

“Caring Scholarship: Correcting Thomas Crowley’s Arne Naess Report” by Alan Drengson

In the Fall 2006 issue of the *ISEE Newsletter* Thomas Crowley reports on his study of “deep ecology” and his visit to Norway, where he met with Arne Naess and others working in environmental philosophy. He mentions that before his trip he took a special interest in Naess and the deep ecology movement, doing a tutorial with Holmes Rolston in the spring of 2006. Unfortunately, his report contains many inaccuracies about Naess and his philosophy. These are basic mistakes that many of us made in interpreting Naess’s work many years ago. They are perpetuated by non-scholarly websites such as Wikipedia, but we think that publications such as the *ISEE Newsletter* should set a higher standard for careful scholarship. I am focusing my comments on the major errors in Crowley’s Report.

I have known Naess and studied his work for a very long time. I am the co-editor of the 10 Volume *Selected Works of Arne Naess* (SWAN) that was published by Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands in 2005. I co-edited several recent issues of the *Trumpeter* series devoted to Naess’s work and the deep ecology movement. I hope that your readers will seek out the Selected Works and also the *Trumpeter* issues (Vol 21, 1 & 2 – 2005, Vol 22, 1 & 2 plus Festschrift supplement 2006) that are available online at <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca>. I also co-edited an anthology *The Deep Ecology Movement* published by North Atlantic (Berkeley) in 1995. In the introduction to this anthology, Yuichi Inoue and I point out that many authors mistakenly conflate Naess’s Ecosophy T (a personal philosophy of life) with the deep ecology movement, which is a global movement supported by people with a diversity of worldviews. They make this mistake partly because they use just the words “deep ecology” and “deep ecologist”. If they carefully examine how Naess writes about these matters, they would not make this mistake. Naess is quite adamant to not call himself a deep ecologist and to distinguish between political movements and personal philosophies of life. (On this issue see the Naess interview by Richard Evanoff in the *Trumpeter* 21, 2 pages 65-77, online.)

Naess says that people with a diversity of worldviews and cultures participate in and support global political-social movements. This is an empirical observation. As he writes in the “Three Great Movements” (in the *Trumpeter* Vol 9, 2, 1992, pp 85 -86 and also in Volume X pp. 219-153 of SWAN) the peace, social justice and ecology movements arose as grass roots efforts based in many countries, drawing supporters from all areas of different societies, with different personal philosophies and worldviews. He says that his own personal philosophy, that he calls

Ecosophy T, is his ultimate basis for supporting all three movements. Personal philosophies are based on ultimate norms and ultimate hypotheses about the world. People support political and social action movements on the basis of their own values and beliefs about the world. Naess is a long time supporter as well as a researcher of social and political movements using cross cultural and multi-linguistic studies based ultimately on empirical methods and surveys.

Naess's own philosophy should not be equated with the deep ecology movement, but recognized as his personal basis for supporting the movement to end the environmental crisis and to live in harmony with the natural world. In trying to characterize any movement of global extent, it is impossible to give a "definitive" account. The best we can do as a result of studying documents, actions, conferences, interviews, and so on, is to broadly characterize a movement in terms of its basic aims and concerns. Thus, when Naess talks about the deep ecology movement, he thinks it can be characterized by 8 points, that he sometimes calls platform principles. The most recent version of the 8 points is published in Naess's book *Life's Philosophy*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA 2002, pp 108-109. They are the following:

1. All living beings have intrinsic value.
2. The richness and diversity of life has intrinsic value.
3. Except to satisfy vital needs, humankind does not have the right to reduce this diversity and this richness.
4. It would be better for human beings if there were fewer of them, and much better for other living creatures.
5. Today the extent and nature of human interference in the various ecosystems is not sustainable, and the lack of sustainability is rising.
6. Decisive improvement requires considerable change: social, economic, technological, and ideological.
7. An ideological change would essentially entail seeking a better quality of life rather than a raised standard of living.
8. Those who accept the aforementioned points are responsible for trying to contribute directly or indirectly to the realization of the necessary changes.

