For the love of all

Ahimsa in Nonviolence and Radical Ecology

Saskia van Goelst Meijer

There is a difference here between proactive nonharming and "doing nothing."
Irina Aristarkhova (2012)

INTRODUCTION

Our world is experiencing an ever growing ecological crisis, which makes it necessary for humanity to reshape the way it is dealing with the planet. Grave challenges for the future of humanity and the earth as a whole have emerged as a result of ecological and economical conduct over the past few centuries. According to some, the environmental crisis is intertwined with other crises (financial, social, political), which has led both scholars and activists to call for a fundamental change in the global paradigm. Where socio-political change is concerned, part of this paradigm change has been attempted through nonviolence. Pioneered as a method in the early 20th century by Mohandas Gandhi for addressing injustice, it has since been taken up by many more individuals and organisations around the world. Nonviolence practices and notions can also be found in certain streams of ecology. One central element in the method of nonviolence is ahimsa, 'the absence of the intention to do harm'. In this article I will explore both ahimsa and radical ecology, to both explain the role and significance of ahimsa in nonviolence and to see if and how the two notions can clarify and supplement each other.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, concern for the state of the environment has grown exponentially. Humanity is increasingly confronted with the growing negative ecological effects of its actions. Various forms of pollution have proved very hard to clean up (Conway & Pretty, 2013; Metcalfe & Derwent, 2005; Meuser, 2010; Whitacre, 2007), and the depletion of resources (Kröger, 2013), loss of biodiversity (Dronamraju, 2008; Naeem, Bunker, & Hector, 2009; O'Riordan & Stoll-Kleemann, 2002), global warming, climate change and rising ocean levels (Maslin, 2004; Metcalfe & Derwent, 2005; Scott-Cato & Hillier, 2010; Shiva, 2008) can't reasonably be overlooked anymore. This has led to the emergence of many global environmental organizations (Curran, 2006; Haigh, 2002; Merchant, 2005; Shiva, 1988; L. Williams, Roberts, & McIntosh, 2011), the emergence of green political parties throughout the world (Bomberg, 1998; Goodin, 2013) and multilateral initiatives to take action. But the views on *how* to address these problems vary widely (Bomberg, 1998; Goodin, 2013; Rogelj et al., 2010; Wulfhorst & Haugestad, 2006; Zimmerman, 1997).

In the view of some, solving environmental problems is seen as incompatible with solving human social problems, of which there are also many (Tanner & Horn-Phathanothai, 2014). Solving global problems then becomes a choice between addressing social issues (famine, war, diseases) or ecological problems. However, in other views both kinds of problems are

seen as deeply interrelated and is it argued that real solutions can only be created through a comprehensive global paradigm shift in which humanity transforms the way it deals with the planet and all its inhabitants (Bronner, 2002; Merchant, 2005; Zimmerman, 1997). Radical Ecology is one stream of thought that takes the latter view.

The term 'Radical Ecology' might conjure up images of activists chained to oil platforms, settling themselves in tree tops to save the redwoods or committing nightly break-ins into laboratories to free the guinea pigs. Although some activists and organizations like Earth First!, Greenpeace or the Dutch Milieudefensie (Environmental Defence) certainly place themselves within the scope of Radical Ecology, my focus here is on radical ecological *thinking* and the philosophical framework it provides (Zimmerman, 1997).

Radical Ecology is premised on the idea that a fundamental transformation is needed in order to deal with the current ecological crisis (Birkeland, 1993; Merchant, 2005). This transformation concerns the relationship between the human and the non-human world, and in addition, humanity's relationship with itself (Birkeland, 1993). The term 'radical' points to the desire for a paradigm shift that changes "the cultural and institutional infrastructure - our frameworks of thinking, relating, and acting" (Birkeland, 1993, p. 15).

