

More stories of deep connection

This supplement comprises nine autobiographical accounts of how their authors came to discover and incorporate ecocentric values into their lives. It follows the first such supplement, in 2017, edited by Haydn Washington. To some extent, Haydn has already said what needs saying in his own excellent introduction, but I will add a few things.

A common thread running through these accounts is, of course, personal encounters with the natural world, perhaps especially youthful ones. I would stress the ‘personal’. While its importance in generating an awareness of nature’s autonomy, integrity and beauty cannot be doubted – quite independent of our human needs, desires and abilities – many of us have been habituated to edit it out in our writing, particularly, but not only, in scientific reports. This can be misleading, because the personal dimension is also vital in continuing to sustain an ongoing engagement with nature. So putting it to the fore, as these essays do, is a matter of honesty and openness, not egotism.

Beyond that, there is a remarkable diversity of experiences evident here. Clearly there are many paths to ecocentrism – perhaps as many as there are people. Natural scientific knowledge remains a recurrent theme, especially (as Haydn rightly emphasizes) when it is driven by, and runs parallel with, a sense of wonder. If you’re doing it right, so to speak, science doesn’t exhaust and eliminate wonder but amplifies it, revealing new dimensions of intricacy, fragility and sheer unlikeliness. It should also generate not arrogance but humility, exposing new depths of how much we *don’t* know.

In this supplement, however, there are also other routes. For Bron Taylor, Sandy Irvine, Liz Hosken, Polly Higgins and

Frank de Jong, activism was and remains important. But uniquely among these authors, Bron writes as a respected social scientist. Sandy’s activism has led to a life of green political engagement, which overlaps with Frank’s involvement with green politics and economics, whereas for Polly it has taken the form of a fierce pursuit of legal ecojustice. Liz Hosken, meanwhile, works in the creative interstices of politics, indigenous spirituality and nature.

Philosophy, especially metaphysics – in co-development with direct personal experiences of the natural (and unnatural) world – has also been significant for several contributors. Victor Postnikov found liberation in ecologically oriented philosophers and educators. Freya Mathews found her ecocentric values powerfully articulated by Spinoza, as Sandra Lubarsky did by Whitehead and other process philosophers. Philosophy here is often accompanied – emphatically, in the case of Victor and Sandra – by a concern with aesthetic beauty, not least as an index of ecological health. Finally, Victor’s related love of poetry overlaps with my own path through literature and the humanities, as well as metaphysics.

Hegel famously observed that some knowledge is only available after the fact. (“The owl of Minerva” – the avian symbol of wisdom – “spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk.”) That particularly applies, I think, to discerning patterns of personal development. I’m sure these authors found it as interesting as I did, trying to trace my own path in hindsight. More to the point, however, we hope you will find it enjoyable and instructive to read how we got here. And if you’re worried about your own way being unsure or convoluted or lengthy, then obviously you can relax. ■

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Keywords

Becoming ecocentric

Shortly after this special supplement appeared, it became known that Polly Higgins had been diagnosed with advanced cancer. We wish her strength, courage and, we hope, the solace of a shining ecocentric legacy already in place.