
Scepticism

The Selected Works of Arne Naess

Harold Glasser, Series Editor
Alan Drengson, Associate Editor

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Interpretation and Preciseness

A Contribution to the Theory of Communication

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Scepticism

Wonder and Joy of a Wandering Seeker

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The Selected Works of Arne Naess

Scepticism

Wonder and Joy of a Wandering Seeker

Revised and Edited by Harold Glasser
in Cooperation with the Author
and with Assistance from Alan Drengson

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Series Editor's Introduction

Arne Naess — A Wandering Wonderer: Bringing the Search for Wisdom Back to Life

[The pre-Socratics'] attitude, in the main, was genuinely scientific whenever it did not merely embody the prejudices of their age. But it was not *only* scientific; it was imaginative and vigorous and filled with the delight of adventure. They were interested in everything—meteors and eclipses, fishes and whirlwinds, religion and morality; with a penetrating intellect they combined the zest of children.

From this point onwards, there are first certain seeds of decay, in spite of previously unmatched achievement, and then a gradual decadence. What is amiss, even in the best philosophy after Democritus, is an undue emphasis on man as compared with the universe.

Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*

When the full scope of Arne Naess's philosophical contribution is examined carefully and placed in context, it will very likely be viewed as one of the twentieth century's most significant and enduring.¹ Naess has made bold and innovative contributions to conventional academic philosophy and social research, particularly in the areas of behaviorist epistemology, empirical semantics and communication theory, scepticism, scientific and cultural pluralism, Gandhi and Spinoza scholarship, normative systems theory (as a general approach for exploring premise-conclusion relations), and the very idea and relevance of total systems (total views in Naess's *lingua*). Perhaps even more significant—although one should not view it as distinct or decoupled—has been his commitment to reconnect philosophy to life experience. This effort is similar to Bertrand Russell's in that it has been particularly pronounced in later life. Naess, however, carries this com-

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mitment to expand philosophy's sphere of concern to life in general and the Earth. Essential to this endeavor, is the mature Naess's radical initiative to reconceptualize reason expansively, to integrate reason with emotions and feelings *in practice*. In some cases this includes using mythopoetics to make a case or communicate a point.² What makes Naess so special is that even while paddling against the current, he exhibits tremendous optimism and openness, joy, and a disarming, infectious playfulness.

Naess strives to *live his philosophy*. For more than thirty years, he has sought to reshape the philosophical debate by drawing from and building on his previous work to outline a nondualistic, nonanthropocentric philosophy of life that affirms the ultimate unity and interdependence of all living beings, while maintaining their individuality. His philosophy celebrates the Earth's richness and diversity—both cultural and biological. That said, one of the main purposes of the *Selected Works of Arne Naess* (SWAN), however, is to provide you, the reader, with the resources to make your own informed judgment regarding the significance of Naess's philosophical legacy.

At age ninety-two, Arne Naess has lived a long life filled with wonder. In his words, he has “seen life”—traveling the world, spending significant periods of time on every continent. He has experienced the world somatically and intellectually in concert as one mind-body—as a being—and seen more than most of us can imagine.

When Naess was born, Archduke Francis Ferdinand was alive, automobiles were in their infancy, and most homes did not have running water. Home refrigerators had just begun to be produced. Television and computers were only imagined. Only a few years before, after being contemplated for millennia, the first controlled and sustained powered flight took place, ushering in a period of ever-accelerating transfer of materials and information, but not necessarily a commensurate increase in knowledge or wisdom.

Consider that Naess has lived through two world wars (and too many “limited” conflicts to count), the rise and fall of the Soviet Union and East Germany, the “liberation” of India and Pakistan, the onset of climate change, and the hastening of “global terrorism.” He has been the beneficiary of tremendous medical advances and unprecedented economic growth, and he has seen the ravages caused by escalating consumption, globalization, and disparities in both income distribution and access to resources. He is part and product of humanity's largest growth spurt. And he has witnessed the most significant loss of cultural diversity and the onset of

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what may become the planet's greatest extinction crisis—but is surely the greatest extinction crisis ever caused by one of Earth's own species. Naess has also seen and, at times, participated in the many hopeful responses to these ills—the peace, social justice, and ecology movements; nonviolent actions to support antiglobalization efforts and protest dam building; voluntary simplicity; conservation biology; wildlands philanthropy; bio-regionalism; green business and architecture; ecological design, economics, engineering, and restoration; and sustainable agriculture, forestry, and fisheries management.

