

The Consciousness of Living Nature

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Elisabet Sahtouris, Ph.D.

Consciousness and Living Nature:

It's difficult to find a truly holistic description of Nature including consciousness as its source and inherent essence. While theoretical physicists almost invariably delve into cosmological realms, it is extremely rare for even theoretical biologists to do so.

We've suffered long enough from a modern worldview, however scientific it purports to be, that holds the universe to be a vast non-living space sprinkled with disconnected non-living galaxies, each peppered with lone non-living stars and planets. Somehow, it tells us, upon the surface of one such planet, if not more, life miraculously sprang from random bits of non-life blown about in random non-living lightning storms. It's been dull and unsatisfying to say the least. Worst of all, we've been weaned on the depressing thought that all this non-life is running out of steam by way of entropy, doomed to "heat death," a deadly, motionless inconceivable coldness that ends it all. So we frail humans can do no more with our miraculous moment of life than to make the best of it by struggling to stretch out our meager natural resources a few more generations and hope our technology may produce miracles to keep us going somewhat longer.

As an evolution biologist I find this deploring, not only because physicists are struggling for models of a universe they begin to realize is as alive as traditional peoples have always held it to be, but because our human future really depends now on a better understanding of who we are, where we came from and what our true potential for creating a happier future is.

Trained as a scientist, I once believed the prevailing story, so I understand how and why others believe it, but in retrospect it's really a *very* odd worldview. How could I, like all my colleagues, accept the idea that life can come from non-life, intelligence from non-intelligence, consciousness from non-consciousness? How is it possible that these strange impossibilities did not disturb us? Even now, most microbiologists peer into their electron microscopes at the insides of cells, watching itsy-bitsy molecules do the most incredibly intelligent things with and to each other to make that cell in all its complexity work—and still don't get it that those molecules know what they are doing, are *conscious and intelligent*.

Of all the sources I have encountered, the contemporary cosmobiology of Jane Roberts as her trance self, Seth, has offered the most persuasive description of the natural universe. I would like here to share some of that description, much of which I have been able to verify in the beliefs and practices of living indigenous people over the past few decades, as I will also illustrate.

Seth's universe begins, as in so many wonderful ancient cosmologies, with consciousness—consciousness units he called CU's for our sake, since we are so wedded to dissecting the seamless universe into separate parts, notwithstanding his assurance that it isn't so. Each CU is described as a kind of center that has "infinite properties of expansion, development and organization" yet within itself always maintains the kernel of its own individuality. Despite whatever organizations it becomes part of, or how it mixes with other such basic units, its own identity is not annihilated."¹ This consciousness transforms into electromagnetic energy (EE units) just as the EEs transform themselves into matter in the part of this sequence that Einstein made famous with his $E = MC^2$ transformation equation.

But back to CUs, which Seth tells us are aware, unpredictable and capable of an infinite variety of activities including the formation, in combination, of what we might recognize as "souls." He goes on to say:

“These units can indeed appear in several places at once, and without going through space, in your terms. Literally...[they] can be in all places at once. They *are* [italics mine] in all places at once... innately endowed with the desire or propensity for growth and creative organization.”

All this vitality, this *life*, before we even get to electromagnetic energy and matter! In fact, Seth says, “Their nature is the vitalizing force behind everything in your physical universe and others as well,” squelching all question, as he points out, as to whether rocks and trees have souls. Many millions of CUs exist in every atom, all traveling faster than light, all of them everywhere at once, “probing” and “experiencing...all possible universes created from these units!”²

Seth’s account of how the universe works has been analyzed in detail by physicist Norman Friedman.³ Yet how much more should it be validated by biology—the science of life.

I have speculated elsewhere⁴ that it was a historical accident which made Galileo use the newly invented lenses in a telescope to look up at the stars rather than in a microscope to look down into a drop of pondwater. Had things been the other way around, he might have focused on the science of life, rather than on the mathematics and physics of non-living celestial mechanics. This would almost certainly have changed the scientific outlook and endeavor dramatically, for, once focused on life, he might have seen it in all the universe instead of seeing mechanics everywhere.

