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Ecological Egalitarianism and Human Diversity: A Deep Ecological Reassessment of Equality in the Philippine Context

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Abstract

Equality has long been a central concern in social and ecological discourse, particularly in nations such as the Philippines where cultural diversity and environmental degradation coexist. This study applies Arne Naess' theory of *Deep Ecology*—which holds that all living and non-living entities possess intrinsic value—to the Philippine context, highlighting its potential to transform the nation's understanding of equality. The research emphasizes that recognizing the interconnectedness of humanity and nature is vital for addressing both social inequality and ecological

crisis. The study adopts a qualitative-philosophical approach to examine Naess' concept of ecological egalitarianism, correlating it with Philippine cultural thought, indigenous belief systems, and environmental realities. Results reveal that embracing an inclusive ecological perspective promotes both social harmony and environmental stewardship. Consequently, the research calls for an integral form of equality encompassing human and non-human communities, aligning with indigenous worldviews and contemporary calls for sustainable development.

Keywords: Deep Ecology, Arne Naess, Ecological Egalitarianism, Environmental Ethics, Philippine Society, Social Equality

Introduction

Equality has long been a fundamental aspiration in human society and remains one of the most urgent and complex issues of our time. In the Philippines, the discourse on equality extends beyond social and political dimensions—it also encompasses cultural identity, economic disparity, and environmental justice (Francisco, 2020) ^[4]. The nation's diverse population composed of over a hundred ethno-linguistic groups and unevenly distributed socioeconomic classes, illustrates both the richness and fragmentation of Philippine society. However, this same diversity has often given rise to systemic inequality, where marginalized groups—particularly indigenous communities and the rural poor—continue to face exclusion from social, political, and economic participation (Santos, 2017) ^[9].

Parallel to these social challenges are pressing ecological crises. The Philippine ranks among the most climate vulnerable nations in the world with deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution threatening both human livelihoods and natural ecosystems (Republic Act 9729, 2009) ^[7]. These twin crises—social inequality and environmental degradation—reflect a deeper philosophical disconnection: the separation between humanity and nature. This alienation has led to an exploitative worldview that privileges human interests over ecological balance and economic growth over environmental sustainability.

It is in this context that Arne Naess' philosophy of Deep ecology provides a compelling framework for reinterpreting equality. Naess (1973) ^[6] challenges the anthropocentric paradigm that places humans at the apex of moral concern. His concept of ecological egalitarianism posits that all forms of life, human and non-human alike, possess intrinsic value, independent of their utility to human beings. This principle invites a radical transformation of human consciousness—from domination to participation within the greater biospheric whole (Devall & Sessions, 1985). By recognizing this interconnectedness, equality is no longer confined to social or political realms but extends to the ecological dimension.

For the Philippines, Naess' Deep Ecology resonates deeply with existing cultural and spiritual traditions. Indigenous belief systems, such as the Ifugao's concept of kinship with the earth and the Lumad understanding of the land as sacred, echo Naess' assertion of the moral worth of all beings (Santos, 2017) ^[9]. These perspectives suggest that the ecological egalitarianism proposed by Naess is not foreign to the Filipino worldview; rather, it revitalizes long standing traditions of environmental

respect and communal living that modern society has gradually forgotten.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how Deep Ecology, when contextualized within Filipino culture and environmental realities, can offer a holistic framework for understanding equality. The objectives of this research are threefold:

1. To examine Arne Naess' concept of Deep ecology and its principle of ecological egalitarianism.
2. To contextualize this philosophy within the socio-cultural and environmental realities of the Philippines.
3. To propose how ecological egalitarianism can inform contemporary Filipino understandings of equality—socially, culturally, and ecologically.

Through this philosophical and contextual inquiry, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on equality by presenting a framework rooted in both global ecological ethics and Filipino moral thought, envisioning a future where equality transcends human boundaries and encompasses the entire web of life (Naess, 1973; Drengson & Devall, 2010) [5, 3].

In pursuing these objectives, this research employs a philosophical-qualitative approach, drawing primarily from Arne Naess' foundational texts and related scholarship in environmental philosophy. It also integrates Filipino ecological perspectives from indigenous and contemporary contexts to ground theory in local reality. By combining hermeneutic interpretation with contextual analysis, this study aims to demonstrate how Naess' ecological egalitarianism can be meaningfully applied to the Philippine experience of social and environmental inequality.

