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The Boat of Deep Ecology and Confucianism's Lighthouse

Evelyna Nazari · Wednesday, April 18th, 2018

"A lighthouse doesn't save the ships…it's just this pillar that helps to guide people home." This is a quote from actress Lea Michele. Individually, both the lighthouse and boat function autonomously. In a lifetime, the two structures may not even come into contact with each other, completing their own duties in separate spheres. Ideologies of Deep Ecology and Confucianism come to symbolize this relationship. When viewed separately, both Deep Ecology and Confucianism have their own purposes and intentions for their respective audiences. In saying that, both do share some similarities, such as encouraging learning from the past and demonstrating a sense of interconnectedness. Yet, due to being distinct entities, the beliefs differ on how they view the human condition and incorporate individualist versus collectivist philosophies; however, their relationship can evolve beyond mere unrelated co-existence. In fact, should Confucianism's humanitarian and collectivistic roots shine its light towards Deep Ecology, environmental consciousness and self-growth would pillar a new beacon of hope and advancement.

The Docked Ship, Ideological Similarities

To begin, Deep Ecology and Confucianism both advocate education of the past, implementing the newfound knowledge to better the self and world. The focus first proceeds to Deep Ecology. To improve existing conditions, a key first step requires the individual to learn more about those who lived before him or her, to internalize their wisdom and experience. Professor of Environmental Studies Alan Drengson describes that endorsing the principles of Deep Ecology necessitates followers to learn values and practices from the indigenous people of the area. Aboriginal individuals have a long history of peaceful habitation scattered all around areas such as the Unites States, to the point where they and the environment mutually synchronize to live their lives together. The video "California's Lost Grizzly" explains how indigenous people of Southern California meticulously started fires to get more water into a stream, increase acorn crops, and promote more visibility between the peoples and the native grizzly bears. In this inter-species relationship, both sides thrived and prospered in co-existence for countless years until the havoc of colonization began. Finding ways to reapply these original, conscientious values thus holds a high merit of importance in instigating a change, a concept closely resembled in Confucianism as well.

Similarly, Confucianism also champions learning from the past to improve society. Whereas Drengson specifies understanding the values of aboriginal people, Confucius does not specify the audience to learn from, per se. Rather, Confucianism describes how Confucius suggests individuals study the cultural legacies in the face of historical ignorance. Acquainting oneself to the actions or

mistakes of the past provides an added layer of clarity of how to approach issues moving forward. Essentially, the intention is to avoid the quote “those who do not know history’s mistakes are doomed to repeat them” from coming to fruition. By doing so, those in current or eventual positions of power may refer to the wisdom of the past to narrow down the best decision to make for the masses. Therefore, learning about past cultures and history, as noted in Confucianism and Deep Ecology respectively, refines both ideologies efforts to create better, informed choices integral to bettering society.

Aside from past education, the other principle that the two ideals follow are these separate, metaphysical tenets that portray interconnection beyond the span of the self. In the case of Deep Ecology, its platform hones this focus in relation to the environment. Environmental Professor David R. Keller explicates that “Once ontological boundaries between living beings are recognized as illusory, one realizes that biospherical interests are one’s own” (Keller, 207). Expanding the concept of reality in one’s mind nestles in a newfound sense of comprehension and empathy. One can now feel the slicing pain of deforestation, the smothering of ecosystems for colonization, or the wounds of poached animals. The pain of the world and the self are now unanimous. Placing oneself in the position of the victimized environment instills a sympathetic passion to make a change, or in the least it provides eye-opening awareness, passable to others. Not stemming too far, Confucianism follows similar metaphysical points.

For Confucius, his ideology views metaphysical boundaries in the light of morality. Specifically, he holds that “…morality is embedded in the universe, as well as in human beings” (“Confucianism,” 1). Due to morality’s placement in both entities, a connection forms between the two. The universe’s morality for Confucius refers to the ethics of higher powers (“Confucianism” 1). If humans tune in to their inner morality and do *just* actions, then they align themselves to the beliefs of the universe–doing not only a good thing on a surface, reality level, but an overarching astral level as well. Consideration of the morality of the universe with one’s own then ultimately allows an individual to make conscientious decisions, much like Deep Ecology and the environment. Hence, both ideologies and their metaphysical ties to humans and larger entities support the effort in raising awareness of issues- developing better, beneficial behaviors.

Sailing Away, Separate Ideologies

Deep Ecology and Confucianism hold diverging attitudes towards humanity that affects the ideological impact each have on the individual. To begin, on one end of the spectrum, Confucianism holds sympathy for the human race, which bodes well for his audience. Almost like a paternal figure, Confucius is described as “…car[ing] about the human condition… [and] worr[ying] about humans” (“Confucianism,” 1). To an individual with no exposure to his ideology, Confucius already creates an approachable persona that doubles in an appeal to pathos. He pushes this mood further by even holding optimism for the self-efficacy of humanity (“Confucianism,” 1). Although, potentially, a little *too* hopeful for the entirety of the human race, his attitude doesn’t discredit the impression he leaves readers. Confucius’ caring nature towards humanity instills a belief of efficacy upon readers, thereby at least allowing them to consider his viewpoint. Even if dissenters or cynics disagree with him, Confucius at least makes a noble gesture to qualify that all humanity regardless has potential–whether the former parties follow his ideologies or not. Thus, Confucianism’s sympathetic attitude towards humanity leaves a positive impression of his stance, which will contrast Deep Ecology’s stark attitude towards humans.

