ARNE NAESS – A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Arne Dekke Eide Naess was born on January 27, 1912 in Oslo. After a long and successful life he passed away on January 12, 2009 in Oslo as the most renowned Norwegian philosopher, where he was honoured with a state funeral. He was one of the most important public figures in Norway and in his later years became known all over the world as a pioneer of the ecological movement.

Given this publicity in recent decades his earlier life was forgotten or obscured in a sense – especially his student years in Paris, Vienna and Oslo before the outbreak of World War II, when he attended the famous Vienna Circle around Moritz Schlick during a stay in Vienna 1934–36. Here he wrote his dissertation Erkenntnis und wissenschaftliches Verhalten (Knowledge and Scientific Behaviour) which was published in Oslo by the Norwegian Academy of Science in 1936.1

Before the beginning of his unique academic career, he had studied philosophy, psychology, mathematics, and astronomy in Paris and in 1933 he submitted two Master’s theses on the concept of truth and behavioural psychological principles (in Norwegian). From 1938 to 1939 he was in Berkeley, where he conducted empirical behavioural studies together with the psychologists Edward C. Tolman and Clark L. Hull. Before, he actively participated in the “Third International Congress for the Unity of Science – Encyclopedia Conference” in Paris, July 1937, where he discussed in some private meetings his conception of truth intensely with Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath and others. As a result of his studies in the context of these discussions Naess published Truth as Conceived by Those Who are not Professional Philosophers (1938).2 In parallel he critically dealt with the Vienna

2 Arne Naess, Truth as Conceived by Those Who are not Professional Philosophers. Oslo 1938. I am grateful to Juha Manninen (Helsinki) for indicating to me the context of this publication: cf. his manuscript Developments and Tensions within the Vienna Circle. Helsinki 2009. (forthcoming).

The Congress is described in my The Vienna Circle. Studies in the Origins, Development and Influence of Logical Empiricism. Wien–New York: Springer 2001, pp. 377–382. The Proceedings of that Congress were published as volume 6 of the series Einheitswissenschaft/Unified Science/Science Unitaire, ed. by Otto Neurath and Jørgen Jørgensen. (The Hague 1938). This issue includes a discussion of Egon Brunswik’s paper “The Integration of Psychology into the Exact Sciences” by Carnap, Naess and
Circle’s doctrine of empiricism in 1937-1939 in his manuscript *Wie fördert man heute die empirische Bewegung? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Empirismus von Otto Neurath und Rudolph Carnap.* (How Can the Empirical Movement Be Promoted today? A Discussion of the Empiricism of Otto Neurath and Rudolph Carnap”) which was published in Oslo only in 1956 (Reprinted in Naess 1992 and 2005). In his Vienna times he did additional research with the Viennese psychologist and Vienna Circle member Egon Brunswik (a proponent of the Karl Bühler school), which was to be continued in Berkeley in exile. Before World War II Naess contributed several related articles to the Swedish Journal *Theoria* 1937ff., which was an important forum for the scientific communication between Viennese and Nordic philosophers even during the war-time years.

At the age of 27 Naess was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo in 1939, a chair which he held until his early retirement in 1970. During the War he participated actively in the Norwegian Anti-Nazi resistance movement. After 1945 Naess became head of an UNESCO project on the East-West Conflict (1948–49) and served subsequently as editor of the philosophical journal *Synthese* (1950–1963), while in 1958 he founded and edited the (still existing) interdisciplinary journal of philosophy *Inquiry.*

In this period (1940–1955) Arne Naess became well known as a activist of the international peace movement and as an adherent of Mahatma Gandhi, before he succeeded as the founder and philosopher of the ecological movement (coining the terms “deep ecology” and “ecosophy”) after 1970.

Following his retirement as a professor he travelled a lot as visiting professor all over the world (to Vienna again in 1984 at the Institute for Advanced Studies) and later on, from 1991 on, continued his highly productive intellectual life at the still existing “Centre for Development and Environment” at the University of Oslo.

His numerous publications include some 30 books and a large number of articles, most of them collected in the 10 volumes of the *Selected Works of Arne Naess*

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4 Cf. the contribution of J. Strang in this volume.


6 *Inquiry* is currently ed. by Wayne Martin (University of Essex) and is published with Routledge. On the role of Naess decisive for introducing modern social science in Norway see Fredrik W. Thue in this volume and his *In Quest of a Democratic Order. The Americanization of a Norwegian Social Scholarship 1918–1970.* Oslo 2006.

7 See the website: www.sum.uio.no.