Materials and Methods

This research adopts a philosophical-qualitative approach anchored in hermeneutic and contextual analysis. The study does not rely on empirical experimentation but instead engages in a critical interpretation of primary and secondary sources related to Arne Naess' Deep Ecology, environmental ethics, and Filipino ecological philosophy. The methodological framework is guided by three interrelated components: (1) textual analysis, (2) contextual interpretation, and (3) conceptual synthesis.

Research Design

The philosophical-qualitative design allows for an in-depth examination of ideas rather than measurable data (Creswell & Poth, 2018) [2]. The study primarily interprets philosophical texts, contextual literature, and cultural materials, examining how theoretical concepts from Deep Ecology can be situated within Philippine social and environmental realities. Through hermeneutic interpretation, Naess' key concepts—such as *self-realization*, *biospheric egalitarianism*, and *ecological self*—are analyzed in light of Filipino perspectives on nature and community.

Data Collection Procedure

This study draws upon two categories of sources:

1. Primary Sources – including Arne Naess' seminal essays such as *The Shallow and the Deep*, *Long-Range Ecology Movement* (1973), *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle* (1989), and other writings compiled in *The Ecology of Wisdom* (Drengson & Devall, 2010) [3].
2. Secondary Sources – consisting of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and local publications on

Filipino environmental thought, such as Santos (2017) [9], Francisco (2020) [4], and relevant documents from the Philippine government and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP, 2019) [1].

These materials were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their contribution to understanding the convergence between Deep Ecology and Filipino ecological perspectives.

Methods of Analysis

The analytical process follows a three-step interpretative framework:

1. Textual Hermeneutics:

Each primary text by Naess was examined to extract and clarify the conceptual foundations of Deep Ecology. Emphasis was placed on identifying the key philosophical principles—especially *ecological egalitarianism* and *the relational self* (Naess, 1989) [6]—that can inform new interpretations of equality.

2. Contextual Correlation:

The second step involved situating these philosophical principles within the Philippine context, particularly by examining indigenous ecological beliefs, Catholic social teaching, and contemporary environmental challenges such as deforestation and climate injustice (Republic Act 9729, 2009; Francisco, 2020) [7, 4]. The goal was to reveal intersections between Naess' universal ideas and Filipino lived experience.

3. Conceptual Synthesis:

The final step entailed synthesizing both Western and Filipino ecological perspectives into a coherent philosophical framework. This synthesis seeks to articulate how *ecological egalitarianism* could redefine equality in the Philippines—not only among human beings but also between humanity and nature.

Ethical Considerations

Although this study does not involve human participants or field data, ethical standards in academic research were maintained by properly acknowledging all intellectual sources and avoiding plagiarism. Interpretations of indigenous beliefs were treated with cultural sensitivity, ensuring that references to local knowledge were respectful and representative of the communities' traditional ecological wisdom (Salazar, 2021) [8].

Scope and Limitation

This study is primarily theoretical and interpretative in scope. It does not attempt to quantify environmental attitudes or measure policy outcomes. Instead, it focuses on the philosophical articulation of equality from a deep ecological perspective as it relates to Filipino thought. The limitations include the potential subjectivity inherent in hermeneutic interpretation and the absence of empirical validation. However, these limitations are consistent with the nature of philosophical inquiry and do not detract from the study's intellectual contributions.

Results and Discussions

The analysis yielded three central insights that collectively demonstrate the relevance of Arne Naess' *Deep Ecology* to contemporary Filipino understandings of equality and ecological justice. These findings show how Naess' philosophical concepts can inspire a more holistic and

culturally grounded approach to equality—one that transcends human-centered frameworks and embraces both social and ecological dimensions.

Equality as Ecological Egalitarianism

Naess' notion of ecological egalitarianism asserts that all forms of life possess intrinsic value, independent of their utility to humans (Naess, 1973; 1989) ^[5, 6]. This principle challenges anthropocentrism, calling for an egalitarian framework that includes non-human entities within the moral community. In the context of the Philippines, this principle resonates with traditional beliefs among indigenous groups such as the Lumad and the Ifugao, whose cosmologies emphasize interconnectedness between humans, animals, spirits, and the land (Salazar, 2021) ^[8].

