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Selected Works of Arne Naess: SWAN Introduction /
Arne Naess Biography

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Arne Naess is one of the most important contributors to philosophical thought in the twentieth century. He has received many international prizes for his contributions, including the Nordic from the Swedish Academy (1996), the Mahatma Gandhi Prize for Non-violent Peace (1994), and the Sonning Prize for contributions to European culture (1977), yet his work as a whole - because of its inaccessibility - has remained largely unappreciated outside Scandinavia.

The Selected Works of Arne Naess (SWAN) is a project dedicated to bringing the full scope of Arne Naess's philosophical contributions to the English-language audience. Naess's work is currently being revised and edited by Harold Glasser, who has worked closely with Naess over the last six years and who served as a visiting Fulbright Professor at Oslo University in 1996. A nine-volume set, prepared under Glasser's direction, will be published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in early 1999.

Arne Dekke Eide Naess was born near the city of Oslo in 1912.¹ He studied philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy at Oslo University, the Sorbonne, and the University of Vienna. While in Vienna, he worked with Dr. Edward Hitschmann, a noted collaborator of Freud, and was welcomed at the famous Schlick Seminar by the members of the Vienna Circle. He received his Ph.D. at 24 and went on to perform postdoctoral research in learning theory with E.C. Tolman in Berkeley (1937 – 1938). Upon returning to Oslo, he was appointed to the University of Oslo's chair of philosophy at the age of 27. He occupied this chair until 1969 when, at the pinnacle of his philosophical career, he sought early retirement to devote himself more fully to ecological issues and activism. Naess has commented that this effort to be more engaged in social conflicts reflects his desire "to live rather than function."

Naess's long philosophical career is punctuated by two main periods. Prior to 1970 he was largely known for his contributions to academic philosophy, but after 1970 he received wide attention from the environmental community for his contributions to ecophilosophy and the deep ecology movement. By making the evolution of Naess's oeuvre available to the English-language audience for the first time, the SWAN allows these ostensibly disparate contributions to be seen as a unified and coherent whole.

Naess has had a profound influence on Norwegian philosophy and social research. From 1939 – 1954 he was the only professor of philosophy in Norway. He was chiefly responsible for organizing the courses for the *examen philosophicum*, required of all undergraduates. His unique paradigm of inquiry, emphasizing pluralism and open-mindedness, a vital concern for contemporary social and political problems, and a thorough grounding in philosophy and the history of ideas, shaped the intellectual fabric of postwar Norway. Naess is credited with rekindling the study of philosophy in Norway and with forming the Oslo school of philosophy. The section on Scandinavian philosophy in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* elaborates:²

The philosophical milieu in Norway today [circa 1967] is determined by an internationally known and original philosopher (who is also a famous mountain climber), Arne Naess.... Naess ... is the originator of a radical type of empirical semantics and the leader of the so-called Oslo group.... The empirical methods applied by the Oslo group employ carefully worked-out questionnaires. By the help of such questionnaires and by teamwork, philosophers of the Oslo group have carried out investigations of such expressions as "truth," "democracy," and "private enterprise."... If it is correct that Norwegian philosophy has had a dead³ period, it is equally correct to assert that, primarily because of Arne Naess, Norwegian philosophy is now in the middle of a period of life and growth.

When asked to comment on this passage, Naess was emphatic about inserting an addenda to the last sentence.⁴ He was proud to convey that contemporary Norwegian philosophers pursue a wide variety of directions and employ a diversity of approaches, many independent of Naess's own line.

Naess's contributions to philosophy extend well beyond Norway. He has made significant scholarly advances in: the philosophy of science, empirical semantics, scepticism, the study of Gandhi and Spinoza, peace studies, the study of democracy, and environmental philosophy (in part, as founder of the "deep ecology movement"). As an example, from 1949 – 1950 he was the scientific leader of a UNESCO project established to examine the nature of ideological controversies between the "East and West." The project culminated in an empirical exploration of the various uses of the term *democracy* since antiquity. This empirical study stressed the term's richness, diversity, and multiplicity of meanings - including its use in the Soviet Union - inciting detractors in both the East and West. According to Naess, "The resulting volume⁵, edited by R. McKeon and S. Rokkan, was promptly sold out and never reprinted by UNESCO due to the politically dangerous character of its items."⁶