Modern theoretical physicists, once arriving at quantum mechanics, were almost forced to acknowledge consciousness as fundamental, though this is still resisted by many physicists who persist in believing their mechanistic conceptualizations and language depict All There Is. Unfortunately, biologists, who should have been first in recognizing life as primary and universal, lag far behind physicists in doing so. My book, *Biology Revisioned*, co-authored with Willis Harman, is an effort to promote this view.⁵

Seth, as I mentioned above, tells us that consciousness precedes both electromagnetic energy and matter, as the origin of a continuum including all three. Consciousness transforms itself into electromagnetic energy just as Einstein showed that electromagnetic energy (Einstein’s E, Seth’s EE units), transforms itself into matter. Once we accept this and trace our scientifically “non-living” material universe back through Einstein’s E, or Seth’s EEs, to its living origin in consciousness, we will see that it is and always has been, necessarily, alive.

What is stranger than strange is that our contemporary scientific society is the *last* to discover this. The idea of a non-living universe composed of mechanically rotating celestial spheres was invented in ancient Greece and taken up by the fathers of modern science—all other cultures, as far as I have been able to determine, including so-called “pre-scientific” European cultures, knew the cosmos to be alive. All indigenous cultures I have worked with as a co-founder of the Worldwide Indigenous Science Network and as a UN consultant on indigenous peoples—those my culture has labeled “primitive”—knew it all along.

Original Humans and Indigenous Cultures:

Seth’s exposition on this early human understanding is worth looking at in some detail, as it explains both what it was and why we abandoned it. As he tells us,

... man first identified with nature, and ... saw it as an extension of himself even while he felt himself a part of its expression. In exploring it, he explored himself also. He did not identify as himself alone, but... identified also with all those portions of nature with which he came into contact. This... was biologically ingrained in him, and is even now biologically pertinent.

Physically and psychically the species is connected with all of nature. Man did not live in fear, as is now supposed, nor in some idealized natural heaven. He lived at an intense peak of psychic and biological experience, and

enjoyed a sense of creative excitement that in those terms only existed when the species was new.

... the species in its infancy obviously experienced selfhood in different terms from your own. Because this experience is so alien to your present concepts, and because it predated language as you understand it, it is most difficult to describe.

Generally you experience the self as isolated from nature, and primarily enclosed within your skin. Early man did not feel like an empty shell, and yet selfhood existed for him as much outside of the body as within it. There was a constant interaction. It is easy to say to you that such people could identify, say, with the trees, but an entirely different thing to try to explain what it would be like for a mother to become so a part of the tree underneath which her children played that she could keep track of them from the tree's viewpoint, though she was herself far away.

... Consciousness is far more mobile than you realize. Operationally, you have focused yours primarily with the body. You cannot experience subjective behavior 'from outside,' so this natural mobility of consciousness, which for example the animals have retained, is psychologically invisible to you.

...you think of [your own consciousness] as 'a thing,' or a unit-- an invisible something that might be held in invisible hands perhaps. Instead, consciousness is a particular quality of being. Each portion of 'it' contains the whole, so theoretically as far as you are concerned, you can leave your body and be in it simultaneously. You are rarely aware of such experiences, because you do not believe them possible, and it seems that even consciousness, particularly when individualized, must be in one place or another.

... In those early times, then, consciousness was more mobile. Identity was more democratic. In a strange fashion this does not mean that individuality was weaker. Instead it was strong enough to accept within its confines many divergent kinds of experience. A person, then, looking out into the world of trees, waters and rock, wildlife and vegetation, literally felt that he or she was looking at the larger, materialized, subjective areas of personal selfhood.

To explore that exterior world was to explore the inner one. Such a person, however, walking through the forest, also felt that he or she was also a portion of the inner life of each rock or tree, materialized. Yet there was no contradiction of identities.

A man might merge his own consciousness with a running stream, traveling such a way for miles to explore the layout of the land. To do this he became part water in a kind of identification you can barely understand—but so did the water then become part of the man.

...It is not so much that he personified the elements of nature as that he threw his personality into its elements and rode them, so to speak. As mentioned, love incites the desire to know, explore, and communicate with the beloved; so language began as man tried to express his love for the natural world.

