

ARNE NAESS

An Optimist for the Twenty-Second Century

Meeting Arne Naess High Up in the Mountains BY JAN VAN BOECKEL

JAN VAN BOECKEL: How did you come to the place where we are sitting now, your cabin Tvergastein?

ARNE NAESS: Already when I was ten, eleven years old, I sometimes walked by myself in this direction, towards the mountain. Already then I looked upon this mountain as a kind of benevolent, great father. My mother had a cottage further down and we could see that mountain every day. Every day it was a little different, and yet it was the same. This great mountain seemed to be such an entity! It was alive for me. I decided that the best thing for me would be to live either on top of the mountain, or further down, on the mountain side. In 1937 the hut was built. The best

carpenters of the area built it in fourteen days. That's to say, half of it, and the other half I made myself. In 1938, I had my first long stay here, for four months during the winter. Since then I have come here every year. It all came out of my reverence for that mountain. Today, I have lived here 4,111 days, in total. That's between eleven and twelve years, if you count the days.

Tvergastein is located about 500 meters above the tree line. In the Alps it would be much higher than 2,500 meters, but it's actually only 1,505 meters high! Because it is situated at 60 degrees north of the Equator, the climate at Tvergastein is purely Arctic. It is at the same latitude as the south of Greenland.

Perhaps people coming from other countries, visiting Tvergastein, think that there are many huts, pri-

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PHOTO ABOVE: JØRN MOEN

vately owned, on this level. But there is nobody else, it's the highest privately owned hut. What you have higher are meteorological stations, et cetera. And there are good reasons for it, because of the climate. It is not the Arctic climate, it is Hallingskarvet I'm for. I'm obeying the urge of Hallingskarvet to come!

Why is the place called *Tvergastein*?

Well, it's an old name, here. A hundred years ago, people went up here to fetch crystals. *Tverga* means: "crossing." I like that word very much, *Tvergastein*—it is the kind of toughness and roughness. I sometimes thought I would call myself "Arne Tvergastein." Because I feel I belong to this area here. It doesn't belong to me, but I belong to it.

Of course, people wonder why one should choose a place where you have to carry everything up. Very early I got this idea that it is difficult to value something highly if it doesn't take effort. When I have carried something up here, I look at it differently. Water, for instance. In the winter, it's quite some work to get water from the lake. To melt water is very un-ecological because it takes *as* many calories to get from minus one to plus one degree Celsius, as getting it from plus one to nearly a hundred degrees Celsius. So to have four or five containers with water in the hut during wintertime gives me a feeling of richness!

A "rule" here at *Tvergastein* is that one doesn't do the dishes, right?

It's a rule that makes people laugh, though some don't like it. Here there are so few bacteria that it isn't necessary to do the dishes. Even in the middle of summer you have snow here, so if you are afraid of bacteria, you just put the dishes in the snow. If we are with four

here, we have each our own set of spoons and glass and so on. So we don't need much hot water. Young people coming here at times also wash themselves in the snow, rolling themselves in it. You get warm and feel very well after doing that. People may call it Puritanical but it is really luxurious and it is Epicurean.

During all the days and nights that I have been up here, I have seen things happening in the environment that I don't like. I have noticed, for instance, that we have much less insects nowadays. Here, at this elevation, insects are always interesting. In the 1940s, I counted, as an amateur, 220 insect species. Now I don't find more than 40. No grasshoppers anymore! These changes have to do with general atmospheric pollution, I think.

For me, it is extremely nice to know that there are people who say that they will see to it, in all of next century, that there would be people here, living according to the rules of *Tvergastein*. Some rules are nonsensical, certainly! But most of the rules would be kept alive here, at this place, all through next century.

Can you explain in what way you consider Mt. Hallingskarvet to be your father?

Of course, people will think it's very strange to regard a mountain as your father. But to me, not at all. Humans *live* in symbols. To many people a mountain is just minerals. But in fact no old culture has looked at mountains as minerals! In many cultures, mountains are holy: you speak to them and you ask them for good advice.

The shape of the mountain, for me, is the shape of some benevolent being. Only a mountain can give me this view, with this fantastic horizon, where you feel powerful and at the same time small. You are very small, and that is important, philosophically. The smaller you are in relation to the surroundings, the

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stars and the mountain, the more you intensely feel that you are somehow, symbolically, part of it. The tinner you are, the more you get something of that greatness. I cannot explain it better. It is like the stars that I saw in my youth. We had really no lights in the streets, nothing like that. We had the stars really straight over our heads. To be playing outside, even in darkness! So I have a special relation to the vastness of the heaven or