In the 1970's, philosophy was still influenced by the events of World War II. Heidegger's flirtation with National Socialism and the Hitler regime, and his unusual way of expressing himself, made it difficult for him to be considered a great philosopher. Naess's book on four contemporary philosophers⁷ was seen as unique because he interpreted in a scholarly and positive way both Heidegger and the fiercely anti-Heidegger philosopher, Rudolph Carnap, a logical empiricist. Carnap, who was forced to flee Nazi Germany, could not fathom how Naess, as an old friend, could present positive discussions of Heidegger and himself in the same book. The two other philosophers included in the book, Wittgenstein and Sartre, also had completely incompatible views of philosophy, but Naess accorded them equally high positive appreciation.

Today, Naess is perhaps best known for his characterization of the "deep, long range" and "shallow" ecology movements.⁸ He views the shallow movement as

having a tendency to pursue Band-Aid measures that ultimately fail to address the philosophical, social, and political roots of the ecological crisis. The deep ecology movement stresses the importance of addressing the fundamental roots and coevolving causes of the ecological crisis. Naess's reputation within the international environmental community results, only in part, from his trenchant analysis of environmental conflicts. His activities often go well beyond arm-chair theorizing to active, nonviolent participation in environmental conflicts. Naess's 1976 classic, *Økologi, Samfunn og Livsstil* (Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle), which emphasizes the role of individual responsibility and activism in resolving the global environmental crisis, has been translated into Swedish, English, Italian, Japanese, and German (forthcoming).

When Denmark decided to institute its version of the Nobel Prize, the "Sonning Prize," Naess was one of the first to receive it, in 1977, for his contributions to European culture.⁹ He donated the considerable sum of 200,000 Danish Crowns that accompanied the prize to Amnesty International and other humanitarian organizations. Naess's social concern, sense of wonder, intensity, humor, thoughtful criticism, and playful nature have all contributed to his success at numerous academic posts around the world. He is to this day, at 85, a frequent international speaker. Naess is the founder and past editor of the influential journal *Inquiry* and a past editor of *Synthese*. He is the author of more than 400 publications in Norwegian, English, German, and French and has been honored by five festschrifts, one each, on the occasions of his 70th,¹⁰ 80th,¹¹ 82nd,¹² birthdays and two on his 85th¹³ birthday.

About the SWAN Project

The SWAN project represents an attempt to bring the full spectrum of Naess's most important scholarly contributions to the English-language audience. The series will consist of ten books in nine volumes and encompass approximately 3,000 pages. It will be by no means an exhaustive compilation of all of Naess's work;¹⁴ but will, simply, through careful selection, offer a representative and relatively comprehensive collection of a prolific philosopher's principal writings. As such, the series will be the definitive collection chronicling the development and progression of Naess's thinking for scholars, students, and critics alike.

Naess is a phenomenally productive philosopher who is constantly creating, revising, and re-revising manuscripts. Many of his publications have never been available in English (two major translations were commissioned for this project), many others are out of print, and a substantial number of articles have never even been published. Major works will be presented as single volumes (although two smaller works will be bound together). Each volume will contain a general introduction to the series by Naess and Glasser and a volume-specific introduction by Glasser, discussing the work's main contributions, relevance, and

relationship to Naess's oeuvre. In addition, each volume, including those previously released, will undergo substantial revision and editing to improve clarity and to meet contemporary standards in philosophical publishing.

The SWAN will also include a volume of selected papers. This volume will be of particular importance to scholars because many of Naess's papers have been, until now, inaccessible in obscure and hard-to-find journals. In addition, because Naess has been so prolific, many of his most important papers still remain unpublished. The most significant of these papers will also be included in the *Selected Papers* volume.

Finally, the SWAN will include a survey volume by the series editor, Harold Glasser. This volume, prepared from dialogues between Naess and Glasser, which were conducted over a six-year period, will present a comprehensive introduction to Naess's deep ecology approach to ecophilosophy as well as link Naess's philosophical work to his work on ecophilosophy. To facilitate scholarly research, this volume will also contain a complete and up-to-date bibliography of Naess's English (mostly) publications. In addition, a comprehensive index for the entire series of volumes will also be available.