The recognition of the intrinsic value of all beings aligns with the Filipino concept of *pakikipagkapwa*—the shared identity and moral obligation to treat others (including nature) as co-persons. Thus, Naess' philosophy provides a theoretical foundation for expanding this indigenous ethical framework toward a global ecological consciousness. This demonstrates that ecological egalitarianism can serve as a bridge between Western philosophical ecology and Filipino indigenous ethics, advancing a form of equality that integrates cultural, biological, and spiritual dimensions.

Human Diversity and the Ecological Self Another key finding relates to the concept of the “ecological self”—Naess' call for expanding human identity to include the broader biospheric community. This idea provides a counter-narrative to the existing social hierarchies that persist in Filipino society, such as those based on class, ethnicity, or regionalism.

The Philippines, while rich in cultural diversity, continues to grapple with systemic inequalities that stem from both colonial history and socioeconomic structures (Francisco, 2020) ^[4]. By adopting the concept of the ecological self, individuals and communities are encouraged to redefine their sense of self not as isolated entities but as participants in a shared ecological network.

Decentralization and Local Autonomy: Lessons for Philippine Environmental Governance Naess also advocates for local autonomy and decentralization, arguing that sustainable ecological management must arise from small-scale, community-driven systems (Naess, 1989) ^[6]. This principle finds direct relevance in the Philippines, where centralized governance often struggles to address local environmental issues effectively. Local communities, particularly indigenous and rural populations, possess traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) that has been proven effective in resource management (Santos, 2017) ^[9]. For example, the *bayanihan* system of communal labor and the *muyong* forest stewardship practice of the Ifugao people exemplify community-based sustainability models that mirror Naess' advocacy for decentralized ecological action. Thus, integrating the deep ecological ethic into Philippine governance frameworks could strengthen community participation and enhance environmental justice. This also aligns with the Climate Change Act of 2009 (Republic Act 9729), which emphasizes local climate adaptation and participatory governance. By fostering decentralization rooted in ecological equality, the Philippines can move toward a more inclusive and sustainable model of development.

Toward a Filipino Deep Ecology: Reimagining Equality The synthesis of Naess' Deep Ecology and Filipino ecological worldviews leads to the proposal of a Filipino Deep Ecology—a philosophical framework that redefines equality as both ecological and communal. This model draws from *kapwa* (shared identity), *bayanihan* (communal unity), and *kagandahang-loob* (inner goodness), aligning these with Naess' ecological self and biospheric egalitarianism.

In this context, equality is no longer confined to human rights discourse; rather, it extends to all living beings within the biospheric community. Such a framework not only addresses social inequality but also promotes ecological justice, highlighting that the degradation of nature inevitably perpetuates human suffering.

This vision challenges the Filipino nation to shift from a utilitarian approach to development toward an ecosophical paradigm—one that values simplicity, sustainability, and interconnectedness (Naess, 1989) ^[6]. In doing so, the Philippines can cultivate an environmental ethic that is both globally relevant and culturally authentic.

Discussion Summary

The results indicate that Arne Naess' *Deep Ecology* provides a robust philosophical lens for re-examining the concept of equality in the Philippine context. The fusion of ecological egalitarianism with indigenous Filipino values offers a transformative path toward integral equality—where social, cultural, and environmental dimensions are seen as inseparable.

This synthesis suggests that environmental degradation and social inequality stem from the same root cause: the illusion of separation—between humans and nature, rich and poor, local and global. Addressing these divides requires cultivating an ecological consciousness that honors diversity while affirming interdependence.

Conclusion

This study explored the philosophical framework of Arne Naess' Deep Ecology and its application to the Philippine context, particularly in reimagining the concept of equality beyond anthropocentric boundaries. The findings revealed that Naess' principles of ecological egalitarianism, the ecological self, and local autonomy can be meaningfully aligned with Filipino cultural values such as *kapwa* (shared identity), *bayanihan* (communal unity), and *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (fellowship and respect for others).