In those early days man possessed a gargantuan arena for the expression of his emotions. He did not symbolically rage with the storms, for example, but quite consciously identified with them to such a degree that he and his tribesmen merged with the wind and lightning, and became a part of the storms' forces. They felt, and knew as well, that the storms would refresh the land, whatever their fury.

... The language or the method of communication can best be described perhaps as direct cognition. Direct cognition is dependent upon a lover's kind of identification, where what is known is known. At that stage no words or even images were needed. The wind outside and the breath were felt to be one and the same, so that the wind was the earth breathing out the breath that rose from the mouths of the living, spreading out through the earth's body. Part of a man went out with breath-- therefore, man's consciousness could go wherever the wind traveled. A man's consciousness, traveling with the wind, became part of all places.

A person's identity was private, in that man always knew who he was. He was so sure of his identity that he did not feel the need to protect it, so that he could expand his awareness in a way now quite foreign to you.

... Take the English sentence: 'I observe the tree.' If that original language had words, the equivalent would be: 'As a tree, I observe myself.' Or: 'Taking on my tree nature, I rest in my shade.' Or even: 'From my man nature, I rest in the shade of my tree nature.' A man did not so much stand at the shore looking down at the water, as he immersed his consciousness within it. Man's initial curiosity did not involve seeing, feeling or touching the object's nature as much as it involved a joyful psychic exploration in which he plunged his consciousness, rather than, say, his foot into the stream—though he did both.

If that language I speak of had been verbal, man never would have said: 'The water flows through the valley.' Instead the sentence would have read something like this: 'Running over the rocks, my water self flows together with others in slippery union.' That translation is not the best either. Man did not designate his own as the only kind of consciousness by any means. He graciously thanked the tree that gave him shade, for example, as he understood that the tree retained its own identity even when it allowed his awareness to join with it.

In your terms, the use of language began as man lost this kind of identification. I must stress again that the identification was not symbolic, but practical, daily expression. Nature spoke for man, and man for nature.⁶

My adopted Peruvian Quechua Indian son Puma, 14 years old as we were having dinner one night in the Andes, translated into Spanish what his grandfather, Don Maximo, last medicine priest of an ancient pre-Inca tradition, was telling me in his own language. Puma paused at one point, as a faraway, softly beautiful expression came over his face. "I want to learn to talk like my grandfather," he mused aloud. "He has such a beautiful way of using words. It is very special. I think I could learn it but I must pay very close attention. He just said he will never forget seeing your soul fly off as a white condor after the ceremony we did in the cave at Sacsahuaman, but he said it in a way I cannot translate." When I asked Don Maximo whether he agreed with Don Faustino, another Quechua elder (both use their given Spanish names publicly), that the birds and animals gave humans language. "Yes," he replied, "it was so. But now that old language is lost. Even I know only half of it."

Seth tells us that in indigenous languages: "In a manner of speaking, the noun and the verb were one. The noun did not disappear, but expressed itself as the verb."⁶ This was confirmed by the linguistics scientist Benjamin Lee Whorf, who showed that it is still the case in languages such as Nootka in the Pacific Northwest and Hopi in the Southwest.⁷ In Hopi, for example, you cannot say "The light flashes," for the light and the flashing are one and the same, as are the animal and the running in the English sentence "The deer runs swiftly."

Our division of nature into things and actions, nouns and verbs, gives us a biased way of seeing, as does the idea of individuals against backgrounds. Once we learn to see again, as indigenous people did, that all nature is alive and undivided, we will not see rabbits in habitats, but simply 'rhabitats.' And we will not see ourselves as separate from our 'environments,' nor will we see those environments as resources for our use; rather we will speak of nature more as the Lakota Indians do in saying: *Mitakuye Oyasin*—"All my Relations."