It can be argued that in western thinking radical ecological thought started in earnest with the advent of Deep Ecology, though earlier traces can be found for instance in the work of Thoreau (Thoreau, 2004; Thoreau & Moldenhauer, 2004a, 2004b), Emerson (Emerson, 2009) and Aldo Leopold (Knight & Riedel, 2002; Leopold, 1970; Lorbiecki, 2011). In addition to Deep Ecology, radical ecological thinking is informed by Ecofeminism (Birkeland, 1993; Gaard, 1993; Ruether, 2005; Twine, 2001) and Social Ecology (Bookchin, 1982; Pepper, 1993) and also by certain religious views (Abdul-Matin, 2010; Ruether, 2005; Setia, 2007). What unifies these streams of thought is a sense that a radically different way of seeing, valuing and relating to the natural environment is necessary in order to turn the current ecological crisis around.

A very similar paradigm shift, that calls for a transformation of humanity's relationship with itself and its place in the world is deemed necessary from the perspective of nonviolence (Nagler, 2004). I use the term nonviolence here not only to point to the absence of violence in solving problems, but as a coherent set of ideas and practices that provide a framework for understanding (social) reality. This nonviolence paradigm mostly focusses on socio-political change, but its visions for alternative ways of relating, of organizing and of being in the world have profound implications for our ways of dealing with the environment (Moolakkattu, 2010; Sasikala, 2012).

The roots of contemporary nonviolence lie, to an important extent, in the work of Mohandas Gandhi, who construed nonviolence, an ancient religious and philosophical concept, into a new systematic and pro-active way that made it applicable in modern society. When we look at this paradigm, we can see five basic elements emerge that together form the core of nonviolence: *satya* or 'truth-seeking', *ahimsa* or 'the intention not to harm', *tapasya* or 'self-suffering', *sarvodaya* or 'the welfare of all' and *swadeshi/swaraj* or 'authenticity and autonomy'. Each of these elements is a complex and layered notion and each is equally important in nonviolence. I will focus in this paper specifically on ahimsa.

I will argue here that ahimsa consists of a conscious change in the way we relate to 'the other' and deal with 'otherness'. Ahimsa denotes an attitude towards others in which we make every effort not to harm their chances of 'being', their dignity and chances for self-development. Whereas in nonviolence thinking this is usually (though not solely) understood in a social way,

in Radical Ecology a very similar attitude is developed in relation to the natural world. Radical Ecological thinking can help to clarify the fundamental shift towards 'the other' that ahimsa represents. On the other hand, Radical Ecology is sometimes accused of taking a misanthropic stance (Zimmerman, 1997). The notion of ahimsa points to an attitude of non-harming towards the other, but one that is fundamentally bound up with an attitude of non-harming towards oneself, because it departs from a relational view of reality. Thus, ahimsa shows that such a misanthropic stance is ultimately counterproductive in the search for a way of living that allows room for all different ways of 'being'. To explore this point further I will start with a general overview of Radical Ecology in the next section, after which I will explore the notion of ahimsa and, ultimately, what they mean in relation to each other.

RADICAL ECOLOGY

As mentioned above, it can be argued that Radical Ecology started, at least in a western context with Deep Ecology, rooted in the environmental thinking of Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (2005c; 2008). In addition, Ecofeminism and Social Ecology, which both to a certain extent consist of a critique to Deep Ecology have a major role in radical ecological thinking. In this section I will explore these three thought streams more in depth to see how they constitute Radical Ecology as a movement that searches for radically different way of seeing, valuing and relating to the natural environment.

Deep Ecology emerges in Arne Næss's work in contrast to 'shallow ecology'. The shallow approach to ecology consist according to Næss of an attempt to solve environmental problems through legal, technical and institutional solutions that focus on short term results and do not question the core values of modern industrial society (Besthorn, 2012; Haigh, 2002; Lane, 2006; Merchant, 2005). Furthermore, in shallow approaches, environmental degradation is seen as problematic only as far as it has an impact on human well-being (Besthorn, 2012). Instead, in Næss's thinking the focus is on the relationships between humans and the ecological systems of which they are part, and rests on the idea that each element in these ecological systems has intrinsic value:

> The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (...). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes (Næss, Rothenberg, & Næss, 1989, p. 29).