By integrating these perspectives, the study proposed a Filipino Deep Ecology, which interprets equality not merely as social parity among humans but as a holistic, biospheric relationship encompassing all living and non-living entities. This vision challenges the prevailing utilitarian and anthropocentric mindset that dominates Philippine development discourse, emphasizing instead an ecosophical paradigm grounded in simplicity, harmony, and interconnectedness (Naess, 1989) ^[6].

Furthermore, the results suggest that ecological equality is inseparable from social justice. Environmental degradation in the Philippines—such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate vulnerability—disproportionately affects marginalized communities, reinforcing systemic inequality (Francisco, 2020) ^[4]. Hence, the pursuit of equality must simultaneously address both human welfare and ecological

integrity.

The philosophical insights of Deep Ecology, when contextualized within Filipino thought, offer a pathway toward a more inclusive and sustainable national consciousness. Such an approach calls for a radical transformation of perception—from seeing nature as an object to be exploited, to recognizing it as a living community to which humanity belongs. This paradigm shift is essential for achieving long-term ecological balance and social equity in the Philippines.

Ultimately, this research underscores the need for continued dialogue between Western ecological philosophy and Filipino indigenous and cultural wisdom. By bridging these traditions, the Philippines can lead in articulating a culturally rooted form of environmental ethics—one that affirms both the dignity of human diversity and the intrinsic value of all forms of life.

This redefinition promotes inclusivity and compassion across boundaries. When applied to social relations, *ecological self-realization* implies that genuine equality among humans cannot be achieved without recognizing our shared dependence on and belonging to nature. Hence, Naess' ecological framework becomes an avenue for fostering both environmental justice and social solidarity in the Philippine context.

Recommendations

Based on the philosophical synthesis and contextual analysis presented in this study, several recommendations are proposed to promote an ecologically grounded conception of equality within the Philippine context. These recommendations aim to bridge theory and practice by linking *Deep Ecology* principles with cultural values, education, policy-making, and community initiatives. Educational institutions should incorporate the principles of Deep Ecology and Filipino ecological ethics into curricula at all levels—from basic education to higher learning. Courses on environmental philosophy, sustainability, and indigenous knowledge systems can help nurture ecological consciousness among students. The Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) are encouraged to strengthen eco-philosophical literacy as part of the nation's broader sustainability goals.

In alignment with Naess' call for decentralization and local autonomy, policy frameworks should empower local and indigenous communities to manage their own ecological resources. Indigenous ecological practices such as the *muyong* system of forest stewardship in Ifugao and the *bayanihan* model of communal cooperation can serve as effective templates for sustainable governance. Government agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) should institutionalize these traditional ecological knowledge systems in environmental planning and policy formulation (Salazar, 2021) [8]. Environmental legislation must reflect ecological egalitarianism by ensuring that all life forms are given due consideration in development projects. Policies related to land use, mining, and deforestation should undergo stricter ecological impact assessments that include both biophysical and sociocultural factors. Furthermore, local governments should adopt community-based monitoring programs that

uphold environmental accountability and participatory decision-making.

Religious and spiritual institutions play a vital role in shaping Filipino environmental ethics. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP, 2019) [1] and other faith-based groups should continue to champion eco-spiritual conversion, echoing the message of *Laudato Si'* that "everything is connected." Interfaith ecological movements can bridge moral and environmental education, fostering a deeper sense of solidarity between humanity and the biosphere.

Filipinos must be encouraged to adopt a form of ecological citizenship, wherein civic responsibility extends to the protection and restoration of nature. Public awareness campaigns, community tree-planting drives, and sustainable livelihood programs should be viewed not only as environmental activities but as expressions of national identity and moral responsibility. By internalizing ecological citizenship, citizens become active participants in nurturing a just and sustainable society.

Finally, it is recommended that future studies expand on this philosophical groundwork by conducting interdisciplinary and empirical research. Potential areas include the intersection of Deep Ecology with environmental law, economic policy, and digital sustainability. Comparative studies between Filipino ecological ethics and those of other Southeast Asian cultures could further enrich the regional dialogue on equality and environmental justice.

In essence, these recommendations emphasize that achieving equality—both social and ecological—requires an integrated approach grounded in philosophy, culture, and practice. By weaving Arne Naess' Deep Ecology into Filipino worldviews and policy systems, the Philippines can cultivate a sustainable model of development rooted in compassion, inclusivity, and respect for the natural world.

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