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### Arne Naess, Celebrant of Diversity

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In May, 1991, during a conference I attended in Boulder, Colorado, a group of participants took advantage of free time to spend a few hours hiking in the hills on the edge of town. After ascending a long slope, George Sessions and I found a comfortable spot on a rocky outcrop atop a cliff that afforded an excellent view of the town and the plains beyond. While talking and soaking up the sun's warmth, we noticed that Arne Naess, who had taken a somewhat different path up the hillside, was free climbing on a jagged promontory below us. Seeing us, Arne waved enthusiastically and continued easily to the top of the rocks. While George and I were amazed that this 79 year old man could move with such apparent ease on challenging rocks, we were also a bit concerned for his safety. Arne himself may have had some such concern, but he certainly did not let it interfere with the joy of climbing! He vanished as quickly as he had appeared. Assuming he had descended, George and I resumed our conversation. About ten minutes later, to our astonishment, Arne's head suddenly popped up five feet from where we were sitting on the cliff. Scarcely having broken a sweat, he had ascended the cliff as if he were climbing a few flights of steps.

"Arne stories," which abound amongst those fortunate enough to have spent any time out of doors with this remarkable man, often suggest that Arne prefers to explore things on his own. He has remarked that because as a boy he had a difficult family situation, he spent a lot of time by himself in the woods and fjords of his native Norway. As a youth, he experienced a profound sense of identification with all sorts of living beings which, like him, were striving somehow to realize their own potential. This intuition of what all life shares proved to be an impetus for Naess' role in the deep ecology movement.

I believe that there is some connection among Arne's joyous effervescence, his affirmation of all life, his preference for solitude, and his commitment to pluralism within the deep ecology movement. Energetic, playful, and irrepressible, he is always ready to explore a cliff face, a mountain path, or an idea. Although happy to explain his own views, he does not present them as truth to which others must conform. While convinced of the validity of the intuition that all life is interrelated and important, he does not pretend that he can *persuade* some to agree with him. Ultimately, one must see for oneself. A critic of dogmatism, he is willing to modify his views if their limitations become apparent to him. Although having company can be for him a joyful occasion, he often prefers to explore nature and ideas on his own. It is significant that two of his heroes, Spinoza and Gandhi, marched to the beat of a drum that most others could not hear. Though Spinoza and Gandhi emphasized the ultimate unity of all things, they also believed that individuals are responsible for realizing their own potential, even while they may also give assistance to and receive assistance from others.

By encouraging the greatest possible diversity of self-expression and self-realization on the part of others, Naess simultaneously cultivates both the freedom and the

differentiation necessary for him to pursue his own path. A critic of conformism, he argues that in the deep ecology movement only a diversity of views will prove to be sufficiently rich to have the desired outcome of allowing for the greatest possible flourishing of life on earth. Just as he celebrates diversity in the natural world, he also celebrates diversity within the world of culture, and especially within the deep ecology movement. He maintains that each person should develop his or her own "total view" or "ecosophy." Time and again, both in his writings and in public remarks, he has urged people *not* to adhere to his own particular version of deep ecology, Ecosophy-T, but instead to develop Ecosophy-A, Ecosophy-B, Ecosophy-B1, and so on. He has consistently opposed attempts to assert that the ultimate premises of Ecosophy-T are the premises of the deep ecology movement as such. As he recently stated,

[S]elf-realization and ecocentric egalitarianism, should not be taken as "deep ecology's primary norms." The two difficult terms will be differently interpreted, and even if they are interpreted as I do, I am sure there are supporters of the deep ecology movement who in their philosophy or religion would disagree or not 'feel at home' with the views.... Richness and diversity of human cultures on Earth require, I think, different articulation of ultimate views..1.

Naess knows that many Christians in the deep ecology movement would hold that all living things should be allowed to flourish because, as creatures of God, they are intrinsically valuable, not merely of instrumental worth to humans. This approach cannot easily be reconciled with the Spinozistic and Buddhist doctrines which Naess uses to articulate his intuition of the inherent worth of all life. Moreover, Naess is aware that ecofeminists tend to think that his emphasis on "self" reminiscent of a problematical masculinist way of thinking. They suggest further that his tendency to be something of a "loner" is consistent with Ecosophy-T's norm of self-realization. Of course, one might argue that by "Self" Naess does not mean the solitary ego. Because he regards all living things as interrelated manifestations of the one Self, *Atman*, he holds that his own "self-realization" can occur only insofar as other things are allowed to realize themselves. Hence, Naess affirms the ideal of the Bodhisattva, who refuses to enter into nirvana until all sentient beings are saved.

While not opposing efforts to reconcile Ecosophy-T's sense of "self" with the relational sense of "self" promoted by some versions of ecofeminism, Naess prefers that people not get hung up about matters concerning ultimate principles or first premises. *His goal is to encourage a deep ecology movement that can unite in a common cause many people with diverse views.* Although he expects that some people may find his Ecosophy-T compatible with their own views, he is in principle opposed to making adherence to Ecosophy-T the litmus test for being a genuine follower of the deep ecology movement. Realizing that neither his personal lifestyle nor his Ecosophy-T are universally appreciated, he does not recommend them except as examples of how lifestyle and total view/ecosophy can reflect and influence one another.

