

Trumpeter (1996)

ISSN: 0832-6193

A Partial Response and Query of Naess: An Earth-
Psyche Bond

Stan Rowe
Trumpeter

STAN ROWE is retired from the University of Saskatchewan. He is the author of many papers and books in ecology.

This note is an addendum to the article "From Shallow to Deep Ecological Philosophy," an attempt to clarify the issues raised by Arne Naess in his temperate and thought provoking response to my paper (see *The Trumpeter* 13 (1): 32, Winter 1996).

The logic of the levels-of-organization concept (volumetric systems-within-systems in a hierarchy) is that of *containment*. Each higher level envelops the lower ones as parts of its whole. Therefore the Sun does not qualify as the next theoretical level-of-organization above Earth. Were we to go beyond Earth, the Solar System might be the next level up as it contains Earth, followed by the Galaxy (containing the Solar System) and the Universe (containing the Galaxy).

The reason for an Earth-level focus (rather than Solar System, Galaxy or Universe) is because this planet is our *immediate* environment. The enveloping Ecosphere is clearly our source and support, the largest creative ecosystem with which we are in *direct contact*, the place where humans act and where their actions make a difference for better or worse. Not so where the Sun or other elements of the Solar System are concerned.

As the proximate system that produces and nourishes life, Earth earns highest standing in "importance" - a critical term as Naess pointed out. Whitehead noted that the word is often trivialized to a market-place meaning. Thus "the Sun is important" or "the Economy is important" or "a pitifully sick man is unimportant" usually denotes a judgement of utility - ecological, economic, or social. By this definition, Naess is right: "The question of whether something has inherent value is independent of its importance."

But Whitehead favors a broader meaning of "importance" and it is this that I intend. He defines "importance" as "that aspect of feeling whereby a perspective is imposed upon the universe of things felt." In this sense, "importance" is a *generic* notion, comprehending the entire field of sensitivity that humans bring to all their activities. Its subordinate *species* are ethics, logic, religion, art, etc.* When Naess defines ethics as having to do with the good life, with care, responsibilities and duties, his sense of importance is implicit. It is the ground of sensitivity for these felt values. The fundamental values of humans reflect their sense of importance, as do beliefs as to whether or not any particular thing has inherent value.

My argument is that, as much as we can, we endeavor to imbue with an Earth-first sense this *generic* framework of importance that we bring to all *specific* ethical questions. It is an attempt to circumvent and subvert the selfish people-first and individual-first sense of importance that is our deadly instinctive and cultural inheritance. One advantage in a world bemused by the narrow

rationalism of science is that the primacy of an Earth ethic can be argued on a scientific basis!

Alfred North Whitehead, 1938. *Modes of Thought*. New York: Macmillan Company and Capricorn Books (reprinted by the latter in 1958).

Citation Format

Rowe, Stan (1996) A Partial Response and Query of Naess: An Earth-Psyche Bond
Trumpeter: 13, 2. <http://www.icaap.org/iuicode?6.13.2.9>

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