Everyone is influenced by the times and events of his or her day. The “prejudices of our age” filter into our lives and work more or less consciously and actively, but at a minimum they enter passively. What is the mature Naess's approach to philosophy, how is it a uniquely self-aware and responsive product of his day, and why should it be seen as monumental?

Naess likes to see himself as a “philosopher of life.” The thought of simply being an academic philosopher—living a life of the mind—makes him restless and uneasy. For Naess, “wonder” is both the point of departure for philosophy and the focus of the enterprise. He is the philosophical equivalent of a hunter-gatherer using his wits and intuition to seek out food (for thought) in a fecund landscape. As they were for the ancient Greeks, science and philosophy are inextricably intertwined for Naess. Science, as the application of reason through empirical investigation, cannot be separated from rational reflection on the nature of reason, and vice versa. For the mature Naess, though, philosophy and science are also distinct. Philosophy is the unique realm in which we take up the deepest, most profound, and most fundamental problems. From Naess's vantage, which defines philosophy openly and discursively, the questions that have fascinated and plagued people for millennia have not changed much and they are not likely to change significantly in the future.

Naess's view of philosophy includes the traditional epistemological question “What can we know?” and the ontological question “What main kinds of things are there?” But it also includes “How do we measure?” and “How do we know?” as well as “What is the relationship between the knower and the known?”³ These are questions that are likely to vary with cultural and social circumstances, but this does not, for Naess, imply cultural relativism. By its nature, this view of philosophy runs counter to the dream of the logical empiricists; it cannot be restricted to investigations of

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“fact” or “logic.” It is imbued with fundamental valuations. Being a philosopher, for Naess, is thus a deeply personal and intimate matter that requires us to engage all of our powers and experience. It should also include questions such as “What are your aims in life?” and “What’s driving you?” as well as encourage a practice of deep and open argumentation by asking repeatedly, “Why do you hold that *p*?” in order to unearth underlying premises and hypotheses. For Naess, all these questions have an empirical component. He sees it as a duty for a philosopher to extend research into the creation and use of empirical methods to address these aspects, unless these questions can be adequately addressed by an existing empirical science, in which case it is fine for a philosopher to perform research here, but it no longer constitutes a *duty*.

In Naess’s view, philosophy is ultimately concerned with how *we*, through our experiences, perceive the world, the world’s relation to ourselves, and the basic features of the condition of people. It is the realm in which we pose sophisticated questions to address perennial problems, probe them from different angles (in Naess’s case, from as many angles as possible), and test and apply the insights to real life—to what we do and decide every day. Its purpose is not to arrive at definitive answers. The purpose of philosophy, rather, is to help us understand what *we* believe in from our innermost perspective, expand this perspective continually, and facilitate communication—so that we might contribute toward improving the state of affairs of the world.

While initially attracted to Bergson’s *les données immédiates de la conscience* (the immediate data of consciousness), Naess grew disenchanted when he recognized that one becomes lodged in an endless circular loop and never exits consciousness. Naess clearly believes that the unexamined life is not worth living (his life is a testament to Socrates’ edict), but he appreciates that disembodied, introspective examination comes at great peril. A mind-centered focus on “examination”—where subjects exist separately from objects, theory is isolated from praxis, and knowledge is decoupled from wisdom—very quickly degenerates into meaninglessness. Worse yet, separating people from and raising people above nature and the coevolutionary process that created us—and provides for our sustenance—can be inimical to life and the evolutionary process.