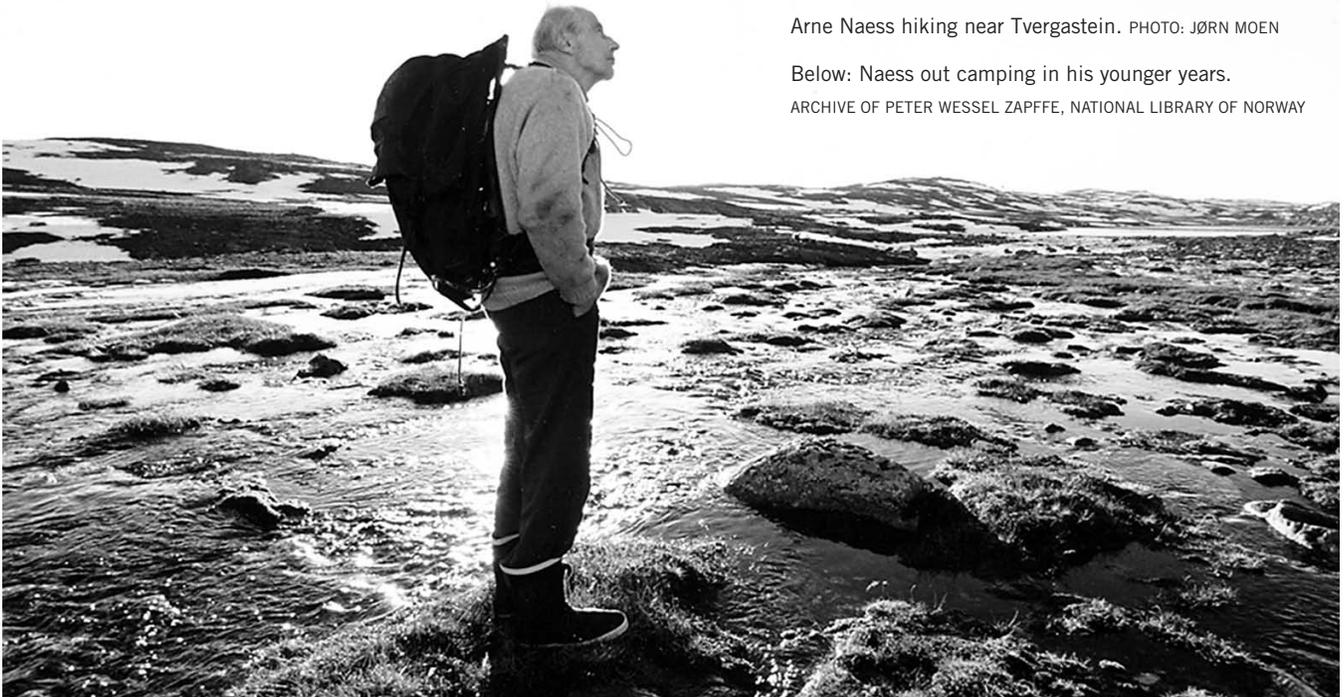
stars, which is different from modern physics about the cosmos. I don't feel any benevolence or greatness, reading about black holes, white holes, galaxies, and so on.

I suppose experiences in early life have much to say about what is to come. I remember that when I was fifteen, sixteen years old, we started going to the highest mountains in Norway. I had made a tent myself in which I had cut a window, which you were not able to shut.

Arne Naess hiking near Tvergastein. PHOTO: JØRN MOEN

Below: Naess out camping in his younger years.

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When I was nearly asleep, I could still see the summits through this small window. I remember this, because it was bitterly cold, those summers. This window made it impossible to keep heat in the tent, it was so stupid!

Hallingskarvet has a kind of brother-mountain. About hundred kilometers from here you can see it very easily in this weather. Gausta, it is called. It doesn't have a very impressive shape, but it is at least as high as Hallingskarvet. Peter Wessel Zapffe said: "Because it was so beautiful, it had to die." They put all kind of stuff on top of poor Gausta, a lot of instruments and all kinds of fancy buildings. It cannot be seen as being alive, like Hallingskarvet. It is now more an instrument. More mineral and less symbol.

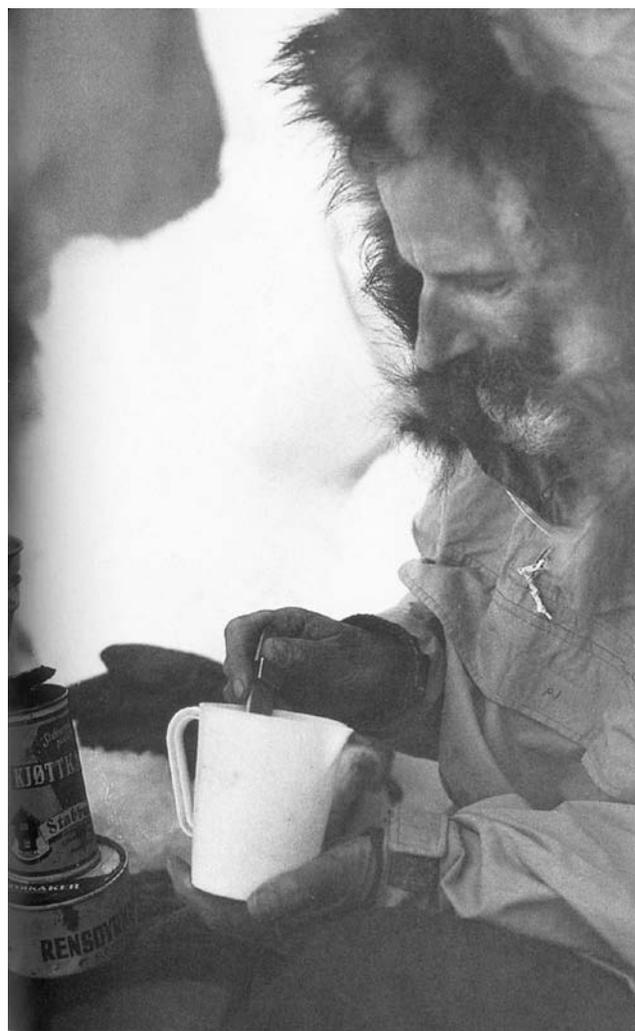
This place can also be very silent. Is the silence important to you?