These principles do not by themselves characterize a specific philosophy, but they are broad enough to be supported by people with many different ultimate views. Naess's Ecosophy T contains norms related to self realization as well as his hypotheses about the nature of the world. The platform above offers a broad general statement about our current challenges in relation to the global environmental crisis and the need to make deep changes. Let me emphasize: Naess has always been very careful to distinguish his own personal philosophy of life called Ecosophy T, from the ecology and other social movements. He is a supporter of the peace, social justice and environmental movements.

As can be guessed from what has been said so far, Naess is a pluralist who stresses the importance for each person, group, community, culture, and so on, to be free to express their own unique ways of feeling and being in the world. He believes that such diversity is not only inevitable, since we are each different, but that it should be celebrated. We do not want a world of monocultures whether in agriculture or personal and cultural worldviews. When a worldview or life's philosophy is consistent with the basic principles of these three movements, then a person might be a supporter of the social justice, peace and the deep ecology movements. Naess thinks that in our individualistic Western societies, we each are inclined to develop our own personal ecosophy (if we care about nature), and we can give it whatever name appeals to us. I might call mine Ecosophy ARD. The T in Naess's ecosophy refers to his mountain hut Tvergastein. Of course, he acknowledges that many of us feel some connection with a religious tradition, and so we might express our ecosophy in terms of Christian teachings, or Buddhist, or what ever. Naess is a life long student of worldviews, languages and cultures. He delights in learning about the diverse personal philosophies and worldviews found around the world. He also recognizes that it is critical for there to be cooperation on many levels locally, regionally, nationally, internationally, and so on, to address problems of mutual concern in our present world. (On this diversity of ultimate views see Naess' article "The Encouraging Richness and Diversity of Ultimate Premises in Environmental Philosophy," *Trumpeter* 9:2 pp. 53-60, 1992, available online as already cited. See also SWAN X pp. 229-249.)

It is unfortunate that some conflate Naess's Ecosophy T with the deep ecology movement, but this is easy to do when you use such vague language as "deep ecology". However, if we are careful scholars, we will start our account of the deep ecology movement with his work. We will also be led to better appreciate cultural and worldview diversity. We then

will see why and how we can support the global deep ecology movement that is characterized by the 8 principles stated above, from our own personal ecosophy.

The acceptance of the 8 principles is now very widespread. In searching the web, I found many organizations now using most of the 8 points, phrased in their own language, to characterize their aims and visions for the Earth and the future. For example, the gist of these principles is found in the Earth Charter and in many documents of other organizations. The links in the <http://www.ecostery.org> website have many examples of these. Every global movement has to have very general principles that can be supported from a variety of ultimate philosophical and religious premises that involve norms and views about the nature of the world. As students of cultures and religions, we should appreciate and enjoy this diversity. Moreover, we need such diversity to be ecologically viable. The diversity of cultures and even dialects is related to specific contexts and local adaptations, as is true for other biological organisms and communities.

A main feature of global movements is that they are cross cultural and supported by people from many places. However, the norms and hypotheses of a personal ecosophy (or philosophy of life that aims for harmony with nature), express the feelings and thoughts of a single unique person. Naess recognizes that each of us has our own personal feelings and views about life. We should each try to articulate our feelings, values and views as best we can. Global movements are by their very nature efforts to unite people of different philosophies and religions for global action to solve problems of e.g. injustice, violence, and environmental destruction. Many of us now realize that we live on a planet blessed with incredible biological, cultural, and individual diversity. We see great diversity at every level down to individuals. (No two grains of sand, flowers, snowflakes, fleas, or people are identical.) There can be no greater concern for individuals than to respect their unique feelings and values, so long as their philosophy does not lead them to destroy or try to control others. This is one basis for Naess's approach as a supporter of Gandhian principles of nonviolent communication and action. He believes that each of us has a right and even an obligation to bring forth our own deepest insights and feelings, and to work together to solve basic human problems in nonviolent ways. We should respect the many different ways of knowing, the diverse ontologies, mythologies and histories.

