To the Editor:

I am glad to see that Arne Naess has so many defenders among the readers of the Environmental Ethics Newsletter. He’s clearly an important figure in the field who has inspired many of us to consider environmental issues from a philosophical approach that goes beyond choosing right behavior with regard to nature, moving onward to conceive of the human relationship to nature in a whole new way. He is a fine man and an energetic thinker, and we are privileged to have such a great-grandfather figure in environmental philosophy.

However, this does not mean our Newsletter should devote so many pages to deep ecology’s central figures wantonly defending Naess with the same verbose rhetoric that they’ve used to no avail for so many years! This IS the kind of excessive hero worship that has led most of the field of environmental ethics to sidestep deep ecology: More analytic ethicists say deep ecology is imprecise, poorly argued, and defended more like a faith than a philosophy. They do have a point. The words of Drengson, Devall, and Sessions sound more like the canticles of true believers than the careful logic of philosophy.

You guys should give it a rest. Welcome a young, talented mind like Thomas Crowley into the world of deep ecology. Let him challenge the old master, as Naess himself did back in the Vienna Circle in 1937 when he raised his hand and said, “you know, I think you’re quoting this Wittgenstein fellow too much. Why don’t you pay more attention to me?”

There has always been a delicate humor in the words and person of Arne Naess, and in the foundational connection between the thinker and the world which is at the heart of deep ecology. Please, guys, don’t lose your smile when you meet a young philosopher who disagrees with you. His generation is the future of this field.

--Dr. David Rothenberg, New Jersey Institute of Technology