021, pp 1–20).
5. *Deep Ecology Movement*: Apart from being “personal” and “subjective”, Ecosophy T represents a cornerstone of the deep ecology movement. Deep ecology advocates for a shift in perspective – from anthropocentric (i.e., human-centered) to ecocentric (i.e., ecology-centered) perspectives. It also calls for a “deeper questioning” of the underlying assumptions and values of modern industrial societies and promotes a profound respect for the more-than-human world (cf. Næss, 1973, 2011, pp. 1–20).

One might rightly say that Ecosophy T represents an intricate holistic environmental philosophy. However, this holistic system is not as complex as Kant’s philosophical system, which we probably owe to the fact that Næss was a realist, while Kant was an idealist – in theory. In the form of a diagram, his Ecosophy T looks like a conceptual tree (see p. 146).

With this diagram, Næss wanted to show that “Self-realization” is the fundamental norm of his ecosophy and that his “personal philosophy” strives towards “non-class society”, “maximum self-determination”, “maximum complexity”, and “maximum symbiosis”.

In addition to their above-mentioned differences in ontological positions (*idealism vs. realism*) and worldviews (*anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism*), one can also see that Kant and Næss differ in terms of their philosophical theories (*objective vs. subjective theory, universal vs. personal theory*). On the surface, one might conclude that these philosophers have nothing in common, maybe even: that they are opposed in their views. Therefore, one has to ask: is it even possible to talk about Kant’s influence on Næss’s ecological thought in a theoretically grounded and sound way? Our answer to the latter question is firmly affirmative – a solid yes! However, to gain a clearer insight into Kant’s not-so-evident influence on the co-founder of deep ecology – one needs to go into the depth of Arne Næss’s theory.

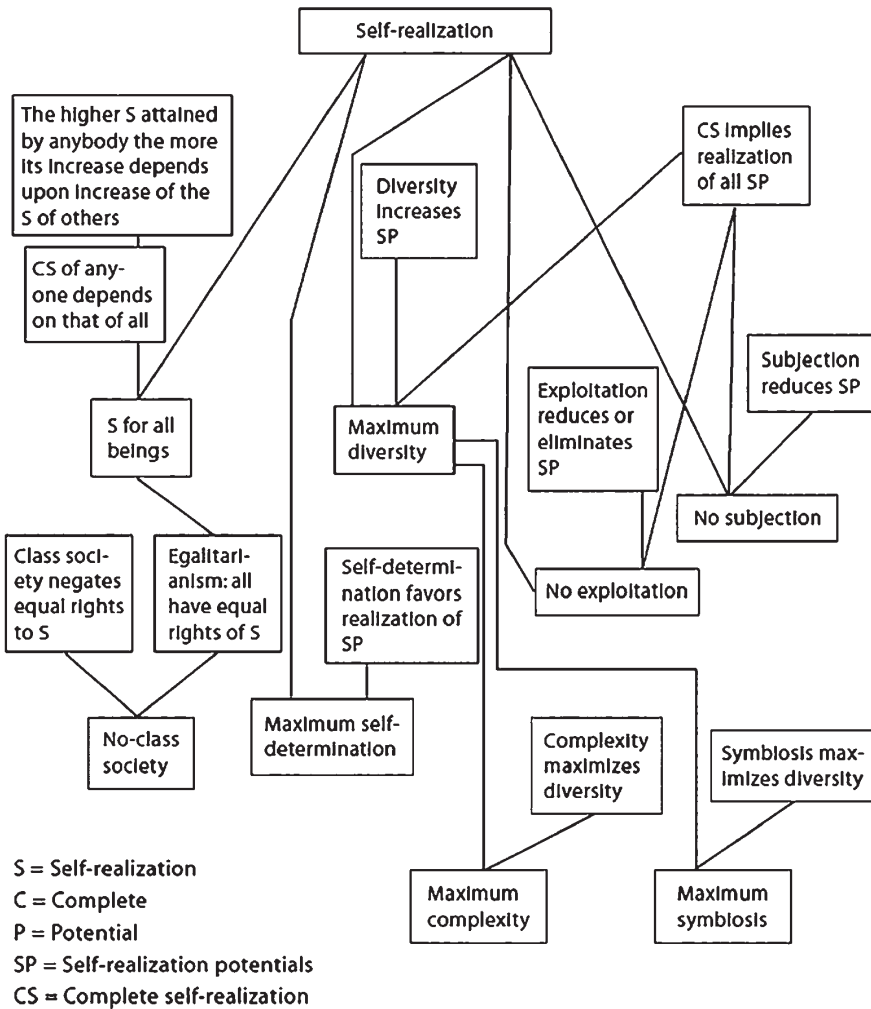


Figure 1. Arne Næss's diagram of Ecosophy T (see: SWAN, vol. 10, p. 485).