SWAN Contents

- Volume I: Science as Behavior
- Volume II: *Interpretation and Preciseness: A Contribution to the Theory of Communicative Action*
- Volume III: Scepticism
- Volume IV: Which World Is the Real World
- Volume V: The Pluralist and Possibilist Aspect of the Scientific Enterprise
- Volume VI: Gandhi and Group Conflict: An Exploration of Satyagraha
- Volume VII: Communication and Argument Freedom, Emotion, and Self-Subsistence: The Structure of a Central Part of Spinoza's Ethics.
- Volume VIII: Selected Papers: 1936 – 1996
- Volume IX: Stones Philosopher: Dialogues with Arne Naess

Notes

1. For additional biographical information see:

Fox, Warwick. "Arne Naess: A Biographical Sketch." *Trumpeter* 9 (1992): 45 – 49.

Fox, Warwick. *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1990.

Rothenberg, David. "The Life of Arne Naess: From Mountaintop to the Depths of Ecology." In *Environmental Ethics: Discourse and Cultural Traditions. A Festschrift to Arne Naess*, ed. Rana P.B. Singh. Varanasi, India: The National Geographic Society of India, 1993: 13-23.

For an autobiographical discussion of Naess's philosophical development, see:

Naess, Arne. "How My Philosophy Seemed to Develop." In *Philosophers on Their Own Work*, ed. Andre Mercier and Maja Svilar. Bern: Peter Lang, 1983: 209-26.

2. Hartnack, Justus. "Scandinavian Philosophy." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, volume 7. New York: Macmillan, 1967, p. 301.

3. From about 1845 to 1910 Norway was dominated by Hegelianism. This period is often referred to as the "dead period" of Norwegian philosophy, not because of Hegelianism, but because it was characterized by a dearth in publishing.

4.. Personal communication, 4/30/97.

5. McKeon, Richard and Stein Rokkan, eds. *Democracy in a World of Tensions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. Naess was the Scientific Leader of the UNESCO project; he was only credited as being the author of the questionnaire itself and the summary paper, although he was intimately involved with the project at all levels.

6. Naess, 1983, p. 223.

7. Naess, Arne. *Four Modern Philosophers: Carnap, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

8. Naess, Arne. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary." *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95 – 100.

9. Unfortunately for the Danish initiative, it was revealed that the sponsor of the prize, Sonning, may not have amassed his great fortune in a decent way. Denmark eventually dismantled the institution.

10. Gullvåg, Ingemund and Jon Wetlesen, ed. *In Sceptical Wonder: Inquiries into the Philosophy of Arne Naess on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1982.

11. Drengson, Alan, ed. *The Long-Range Deep Ecology Movement and Arne Naess*, Special Edition of *The Trumpeter* 9 (Spring 1992).

12. Singh, Rana P.B., ed. *Environmental Ethics and the Power of Place: Festschrift to Arne Naess*. Varanasi, India: National Geographical Journal of India, 1994.

13. Witoszek, Nina and Andrew Brennan, eds. *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Progress of Ecophilosophy*. Oslo: Centre for Development and the Environment, 1997 and Light, Andrew and David Rothenberg, special eds. *Arne Naess's Environmental Thought*, Special Edition of *Inquiry* 39 (June) 1996.

14. Space and time limitations prevent us from including many of Naess's interesting and important works in the SWAN collection. A few of these include:

Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy. Translated and revised by David Rothenberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. This highly influential book is not included in the SWAN because it is widely available and still in print.

Filosofiens Historie I: Fra Oldtiden til Renessansen (History of Philosophy). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1980a and *Filosofiens Historie II: Fra Renessansen til vàr Tid (History of Philosophy)*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1980b. This is Naess's attempt to offer a nondidactic, integrated overview of Eastern and Western philosophy.

Galtung, Johan and Arne Naess. *Gandhis Politiske Etikk (Gandhi's Political Ethics)*. 2nd edition, 1968. Oslo: Johan Grundt Tanum, 1955.

Four Modern Philosophers: Carnap, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre. Translated by Alastair Hannay. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Note: This account of SWAN comes from the Foundation for Deep Ecology.

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