His idea of intrinsic value is rooted in the notion that all beings are deeply and interdependently related, and are all part of a greater whole. This interrelatedness is understood here in a very specific way. Neil Evernden explains:

> To the western mind, interrelated implies a causal connectedness. Things are interrelated if a change in one affects the other. So to say that all things are interrelated simply implies that if we wish to develop our "resources," we must find some technological means to defuse the interaction. (...) But what is actually involved is a genuine intermingling of parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities (Evernden, 1996, p. 16).

Because all beings, including humans, are seen as integrated parts of a bigger whole, their worth cannot be reduced to a function of another's well-being. All have intrinsic worth and the 'right' to flourish as they are. Therefore, humans, like all other beings, should live in a way that does not harm other's chances for well-being and self-development (Besthorn, 2012).

Næss dismisses the idea of a hierarchy in which humans have the right to control or dominate nature and use it as they see fit. Doing so would harm the integrity of other life forms and thus the ecological system of which humans also are a part. This would also amount to harm to humans themselves (Besthorn, 2012). Thus, Deep Ecology is concerned with creating 'ecological justice', a situation in which all life forms are able to flourish in their own ways. For this to happen, according to Næss, we need to make a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric view of the world (Drengson & Devall, 2010). To Næss, this begins with the shift from a concept of a personal self to that of an ecological self (Haigh, 2002). As can be seen from Evernden's quote above, if one takes genuine interrelatedness as a starting point, one has to give up, at least to a certain extent the idea of separateness. To Næss this implies giving up the idea of a separate self and replacing it with an ecological concept of self (Devall, 2001) in which:

> human beings (...)will cease to think of themselves as being discrete individuals and will see themselves as parts of an all-encompassing ecological whole. Only then, humans will recognize that the conservation of the world is the conservation of themselves, and they will participate fully in this conservation without reservation or sense of painful duty. The task of "self-realizing" is not a challenge to cultivate the moral integrity to think of others but rather to conceive of the world so broadly that we see ourselves as a part of everything (Lane, 2006, p. 77).

The critique of both Ecofeminism and Social Ecology on Deep Ecology thinking is, among other things, that Deep Ecology in its search for an ecocentric worldview, too easily takes humanity as a unified whole and that the attitude of this whole is often cast as unanimously anti-ecological. Both Social Ecology and Ecofeminism see a lack of political awareness and critique in Deep Ecology's thinking. Bothe Ecofeminism and Social Ecology point to a deep seated link between the rationale of domination and exploitation of the earth and that of groups of humans by other groups. They insist that the much needed transformation to curtail the ecological crisis will not simply arrive by changing our (ecological) consciousness, but that humanity needs to work at restructuring its internal attitudes and institutions.

Ecofeminism agrees with the Deep Ecology stance that most ecological problems today stem from the "atomistic, hierarchical and dualistic" (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 277) way of operating of modernity. However, Ecofeminism does not see anthropocentrism as the root cause of the problem, but rather androcentrism or patriarchy. Ecofeminism sees patriarchy as a "logic of domination" (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 2) that not only views maleness and rationality as superior and opposed to femininity and emotionality, but also values culture over nature. This leads to the domination of women, but also to the domination of non-human life. Because nature is linked to the feminine, like women it has to be tamed, ordered and brought under control. What needs to happen to change the environmental crisis around according to Ecofeminism is a dismantling of patriarchy (Zimmerman, 1997).

Ecofeminists are also concerned that the 'expanding self' concept of Deep Ecology glosses over the importance of diversity and particularity (Gaard, 1993, 1997).