Nature, that which is, the reality of the pre-Socratics, is Naess’s philosophical palette, not the “world” of his own consciousness as has become

the norm with so many contemporary philosophers since Descartes. Popper and others posit the existence of three worlds that correspond to the development of our commonsense view of reality. World I is the physical world, the “external world,” the world of our sensory impressions. World II is the world of all conscious experience, the psychological world of the “immediately given,” which incorporates our feelings and intentions. World III emphasizes the logical content of reality. Naess finds these multiple views of reality unconvincing and potentially dangerous. With a worldview inspired by Spinoza’s *Ethics*, he is fundamentally opposed to the notion of multiple worlds.

Naess’s mature philosophical approach and contributions are shaped by full engagement with a relational reality, in which no firm subject/object, substance/property, universal/particular, fact/value dualities exist. John Muir’s famous, deceptively simple aphorism sets the stage: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” Reality as we experience it, according to Naess, is a dynamic, multilayered manifold of hierarchically related *gestalts*—of which we are always a part. It is the opposite of atomism. Contrary to the dominant, Western way of viewing reality, there are no extrinsically connected discrete objects or “things in themselves” in the sense of Kant’s *Ding an sich*. With Naess’s “gestalt ontology,” there is no dualistic “I” standing outside of reality looking in. Living beings, individuals in the sense of Spinoza’s modes, are spatiotemporal manifestations of “one substance,” nature or reality. As Naess points out in *Freedom, Emotion, and Self-Subsistence* (SWAN VI), Spinoza’s medieval terminology of substance, mode, attribute, God, and Nature is dispensable. In addition, Naess goes on to characterize “living beings” broadly to include individual organisms as well as ecosystems, rivers, mountains, and possibly Earth (Gaia).

Naess’s view of reality calls for a gestalt shift. His gestalt ontology does not stop with gestalt psychology’s simple notion of holism, where the whole is more than the sum of the parts. It goes on to add that the internally related subordinate *gestalts* are themselves more than mere parts. There are no parts as parts or wholes as wholes; higher-order wholes are not reducible to lower-order wholes. The concrete contents of reality have gestalt character. For Naess, we experience reality spontaneously and our experience of the world is made up of *gestalts*. “[This] is the world we experience. Nothing is more real.”⁴ People create abstract structures to reflect

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on or analyze spontaneous experiences and their structure; they are the interrelations between spontaneous experiences. Mind and body are mental contrivances and conveniences—abstract structures in Naess's parlance—for helping us to describe, model, or understand certain states of affairs. They are not the contents of reality. Only individual occurrences of spontaneous experience make up the concrete contents of reality.

What are the consequences of Naess's "ontological realism" as expressed in the form of gestalt ontology? First, living organisms have different levels of access to reality, based on their capacities, experiences, and backgrounds. This implication of "reality is one" plays a central role in the mature Naess's approach to philosophy of science. One of his main thrusts is to undermine the claim that the exact physical sciences show all that is, that they have a privileged view of reality. In his view, science creates extremely abstract structures of what is real, but those structures do not actually *describe* any of reality's concrete contents (descriptions are themselves normative). Jakob von Uexküll, the famous ethologist of the early twentieth century, whom Naess read closely in his youth, helps clarify this notion. "As the spider spins its threads, every subject spins his relations to certain characteristics of the things around him, and weaves them into a firm web which carries his existence."⁵

Different people experience reality differently, yet we often, incorrectly, speak of *different realities* as if they existed. By the same token, identical accounts of reality in no way imply verification of that view by correspondence; from Naess's perspective, such accounts by themselves are merely a sign of cultural poverty. "God" could have created the Earth and life 6,000 years ago, but the evidence to support this case is thin and the evidence to support evolution is stronger, in part because biological science and paleontology generally employ a greater level of depth of intention and thus aspire to maintain higher standards for the evaluation of evidence. Radical pluralism and scientific possibilism do not imply scientific or ethical relativism.