Oh yes. If you were to sit down here, when there isn't much wind, you may listen to the silence. In the mountains, the silence is very important. I prefer to get away from people. Here you have endless movement in the water, endless variety of movement. And the light, it's endless. You can sit here and look at a mountain stream. The longer time you use, the more it says. It's communicating more and more. You have all sorts of waves. Tiny ones and then little bigger, and still bigger. Movement in this direction, movement in that direction. It's flowing. *Infinite* complexity.

Could you tell about that big achievement in your life, when you climbed Tirich-Mir?

As a climber, it is impossible *not* to look forward to seeing the Himalayas. It is the greatest area of mountains and the most fabulous. So clearly, I had to visit the Himalayas. I was all for getting high up on one of the really high mountains, where nobody else had been. And we decided upon a mountain called Tirich Mir, which is the highest mountain in Hindu Kush, a little more than 25,000 feet high, 7,705 meters. Some expeditions had tried and were not able to reach the summit. So in 1950—I was already quite old—I was

able to get one Norwegian climber with me. We didn't dream of reaching the summit that year, but then, the next year we had an expedition. And that time, I got too much of it, because when we were on the mountain, it was not beautiful any longer, it was at a distance. It was not very different from other mountains. Some of the porters looked upon Tirich Mir as a mountain that didn't like humans to go there, it would send down avalanches. Some old people warned children and others: "Don't go higher up there because the mountain doesn't like it." And certainly, you could get terrible weather. If you are inexperienced, you don't see it coming.



Arne Naess on Tirich Mir. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

Can you tell why the tree line is important to you?

It is not only the mountain, I think, that is of such a metaphysical value, but also the very tree line. You come from a more or less dense forest and suddenly you have this freedom of vision. There is a special pleasure in Norway, to come to places where you have a broad tree line, where the trees are fairly small because of the storms. To move from the forest to the area above the tree line is for me both an increase in freedom and in challenge. That is why I have written an article on the metaphysics of tree line. For many people it is rather the opposite and that's okay for me.

You once said: “We may have to relearn the way children appreciate trees.”

Well, children are more spontaneous in the sense that reflection and conventional views of things do not play such a strong role yet. If we would be able to see a little bit more like children, we would gain very much. That's a very difficult re-development, to get into this state, of the children's inner life. In conventional thinking, the tree that science talks about is the real tree. In my view, the sorrowfulness or the joyfulness of a tree is just as real as its size, its dimension, its geometrical properties—let's say its *Gestalt*, its form.

What do you mean by the term *Gestalt*?

If you place three dots on a black board, it is very difficult not to see it as a triangle. Immediately you see some kind of form. Say, you hear: *da-da-da-daah*. If you are acquainted with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, this immediately is colored through that *Gestalt*. *Da-da-da-daah* is the smallest *Gestalt* within the first movement, which is a tremendously complex *Gestalt*. On its turn, it is again part of a more comprehensive *Gestalt*, which is the symphony. The symphony is *again* part of another *Gestalt* when you are really sitting there, in a concert, listening to it, looking at the orchestra. And it depends on who is accompanying you! If you are there together with your girlfriend, *da-da-da-daah* will sound different. That means that your life is situated in very compre-

hensive forms or Gestalts. You both have to work from parts to wholes, and from wholes to parts. The whole is more than the part, and the part is more than the whole. I mean, a tiny part of the Fifth Symphony is certainly conveying something that can't be conveyed by the whole! So the part is also bigger than the whole. That is often forgotten, in so-called holistic thinking.

In what sense is this notion of Gestalts important in your environmental philosophy?

If I look at my hut Tvergastein, as I do at this very moment, the surroundings take part in what I see. I see it embedded in a mineral environment, where it stands out as a kind of living being. There is this contrast with the minerals, all the stones, the vastness of the dimensions outside. This influences what you see when you look at the hut. You see, when being in nature that is as vast as this, the very vastness becomes part of your spontaneous, completely spontaneous, experience. And then if you look at details here, you see the form of the stone, you see the organisms there. You see a part of nature that is so independent of us, as humans. Your vision is not “I see a stone,” or “I see a hut.” In nature it all comes together.