> Identification and holism neglect difference. The whole, such as a rainforest or planet Earth itself, contains not only magnificent trees, birds, and other life forms, but trash, sewage, and clear-cut landscapes. Both identity and difference are necessary to a new ecological philosophy and ethics (Merchant, 2005, p. 111).

Ecofeminists don't see a need for an ever expanding concept of self that identifies with everything, but for highly specific identifications "such as love for a local landscape"

(Merchant, 2005, p. 111). Ecofeminists worry that the idea of the ever expanding self brings egotistical motivations in through the back door. When humanity realizes that harming nature is harming the self, "Rational Man will then presumably change His ways" (Gaard, 1993, p. 29). Ecofeminism instead stresses the importance of emotional and spiritual engagement with the natural world, from which a deeply felt concern and genuine care for 'the other' might arise. So, it is not so much concern for the self, however expanded it might be, but genuine concern for the other, in all its otherness that is key in Ecofeminism.

The third important source for radical ecological thinking is Social Ecology. Formulated by Murray Bookchin (1982) as a socio-ecological critique to modern society, Social Ecology views the ecological crisis as the outcome of authoritarian social structures in general, in which the inferior is forced to behave according to the rules of the superior and in which it is normal and acceptable that the superior uses the inferior for its own good. Social Ecology disagrees with Ecofeminism that all such structures of domination are connected with patriarchy. Instead, environmental destruction rests on the perceived split between humans and nature, which itself is a result of distorted social relations in which elites control and use the masses for their own needs:

> We must re-examine the cleavages that separated humanity from nature, and the splits within the human community that originally produced this cleavage (Bookchin, 1982, p. 42).

Like Deep Ecology, Social Ecology sees human beings as fundamentally natural beings whose well-being is "inextricably bound-up with the well-being of the natural world" (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 2). But, unlike Deep Ecology, the transformation envisioned by Social Ecologists is foremost social. Whereas Deep Ecology is not really concerned with the relations between humans and looks only towards the transformation of the relations between humans and nature, the key for Social Ecology lies in the creation of a counter-culture that is socially and economically egalitarian and truly democratic and participative. However, from the Deep Ecology perspective comes the critique that more egalitarian social relations do not necessarily lead to a more egalitarian relationship with nature.

Radical Ecology as a whole has absorbed the viewpoints and mutual critiques of these different streams. It is thus not a unified stream of thought that works from or towards a fixed ideology. Rather, it is a way of thinking that searches within a certain 'bandwidth' how a radical transformation of human 'being in the world' can be brought about, that would allow humans and non-human beings both to flourish. From the perspective of Radical Ecology such flourishing can only happen if we focus on the ecological, or interrelated nature of life, without losing sight of the particular needs of all species. In that sense it is a form of Deep Ecology, that is not satisfied with finding (shallow) legal, technical and institutional solutions to the ecological crisis. Radical Ecology stresses the need for a change in consciousness, but also for the need of a transformation of humanity's concrete ways of acting and understanding itself. In this area, Radical Ecology runs the risk of becoming misanthropic, when it points to an understanding of humanity solely as the destructor of the planet for instance. It is here that the concept of *ahimsa* as it is understood in nonviolence thinking, might have something to offer. In the following sections I will explore this notion of ahimsa and the way it has developed in nonviolence thinking and practice.

AHIMSA

The Sanskrit word *ahimsa* represents an ancient Hindu, Jain and Buddhist concept. The word

is a negation of *himsa*, often translated with harm or violence, which is derived from the root *han;* to strike, slay or kill (Bondurant, 1965; Chapple, 1987). It is thought that the word himsa is a desiderative, meaning *the desire* to hurt[1] (Bondurant, 1965; Phillips, 2013). Ahimsa then means 'the absence of the desire to harm' (Chapple, 1987; Vajpeyi, 2012).