There are at least four other key implications of Naess's gestalt ontology. First, the existence of one, interdependent reality tends to curb solipsism. Second, the world we live in spontaneously can no longer be characterized as merely subjective. Expressions such as "the social construction of nature" become oxymoronic. Third, individual organisms exist as knots in a biospherical web or net. Reality is not anthropocentric; it is not particular

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to humans. Fourth, humanity can no longer justifiably be seen in opposition to a separate object—nature. This insight tends to temper any “natural” tendencies toward anthropocentrism. As with Leopold’s Land Ethic, people become plain members and citizens of the biotic community, albeit ones with unique powers and proclivities and thus special responsibilities. We are all individual beings, yet we vary in the extent to which we are integrated into the whole.

Humans are massively altering the gestalt character of reality, diminishing it, making it less complex. We do this, Naess argues, without necessarily recognizing we are doing it or the extent to which we are doing it. Thus, we are unable to evaluate the tradeoffs of making such decisions. Naess argues that we generally act simply according to how we “see” reality, but there are aspects of reality that may not be available to us. These aspects are no less there because they are currently unavailable to us, yet they can be destroyed very easily. Sometimes we also confuse our abstract structures of reality (models, data, concepts, etc.) with the contents of reality and vastly underestimate the complexity of internal relations between gestalts, leading ourselves to believe, incorrectly, that higher-order wholes can be reduced to lower-order wholes. It is Naess’s hope that by embracing gestalt ontology, we are encouraged to cultivate our opportunities and faculties for experiencing reality more fully—for experiencing more complex, higher-order gestalts. It is also his hope that we will openly and more carefully consider, in advance, how a proposed research program, action, or decision might affect other peoples’ (or other life-forms’) opportunities for rich spontaneous experiences (consider, for example, the possible impacts of ostensibly beneficial research on nuclear fission or molecular biology). In the end, however, we should remember Naess’s own caution—his description of gestalt ontology is itself an abstract structure. As Naess says, “For me reality has always been something slippery to handle. I seem to grasp it firmly, but like an eel, or even a small lively trout in shallow water, firmness of grasp does not guarantee against escape.”⁶ But does reality really have gestalt character?

Truth—as in *the* truth—is not a defensible notion for Naess. For too many academic philosophers, wonder has been extinguished and replaced by a belief that definitive answers have been found, that the original, initially vexing questions can be laid to rest. Naess is under no such illusion. He views humans as essentially fallible and he sees this domain of fallibility

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as extending to mathematics and formal logic. This may be why he so freely returns to previously explored material (sometimes just after writing it) and looks at it afresh, with new and frequently competing and even conflicting insights. For Naess, truth is something we seek continually without expecting or believing that it can be found. He seeks peace of mind (*ataraxia*) by suspending judgment (*epoché*). While necessity requires him to take firm positions in life, he often resists taking such positions in his written philosophy. Having reached a general state of mental suspense (*isothenia*), he prefers, as a mature sceptic, anticipating his own tendency to come up with counterarguments and counter-counterarguments, to suggest alternative paths, inspire new ways of looking at things, and foster informed, open-minded debate. This *zetetic* inclination, although nascent in many of his earlier works, was made explicit and became a central theme in his philosophical writings in the 1960s.

For Naess, passivity has no place in philosophy or life. In his famous debate with Sir Alfred Ayer, Naess defines Spinoza's *amor intellectualis* as a "kind of loving attitude towards what you have insight into, while considering it in an extremely wide perspective."⁷ For the mature Naess, *amor intellectualis* involves using his technical and intellectual training to articulate, in direct and forceful ways, his attitudes and evaluations on matters of practical consequence. Like Spinoza and Gandhi, Naess is concerned with human salvation in this world, but Naess, with his concept of "wide-identification," expands this concern to both humankind's relationship to life in general and the self-realization of all life-forms for their own sake. Whether it be understanding how lay people conceptualize truth or experts characterize democracy; considering how our approach to science not only shapes how we do science, but the nature of scientific outcomes too; using philosophy to improve practical communication; facilitating thoughtful debate on the potential dangers of Norway joining the European Union; or discussing the ethics of climbing, the meanings of sustainable development, or distinctions between different approaches for addressing the ecological crisis, Naess seamlessly connects philosophical questioning to activeness in relation to the questions.