There is a mountain in southern Norway, called Andersnatten, which has been used as a painting object for artists. Many artists and also non-artists find that it has the shape of a troll. A big fellow, the trees are his hair. *Gestalt* thinking is such that this spontaneous perception of a troll is a completely adequate description of reality; it is on par with somebody saying that it is just a heap of stones. As long as it is a spontaneous perception of a *Gestalt*. A *Gestalt* of course is then not only the shape of a troll but also its *being* as a troll. That is to say, you then get all the mythology about trolls into what you see. What you see is a culturally tremendously complex thing.

In my work, this concept of spontaneous experience is relevant for the relation between ecology and philosophy. People would say, for instance: “We make a road now through this forest, and it's through its center. But the amount of square meters that this road will

cover is tremendously small.” Then I would say: “But it goes through the *heart* of this forest!” And one might get the reaction: “That’s nonsense. That road is such a small part of the forest that it makes no difference.” Actually, when you get deeper and deeper into the forest, you have this feeling of being *deep* in the forest. If you then hit upon a road, this feeling completely disappears. People might say: “Well, that’s your imagination. There *is* no heart here.” But if you start arguing this way, saying that there is no heart, only certain distances, you get into a worldview which resembles that of the great philosopher Immanuel Kant. You end up saying: “Nature is without colors, without shapes, even without cause and effect. Because relations of cause and effect are created by humans. In short: there is *nothing* in nature in itself! You have no access to nature in itself.”

Even in contemporary so-called postmodernism, nature is only a limiting thing, which you can never really see or appreciate. You appreciate only your own ways of thinking and feeling and you are completely determined by your culture, and so on. From this point of view, the protection of nature is a sham, in a sense. There is something there, but you don’t have any access to it. This position undermines, for some people, their belief in the necessity of protecting nature as a fast undertaking for the next two centuries.

Once a young man was caught by the police because he was standing where they planned to make a road. He was a Sami. He took part in a direct action to prevent the river from being dammed for hydroelectric development. The police yelled at him: “Why are you standing there? You’re not supposed to be here!” And he responded, “Well, this here, is part of my self.” It was the area of the river where his reindeer were crossing; he had been there, ever since his boyhood. He was there in such a close connection with his “self” that he could say: “It is part of my self.” That is typical of the deep ecology movement, that you feel your self is hurt when they hurt the place with which you identify. You identify with a place in such a sense,

that its destruction is like cutting yourself. And it *is* cutting yourself. Because your self is much more than your ego. The self has to do with that with which you identify. If I ask you: “Who are you?” You will answer with these close relations, the people around you. And also with mentioning your job, your social status. You will say something about that with which you identify. And this Sami young man was identifying so much with this place, that the thought of having a big road there would destroy something inside him. In self-realization, as I use the term in ecological philosophy, the self is not the tiny ego nor the social self, it is what I call “the ecological self,” that is to say, the total reality in which you are immersed.

In the early 1970s, you were the first to coin the term “deep ecology.”

In 1970, I started using the term “deep ecology,” or better, “to be a supporter of the deep ecology movement.” That is: to join in activism to get rid of the ecological crisis. To join, on basis of your life-philosophy or your religion. You are motivated from what I call “deeper premises.” This will restrict your possibilities, but not what I would call your self-realization. You cannot just do anything you would like. We simply cannot continue this lifestyle.

Some people look at nature only as resource. We say, instead, that it makes sense to do something for nature *in itself*. The first point in what I call the Eight Points of Deep Ecology says that every living being has inherent or intrinsic value. It makes *sense*, to do something for another living being.

A very important other point is that humans don’t have the right to reduce the richness and diversity of life on this planet, except to satisfy vital needs. Every word in such a formulation is of course open to different interpretations. But in the deep ecology movement we feel that we do not have the right to reduce life on earth.

There is something which each living being has in common with every other living being. It is a value which we call “intrinsic value.” And then the question

comes: Is there more or less intrinsic value? I'd say, it's up to you to decide whether you consider that intrinsic value. I find, according to my intuition, that one shouldn't grade intrinsic value in more and less intrinsic value.

However, what one *ought* to grade, very much, are one's obligations towards different kinds of living beings. I use the term "differences in obligation" towards different living beings. In my view, our obligations are tremendous towards fellow human beings. About animals we mostly just know that they care to be alive. When we deal with human beings, we know very much what it means to suffer.

An additional point, as part of the Eight Points, is that it would be better for humans if there were fewer, and it would be *much* better for non-humans. We have also formulations saying that a decrease of human population is necessary to have the non-humans realize their potentialities. But if you use the term "decrease," people then think in terms of one generation. Even if it is said, again and again, that this is a question of hundreds of years.