The notion of ahimsa can be found, although in different forms, in all the Indian renouncer-traditions[2] (Chapple, 1998), where it is understood as a holistic concept that rests on the identification of oneself with all others (Kumar, 2004; Shastri & Shastri, 1998). The Vedic (Hindu) tradition provides a theoretical basis for this view, stating that everything in the universe is "interconnected, interrelated and interdependent" (Shastri & Shastri, 1998, p. 70). The yogic tradition takes ahimsa as one of the central virtues and renounces the slaughter of animals for sacrificial reasons or food. Over time, the understanding of ahimsa evolved to also include non-harm through speech and thought (Bondurant, 1965; Shastri & Shastri, 1998).

Although in the classical texts of Buddhism the term ahimsa is mentioned only sporadically (Chinchore, 2005) refraining from harm is one of the religion's central precepts. In most Buddhist traditions ahimsa is connected to the development of the 'right' mental states[3] and the attempt to become free of those mental states that lead to violent behaviour; any form of enmity. Buddhism stresses the importance of intentionality in ahimsa.[4] Causing harm is morally wrong if caused intentionally, but unintentional harm is often not seen as himsa (Chinchore, 2005; Keown, 2005).

For the Jains ahimsa is the central focus of religion and life (Chapple, 1993), in a radical and comprehensive way. Ahimsa is extended to all living beings, but where in the Buddhist tradition the focus is on the intention and on mental states, Jainism looks at action. They also extend the meaning of ahimsa to include the prevention and reparation of harm (Koller, 2004). Jainism recognizes that complete ahimsa is impossible in life, but Jain monks attempt to practice ahimsa in all actions. For lay people, the emphasis is on "minimizing harm and choosing positive actions that have benign effects" (Rankin, 2013, p. 154). In all these traditions ahimsa points to an attitude of refraining from hurting others, including non-human life forms and to a world-view in which all life is interrelated.

GANDHI'S AHIMSA

In the west, the term ahimsa is perhaps most widely known in relation to Gandhi and his nonviolent social change. For Gandhi ahimsa was indeed one of the fundamental aspects of his practice. Though Gandhi himself was a devout Hindu, both Buddhism and especially Jainism have influenced his commitment to ahimsa (Ansbro, 2000; Bilgrami, 2011a). Influenced also by his Christian schooling, his studies in London and his life in South-Africa, Gandhi's political thinking is highly original. It blends aspects of diverse world religions with political theory and ideas of contemporary secular thinkers like Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Ruskin (M. K. Gandhi, 1996). He expands the meaning of traditional Indian concepts and uses them in new socio-political way. In the case of ahimsa he converts this ancient moral principle into a principle of action that can be used as a force in the world to create social change. To the ancient

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[1] Stephen Phillips explains: "The desiderative form is also used for will and intention, thus "will to X," and ahimsa intention not to harm, i.e., nonharmfulness. (…) the etymological lesson is that the word connotes an attitude of personal policy. Nonharmfulness is an attitude one adopts, or tries to adopt. The idea suggests a rule, or set of rules, governing effort and action" (Phillips, 2013, p. 285).

[2] Buddhism, Jainism and Yoga.

[3] One of the core concepts in Buddhism is 'the Eightfold Path', consisting of the cultivation of right view, right intention, right speech, right action right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

[4] See the comments by Stephen Phillips above, note 29.

principle of non-harm, Gandhi adds the dimension of active love or good will (Ansbro, 2000).

> In its negative form, it means not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind. I may not therefore hurt the person of any wrong-doer, or bear any ill will to him and so cause him mental suffering. (...) In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son (M. K. Gandhi, 1999b, p. 252).

He is adamant that ahimsa should be applied in the same way to everyone, not just to those who love us. Gandhi understands ahimsa also to mean the rejection of 'inner violence' or 'violence of the spirit:

> Ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of ahimsa. But it is its least expression. The principle of ahimsa is not to hurt by evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill of anybody. It is also violated by holding on to what the world needs (M. K. Gandhi, 1945, p. 6).