Indigenous understanding of nature is still far closer to the universe according to Seth than is our own purportedly advanced science and Seth tells us exactly why. But first, let us consider, as another example, our scientific understanding of what causes changes in weather—patterns of cloud cover, heating and cooling, etc. And then consider Seth's description of early human (indigenous) understanding of the same phenomena:

In a kind of emotional magnification unknown to you, each person's private emotions were given an expression and release through nature's changes—a release that was understood, and taken for granted. In the most

profound of terms, weather conditions and the emotions are still highly related. The inner conditions cause the exterior climatic changes, though of course it now seems to you that it is the other way around.

You are robbed, then, or you rob yourselves, of one of the most basic kinds of expression, since you can no longer identify yourselves with the forces of nature.”⁶

Many contemporary native people, who have lived in both their traditional culture and in our industrial society, such as Iroquois Chief of Chiefs (Tadadaho) Oren Lyons, successor to Leon Shenandoah, have retained their identity with nature to the extent that they can clearly affect the weather and bring wild animals close. Interestingly, non-native scientists such as David Abram, author of *Spell of the Sensuous*, Fred Alan Wolfe, author of *The Eagle's Quest*, and myself, have had such experiences of identity with and response from nature after spending time with native people. My favorite personal experience involved the sudden “materialization” of a full-grown elk that ate an apple from my hand and left his saliva as evidence of his reality. Medicine men of many cultures, such as my Amazon friends Sapain of the Xingu nation and Anunk Nunink of the Shuar, learn the medicinal properties of plants and how to use them by direct communication with the plants themselves.

So why would most of us humans have given up these profound, beautiful and useful abilities? Seth continues:

Man wanted to pursue a certain kind of consciousness, however. In your terms, over a period of time he pulled his awareness in, so to speak; he no longer identified as he did before, and began to view objects through the object of his own body. He no longer merged his awareness, so that he learned to look at a tree as one object, where before he would have joined with it, and perhaps viewed his own standing body from the tree's vantage point. It was then that mental images became important in usual terms-- for he had understood these before, but in a different way, from the inside out.

Now he began to draw and sketch, and to learn how to build images in the mind that were connected to real exterior objects in the presently accepted manner... He used partial [images], fragments of circles or lines, to represent natural objects... he began to imitate their form with... his lips...⁶

In other words, he intentionally set himself apart from what he now saw as the “exterior objects” of nature: the rabbits, the habitats. And he divorced his consciousness from theirs, no longer able to “stand at the shore looking down at the water, as he immersed his consciousness within it.” No longer able to travel downriver *as* the river, he had to build boats in order to explore; no longer able to communicate telepathically with other humans, he developed spoken language, then writing, printing, telephone and computer.

Problems of Individuation:

The pursuit of this kind of consciousness—Seth calls it “individuation,” has culminated in our materialistic technological culture, with its many benefits, but the price has been very heavy and we now face possible extinction, along with many other species, because of the extent to which we destroy and poison the ecosystems on which we depend.

Individuation became isolation as we developed survival anxieties such as fear of each other and of scarcity, which in turn led to intolerance, greed, competition, warfare, gross inequities and destruction of our own life-support systems, a pattern lethal to any living system as we now begin to see. Nature became a collection of resources for our use. Our mechanistic reductionist science affected not only our view of nature, but our view of our own society, in which our politics, our economics, religion, arts, science, ethics, etc. are as separated as our families and communities

and nations have become. One Andean Aymara Indian, Nicolas Aguilar Sayritupac, said about us Westerners: “They have given up their humanity in giving up community.”⁸

We fail to make connections among the living systems at different levels of even our own social organizations, such as families and whole societies. All of us would agree that in a family one does not starve three children to overfeed the fourth, yet we cannot seem to see the connection with our worldwide economic practices. We even perceive ecology as opposed to economy, when, in the original Greek, these words literally mean “rule of the household” and “organization of the household”—in our terms, organizational design and operating principles. Can they then be set in opposition to one another without inviting disaster?

Xilonem Garcia, a Meshika Indian elder, once told me “Anyone who knows how to run a household, knows how to run a world.” She was comfortable jumping levels because she understood that both are living systems and must therefore function essentially the same way—a way that keeps all parts healthy. To identify with conscious, intelligent nature is to see easily that living systems use the same ordering principles at all levels: diversity, equality, cooperation, reciprocity, creativity—the opposite of our monocultural, competitive inequalities. Our own bodies would quickly sicken and die if they tried to run themselves like international economics, exploiting some parts to bloat others!