Naess is a scholar of cultures and also has been a social activist all his adult life. He retired early to devote himself to socially responsible actions and has continued to support the

social justice and peace movements. In recent years, he has concentrated on the deep ecology movement because he sees our common future in jeopardy by the threats of global warming and other environmental destruction. I have heard Naess give many talks on these issues, and he always stresses caring for others and addressing the serious problems of injustice and want in the world. Naess' caring lifestyle reflects his philosophy.

To suggest, as Crowley does, that Naess is a recluse and goes to Tvergastein to get away from people is not true. In Norway there is a cabin tradition that grew out of the farm setters, which are in the mountains where the meadows are used for summer pastures. Mountain huts are found all over Norway. In Norway there is also a tradition called "friluftsliv" which is activity in the free air. Living in cabins on the shore or in the mountains is part of this Norwegian tradition. People go to the cabins with other people. As is true for other Norwegians, Naess' time spent at his hut is rarely solitary. I visited Naess at his mountain hut with my whole (then young) family. Our daughters were 9, 12 and 14 at the time. While we were there other guests arrived. Despite being very involved in lots of other matters, Arne took us to the top of Mt. Hallingskarvet where we hoped to see the Jotunheimen Mountains (Home of the Giants) and he showed us many interesting things about culture and nature. He was then in his 80s.

My most recent time with Arne was in Oslo for a week in November 2005. We had many good conversations on philosophy and other subjects. One day we went for a walk together in one of the many large forested parks near the city. As we walked, children, elders, and people of all ages greeted and talked with Arne. It was very exciting and joyful to be with him in this cheerful community of people. He clearly loved being surrounded by people, talking, joking and interacting with them. We also spent time just looking at plants and birds and listening to the wind in the trees ("music" to use Arne's words) on quieter parts of our walk. There were times indoors, when we were talking, when Arne became tired and had to rest. But then he was 93 and like all of us has periods of greater and lesser clarity.

Crowley says that Naess's Ecosophy T has become more and more identified with "deep ecology". This is not the result of anything Arne has done, but it is the result of careless scholarship and failure to read his work. It is too bad that Crowley did not use the full phrase "deep ecology movement." Even if other writers have been so careless as to equate something called "deep ecology" with Naess's Ecosophy T, then you would think caring scholars would sort this confusion out, as some of us have done. We have been careful to do this in the

*Trumpeter* issues devoted to Naess and his work and also in the 10 volumes of the SWAN. (E.G. consider recent articles by Andrew McLaughlin, George Sessions, Harold Glasser, Bill Devall, Tim Quick, Andrei Whitaker, Margarita Notario, and Yuichi Inoue, to mention a few.) Let me once more to put this very basic matter as plainly as possible.

Global (and national) social-political movements are made up of supporters who have a wide variety of backgrounds, personal philosophies and worldviews. They unite around certain general principles, and they work in their own places to initiate policies and practical actions that further the aims of the movement. There is no way we could ever have a single worldview or philosophy of life uniting the whole planet. It is a great mistake and assault on human spiritual integrity, to try to make everyone have the same philosophy of life, religion or political views. Diversity of all kinds should be treasured, honored and respected. We should celebrate this diversity of personal philosophies and cultures as a great strength, for it enables us to solve environmental and other problems in diverse ways at the local level. (Platform principle 2 stresses the intrinsic value of diversity.) The solution to so many of our problems requires the creativity of each of us at the local level in micro solutions. Naess is a cheerful optimist, who often says that we tend to seriously underestimate ourselves. We are each far more capable than we might realize. As a possibilist he says that “anything can happen”. We each have great creative potentials that can contribute to solutions of our problems and enable us to improve quality of life with the least consumption of material and energy, as is suggested by platform principle 7.