Although Gandhi is convinced that we should not harbour ill will or hatred against anyone, people should not cease to hate practices and systems of oppression or exclusion. He recognized that his practice of ahimsa could not allow for a toleration of structural violence,[5] or violence and injustice in general.

Just like in the ancient religious traditions that generated ahimsa, Gandhi's views rest on an understanding of all life as interrelated. In this view the well-being or suffering of one affects all others (Joseph, 2012). Therefore, ahimsa can never be construed as passivity. Resisting injustice should be done as an act of ahimsa towards oneself and to the perpetrators. Their unjust behaviour harms their own humanity just as much as it harms others. Tolerating injustice or violence actually amounts to two forms of himsa to both victim and perpetrator, who would be allowed to continue harming themselves by harming others. Ahimsa thus required actively opposing systems of injustice and: "the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant" (Ansbro, 2000, p. 5).

To Gandhi, ahimsa is closely related to another of the central aspects of nonviolence: that of *satya[6]*, or truth- seeking. In Gandhi's life and work ahimsa and satya are the core concepts. To him, nonviolence is essentially a quest to understand the deepest truth about reality, and to find ways to live in accordance with that truth. He is convinced that there was an Ultimate Truth, but is equally convinced that people could only understand it in a relative sense. People can only come to know something about the truth of reality through their experience. But because people have very different experiences in life, their views on truth will also differ vastly. These truths then do not cancel each other out, because all the experiences are equally real. They each represent different facets of reality. This leads Gandhi to have an "epistemological respect for the views of others" (Koller, 2004, p. 88). Confronted with views of reality that are completely opposed to our own, we have no choice but to take them seriously, as representations of reality. This does not mean we have to part with our own views, after all these also represent Ultimate Reality. It does mean that we have to look for ways of action that can respect both truths and that we remain open to the possibility that our confrontation with the view of the other, which is an experience, might lead us to change our

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[5] See for an explanation of this term both Galtung (1996) and chapter 2 in this volume.

[6] See for an in-depth explanation of satya chapter 3 in this volume.

mind (or the other might change his mind when confronted with our truth).[7] This adds another dimension to the idea that we are all interrelated:

> This understanding encompasses the insight that other beings are not "other" to themselves; that they are themselves just as much as we are ourselves. It is this insight that enables us to see the "other" on its own terms, from its own side, rather than as merely the "other", that is opposed to us. And this ability to see the other person as not merely the "other", but as identical to our own self (…) operationalizes ahimsa (Koller, 2004, pp. 86–7).

As Koller explains, ahimsa implies meeting the other on his/her own terms, without stepping over your own terms. The operationalization of ahimsa lies in the realisation that others are not identical to us in the sense that they are the same, but in the sense that they live in the world on their own terms and have their own way of being, like we do. Ahimsa points to the active attempt to create a situation in which each can fully live.

AHIMSA AS AN ELEMENT OF NONVIOLENCE AFTER GANDHI

Although the word ahimsa has a specific background in Indian philosophy and religion, Gandhi expanded and slightly altered the meaning of this ancient term and used it as an active element in the practice of nonviolence. That this element has always been deemed vital by those who engage with nonviolence even though they might not approach it from a Hindu, Buddhist or Jain perspective, can be seen for instance from the work of Abdul Ghaffar Khan[8] (Bondurant, 1965; Easwaran, 1999; R. C. Johansen, 1997) and Martin Luther King (M. L. King, 2010a, 2010b).

Khan was a Muslim activist in what is today the border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Starting out by building schools and setting up projects to improve hygienic conditions in his native area, he moved on to political activism. Kahn founded an organization known as the Khudai Khidmatgars (Servants of God). Shaped in the image of an army the Khidmatgars struggled nonviolently to improve social conditions in the region and eventually for independence from Britain (R. C. Johansen, 1997). To the Pashtun people, the word ahimsa had little to no meaning. Invoking the Islamic concept of *sabr* (patience, endurance) and referring to a Qur'an verse stating that one should

> respond to evil with what is good, and your enemy will become like a close and affectionate friend (Qur'an verse 41:34 as quoted in: Halverson, 2012).