Why is it so important to respect the richness and diversity, to not reduce them?

This is important for our quality of life, especially for those who have had access to free nature in their youth, they are *inclined* to keep up the richness and diversity. You will see that it is meaningful to do something for other beings than just humans.

There are some animals who live around here, foxes for instance. One day I looked through this window, and I saw a fox stopping in its tracks and looking at me. That's a tremendous experience, a wild animal living here all year. *All year!* The more animals you have around here, the greater you feel your life is here.

I use "richness." "Abundance" would be a better, more precise term. But somehow, with abundance, you just think about the numbers. I like the term "richness" because it is a little more than just counting. It's something very different from biodiversity. There may be high degree of biodiversity in a certain area,

but in the same area it may be practically impossible to see any wild animals. Biodiversity has to do with the limit of extinction.

I take cultural diversity of humans on par with species diversity among non-humans. Every year, a number of non-industrialized cultures are going extinct or getting near to extinction. So there is, from a deep ecology point of view, great concern about the possibility of economic unification of the world by a strong world market. If you have the same kind of products you buy, the same kind of economic system all over, I am afraid that it is practically impossible to have deep cultural differences. You then only have *sub*-cultures, as you have within New York, for example. You have marvelous subcultures, for instance of musicians. But it is not the same as a culture. I think, when we talk about the potentialities of humanity on this planet, they are narrowed down considerably if you have the same culture all over.

Can you explain the difference between basic needs and vital needs?

With basic needs, generally, you have food, shelter, and certain other things. Vital needs are relative to the kind of society you are in. In Norway, for instance, at this time, for this generation of Norwegians, education of a formal kind will be a vital need. In arctic Norway, at the moment, it tends to be a vital need that a family or the neighbors have a car. The vital need of sheep owners is to not have any wolves around.

But the wolf, also, has value in itself?

People in these valleys would say: "Oh yes, they have value in themselves, but: no, thank you!" Killing is absolutely compatible with recognizing intrinsic value. There is no logical relation there, so that if you think this animal has intrinsic value, this would imply that you cannot, under any circumstances, kill it. You see, with all the reindeer here and practically no big carnivores around, we *have* to kill a lot of them every year. Many thousands of reindeer are killed for ecological reasons.

Can you tell a bit more of that case of a deep ecology direct action that you already mentioned, and that took place in support of the Sami people in the late 1970s?

There are hydro-electric power stations all over Norway. For this they build big dams. In arctic Norway, far north, there was a plan to make a big dam that would also affect the Sami people. Some of us then thought that we couldn't build a dam that is harming the Sami, that's impossible! So, there was a direct action. We stopped the construction of a road that would be necessary to start the project. And then came wintertime. It was very cold, and we were with more than 1,000 people, protesting. That made an impression. But the government sent a big steamer with 600 policemen to stop us. In deep ecology direct actions the Gandhian principles are adopted and according to those you have to be very polite and nice to people who oppose you. There were people who were in favor of the dam, espe-

cially those who claimed that we needed this electricity, or that unemployment would go down when we would build this dam. They were very angry. When they came to our camp, we said: "Please sit down, have some coffee." They just couldn't resist that temptation; they sat down, had coffee and were not opposing us in a violent way, you see.

Some of us had the great privilege to be fastened to the ground, with strong iron chains. One of the people that was most active there, Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng, was sure that they wouldn't have the technology to unfasten us from the rock.

We got punished. It's a rule in deep ecology that you *ask* for prison, you gladly ask if you can get to prison, instead of being sentenced to pay a monetary fine. It is important to send that message. This has to do with what we communicate to the Norwegian people. I asked for it, but, you see, they wouldn't let me, Professor Arne Naess, go to prison.



Both Sami and non-indigenous activists blocking the construction road for the Alta dam in 1979. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

The slogan of the activists seemed to be very well chosen, it was: “Let the river live!” In Norwegian: *La elva leve*. Marvelous! I don’t know who made that slogan but *wow*, like fire, that was the thing! *Let the river live!* Not: We don’t need the electricity, or: we can have electricity from other places, here in Alta. We even had specialists showing that there was the alternative to get energy from further down south, thus not disturbing anything Sami. But no: *Let the river live!* And that is typical deep ecology, you see.

You regard yourself as an *ecosopher*. What does that mean?

Well, the word ecology, for me, is the name of a science. We have thousands of volumes of very good scientific reports about the state of the planet. But we need wisdom. That is to say: that you do make practical decisions on basis of really good premises. And you act according to these premises. So we need *sofia*, that is, wisdom. And *ecosofia* means wisdom of the household. It means that you must behave according to your ultimate value priorities, here, on this planet.

It is more important, at this moment in time, to teach *ecosophy* than to teach ecology. *Ecosophy*, as I use the term, is not only being wise in one’s relation to the planet, but it also involves developing a total view which includes one’s relation towards nature. A total view that is inspired by a philosophy like Spinoza’s, or another kind of philosophy or religion, and also informed by our current situation of ecological crisis. *Ecosophies* would then be people’s personal points of view: in general these cover one’s view on life, the political and social views one has, et cetera.