3.1. The Depth of Kant's Influence on Næss

In the philosophical work of Arne Næss, one can find various references to certain segments of Immanuel Kant's philosophy. For example, in *The Selected Works of Arne Næss* (Drengson & Glasser, 2005), Kant's name is mentioned more than 100 times in different contexts, which is not so impressive bearing in mind that Spinoza's name is mentioned more than 2,000 times. However, although many scholars have interpreted these references either as "appreciation" or "criticism" of Kant's philosophy, some references cannot be so easily classified into these categories. In this context, Næss's references to Kant's early philosophy caught our eye the most.

To give an example, in his book *Life's Philosophy: Reason & Feeling in a Deeper World* (2002), Næss writes the following:

“In a youthful work of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), I have found a conceptual distinction that is of great help in appraising maturity in emotional life. It is the difference between moral actions and those that are beautiful. Kant leans in the direction of believing that an action is moral if and only if it is motivated by respect for a fundamental ‘categorical imperative.’ The categorical imperative may perhaps be defined thus: you must not act in a way that you cannot accept that everyone else should act in a given situation. Some people think it is unpleasant to see *not* twice in the same sentence, but ethics generally deals (luckily?) with few things that one ought not to do and says more about what is acceptable. Here is a variation of the fundamental ethical rule without the word *not*: You should act as if you wanted everyone to follow your rule of action. This is consistent with the previously mentioned rule, that we ought to arrange our lives in a way that assumes that, if they so wish, others can also live as we do.” (Næss, 2008, p. 128)

By referring to Kant’s philosophy, Næss also wrote about the distinction between beautiful and moral action in his other books (cf. Næss, 1989, pp. 85–86). Moreover, he wrote several articles where he thoroughly explained the latter distinction in great detail. In his article *The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects* (1986), he explicitly admitted the following:

“... I have a somewhat extreme appreciation of what Kant calls beautiful actions (good actions based on inclination), in contrast to dutiful ones. The choice of the formulation ‘Self-realization!’ is in part motivated by the belief that maturity in human beings can be measured along a scale from selfishness to a broadening and deepening of the self, rather than measures of dutiful altruism. I see joyful sharing and caring as a natural process (which, I regret, is somewhat retarded in myself).” (SWAN, p. 54)

And he even talked about this distinction in some of his interviews. For example, in the interview *An Optimist for the Twenty-Second Century: Meeting Arne Næss High Up in the Mountains* (1995), Næss said:

“In an early work, that is not so well-known, he distinguishes between moral actions and beautiful actions. An act is only moral, if it is completely motivated by a respect for the moral laws, some eternal laws of morality. But then, he says, people are often inclined to care for other people and animals for reasons other than adhering to moral law. They do it through inclination! They *feel* like it. So Kant said, that if people do what the moral law requires of them, but do it through inclination, they ‘act beautifully.’ Whereas if you protect because of the moral law you don’t act beautifully, but morally. It is promising for the protection of the planet, that more and more people are led into situations where they do things out of inclination. Because the human force of inclination is tremendously bigger than the force or motivation to act morally.” (Næss, 1995, pp. 12–13)

From these few examples, one can see that the relationship between Kant and Næss is not as simple as it seems; and that we cannot so easily interpret Næss's references through the categories of "appreciating" or "criticizing" Kant's philosophy. Rather, these examples show that Kant – along with other previously mentioned thinkers (i.e., Spinoza, Gandhi, and Carson) – also had a significant influence on Næss's ecological thought. Furthermore, we even argue that the latter influence is potentially important for deep ecology in general – because the distinction between beautiful and moral action lies at the very foundation of the deep ecology movement (cf. Næss, 1989, pp. 85–86, 2008, p 133–139, 140–141). So, let's take a closer look at the origin of this distinction and what constitutes the difference between "beautiful" and "moral" action.