Crowley says that there are some “extremists” in North America and Australia who are still “deep ecologists,” who accept the main principles of Ecosophy T, and yet he does not name them. This is regrettable and not a scholarly way to write about something of importance. Naess’s Ecosophy T has two basic norms “Self Realization!” and “Self Realization for all beings!” He says that he feels a sense of identification (not identity) with many beings in nature. He suggests that we can extend our care to others, including other beings. Our personal self realization is interdependent with theirs. These norms are associated with complex statements about the nature of the world that are related to Naess’s own ontology and theory of knowledge. All of these are in turn connected with his complex intuitions, insights, feelings and views about the nature of language and communication systems. If others are inspired by his Ecosophy to articulate similar life philosophies, he is glad, but does not claim universality for his own views.

He is not urging that his personal philosophy become a political movement. Nor do his views seem extreme today.

One way to better appreciate Naess's work as a whole is to see it related to understanding and facilitating communication on every level from verbal to nonverbal. His work in empirical semantics was offered as a contribution to a theory of communication. His aim was to find ways to facilitate nonviolent communication, not only with humans, but with other beings. His work is also related to understanding human languages as part of the larger evolution of communication systems. Communication systems existed in the natural world long before human languages arose. Human languages as systems of communication are always changing. Therefore, what I say today might need to be modified or rephrased as the days go by. We each are challenged to communicate with others on many levels, and sometimes we miss things by our own preconceptions and judgments. This leads us to one reason for Naess's skepticism, which is summarized in the phrase, "seek the truth but don't claim it". Each person I talk with gives me more to understand and appreciate. I should never assume that I fully understand what their whole view and feeling for life is, for it can only be conveyed in very fragmentary ways. We and our languages are always changing and limited.

Naess's (Pyrrhonian) skepticism reminds us that we are always learning, and that we should never stop as long as we are alive. Natural languages are the home of our cultural relationships and narrative traditions. Of necessity, they are never very precise and are very complex in their poetic, metaphoric and mythic dimensions. For Naess, the core of a meaningful life is in being with friends and sharing our feelings, thoughts and actions. We are happy when we are always growing, transforming and discovering more about the world, others and ourselves. This is part of what we are, and we should remain this alive when mature. Thus, philosophy is more an action or activity, and should never be turned into a finished or fixed doctrine. All models, doctrines and theories are heuristic learning devices and life is always changing. The essence of a full life is to be always creatively learning and adapting. We should not try to impose uniformity within social movements, but allow for a wide range of actions and personal styles. The front of international social movements is long and deep. There is room for everyone to be included and multitudes of contributions to be made. The long range deep ecology movement involves deep ongoing questioning, deep self examination, deep exploration of nature, deep feelings and deep changes. This is a lifelong process of discovery that we should

pursue with a sense of joy and play. When Naess visited us in Victoria one time, he disappeared from a dinner we were hosting for him. We found him in the backyard with our 7 year old daughter climbing one of the trees and having a great time. He was then in his 80s.

A final note about care in scholarship: one of the reasons so many of us have great respect for Arne Naess is not because of “hero worship” related to his many exploits in mountain climbing and his innovative activities that have attracted a lot of attention such as Gandhian Boxing. It is because as a scholar he has always set the highest standards of care in reading the texts of others. He has always been exceptionally fair in representing the views of others, including philosophers with whom he disagreed. He certainly deserves better treatment in scholarly and other publications. It is time to quit perpetuating the misrepresentations of his views and work, since today there is no excuse. There is now a representative body of his work in English ready for scholarly study in the many sources mentioned in this paper. I urge your members to set things straight by reading the material cited above. They will discover an inspiring collection of Naess’ writings that represent a significant lifetime of creative scholarly achievement.

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