Spinoza has a wonderful distinction between *Natura naturata*, and *Natura naturans*. He has a verb for nature, *naturing*. To him, there is a force, some kind of dynamics, creating nature. And that is *Natura naturans*. For this he uses Nature with a capital “N.” And then you have *Natura naturata*, “natured nature”; nature as something that is made already, created, static, and that is nature with an ordinary “n.” God and *Natura naturans*

natura naturans are then for him synonymous. God as creative nature. We as humans are part of *Natura naturans*. We humans are special favored beings, so to say, in creating nature. So you have both in one.

For him, the highest kind of knowledge is what he calls intuitive knowledge, which is knowledge of particular things. Not generality, as in science. He has a verb *intelligere*. People then think that this has to do with intellect. But *intelligere* has to do with understanding. The highest kind of understanding is the understanding love of particular beings. That, he calls *amor intellectualis Dei*, and this is not intellectual love, but it is an understanding love. For him, understanding and loving cannot be separated at all. Loving is a kind of understanding and understanding is a kind of loving. That kind of psychology is very good. He has anticipated Freud to some extent, saying that one gets on the way to greater freedom, through knowing oneself, and through knowing one’s weaknesses. If you know your weaknesses, you are already on the steps upwards towards greater freedom. So, with complete understanding of one’s weaknesses, one is on a higher level of freedom already.

Is that connected to the idea that one has to ask deeper questions about oneself?

The particular thing about the deep ecology movement is that you go deeper into questioning, towards ultimate questions. That’s Spinoza one hundred percent. And then he asks: “Which would be the ultimate things you believe in?” He goes to the foundations, but that does not imply dogmatism nor that one has to have a closed mind! You may have a completely open mind, trying to get to the bottom of things.

What is your bottom?

Well, I have the word self-realization, which is not the realization of one’s ego, but of one’s larger self. The ideal is a maximum of identification with every other being. For convenience, I have used one norm: to develop self-realization.

You talked about spontaneous experiences, are those a source for intuitive knowledge?

Exactly. Intuitive knowledge would be intuitive understanding of a particular other being. This intuitive understanding must be a component of spontaneity. Without any spontaneous understanding, it would be an abstraction. So in many ways I can use Spinoza in the development of my total view. But it doesn't mean that I must have the same opinion as Spinoza. Spinoza didn't have much regard for animals. But this is of no importance to me. I am inspired by the kind of thinking, which is so splendid.

Some people wonder how I can be a Spinozist. Because Spinoza believed, like Descartes, in rationality. But you see, what he said was that in order to gain in freedom, one must use one's rationality. That rationality is an instrument to gain in freedom. Rational thinking is also necessary to gain the kind of freedom that allows room for understanding of the intuitive kind. So this rationality was completely pragmatic.

It is interesting that Spinoza, who is classified as a great rationalist, uses the term "intuition." Intuition here only means that you don't have a level of argumentation that is deeper still. It is intuitive in the sense that it is not founded on argumentation itself. When there is a situation in which you feel an intuitive understanding of another living being, that moment is a spontaneous experience. This intuition that you have doesn't mean that it's absolutely true or absolutely unfounded, but its foundation is not part of an argumentation. You have to go beyond argumentation. Beyond rationality, but not *against* rationality. Because you need rationality all the time. We need to train ourselves to take care of and to trust our intuitions.

What is your view on the ecological crisis as it is today?

We can still change the direction from increasing unsustainability to decreasing unsustainability. But for every year it costs more, to get stabilized in a sustainable ecological world order. One can say in general

that the crisis consists of a decrease in life quality of the planet. On the whole, the life conditions are decreasing in quality. Of course, this affects humanity in a very serious way. And, as always, it affects the poor more than the rich. The rich can always move away from a polluted area, can always get clean water and water enough. But the poor cannot do that.

To the astonishment of certain journalists, I am an optimist. But then I add, "I am an optimist for the *twenty-second* century." And they say: "Oh, you mean the twenty-first!" "No," I reply, "the *twenty-second* century!" I think that in the twenty-first century, we have to go through some very bad times and it will hurt even the rich countries. Now it is all sailing smoothly—but it will hurt the rich. So, I am a short-range pessimist, and a long-range optimist.

I would like to talk about Gandhi. Could you tell how and when you first came across his work?

I think that was in 1931, when I was writing my master thesis and studying just down here, at Ustaoset, in my mother's hut. In the neighborhood was a small hotel, where a few Indian students came. I contacted them immediately and we had lengthy discussions about the future of India. At that time I started reading about Gandhi and his campaigns in South-Africa, not yet in India. He started there. What made an impression on me was his way of communicating, his way of identifying with the opposition. He was nearly killed by some people who regarded him as a traitor. When he woke up in the hospital, one of the first things he said was: "Don't persecute these two people who tried to kill me." This bravery, plus his way of explaining the viewpoint of his opponents who tried to kill him, I found marvelous.