In cutting ourselves off from communion and community with the rest of nature, our most fundamental, critical loss was that we forgot who we really are in the larger scheme of things. Instead of knowing ourselves as pure consciousness (spirit) having an intentional human experience, we saw ourselves as fundamentally material beings having occasional spiritual experiences like frosting on the cake. Mainstream scientists, lagging far behind pioneers such as Walter Russell, have convinced themselves that human consciousness is a product or “epiphenomenon” of material evolution; all other human experience of non-material realities being considered unscientific imagination or deception.

In native cultures, on the other hand, reality has various levels, both material and non-material. People move among them without difficulty. In Peru years ago, for example, Puma (mentioned earlier), his father, his grandfather Don Maximo and I had done a three-hour *despacho*—a gratitude offering ceremony—to the living snow-covered-mountain deities or *Apus*, in order to insure a safe journey to the United States, where Puma was going with me for the first time to give a speech in Washington D.C. I had vowed to *Ausungate*, the mountain *Apu* I always felt closest to, that I would make the pilgrimage to visit him, but just before we were to carry it out, Don Maximo received a warning not to go—he knew that one of us would have an accident if we did. He said we should do a ceremony instead, near Cusco, in the domain of the *Apu Sacsahuaman*. When I asked if this would not violate my vow to *Ausungate*, he said “Not at all, because you *will* go to him. You will fly to him in spirit and it is the same.”

Seth teaches us that we each have many identities in many probable realities, both material and non-material. “... units of consciousness are within all physical matter, containing their own memories. Both biologically and psychically, then, you are aware of your multipersonhood.”⁹ Each of our “I-selves” in “this” reality is composed of CUs (pure consciousness), EEs and matter simultaneously. There are no boundaries to our consciousness (minds), and all matter, all events, all experience is the cooperative manifestation of consciousness—our own, that of all nature’s beings, that of every cell, every molecule, every atom and every particle (recall that there are millions of CUs per atom). But, “...individual consciousness became so entranced with its own experiences, however, that the clear-cut, steady and conscious communication with the mass consciousness went underground, so to speak.”⁹

Solutions:

How then can we use Seth’s teachings to combine the best of indigenous understanding with our modern culture toward a healthier and more enlightened world for all?

First, Seth tells us himself:

You view the fantastic variety of physical life—its animals, insects, birds, fish, man and all his works—with hardly a qualm; yet you must understand that the nature of consciousness itself is far more varied, and you must learn to think of an inner reality that is as infinite as the exterior one... The present idea of the soul, you see, is a “primitive” idea that can scarcely begin to explain the creativity or reality from which mankind’s being comes.”⁹

Not only must we understand that all creativity, including our biological, material world, stems from consciousness, but that this creativity is not subject to the constraints of time as science tells us. Past and future are accessible to us and can be extremely useful. Even physically, our past is still present in surviving indigenous people, and Seth shows us how we can use our future to our benefit in the following example of a bulb and the flower which grows from it:

In basic terms they exist at once. In your terms however it is as if the flower-to-be, from its “future” calls back to the bulb and tells it how to make the flower. Memory operates backward and forward in time. The flower—calling back to the bulb, urging it “ahead” and reminding it of its (probable future) development—is like a future self in your terms, or a more highly advanced self, who has the answers and can indeed be quite practically relied upon.”⁹

Let us look to and call upon our best possibilities, our best future probable selves, our best future probable realities and bootstrap ourselves toward them! If we focus collectively on disaster, if we continue the form of individuation leading us toward it, there is no doubt we will bring it about. Instead, let us remind ourselves who we are in all our best potential at all levels of being. Let us remind ourselves that we chose to practice individuation as a new experience in a new form of consciousness. Let us assess that experiment before it takes us to extinction, thanking every individual consciousness and body that helped carry it out, whether they were a Feudal manor lord, a Conquistador or a greedy businessman, a scientist, an artist, a starving child, a dictator, a tortured prisoner. Each played an important role; at a soul level apparent enemies cooperated. Let us cooperate consciously now in looking to the understanding we all had when we were in complete communion with nature; in using our individuated selves in cooperative ways as Seth told us was essential. Let us forget differences and work together in tuning into and/or creating the vision of that probable future we desire, and let us muster the collective faith and will to manifest it.