For Khan the emphasis was addressing the harm that was inherent in the social conditions in his native area, both those inherent in Pashtun culture and those inflicted by the British. The Kudhai Khidmatgars worked both towards social uplift for all and towards a diminishing of the violent tribal practices such as blood feuds.

A few decades later, Martin Luther King translated Gandhi's ideas to the American (Christian) context and equated ahimsa with *agape*. Agape refers to one of three forms of love that are discerned in the Greek philosophical tradition and is translated by King as a form of active good-will or benevolence towards all living beings (Atack, 2012). King uses the notion of active love in a very specific sense:

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[7]   For a more in-depth exploration of satya and its role in nonviolence see chapter 3 in this volume.

[8]   For a more in-depth discussion of Ghaffar khan and his work see chaper 2 in this volume.

> In speaking of love at this point, we are not referring to some sentimental or affectionate emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense. Love in this connection means understanding, redemptive goodwill (M. L. King, 2010a, p. 92).

King's redemptive love is a disinterested kind of love in the sense that it is love for others for *their* sake, not for the benefits that the relation brings to oneself. Therefore, one should not distinguish between friends or enemies but aim at preserving, restoring or creating a sense of community (M. L. King, 2010a), something that King often referred to as the creation of a 'beloved community' (M. L. King, 2010b). King resonates Gandhi's notion that all life is interrelated. In one instance King explains his idea by citing from a letter by novelist James Baldwin:

> The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity... But these men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it (Baldwin, 1963, pp. 23–4).

From this description it becomes understandable how ahimsa works as an element of transformation in a process of nonviolence. Ahimsa refers to the removal of the *intention* to harm. Inadvertently causing harm would not constitute himsa, yet, the intention itself would. Gandhi, King, Khan and others, have shown that ahimsa means changing one's attitude towards the other and see him not as a separate 'other' but as part of a shared constellation of relations. In such a shared constellation of relations committing 'harm' towards one of the elements (another person) becomes harm to oneself because it damages the shared network of which the self is part.

RELATING TO THE OTHER

Thus, ahimsa is that element in a process of nonviolence which calls us to make a qualitative shift in our relationship to others. Ahimsa points to an internal process of re-framing in which one attempts to discover and transform any feelings of enmity and actions that might cause harm, and to cultivate goodwill and disinterested love towards all others, regardless of the attitude the other takes towards you. The active nonviolence of Gandhi, Khan and King is mainly directed at social change and in the context of their work this 'other' points to other humans, adversaries. The term ahimsa is seldom mentioned, however, when we look at the paradigm shift towards the natural world proposed by Radical Ecology something very similar is at stake; amounting to "saying "yes" to all living beings" (Aristarkhova, 2012, p. 637).

Radical Ecology strives towards a world that is sustainable and both ecologically and socially just, by critically examining the current attitude that underlies our socio-economic, political and cultural institutions, and by working towards transformation. It is thus not only concerned with environmental conservation, but also with the creation of alternative forms of economic, political and social organization. Although the different streams in radical

ecological thinking each lay a different emphasis and sometimes conflict over specific viewpoints, Radical Ecology as a whole calls for a fundamental transformation of our attitude towards the other, but here 'other' emphatically includes non-human species, nature and the cosmos in general.