Naess's philosophical career can be seen, in one sense, as an attempt to bridge C. P. Snow's two cultures. Believing that the central questions of philosophy are here to stay, he has developed his philosophy over seventy years in part through his effort to relate these questions to the issues of his

rapidly changing, trying, and tumultuous era. Naess's lifelong commitment to integrate interests in nature, science, and logic is evidenced by the mature Naess's championing of philosophical approaches in which both metaphysics and science contribute to all-embracing systems of thought. This approach is particularly prominent in Naess's development of normative systems theory, a strategy for promoting systematic reflection on premises and conclusions. Recognizing that all philosophical questioning must stop somewhere, Naess calls the essential intuitions that serve as bedrock assumptions for our total views, ultimate norms or ultimate premises. Further, recognizing that our philosophical conclusions as well as our lifestyles and everyday actions often appear inconsistent with these ultimate premises, Naess has developed a strategy for using premise-conclusion strings to help identify potential norm conflicts as well as to help assess whether potential agreements and disagreements are real or pseudo. Use of this technique figures prominently in Naess's approach for improving communication, in his approach for exploring both the philosophical basis for Gandhi's *satyāgraha* (active nonviolent resistance) and the Gandhian premise "Any human conflict can be justifiably resolved through nonviolence," as well as in his own Ecosophy T.⁸

With regard to total views—broad philosophical systems like Spinoza's, which attempt to communicate our deepest insights and communicate views of life—Naess argues that although the existence of complete, explicit total views is absurd, it is equally absurd to presume to criticize a total view without adopting one (at least implicitly). After relinquishing the possibility of creating a consistent empirical theory of knowledge, Naess came to believe that any theory of knowledge presupposes all major philosophical disciplines, at least on the metalevel. One cannot have a theory of knowledge without presuming a particular reality, at least implicitly, and this necessitates having an ontology, metaphysics, ethics, and so on. This has practical consequences too. We never simply act solely as a philosophy professor who specializes in logic or ethics; we are always, at least partly, mother, daughter, lover, scientist, . . . , and philosopher. If we accept the premise "For every decision we, explicitly or implicitly, take all things into consideration," then the notion of total views or total normative systems can be seen as very "useful fictions," which, if articulated, might help us to improve decision making.

Naess is careful to point out that he sees his own total view and others

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as fragmentary and constantly evolving—ever “on the way.” Moreover, even if we could have a completely formed and integrated total view, we could not count on being able to articulate it. There will always be a tension between the Spinozistic goal of clarity and the pragmatic reality that in this world we can never wait until all the facts are in. None of these issues, however, justifies abdicating our responsibility to try to articulate our own total views. The mature Naess is a radical pluralist. He believes in defending coherent systems, without claiming that their relation to reality is definitive. While he is committed to the importance of models and systems, he is opposed to the idea that there could or should be a definite worldview. Naess's hope is that there will be no definite scientific worldview in the future.

No Western philosopher since Descartes—except perhaps Spinoza, who has also been a primary inspiration for Naess—has had the potential to help us drastically reshape our relationship to each other and life in general: not by spelling out *a* clear and coherent total system—to be taken as *the* truth—but by challenging us to articulate our fragmentary total views and connect the abstract problems of philosophy to issues of contemporary social and political conflict. In Naess's view, “[t]he full meaning of a theory can only reveal itself in practice, and practice is blind without theory.”⁹ To be a philosopher of life, one must embrace both theory and practice and engage them in dance.