3.2. Beautiful vs. Moral Action

In his article *Beautiful Action: Its Function in the Ecological Crisis* (1993a), Næss is looking for actions that might be more politically effective than those driven by a sense of ethical obligation to act in ecologically responsible ways (cf. Næss, 1993a). In doing so, Næss is referring to Kant's "youthful work" under the title *An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism* (German: *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus*, 1759), which was written as an announcement of Kant's lectures for the next semester. In this youthful work, among other things, Kant discusses Leibniz's philosophy, the proof of God's existence, and the problem of the existence of evil (cf. Kant, 1992, p. 78 ff). By a somewhat creative interpretation and adaptation of Kant's ideas, Næss came upon the distinction between beautiful and moral action (cf. Næss, 1993a).

Although this distinction has been mostly neglected by historians, Næss "borrowed" Kant's distinction between beautiful and moral action – and said the following:

"I foresee a bright future for this terminology. It offers a fairly new perspective on our actions within the realm of radical environmentalism, or more specifically within the deep ecology movement." (Næss, 1993a, p. 67)

But what is the difference between a "moral" and a "beautiful" action? How can we know if we are acting morally or beautifully? As Næss argues:

"According to the terminology of 1759, an act deserves the name *moral act* if it is solely motivated by respect for the moral law: you do it simply because it is your duty; there is no other motive. Presumably a factual mistake would not spoil the *morality* of an action – if you have done your duty *trying* to find out the facts of the case." (Næss, 1993a, p. 67)

On the other hand, when it comes to "beautiful action", Næss immediately adds:

“Suppose you do your duty – you perform the action which the moral law prescribes – but not *only* because of respect for the moral law. You perform the act simply because you are inclined to act like that, or at least partly because you have the inclination. It ‘feels natural’ to do it. In that case Kant calls the act *beautiful*. It is neither a moral nor an immoral act. An immoral act is one that conflicts with the moral law. The beautiful act is, in Kant’s terminology, a completely irrelevant act morally speaking.” (Næss, 1993a, p. 67)

The same distinction can also be found in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the chapter “On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason”, Kant writes the following:

“It is very beautiful to do good to human beings from love for them and from compassionate benevolence, or to be just from love of order; but this is not yet our conduct’s genuine moral maxim appropriate to our station among rational beings *as human beings*, when with proud conceit we presume – as volunteers, as it were – to brush aside the thought of duty and, as independent of command, to want to do merely from our own pleasure what we would need no command to do. We are subject to a *discipline* of reason, and in all our maxims must not forget to be submissive to it, not to detract from it in any way, and not to curtail in any way – through delusion based on self-love – the authority of the law (even though our own reason gives it) by positing the determining basis of our will, even if in conformity with the law, still in something other than the law itself and in respect for this law. Duty and obligation are the only designations that we must give to our relation to the moral law. We are indeed legislating members of a kingdom of morals possible through freedom and presented to us by practical reason for our respect; but we are at the same time subjects of this kingdom, not its sovereign, and a failure to recognize our low level as creatures – as well as self-conceit’s [attitude of] refusal toward the authority of the holy law – is already a defection from the law in spirit, even if its letter were fulfilled.” (Kant, 2002b, pp. 106–107)

However, although Kant stands firmly by moral action, Næss gives priority to beautiful action – believing that it has much greater potential and effectiveness in the current ecological crisis. Or, in Næss’s words:

“In short, there is little understanding that fostering *inclination* is essential in every aspect of socialization and acculturation, and therefore also in the global ecological crisis. Moralizing is too narrow, too patronizing, and too open to the question, ‘Who are *you*? What is the relation of your preaching and your life?’ An invitation to act beautifully, to beautiful acts rather than talk about them, to organize society with all this in mind, may lead to recognition and acclamation of such acts, and be a decisive factor that at last will decrease the unsustainability. ‘Tell me about your beautiful acts today! Do the authorities encourage such acts?’” (Næss, 1993a, p. 71)

Even though they differ in what they stand for, in theoretical and practical terms, when it comes to the distinction between beautiful and moral action, it is clear that Kant’s distinction had a significant impact on Næss’s ecological thought. This is

further supported by his own words, which he uses to conclude the discussion about beautiful and moral actions:

“What I have offered for reflection is a small variation in our perspective, looking at what goes on in terms of a Kantian distinction. Thank you, Immanuel.” (Næss, 1993a, p. 71)

But to fully appreciate and understand the depth of Kant’s influence on Næss, one also has to look in the other direction – at Næss’s critique of the Kantian mind. Namely, although he respects Kant’s philosophical authority and uses his distinction between beautiful and moral actions in his Ecosophy T, Næss interprets Kant’s moral philosophy – critically, or as Næss would put it: with deep and meaningful questions.