When Naess and Sessions worked out the deep ecology "platform" during a camping trip in Death Valley in 1984, their aim was to establish a set of general principles that would be sufficiently broad to include a wide variety of eco-activists under the large umbrella of the "deep ecology movement." Ecofeminists such as Jim Cheney have agreed that, with some reservations, they can affirm those principles and to that extent may be considered followers of deep ecology—But this does *not* mean that Cheney is willing to adhere to Naess' Ecosophy-T. Confusion and necessary friction arise when people insist that the deep ecology movement just *is* some version of Naess' Ecosophy-T. In Naess' view, the fact that most writers identifying themselves as deep ecology theorists, and do in fact happen to promote some variant of his Ecosophy-T, does *not* mean that Ecosophy-T should be understood as representing *the* theoretical foundation for the deep ecology movement. While some theorists have found Naess' ideas to be helpful for articulating

their own intuitions, he himself is saddened by conformism within the deep ecology movement. Both at the level of ultimate principles and at the level of specific, local actions, Naess holds that significant variations are not only to be expected, but encouraged. The richer the variety of ecosophies, the wider and deeper the emerging responses to ecological problems. No one has the one and only "right" answer or the "correct" view in respect to such complex matters.

As I noted earlier, Naess does defend the validity of his intuition (however it may be articulated) that all life is inherently valuable. Without some such intuition, he says that it would be difficult for someone to affirm the deep ecology movement platform. He also notes, however, that one cannot "prove" the validity of intuitions. Moreover, intuitions can differ. Some people, for example, claim to intuit that humans are more important than anything else. Based on this intuition, people have developed philosophical systems whose ultimate premises may call for prudent use of natural resources, but do not concede that non-human beings are intrinsically valuable. Warwick Fox may well be right in arguing that one may begin from ultimate premises and arrive at views that are inconsistent with the deep ecology platform.<sup>2</sup> Naess, however, would ask whether such premises are truly "ultimate." He believes that in the process of asking probing questions about those premises and their originating intuition, many people would begin to see that what seemed like an "intuition" about human specialness is probably more like a prejudice promoted by anthropocentric culture. As we grow up, such a prejudice overrides the profound intuition that many of us have as children: *that we humans are only one part of a large and mysterious world which is far more than a source of raw materials.*

Today, increasing numbers of business and political leaders are beginning to understand that human well-being cannot be achieved at the expense of the well-being of ecosphere. Naess maintains that in private conversations, a number of industrialists have proffered views that are consistent with features of the deep ecology movement. When *Business Week's* cover story (May 11, 1992) bears the title "Growth vs. Environment: The Push for Sustainable Development," we have reason to conclude that important changes may be in the offing. It is true that such stories often continue to emphasize that ecologically sound practices will promote human well-being. The crucial fact, however, is that the *internal relation* between humanity and the ecosphere can no longer be denied. As this realization becomes more apparent, some people in positions of political and economic leadership might begin to feel more comfortable about affirming and articulating the long-repressed intuition that all forms of life and the ecosphere itself have inherent worth. There are many roads that lead to support for the deep ecology movement.

Naess insists that only continuous and genuine dialogue can promote such a shift within contemporary society. Such dialogue is also needed to prevent people in the deep ecology movement from becoming wedded to a set of orthodoxies. For Naess, even much of the deep ecology platform should not be regarded as a sacred text to which ecological activists should be required to pledge allegiance, but rather as a plausible *starting point* in an on-going effort to develop a consensus (in principle revisable) about certain broad attitudes and principles. People become rigid and defensive, when they succumb to the temptation that their own views are the final truth. In such a constricted condition, we are no more capable of adapting our views to meet changing circumstances than a climber with stiff joints and a narrow perspective is capable of negotiating a difficult cliff. Arne Naess is, fortunately, supple in both domains.

Years ago while waiting for a train in a London subway, I saw a large poster that quoted a remark from someone whose name I have now forgotten. The poster read something like the following: "When I was young, I was sincere in my beliefs, but I never claimed that they were the truth." Ecologists of whatever stripe must be sincere, for otherwise they would be ineffective. All adherents to the deep ecology movement may agree that there is validity to the intuition that all life is in some sense intrinsically valuable, but they may

disagree about terminology, even regarding the terms "intrinsically valuable." Intuitions about the worth of life may be articulated in a wide variety of ways; likewise, there are a number of different ways actively to promote the well-being of life on earth.

Arne Naess is admirable in part because of his insistence that Ecosophy-T should not have a privileged position within the deep ecology movement. His flexibility, his willingness to learn, and his Socratic quest for ever deeper understanding sets him apart, but simultaneously sets him forth as a model for the rest of us working to promote the well-being of life on earth.

## Notes

1. Letter from Arne Naess, 23 March, 1992.
2. Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Psychology* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991).

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