In Norway, Arne Naess is regarded as a national treasure, a seeker and a seer, a “minor prophet,” in his own words. His radical pluralism and endorsement of diversity are demonstrated by his complex character. He has a proclivity for being aloof and charming, somber and joyful, accountable and carefree, arrogant and modest, slippery and precise. In a world of contradictions—breathtaking beauty *and* ineffable squalor and suffering—Naess is no exception. He is an antiguru guru. He strives for high levels of consistency and integration in his philosophy but accepts that in his personal life he cannot live up to his philosophical systems' requirements. He strives for definiteness of intention, yet he appreciates vagueness and eschews dogma, refusing to be pinned down to a particular viewpoint or placed in a particular philosophical camp. This stance is further supported by his sometimes maddening tendency to revise, revise, and re-revise. As a consequence, one cannot go to any of his books or articles and find the “definitive” Arne Naess. He is a

troublemaker too, but the kind of troublemaker people want to have around because he challenges orthodoxies with an elfin irreverence. Naess stands out because his frequently outlandish and controversial views are felt deeply, reasoned carefully, and conveyed playfully.

Naess has had a profound influence on Norwegian academic life and the society as a whole. From 1939 to 1954 he was Norway's only professor of philosophy. He was chiefly responsible for organizing courses for the *examen philosophicum*, introductory examinations in logic, methodology, and history of philosophy that an entire generation of undergraduates (roughly 100,000 people) were required to take, regardless of their disciplinary focus. His unique paradigm of inquiry—emphasizing open-mindedness, empirical analysis, pluralism, a thorough grounding in philosophy and the history of ideas, and a vital concern for contemporary problems—is credited with shaping the intellectual fabric of postwar Norway. At a press conference for Naess's eightieth birthday, the Norwegian Minister of Education testified to the significance of the Norwegian version of Naess's *Communication and Argument*, one of the primary texts for the *examen philosophicum*. "We have all read it. We *still* cheat in argumentation, but now with feelings of guilt."¹⁰

Naess is also 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:¹¹

The philosophical milieu in Norway today [circa 1967] is determined by an internationally known and original philosopher. . . . Arne 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 dead period,¹² 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 addendum to the last sentence.¹³ 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. This point is borne out by the more than forty-four permanent teaching positions currently at the University of Oslo's Institute of Philosophy

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and the broad spectrum of approaches these philosophers pursue, from the analytic tradition to phenomenology and from existentialism to hermeneutics. As one of Naess's successors, Alastair Hannay, in his section on Norwegian philosophy in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, has commented, "Norway enjoys a varied and vigorous philosophical life. . . . Philosophy's place in Norwegian academic life, as in the society at large, is due in large measure to Naess."¹⁴

The reach of Naess's contributions to philosophy and social research extends well beyond Norway. Significant international recognition has also come his way for these contributions. He has received the Peer Gynt Prize awarded by the Norwegian Parliament (2004), the Nature and Environment Prize from the Nordic Council (2002), the Nordic Prize from the Swedish Academy (1996), the Mahatma Gandhi Prize for Non-violent Peace (1994), and the Sonning Prize for contributions to European culture—Denmark's version of the Nobel Prize (1977). He has even been honored by five festschrifts, one each for the occasions of his seventieth, eightieth, and eighty-second birthdays and two for his eighty-fifth birthday.¹⁵ He is the founding editor of the influential journal, *Inquiry*, created to promote collaboration between philosophers and social scientists. He is also a renowned mountaineer and climber, an occasional nonviolent political activist, and father of the deep ecology movement. His social concern, sense of wonder, and trickster nature have all contributed to his success at numerous academic posts around the world—preferably near mountains or deserts—from Berkeley to Jerusalem and Helsinki to Hangzhou. He is, to this day, still a frequent international speaker.

Even with this high level of accomplishment, the significance of his work as a whole—as a gestalt—has yet to receive broad-scale appreciation outside of Scandinavia. There are many explanations for this situation.

The overarching reason has likely been the general inaccessibility of his oeuvre. This inaccessibility has many facets. Naess has been incredibly prolific, producing over four hundred publications, more than thirty of which are books. These publications span topics from argumentation theory to zeteticism, with adventures along the way at such seemingly incongruous destinations as climbing ethics, cultural anthropology, and deep ecology. His range of topics—in abundance, breadth, and depth—is trying, at best, for our increasingly compartmentalized and specialized academic communities.

