

Reflections on Naess' Humor and Ecosophy from Two Meetings

Mark A. Schroll

I first met Arne Naess at the "Human In Nature" conference in Boulder, Colorado, May 4-7, 1991. Impressing me not with his intellect but with playfulness, as one afternoon we wrestled each other in the Naropa parking lot.¹ We met again May 22-27, 1994, in Killarney, Ireland, at the 13th International Transpersonal Association conference, where Naess revealed his sense of humor. Walking through the hallways of the immense Great Southern Hotel where the conference was held I noticed Naess wandering around looking lost. Asking what he was doing, he said he could not find his room; so winding our way through the hotel corridors we soon found his room. Naess invited me to have some tea and discuss our mutual interests, but then discovered he had lost his room key. Evoking his response: "It's a good thing I left my window open. I'll go outside and crawl through the window to let us in." This would have been impressive to see as Naess' room was on the second floor. I laughed saying, "Arne all we need to do is go to the front desk and get another key." Naess replied, "You mean we can do this?" I was not quite sure if he was serious or just wanting to observe my response, but at this moment Kit Fai (Naess' wife) shouted: "Arne! Where have you been? I've been looking all over for you!" Walking toward us and opening the door to their room she turned to me saying: "Arne will talk with you later, it's time for him to take a nap."

I never had another opportunity to talk with Naess, yet the reason he had invited me in for conversation was in response to my comments two days earlier after his lecture on "The Relation of Ontology to Psychology":

Schroll: I like your eight-point deep ecology movement platform. But nowhere in this list is there any reflection about the need for a transformation of consciousness, or in your terms the process by which a particular event that triggers the spontaneous conceptual gestalt that allows the culture to bring forth coherence and meaning. So we would be unable to obtain an understanding of Yeats' famous lines, "the best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity." My question is this: What experiences in your own life triggered the

awakening of Self-Realization! and is it perhaps only through a sharing of these transpersonal stories via dialogue that we can get out of the current mess we are in?

Naess: Yes, I would say that the ways are not all one and the same ways. I have my ways, and they do not belong in the deep ecology movement platform. They belong to level three [of what I refer to as Ecosophy T]— Oh! I did not mention level three, having to do with the causes of the existing society as it is. Such as the ecofeminist assertion that hierarchy and male-centeredness are “causes” that continue to spawn new maladaptive behaviors. [So it is in level three where I] get into theories about root causes, how I can change myself, etc. . . . You make a demonstration of this with your body language.²

This brief tutorial with Naess was commemorated afterwards with a photo that Kit Fai took of us.³ In recollecting this exchange what I find most illustrative of Naess’ way of being is the way he responded to my question. I felt vindicated, and yet I was also being corrected. His means of pointing out the error in my misunderstanding of his deep ecology movement’s complex philosophical system (that he summarizes in his apron diagram) served as a catalyst to deeper inquiry.⁴

It can therefore not be repeated enough that *Naess’ platform is a means to guide our process of deep questioning about what needs to be done to create a better world.* The absence of telling us *how* to create this world is consistent with Naess’s radically pluralistic stance. Naess does not spell out the specific means in this platform of how to create a better world because he wants us to figure it out for ourselves. This is why the deep ecology movement is a dynamic process and not a reified discipline with established boundaries, because Naess wants all of us to continue asking ourselves deeper questions.⁵

References

Drengson, A. and Devall, B. In review. The deep ecology movement: Origins, development and future prospects. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*.

Schroll, M. A. 2007. Wrestling with Arne Naess: A chronicle of ecopsychology’s origins. *The Trumpeter* 23 (1): 28-57.

Schroll, M. A. 2009. New science, new culture manifesto: Transpersonal ecosophy's vision of what it means to be human. *Association for Humanistic Psychology-Perspective* June/July:8-10.

Schroll, M. A. and Rothenberg, D. 2009. Psychedelics and the deep ecology movement: An interview with Arne Naess. *Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies Bulletin*, 19 (10): 41-43. <http://www.maps.org/news-letters/v19n1/v19n1-pg41.pdf>.

Naess, A. 1994, May 25. The relation of ontology to psychology. Paper presented at the 13th International Transpersonal Association conference, Great Southern Hotel, Killarney, Ireland. Audiotape <http://www.conferencerecording.com> (800) 647-110.

Notes

1. Schroll 2007.

2. Naess 1994. Drengson and Devall point out:

Some writers misunderstood Naess. They thought that his *Ecosophy T* with its Self-Realization norm was meant to characterize the whole deep ecology movement as part of a single philosophy called "deep ecology." . . . *Ecosophy T* is not meant to hold for everyone, since it is tailored to his [Naess'] very modest lifestyle suitable to a place like Tvergastein" (p. 8).

Naess encourages each of us to find ways of experiencing Self-Realization that lead us to the creation our own Ecosophy. Honoring Naess' encouragement to create our own ecosophy and the means to experience Self-Realization, I offer my perspective (Schroll 2009).

3. Schroll and Rothenberg 2009. This article contains a brief error mistakenly referring to David Rothenberg as Donald Rothenberg.

4. Drengson and Devall 2008 (Pp. 9-12).

5. Schroll 2007 (p. 40).