In intense conflicts, what is effective is to have your emotions under control, to see the points of your opponent and then to go against what you must go against. Never attack the persons. You attack their opinions, their attitudes.

According to Gandhi, one must seek the center of

the conflict, not the surroundings. If you do that and use your resistance it is only by luck that you *don't* lose your life or your health. I think it is very different from a pacifist attitude. A Gandhian has to go into the center of conflict, that's to say: you partake in the war, but without any weapons.

You once said that you felt that the period after the Second World War was worse than the time during the war . . .

When Norway was invaded by the Nazis in April 1940 and was occupied for five years, not many people knew what could be done. I felt that the Gandhian way would be to participate in the Resistance, but without weapons. In the Resistance movement there was absolutely no friction between people who would fight non-violently, without weapons, and those fighting with weapons. Because, for people in both categories, there was this problem that if one would be caught, one would be tortured within half an hour. The Gandhians and non-Gandhians had an excellent partnership within the war.

When the war stopped with Hitler being crushed, the question was what to do with the people who were supporting the occupation, from a Gandhian point of view. First of all, according to Gandhi, we had to see what their standpoint was. I was then in favor of a so-called "silken" treatment of those who had been on the wrong side during the war. I could take this position without anybody attacking me, because I had been in the Resistance movement, and they knew that I had not helped the occupation force, the Nazis, in any way. I could stand up for a treatment that was according to Gandhian principles. But, of course, in other countries, like in France and Hungary, they didn't think that way in general, so they killed many of the people who had been "on the wrong side," as they say.

There are so many black points in the history of Norway, in the period from 1945 to 1950. Especially in 1945, I was rather depressed—in fact more depressed than during the war—about the fact that

people couldn't say: "The war is over, now we shall just see how we shall treat those who were on the wrong side." One should always treat others in a correct way, as persons, and never judge anybody because of his or her affiliation to an organization.

I am glad to say that at one time during the war I was probably saved from prison, by a man in the Gestapo. I was sitting alone in the house of family members, which was suddenly invaded by three Gestapo people. They had their weapons pointed at me, because they thought that there would be some Resistance people there. They searched all over. The officer opened the drawer and grabbed into it. And then he said to me: "What's this?" What he produced was a booklet on how to do sabotage in industrial buildings. It couldn't be worse. It would mean torture immediately, when somebody found that. I had to decide very quickly whether he understood what it was or not. And I decided that he understood Norwegian, so he understood what it was. Then he said: "This is something that shouldn't be in a drawer!" He put the document back into the drawer and closed it, looking angry. I thought, "My God, what will happen now?" I was arrested and was subsequently interrogated. And then, a couple of hours later, he said: "You may go." "May I ask," I said, "from where do you come?" And he answered: "Schleswig-Holstein, at the border with Denmark." Then he added: "Everybody in the police had to go into the Gestapo. Otherwise they would go into prison. So I went into the Gestapo. Period." I thought at that moment that I would really like to talk more about this with him. But I didn't, I left. It was very brave of him. He clearly wasn't doing what the Gestapo had asked him to do. He was against the Nazis, as a Gestapo man. So you see: if somebody is a Gestapo officer, and the Gestapo is killing people, that doesn't mean that you should treat or conceive of this man as an enemy. According to Gandhi, you never treat anybody as an enemy. You always see in other people a possible friend. There, at that moment, I didn't see him as a possible friend, but actually he was, in a sense. You

see, it made a big impression on me. Of course, if he hadn't been against the occupation, I would have been put into prison, even though I was innocent, because I had nothing to do with that document.

Is there a kinship between Gandhi and Spinoza for you?

Gandhi looked upon joy as something necessary and beautiful, like Spinoza. According to Spinoza, joy stemming from your personality corresponds to a step to greater freedom and greater virtue. And if there is melancholy, you lose some freedom, and you lose in virtue. If you are depressed, with your total personality, it's not only very painful, you are also decreasing your level of freedom and virtue. And that's Gandhian, that's Spinoza for me.

But one might argue that the ecological crisis gives every reason to feel sad.

Both Gandhi and Spinoza would say that there is no reason for it. It takes much self-discipline and self-reliance to keep the insight alive that things are getting worse. But you never stop with having spontaneous experiences. When you say that it's getting worse, you continue, immediately, with the question: "So what are we to do now?" Immediately, when you wonder what you are going to do the next moment, you actually start doing this. Because then you do something of which you think it is important and which is in accordance with your whole personality. Inevitably, you get joyful.

You have been a university professor for many years. At one point you got interested in the ecological problem.

By chance, it came from United States. The biologist Rachel Carson wrote the book *Silent Spring*, in which she talked about pesticides. First of all she argued against destroying the soil. But she also pointed out that we were destroying life along the shores, and on this she was a specialist. I had a friend who told me a little about Rachel Carson in 1967, four years after the

book was published. From that time onwards, I saw that it was possible, through social and political means, to change policies towards nature. This made me very active from about 1970. And I then wrote several hundreds of articles, and also a couple of books.