In addition, the bulk of his most significant works have been out of

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print for quite some time. Many of the earlier editions of the books were edited poorly and documented sparsely. A significant portion of his important articles and book chapters appears in obscure or difficult-to-find books and journals, and much of his work has remained unpublished (at least two hundred papers and several book-length manuscripts). Naess's main works appear in three primary languages, German, Norwegian, and English, although he has also written in Danish, Swedish, and French. Finally, Naess's prose can be dense and opaque, if not downright confusing. Although this trait is by no means unusual for a philosopher, when blended with Naess's appreciation for vagueness and ambiguity, his aversion to authoritative stances, and his tendency to revisit topics by reconsidering earlier viewpoints, the already high entrance fee can become prohibitive.

The boundless range of Naess's interests and the general inaccessibility of his entire oeuvre have led some scholars to view him rather pejoratively as a dilettante. Some of these critics view him as flitting from one area of interest to another, not mining any to its logical conclusion; some see him as throwing away a great talent in logic; some view his social research, especially his work with questionnaires on lay people's and experts' perceptions of philosophical concepts and his use of statistics, as outside the realm of serious, professional philosophy; and still others see him as inappropriately conjoining his philosophy with activism. His breadth has even led a few of the more extreme critics to dismiss his work out of hand. Although some of the criticisms detailed above do have merit, in my view Naess gives the dilettante a good name.

To address this range of concerns, the *Selected Works* project was conceived. The project was the brainchild of Douglas Tompkins. "Miracle Doug," as Arne refers to him, is the founder of the Foundation for Deep Ecology and is himself a renowned climber and kayaker in addition to being a wildlands philanthropist who has helped protect immense tracts of land in Chile and Argentina, some as large as Yosemite. The *Selected Works* would have simply remained a "great idea" without Doug's generosity and support. The project was initiated in 1994 and commenced editorial work in 1996 under my direction.

In the introduction to his *Four Modern Philosophers: Carnap, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Sartre* (1968), Naess decries the condition whereby the philosophical life of an individual is set by the local philosophical scene, by provincial biases, or by what is easily accessible.¹⁶ Such accidents of envi-

ronment should not, in Naess's view, play a pivotal role in shaping a budding philosopher's development. I see the *Selected Works*, at least in part, as a response to this predicament.

The purpose of the *Selected Works* is to bring—for the first time—the full scope of Naess's philosophical contributions to the English-language audience in one collection of highly readable and meticulously edited volumes that adhere to the highest standards of contemporary academic philosophical publishing. The *Selected Works* is, however, by no means exhaustive; it is not a collected works.¹⁷ We have simply aspired through careful selection to offer a representative and relatively expansive collection of Naess's principal writings. As such, the *Selected Works* is the definitive repository of Naess's oeuvre, chronicling the development and progression of his thinking for scholars, students, and critics alike.

In the remainder of this essay, I attempt to sketch briefly one possible version of an intellectual biography for Arne Naess. I endeavor to trace some key influences on Naess's philosophical development, discuss the evolution of his philosophical outlook, and touch on the relevance and significance of each volume in the *Selected Works*. I close with a short note on our editorial approach.

From Scientism to Wisdom: Toward a Philosophy of Life

The philosophic researcher should be task-minded, not discipline-minded, and should follow his questions wherever they lead.

Arne Naess, "Norway"

Arne Dekke Eide Naess was born in 1912 in the dining room of a large house with a wild, expansive garden. The house was on the outskirts of Oslo in Slemdal, a short walk from where Naess lives today. Arne was the unplanned fourth child of a wealthy family from Bergen. Before he was a year old, his father, who was ill with cancer, had died. Overwhelmed, his mother, Christine, entrusted little Arne to the family's governess. This is where his first memories begin.

Arne speaks of Mina, his governess, endearingly. She is described as satisfying little Arne's every wish, be it procuring live flies for his bath or bringing a trunk filled with bottles on a family trip so that he could continue his water-play experiments. Sometime before Arne was four, Christine dismissed Mina, ostensibly for spoiling Arne too much. This initiated a deep

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