3.3. Næss’s Critique of the Kantian Mind

As mentioned earlier, Næss is an ontological realist who promotes a relational and gestalt ontology, which is not compatible with Kant’s idealistic worldview. However, by referring to their differences and using Kant’s philosophy as an example (which he deeply respects and appreciates to some extent), Næss elaborates his personal philosophy even further. To give an example, Næss argues that human beings have direct access to the world (i.e., nature), by strictly opposing the Kantian concept of *Ding an Sich*.² Næss tried to explain his idea of direct identification with nature by using the example of a spontaneous feeling.³ More precisely, Næss spoke about the connection with nature, a feeling that can be achieved when one finds himself/herself deep in the forest – in the so-called “heart of the forest”. And if there were a road nearby, that feeling would quickly disappear (cf. SWAN, pp. 551–552). However, most people would probably not agree with this “poetic” line of argumentation. They might even say: “Well, that’s your imagination. There is no *heart* here.” (cf. SWAN, pp. 551). But if you start arguing this way, by saying that there is no “heart of the forest”, you pretty soon end up adhering to

“... a worldview which resembles that of the great philosopher Immanuel Kant. You end up saying: ‘Nature is without colors, without shapes, even without cause and

² Interestingly, in one of his conversation with David Rothenberg, Næss said: “Yes. I don’t know how far down the so-called kingdom of animals you can go. The essential thing is that we must avoid the thought of things in themselves that Kant talked about as *Ding an Sich*, a reality apart from the sensed world.” (Rothenberg, 1993, p. 154).

³ Also, Næss argued: “We tend to see ourselves in everything alive. As scientists we observe the death struggle of an insect, but as mature human beings we spontaneously also experience our own death in a way, and feel sentiments that relate to struggle, pain, and death. Spontaneous identification is of course most obvious when we react to the pain of persons we love. We do not observe that pain and by reflecting on it decide that it is bad. What goes on is difficult to describe; it is a task of philosophical phenomenology to try to do the job.” (Næss, 1993b, p. 73).

effect. Because relations of cause and effect are created by humans. In short: there is nothing in nature in itself! You have no access to nature in itself.” (Næss, 1995, pp 6)

Bearing this in mind, it is also easier to understand Næss’s references that appreciate or criticize Kant’s moral philosophy, such as this one:

“In spite of his in some ways unfortunate influence, in my opinion, Kant’s works are and will continue to be a major source of inspiration.” (Næss, 1993a, p. 67)

Namely, in a world without colour and form, cause and effect, Næss does not want to live – it is not his world(view). On the contrary, he firmly stands by the world(view) of concrete contents, which is also a basis for his critique of the Kantian mind (cf. Næss, 1985). Given that this critique – or perhaps more precisely: a critical dialogue with Kant, can be found in several of Næss’s books and articles, we will not go into detail here. Rather, we will focus on the importance of this critical dialogue for deep ecology in general.

4. DISCUSSION: IMMANUEL KANT AND DEEP ECOLOGY

In the following chapter, we will briefly discuss the practical application of Kant’s distinction between beautiful and moral action in the context of deep ecology. In doing so, we will shortly discuss some “Kantian roots of deep ecology” and potential “Kantian contributions to deep-ecological thinking”. Finally, as a result of this discussion, we will present an outline of a Kantian ecosophy, accompanied by its basic principles and short definitions.

4.1. Kantian Roots of Deep Ecology

Certainly, one of the “strongest” and most “branched” Kantian roots of deep ecology is the distinction between beautiful and moral action, which forms – in one way or another – the very foundation of the deep ecology movement. In that sense, some ecosophies give priority to moral action and those that give priority to beautiful action. Næss’s Ecosophy T, as we have seen, encourages beautiful actions (cf. Næss, 1989, pp. 85–86, 2008, pp. 133–139, 140–141). However, the Kantian roots go much further than that! In the deep-ecological discourse, which also encompasses debates on environmental and animal ethics, one can also observe a growing trend of referring to some of the key concepts of Kant’s moral philosophy (Fieldhouse 2004; Breitenbach 2009; Vereb 2017), which is largely contrary to Næss’s original thought (i.e., his Ecosophy T). However, we can thank Næss for that as well, because his ultimate goal was to encourage individuals to articulate their personal ecosophies – and even those that would be based on moral rather than beautiful actions. And even