For inspiration in that endeavor, let me close with the words of William James after death, speaking through Jane Roberts:

Now I see that all of the earth’s natural events—its seasons, the varieties of manifestation and expression—all represent an inner inexhaustible Nature that is mental as opposed to physical, if we must use such terms. The given planet, with its astounding framework of creativity in which earth’s creatures reside, and which supplies them with all their needs and requirements—all of that represents but one facet of this larger Nature’s capabilities.

This Nature, initially mental, propels thoughts into actualities, regulates their development and growth, and provides to each being a given mental, psychic and spiritual world which is, again, naturally expressed and seeks its own development. Here also, the psychic requirements and needs are met, and a state of grace is safely provided in which action can be taken without care; and by this I mean without the anticipation of impediments.

This brings us to faith, of course, which as I now perceive it is a physical, biological condition of growth and a psychic or spiritual condition as well. It is as if faith were the agent that developed a negative into a definite picture in the darkroom of the mind; and without faith, the events will not “take.”

... To the extent that faith applies to anything, then it is trust in one’s natural order of being; the feeling that the conditions for existence are largely

conducive to it; that needs will be met within the circumstances of that natural order; and that one is couched and supported in one's existence by some larger Nature from which the natural order springs.

In such a medium, bones, frogs, stars—and philosophers—grow.

I am speaking of a pragmatic psychic or spiritual medium that must be present if any cell is to develop, if any atom is to combine with others; in other words, of a medium in which all events and actions happen. The expectation of motion is involved, whether it be physical or mental motion or both, and a freedom of direction in which action can occur. That is, faith is self-moving or promotes motion and dissolves barriers.

... Faith easily makes a legitimate biological claim, then. Its lack in any area results in a vacuum of development, a weakness in which, for example, faith's natural immunities break down or disappear. Faith's presence is an active health-promoting agent.

... but faith I now see is a more general omnipresent quality that is best not attached to any particulars, while it may at the same time include them in its larger scope.

On the other hand, faith is personal, intimate, and must spring from the individual's innate knowledge of his connections with Nature, following the order of existence into which he was born. Each person is born with that spiritual and biological optimism, that psychological aura of safety in which existence is meaningful precisely because each individual feels the presence of a personal universe in which he and every other consciousness has meaning, even though that meaning may not be intellectually understood... I now know beyond all doubt that each person is gifted with natural faith and insight, with built-in impetus and guidance in which biological and spiritual faith are equally merged.”¹⁰

¹ Roberts, Jane *The Unknown Reality*, Vol. 1, Session 682, 9:20

² Ibid. 9:47, Session 682,10:06

³ Friedman, Norman *Bridging Science and Spirit*, Living Lake Books, St.Louis MO 1994

⁴ Sahtouris, Elisabet *EarthDance*, Metalog Books, Santa Barbara CA 1996

⁵ Harman, W. & Sahtouris, E. *Biology Revisioned*, Institute for Noetic Sciences, Palo Alto CA 1996

⁶ Roberts, Jane *The Nature of the Psyche: Its Human Expression*, Prentice Hall, NJ 1979 Chapter 6, pp95-100

⁷ Whorf, B.L. *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by John B. Carroll, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1956

⁸ Sayritupac, Nicolas Aguilar, in the Prologue to *Genesis de la Cultura Andina* by Carlos Milla Villena, Fondo Editorial C.A.P. Coleccion Bienal, Lima 1983

⁹ Roberts, Jane *The Unknown Reality*, Prentice Hall, NJ 1977, Vol. 1, Session 683, 9:33-10:45

¹⁰ Roberts, Jane *The Afterdeath Journal of an American Philosopher: The Worldview of William James*, Prentice Hall, NJ 1978

