

Natural Inclusion
and the
Big Bothersome Bias that Gets in the Way

A Spontaneous Essay by Rev. Roy Reynolds

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The likelihood is that you have a big bias. I mean a bias that prevents you from imagining in a way that nudged me awake back in early 2007. I experienced the world afresh. That's right; I started seeing the world of nature and people differently because I started viewing life through the lens of "Natural Inclusion." That is the name that the natural scientist, Alan Rayner, gave this lens. In a moment or so you will learn why "inclusion" is so necessary for perceiving nature deeply.

Please forgive me, though, if you happen not to be burdened by this bias. Most people are. Maybe you are one of those exceptional people who can "see with artist's eyes" and "feel with a poet's heart." That is, maybe you are someone who enters the openness of what poet John Keats called "negative capability." He wrote that in a letter to his brother. He wrote:

"The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with beauty & truth [. . .] I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason [. . .] with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."

[from a Letter to his brother in Dec. 1817]

Keats was referring to a willingness to embrace uncertainty, to live with mystery, and to make peace with ambiguity. He was affirming the importance, and the need, to be present with "not knowing," and with staying there without needing to readily relate that "not" to something that

you “do know.” Something based in fact and reason. That’s hard to do. It easily makes us uncomfortable. We naturally want to move out of that space of unresolved tension, that chaotic, unsettled feeling. We are pulled toward resolution, toward what we know, or think we already know.

Like that tree over there. Do you see it? Where do your eyes land when you look at that tree? What do you think, almost immediately? “Ah, that’s a Magnolia. That one over there—that tall strong one—that’s an oak tree. That one in your neighbor’s front yard; that’s a Dogwood. You can tell by its white blossoms, each with four petals.”

Did you look outside at trees just now? Or in your memory? Did you go immediately to identifying the different types of trees? It’s natural isn’t it? We look at the shape of the tree, its size and colors. We move in more closely and check out the leaves, the blossoms, and even the texture of the bark. It’s a fun habit identifying the different kinds of trees in our neighborhood, or in the forest.

That’s our bias. We move toward what we know. We do not normally move toward, and stay present with, what we do *not* know. We do not—for instance—enter visually the spaces between tree branches or, closer in, the spaces between the leaves. Why would we do that? Those spaces are nothing. They are empty and void. There’s nothing there to look at.

Hmmm, “nothing to look at.” Have you, by any chance, studied artistic composition? Have you learned to pay attention to the spaces—not the images of things, but the spaces—in a painting? Anyone who has learned the fundamentals of artistic composition soon realizes that those spaces are every bit as important as “the things” in the paintings. The spaces create context and form. They “set off” what we notice as the subjects—the “things” in the painting—so there is a composition that guides our eyes as they move around and take in the full scene of the painting. The picture, if it is representative painting, emerges into being. It’s “story” takes on qualities.

Those spaces, those in-between voids, are essential to the painting. Those spaces between the leaves and branches in trees are—likewise—essential to the life of the tree. Can you imagine a tree without spaces? No, you

can't. Space is necessary. Truth be told, space is essential for life. It's really that simple. Space is essential everywhere.

Nothing would have shape, nor would it have life, without the presence of space. Yet we totally disregard space as essential to anything we see, sense, think, or know. This is our "Big Bias." **We disregard space.**

What was my big "Aha!" back in February 2007, when I first saw Alan on Youtube video, and when I started reading his essays? I learned that I had everything "bass-ackwards." I had things as central, and space as subordinate, even tangential. I was focused on the "object at hand," whether that object was a person, a thing, a nonhuman organism such as a tree, a set of facts, or even an idea. I was focused (as it were) on the "finished product," and not on the living-growing-changing presence in whatever form that presence was before me.

I learned that Alan thinks of all of these living presences as "flow-forms." They are rather like the fluid bubbles in a lighted lava lamp. They are continually oozing and changing their shapes, even merging with other bubbles to form new shapes. The only difference (and I do mean "only") is that the clearer oil in the lava lamps—the sea within which the fluid globs float—is space. That's right, space as a "presence of absence" (that's Alan's language).

Absence needs to be recognized as a presence. Space, that is "absence," has a very important role to play in life everywhere. If you need to think of space as an "ocean of space," so be it. That imagery helped me. But you need to keep in mind that everything is porous, and is permeated by space. Every boundary everywhere is porous. Space "gets through." Space is the container of everything. Space—which is everywhere and can never be cut or blocked out in any way—is the "medium of life." Space invites life into being. Space is a frictionless, resistance-free medium that "receives" and "embraces" and "sustains" whatever form of energy starts stirring into becoming whatever form it takes. The energy can be (so-called) solid, gaseous, or liquid. It can be human organs, bones, and flesh. It can be the bark, roots, and branches of trees. It can be any form of life whatever.

Space is there (and everywhere) permeating every one of these flow-forms, dwelling on their insides, their outsides, and far beyond any and all forms of life. Space includes it all, holds it all, “mothers it all.”

Are you still here with me? Are you imagining space—with its receptive openness—as the constant presence everywhere? Okay, then here comes the word “inclusion.” Alan’s vision of nature is “Natural Inclusion.” His view, as an ecologist whose specialty is fungi and mycology, is that all forms in the natural world (yes, humans, too) are natural inclusions of space and form. They are natural inclusions of receptive space and the energetic-informative tangible “flesh” of all that we call “matter.” Matter by itself is nothing, whether we are talking of sunlight or copper or ozone or human bodies. No form of matter has life without also sharing that life with space that provides the context, the openness. Things don’t exist without having space within which to exist. Things do not exist without having space to receive and invite them into existence.

This may sound like a philosophical statement. It is not. It is a statement of fact, natural, observable fact. This statement is based upon concrete, tangible, naturally evidential reality. All you need to do is imagine it.

To imagine space as primary, and everything else as dependent upon space as “receptive presence,” may be the hardest thing you have been asked to imagine. But it will make all of the difference. We have the engrained habit of thinking of energetic power as “forces” exerting their influence. We now need to stop thinking that way. We need to expand the lens from which we view life. We are too close to “things” and too neglectful of “space.” We need to reverse that habit if we are to get the vision and meaning of Natural Inclusion. If it will help you, think that “space sucks!” That humor may help you retain the role of space. Think that the receptive presence of space is continually inviting everything into being, every form of information and energy. Everything is “welcomed into being.”

Try this for a time, and see if you (as I did) don’t begin to recognize the amazing wisdom and natural truth to this way of perceiving reality.

Good luck to your future imaginings. You may find yourself opening up to quite a bit that has otherwise been hidden, simply because of the bothersome bias that “things do stuff.” They don’t. They are “invited to do stuff,” by the receptive space within, through, without, and beyond.