though they might not be called “ecosophies” at all. In that sense, Næss cared more about ecological well-being than proving that his worldview is the only one that is morally justified and theoretically sound. Because it’s not! On the contrary, if your personal ethics, ecosophy, or life’s philosophy aims at the same goal (i.e., ecological harmony and flourishing of all life forms), but starts from different theoretical assumptions, Næss would support it as well. This can also be seen in his references to Kant’s philosophy, in which the deepest Kantian roots of deep ecology are hidden. Those roots are Kant’s notions of “intrinsic value” and “humanity as an end in itself”. Here are just a few examples that illustrate how Næss uses these ideas in a deep-ecological context:

“By attributing intrinsic value to nonhuman beings, deep ecology supporters may be said to accept a widened Kantian maxim: no living being should be treated *merely* as a means. The wideness of the application of the predicate *living* is, of course, open to different proposals. It is, for example, not necessary to include the HIV virus.” (SWAN, p. 97)

“The venerable German philosopher Immanuel Kant insisted that we never use a human being *merely* as a means to an end. But why should this philosophy apply only to human beings? Are there not other beings with intrinsic value? What about animals, plants, landscapes, and our very special old planet as a whole?” (Næss, 1993b, pp. 70–71)

Back to Immanuel Kant and the use of a human being merely as a means to an end. What makes possible a vivid experience of intrinsic value corresponding to a vastly generalized Kantian maxim? In short, what makes intense personal appreciation of diversity of life forms and the whole ecosphere possible? There is one process that perhaps is more important in this respect than any other: the process of so-called *identification*. (Næss, 1993b, p. 73)

These quotes clearly show that there are certain Kantian contributions to deep-ecological thinking. Let’s briefly see what they are.

4.2. Kantian Contributions to Deep-Ecological Thinking

In addition to what we call “Næss’s critique of the Kantian mind” and Kant’s distinction between beautiful and moral action, there is a wide range of concepts that *might* take root in the deep-ecological context. These concepts include: “duty”, “moral law”, “categorical imperative”, “moral autonomy”, and “moral development”. These concepts, as well as some others, can open the door to a better understanding of those ecosophies that promote moral rather than beautiful actions. We will put that to the test right away! In the next chapter, as a result of this short discussion, we will outline a Kantian ecosophy that will be accompanied by its basic principles and short definitions – by using some of the most important concepts of Kant’s

moral philosophy. So, how would a Kantian ecosophy “look” like? What would be its theoretical structure and practical implications? Let’s take now a small step towards a Kantian ecosophy!

4.3. Towards a Kantian Ecosophy?

A Kantian ecosophy, inspired by Arne Næss’ Ecosophy T, could integrate Kantian moral principles with ecological wisdom to create a personal philosophical system – that is, a lifestyle that respects both human autonomy and the intrinsic value of the natural world. Here’s how a Kantian ecosophy might be structured:

1. *Respect for Nature and All Living Beings:*

(a) *Categorical Imperative:* At the core of a Kantian ecosophy would be the application of Kant’s categorical imperative to environmental and animal ethics. This would also involve creating maxims that could be universally applied to all moral agents without leading to unnecessary environmental degradation and animal harm. For example, a principle like “act in such a way that your treatment of non-human animals and ecosystems could be adopted universally without unnecessary harm” would guide ethical behaviour.

(b) *Humanity as an End in Itself:* By adopting the principle that humanity should always be treated as an end in itself, a Kantian ecosophy might argue that moral agents should consider the long-term impacts of their actions on the environment because they consistently also affect human dignity and well-being as well.

2. *Intrinsic Value of Nature and Non-Human Beings:* While Kant traditionally focused on rational beings (i.e., human beings), a Kantian ecosophy could extend moral consideration to the environment and non-human beings based on their role in the ecological system. This could be justified through the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature and non-human animals and their importance in supporting the autonomy and well-being of humans and other sentient beings.

3. *Environmental Duty and Stewardship:*

(a) *Environmental Duties:* A Kantian ecosophy could outline specific moral duties towards the environment, such as preserving biodiversity, reducing pollution, and promoting sustainability. These duties would stem from the obligation to respect and maintain the systems that support life and flourishing of all living beings.

