

Arne Naess, His Life and Work Part One: Sections 3 and 4

Introduction

Bill Devall and Alan Drengson, Editors of Naess Series

The essays selected for this issue of *The Trumpeter* are reflections of Arne Naess's wide field of inquiry, vision, and experience. He understands, like Gandhi, the vital need for personal and cultural transformation so that individuals, communities, and societies can become more mature. He sees the need to inquire into what kinds of democracies we need in our societies to meet our global and local challenges. He respects individual uniqueness and at the same time seeks peaceful co-operation and common grounds. He is committed to nonviolent, respectful communication that celebrates our unique differences and cultural diversity, even while recognizing our common planetary home and humanity. He extends this respectful approach to all beings, not just to humans. He is a celebrant of diversity and individuality while supporting local community, cultural integrity, and green history.

Like Gandhi, Arne is willing to speak with a wide variety of people on diverse topics. Section 3 of this issue, for example, includes talks he presented to a group of potters and another given to architects as well as an essay directed to scientific researchers and policy makers on "Science in Ecologically Sustainable Societies." Clearly, Naess's wide-ranging interdisciplinary, multidimensional inquiry seeks ways to unify our knowledge and feelings for effective action at the personal and social levels. He takes our current environmental crisis, and other human problems, as needing work and contributions from each and every person. He thinks each of us has unique gifts to offer.

Naess's playful approach to boxing as friendly encounter belies its image portrayed in popular culture as a violent sport. His approach is like that of Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, who emphasized

that we should approach all opponents as someone to befriend. Arne's boxing practice is vigorous training in nonviolence that strengthens and enables one to gain deeper courage for nonviolent resistance. These and many other actions illustrate the playful attitude and light-footedness that he takes to philosophy of life. For him, living philosophy is more vital and present than writing academic papers about it. As a teacher he invited all his students, even at the beginning level, to become life philosophers with their own unique integrated approach to life. Philosophy begins and remains in wonder with ongoing inquiry going as far as our imaginations and creative energies can take us. In terms of quality of life, there are vast possibilities open to each of us at each moment. Our spontaneous experience is far richer and deeper than can ever be captured in a specific system or linguistic description. Our natural languages are deep in these meanings and possibilities with many levels of interpretation and symbolism possible.

Naess supports teaching academic courses in the science of biology, but he also advocates offering "life appreciation courses." He praises and practices walking or being in nature each day, as Henry Thoreau exemplified in his walks in the woods near Concord Massachusetts in the mid-nineteenth century. Like Thoreau, Naess notices what plants are flowering and when the migrating birds began to arrive. He appreciates the small creatures. Since his early childhood, Arne has been a friend to the small plants and creatures when he is walking in the woods, or wading in the water. For him active participation in the outdoors is essential to understanding and feeling our place in the rhythms of nature. In "The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology," he discusses life in free nature (*friluftsliv*), the tradition in Norway of skiing, hiking, mountain climbing, and other outdoor activities. All people need and have a right to have "access to free nature." He sees it as essential that children have time for unstructured play in free nature. He thinks it is important for all of us to continue to play in this way throughout our lives. Many human problems arise from our separation from nature and our own deeper feelings, and from our inability to play with light-hearted kindness. We should not take ourselves too seriously, but we should be serious in our play and work.

Arne's mountain adventures, combined with his interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy of emotions such as modesty and joy, led him to meditate on the contradiction between "conquering" and "climbing" a mountain. As Spinoza noted, we can realize how small we are when climbing a mountain or contemplating the Cosmos, but we can also participate in their greatness. The larger our sphere of love and positive feelings, the larger our sense of who we are and what we can do. From

an early age, Naess had strong feelings of identification with mountains, and even came to feel that the mountain where his hut is, *Hallingskarvet*, is like an old father to him in its equanimity. He has come over the years to reflect and embody this same equanimity extolled by Spinoza. In some of his mountain climbing essays, he sounds like Zen teacher Dogen, who wrote, “Mountains are walking. Those who do not realize that mountains are walking have not realized their own walking.” We can participate in the time and endurance of mountains. In Naess’s gestalt ontology, the mountains and other beings of the natural world have their unique aliveness and presence that we can appreciate from a multitude of unique perspectives and languages. We should appreciate and enjoy each of these concrete contents as a gift that we see and touch only once. By living in a place, we come to know and become part of its unique mythology. This is shown in Naess’s own life in his relationship with the mountains and his hut *Tvergastein*, where he experimentally developed his own Ecosophy T.

Finally, Richard Evanoff’s interview with Naess, “Ecosophy and the Deep Ecology Movement: Beyond East and West” was first published nearly three decades ago, but Arne’s comments remain as fresh and inspiring today as when they were first published. This last piece in this issue of *The Trumpeter* illustrates how Arne joyfully encourages others to discover and articulate their own personal ecologically harmonious philosophy of life, their own *ecosophy*. He encourages people to continue to revise their ecosophies as they develop greater integration and maturity through life. For him this is an ongoing process since nature is creative and things are always changing.

We look forward to the third issue in this Series, which will include additional works by Naess and also works by others discussing themes and topics that have been explored in these writings. The next issue focuses on such topics as: normative systems, typologies of total systems, pluralism, self-realization, what is real and what abstract, daily language and its necessary lack of precision, and why this is one of many reasons for mutual respect and tolerance given our differences in ways of experiencing and expressing ourselves. Authoritarian systems try to control our language and thinking, something Naess avoids as he celebrates the richness of our unique ways of being in the world. As he noted in the *Trumpeter* 21-1 issue, our Earth’s cultural and personal life philosophy diversity is a great achievement of Cosmic significance.

We invite others to submit papers for this *Online Arne Naess Festschrift* celebrating Naess’s 93rd year and the completion of the ten

volumes of the *Selected Works of Arne Naess* (SWAN), published in the Fall of 2005 by Springer in Dordrecht, Netherlands.

We thank all of those who helped make this Naess Series possible: Bruce Morito, John Ollerenshaw, Kit-fai and Arne Naess, and the Foundation for Deep Ecology for supporting the SWAN Project to which Harold Glasser made significant contributions.