On the other hand, Deep Ecology confronts anthropocentrism and its destructiveness, leaving,

minimally, a subconscious, negative impression to its readers. Deep Ecology, in its best intention, urges humans to deepen environmental conscientiousness, recognize the inherent worth in all non-human things, and make a change for Earth's ever-worsening conditions (Keller, 208). Philosophical founder Arne Naess also identifies humans' parasitism and avaricious tendencies of consumption. Keller transcribes some of Naess' points from the Deep Ecology Platform that dictates that "[h]umans have no right to reduce this [non-human] richness and diversity… [p]resent human interference with the non-human world is excessive…" (Keller, 210). Naess' points do hold true; humanity's prodigality and greed is exemplified through unjust colonization of indigenous peoples, continual disregard for trash, and destruction or depletion of ecosystems and resources. However, it's Naess' rather harsh use of tone towards humanity's culpability, without a mention of redemption for consolation, that offsets the reader either consciously or subconsciously. Interested individuals want to help, but he induces guilt that stagnates amelioration.

To amend this, Naess' cut and dry solution needs an extra point that addresses or qualifies humanity's potential for change- Confucianism comes into play. Integration of Confucianism's paternal concern for humanity would expand Deep Ecology's following and effectiveness. Especially with Naess' diction of "human interference," he automatically distances the reader as a number, a figure, or potentially already a perpetrator to the problem. If Naess incorporates an extra point that identifies humanity's potential to make change, his platform would be more approachable, promoting better odds of creating a cultural shift. Thus, despite Deep Ecology's and Confucianism's contrasting impressions of humanity, Confucianism's points offer insight on how to improve Deep Ecology's perception of humans and its relationship with the reader.

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The second way Confucianism and Deep Ecology differ is through the contrasting philosophical foundations that shape their beliefs, the former with collectivism and the latter with implicit individualism. Starting with Confucianism, Confucius rather blatantly weaves eastern philosophy in and out of his platform. Should a person exhibit selfishly motivated behavior, Confucius reprimands that these individuals "lack respect for others including their family members" ("Confucianism" 2). Confucius places importance on social harmony and dives into the consequences of ill behavior. As a result, he essentially describes that individuals should consider their actions and the ramifications it may have not only on the self, but those around them. In fact, Confucius widens this scope through his "emphasis on community rather than the individual" ("Confucianism," 2). By considering the collective whole of a particular society, Confucius places an extra layer of responsibility for individuals to pursue benevolence, or face the repercussions of breaking the unwritten rules of a social contract. As such, Confucianism's collectivism keeps individuals wary, promoting a better sense of self-awareness and conscientiousness.

For the case of Deep Ecology, Naess has communal intentions for his platform's outreach, yet his beliefs evoke more implicit individualistic notions. Deep Ecology places the importance on the self and self-realization- expanding one's mindset to deepen their concern for the environment. Naess' final point in his platform holds that those who agree to his ideology have "an obligation … to try and implement the necessary changes" (Keller, 210). He places responsibility on the supporter to initiate a change, which propels a solid step forward in making a difference in the world. Championing a metaphysical extension of boundaries (Keller, 207), Naess promotes empathy of nature's pain as reflected upon the self, intended to improve conscientiousness. Even when the self ascends beyond these metaphysical boundaries and feels motivated to "implement changes," he

fails to address the importance and influential role of families, communities, or societies in spreading this ideology. Deep Ecology's notions of individualism settle in through here, but, to fill in the missing gap, Confucianism can proffer a solution.

To take Deep Ecology's influence to the next level, Confucian's collectivistic basis can solidify and expand Naess' philosophy. Deep Ecology starts off strong with reshaping the perception of the self, but this mentality needs exposure early on in life, especially at a young, developing age. Meshing in Confucianism's eastern roots, Deep Ecology would latch on better to society if the education system introduced or promoted this idea in institutions. This minimally provides exposure to the view, allowing students to consider it on their own as they grow older. Alternatively, implementing Naess' principle into family or community values also proves useful. Being surrounded by like-minded people who share similar values strengthens and spreads the belief more effectively than just reaching self-perfection without consideration of the roles of others. So even with Deep Ecology's implicit air of individualism, Confucius' eastern influence can dramatically improve Deep Ecology's outreach and efficiency.

To draw to a close, both Deep Ecology and Confucianism contain principles of merit that distinguish them as their own ideologies. Like the boat and the lighthouse, both can function independently. They do share some similarities, such as learning from the past and pushing metaphysical barriers towards universal interconnection; however, they also differ in how they derive their foundational platforms, i.e. individualism versus collectivism, and how they view the human condition, i.e. care versus criticism. Yet, it's when the two collaborate and combine principles that something promising occurs. Overlapping Confucian principles with Deep Ecology adds to the environmentalist effort by enticing readers and audiences. The blends of Confucianism softens the attitude towards humanity- while not detracting from responsibility and urgency- and considers the role of the community into this formula for change. Much like the lighthouse guiding a lost boat, perhaps the union of these two can finally provide Deep Ecology the beacon of light needed to create a lasting, positive impact on decaying non-human life.

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