The shift in attitude that is proposed by Radical Ecology is not in the first place related to dealing with an antagonistic other (although nature is sometimes cast that way in western thinking), but with an 'other' that is a different life form. However, in both cases the other has a different outlook on life, and different needs for flourishing that might conflict with our own. The overlap in thinking between Radical Ecology and nonviolence is not entirely surprising. Years before Arne Næss formally started his work on Deep Ecology, he made an extensive study of Gandhi's work (Næss, 2005b). In his later writings on Deep Ecology Næss often mentioned his indebtedness to Gandhi in his thinking on ecology (Næss, 2005a; Næss et al., 2008; T. Weber, 1999) and has even stated that his work on Deep Ecology is really an outgrowth of his thinking on Gandhi and Spinoza and his experiences in the mountains of Norway (Devall & Sessions, 1985; T. Weber, 1999). Gandhi's influence is especially visible in Næss's ideas on self-development (T. Weber, 1999; Zimmerman, 1997). It led Næss to conclude that true self-development could only happen in relation to the self-development of all other beings, and that (social) action to create circumstances that foster development for all, including all oher species, is an integral part of this process (Zimmerman, 1997).

Ecofeminists have criticized Naess' ideas on an expanding self, because it would lead one to overlook profound differences between individual people, groups or species, and stepping over the "otherness" of the other.

As Koller has explained, seeing the other as connected to oneself does not point to understanding the other as the same, thereby overlooking its otherness. Rather, it points to the realisation that the other is "not 'other' to itself" (Koller, 2004, p. 86) and is identical to us *in that sense*. It points to the attempt to see the other, as much as possible, "on its own terms" (idem.). Given the influence of Næss' thinking on Radical Ecology it is not surprising that Gandhian elements can be found there. What *is* rather surprising is that Gandhi or his ideas are so seldom mentioned either in Deep Ecology or in Radical Ecology in general (T. Weber, 1999).

As I have explained above, the notion of ahimsa in its ancient form, especially in the context of Jainism was extended towards all living beings (Aristarkhova, 2012; Chapple, 1998; Kumar, 2004; Long, 2009). Although Gandhi himself certainly extended ahimsa to include all living beings (M. K. Gandhi, 1945), he referred to ahimsa mostly in the context of his social struggle. Gandhi adapted ahimsa from a philosophical notion that he found to be too "negative and passive" (Parekh, 2001, p. 46) and widened it with ideas from other religions and secular thinkers that were "activist and socially oriented" (idem.). Blended they "yielded the novel idea of an active and positive but detached and non-emotive love" (idem.). When nonviolence was used in other contexts, for instance by Khan and King, the element of ahimsa (although not always mentioned by that name) was infused with new notions, such as the Muslim concept of *sabr* and the Christian notion of agape.

I think it is necessary to revive ahimsa's ancient roots and broaden its understanding once more in the direction of other living beings and nature as a whole. Radical Ecology shows us, through its internal debates that social and ecological issues are so intertwined that in our globalized twenty-first century world they can't be taken as separate issues any more (Merchant, 2005). The concept of ahimsa, as developed through nonviolent practices and thinking can give clues how to approach these crises in a way that does justice to the

interrelatedness of the problems.

Radical ecological movements are often accused of, and sometimes indeed take, a misanthropic stance. The notion of ahimsa points out that such a stance is ultimately unproductive. Ahimsa points to the realisation that the lives of humans and the lives of non-human species are intertwined and that harm to one ultimately amounts to harm of all. This means that ecological problems can't be reasonably solved in a way that leaves no space for humans to flourish. On the other hand, concrete changes in the way humanity views itself and acts on the planet is necessary for the natural world to flourish likewise. Attitudes in which humanity as a whole, or specific human groups are, for whatever reason, perceived as superior and therefore entitled to more resources or chances for self-development are likewise unhelpful. Such attitudes of superiority and entitlement exist in similar ways towards different social groups and to nature.

Ahimsa denotes an attitude towards others in which we make every effort not to harm their chances of 'being', their dignity and chances for self-development, by consciously changing the way we relate to them, and by actively cultivating an attitude that helps others to flourish. The cultivation of such an attitude is no simple task as Gandhi, Khan, King and Radical Ecological thinkers have equally shown. But from the perspective of nonviolence it is the only way to come to the fundamental changes that radical ecology is calling for.