



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (Concordia University, 2010)

**“In Search of Wholeness: Holism’s Quest to Reconcile Subject and Object from
Leibniz to the Deep Ecology Movement”**

School of Environmental Studies

Thursday, August 20, 2015

10:00AM

David Turpin Building

Room B247

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Duncan Taylor, School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Alan Drengson, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Nina Belmonte, Department of Philosophy, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Honore France-Rodriguez, Department of Education Psychology & Leadership Studies, UVic

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which key holistic thinkers over the course of the last three hundred years have articulated unity between the human subject and objective world. I borrow the term “holism” from the philosopher J. C. Smuts, who coined it in his 1936 work *Holism and Evolution*, and I use it here in an expanded sense that includes all thinkers in the Western tradition who, like Smuts, have been preoccupied with the question of unity. Although the nature of cosmic unity and the individual’s place within it have been questions for philosophical debate since the classical Greeks of the sixth and fifth centuries BC, from the seventeenth century onwards these questions became largely associated with a series of thinkers who sought to overcome the dualistic separation of subject and object introduced by Galileo, Descartes and others in the mechanistic philosophical tradition of Western thought. My consideration of the holistic tradition includes selected writings by Leibniz, Hegel, Whitehead and Arne Naess, cofounder and key communicator of the deep ecology movement. In my discussion of these authors I observe an emerging pattern that has gradually carried holistic thought away from its traditional dependence on an absolute universal Being as the origin of unity in the world, towards an increasing emphasis on Becoming as the origin of Being. This pattern is confirmed by my broad analyses of Renaissance philosophy and of the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers Vico, Hamann and Herder. It is further confirmed by Naess’ vision of the deep ecology movement, which emphasizes plurality and diversity in the struggle to create more ecologically sustainable forms of human living. The pattern is challenged, however, by my discussions of Heraclitus and of the deep ecology movement, which both exhibit features that also contradict the existence of a definite linear progression “from Being to Becoming.” Insofar as the deep ecology movement recognizes the validity of a broad diversity of philosophical views and premises as grounds for ecological action and decision-making, it is part of a larger movement in contemporary societies that is helping create an open space wherein all perspectives are appreciated as valuable in their own right. This movement seeks to challenge all absolute and hegemonic claims to truth (which in the early twentieth century gave rise to fascism and in our present day continue to inform our views of nature and the self), and, as I suggest, is also contributing to the emergence of an apophatic perspective in our own day that is a precondition for change.