As one of the most famous professors in philosophy of Norway, you gave up that position.

I gave it up in 1969. It was a complicated life, being a professor. You get accustomed to certain ways of thinking. I had all my lectures and meetings on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, so that I could get away into the mountains the rest of the week. But I had to come back again into the city. I planned the examinations in such a way that they would take place early in the year, in the spring time, in order that I could get away. But it didn't help much. I always gave more lectures than was required of me, in order to prove that I wasn't skipping my responsibilities at all.

You are very inspired by Kant's notion of nourishing "beautiful actions."

What distinguishes supporters of the deep ecology movement from other activists is that they have, as a starting point, a kind of life philosophy. They go into themselves and ask: "What is meaningful for me and what makes me feel the way that I feel now?" What one feels and what one is, hangs together with nature. When you protect nature, you protect yourself, in this way. In this context I have been lucky to find a distinction in the works of a really great philosopher, Immanuel Kant. In an early work, that is not so well-known, he distinguishes between moral actions and beautiful actions. An act is only moral, if it is completely motivated by a respect for the moral laws, some eternal laws of morality. But then, he says, people are often inclined to care for other people and animals for reasons other than adhering to moral law. They do it through inclination! They *feel* like it. So Kant said, that if people do what the moral law requires of them, but do it through inclination, they "act beautifully." Whereas if you pro-

fect because of the moral law you don't act beautifully, but morally. It is promising for the protection of the planet, that more and more people are led into situations where they do things out of inclination. Because the human force of inclination is tremendously bigger than the force or motivation to act morally.

Is there a way to *nourish* inclination?

The way to nourish inclination is most obvious when you have to do with children. Because you just lead children in free nature, and you bend down to look at a tiny flower, for instance. You bend all the way down, and the child will say: "What are you seeing there? There is nothing to be seen." And then you could say: "Look at this!" And you show your inclination to see the beauty and the marvel of life. You don't trample on it. Then children easily get to be inclined to behave properly.

Another example. If you have a lot of insects on the window, parents might decide to kill them with some poison. But they also have the opportunity to try to catch these insects, not hurting them but taking them all the way out! The small children could try to help the insects out. I would say to them: "They like to go out, you see! Just as *you* would like to get out, they would." And they identify with these insects. That takes *no* time for children. If the parents behave properly, it's not difficult to get children inclined.

Is learning a new way of perceiving more important than working with morals?

Absolutely. I would say that seeing the world in a certain way, is very important. In philosophy that is called ontology: What's there, what's real? To see the reality of life is much more important than getting rules for how to



Tvergastein, seen from below, with Hallingskarvet in the back. PHOTO: JOHAN BRUN

behave. I'm for what I call "Gestalt ontology." The world is made of Gestalts, that's the reality we have. There are certain ways of experiencing Gestalts, in which one has to train oneself. With sufficient training, you widen your self more and more. I speak about the Self with a capital "S." And there is no limit, for me.

At one point in your life you identified strongly with the death struggle of a flea.

This is quite a story. I was sitting at a table, at that time, and on it I had a lemming. Suddenly a flea from the fur of the lemming landed on the glass plate under my microscope. And there it was, in the drop. Things were happening in that drop, that I, as an amateur chemist, wanted to study. And all of a sudden, there was a flea there. I couldn't save it. It was impossible because of certain forces on the surface of the tiny drop. So there was no chance. It lasted about ten minutes, the death struggle of the flea. I sometimes talk about that because one cannot *avoid* seeing one's self. Fleas have six limbs, and every limb was doing things which we do when we are suffering. You see, the movements were as we would do. So it illustrates what I call identification.

What *is* identification?

It is just that you see yourself in somebody else. You see another being similar to yourself. Similar, even if

there are tremendous differences also between you and the other being. But if you identify with it, you are also prepared to do something for whatever it is that you identify with. You are prepared to do something for its sake. There are certain characteristics, on basis of which I would say that something is a living being. Exactly what these are, I couldn't tell. If you pick up a tiny bread crust, like this one on the table in front of me here, it is a fragment; that's not a living being. A flea, of course, is different. It is obvious that it has an interest to get out and to go on living.

I'm a great believer in equanimity. Whatever the changes, far inside of me there is a balance. Not harmony, that's a too strong word. There is a balance inside here, and you look with benevolence at everything that is not directly trying to kill you. One has, somewhere inside oneself, a trust. A trust that is not a *belief* of a dogmatic kind, or anything. If there suddenly would be a flood now, coming through the house, or a tremendous big stone on the way down to us from the mountain, hitting us within two seconds, that possibility shouldn't disturb us much. Nor should the possibility that we have wars of a terrible kind, or that millions of species go extinct. You go on. You just try to help what you think is worth to help, and you keep quiet, inside.