(b) *Environmental Stewardship:* Reflecting Kant’s notion of moral responsibility, a Kantian ecosophy would advocate for the role of humans as stewards of the Earth. This involves taking responsibility for the impact of our actions and striving to protect and restore natural environments for future generations.

4. *Intergenerational Justice*: Following the latter line of argumentation, a Kantian ecosophy might emphasize intergenerational justice, as a means of ensuring that our moral actions do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This aligns with the Kantian principle of treating humanity as an end, considering the well-being of those yet to be born.

5. *Moral Autonomy and Development*:

(a) *Moral Autonomy*: In line with Kant's moral philosophy, a Kantian ecosophy could emphasize moral actions that promote the autonomy of all individuals, both of current and future generations. Ensuring a healthy environment is crucial for individuals to exercise their autonomy effectively.

(b) *Moral Development*: A Kantian ecosophy might stress the importance of developing a moral character that respects nature as a whole. By fostering and developing virtues such as humility, respect, and responsibility, moral agents can better fulfill their duties to the environment and the natural world.

In other words, a Kantian ecosophy would extend Kant's moral principles to the natural world, by emphasizing duties to respect and protect the environment. To be more precise, by integrating concepts like the categorical imperative, intrinsic value, and intergenerational justice, this ecosophy could provide a trustworthy framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges while respecting both human autonomy and the intrinsic value of nature and non-human beings.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, even though there are important differences between Kant's and Næss's philosophical theories and worldviews (e.g., *anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism*, *objective vs. subjective theory*, and *universal vs. personal theory*), there is also a strong theoretical connection between these two philosophers. Namely, Kant's distinction between beautiful and moral action, as we have seen, significantly influenced Næss's ecological thought – in fact, this distinction, in one way or another, is at the very centre of deep-ecological thinking. If truth be told, it is in its very nature, so to speak. Therefore, Kant's distinction between beautiful and moral action is also a great contribution to deep ecology in general. However, as we have argued, some other Kantian concepts – such as: “duty”, “moral law”, “categorical imperative”, “moral autonomy”, and “moral development” – might also take root in a deep-ecological context. On that note, as a result of our discussion, we outlined a Kantian ecosophy and presented its basic principles and short definitions – by using some of the most important concepts of Kant's moral philosophy. Finally, by reading Kant and Næss

side by side, we concluded that their philosophical views – no matter how different they might be – agree at least on one thing: human beings *could* and *should* make a difference by acting *morally* and/or *beautifully*.

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Između lijepog i moralnog djelovanja: Immanuel Kant i Arne Næss

SAŽETAK

Autor rada promišlja o Kantovoj distinkciji između lijepog i moralnog djelovanja te o njezinu utjecaju na ekološku misao Arne Næssa. Referirajući se na Næssovo tumačenje Kantove moralne filozofije, napose njegova manje poznatog spisa *Pokušaj nekih razmatranja o optimizmu* (njem. *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus*, 1759.), autor iznosi tezu da Kant – iako se tako ne čini na prvi pogled – ima važnu ulogu u Næssovoj filozofiji okoliša (tj. Ekozofiji T) te da njegova moralna filozofija predstavlja čvrste temelje za artikuliranje vlastitih ekozofija. To je potaknulo autora da promisli o (I) dubini Kantova utjecaja na Næssa, (II) kantijanskim korijenima dubinske ekologije i (III) kantijanskim doprinosima dubinsko-ekološkom promišljanju. Autor je pritom ocrtao i jednu kantijansku ekozofiju – koristeći neke od najvažnijih koncepata Kantove moralne filozofije (npr. dužnost, intrinzična vrijednost, kategorički imperativ, moralni zakon, moralna autonomija, moralni razvoj i čovječnost kao svrha po sebi). Naposljetku, kao rezultat ove rasprave, autor je došao do zaključka da se Kantova i Næssova filozofska teorija i svjetonazor – bez obzira na njihove razlike – slažu barem u jednoj stvari: ljudska bića *mogu i trebaju* napraviti promjenu djelujući *moralno i/ili lijepo*.

Ključne riječi: Immanuel Kant, Arne Næss, etika, etika životinja, etika okoliša, dubinska ekologija, moral, ljepota.