New Page

The work of the neurobiologists in the last thirty years has been the source of what inspiration I have in changing our world view. This work, while it has inspired more effort and investment in Big Data technology and artificial intelligence, has more importantly redressed the imbalance between Faith and Reason, caused by the Enlightenment enthronement of mechanistic science, by showing how ***Feeling*** is essential to cognition and consciousness. Feeling is also related in this work to the physio-chemical activity of the autonomic system in all organisms, which re-establishes the link between ourselves and the biosphere.

The writers who have taught me about this are Andreas Weber, a German biologist and poet, and Antonio Damasio, a neuroscientist with strong humanist leanings. Both stress the importance of feeling as moral potential as well as a precondition of consciousness. Weber's teacher, Francisco Varela, is also an important voice. Uniquely (in the West) he has proposed that Buddhist practices of mindfulness are in fact a legitimate and practical way to work with "groundlessness". In the medical and psychological field Bessel Van der Kolk's book The Body Keeps the Score has had a profound personal effect on me.

This new world view makes it necessary to approach problems like climate change, the injustice of neoliberal economics and the destruction of the biosphere with a humility that humans seem to have lost toward the gift of Life. This gift is now being found to involve some kind of sentience we cannot define or control but which makes it possible for bodies to *be* in a world. This seems to me to be what Spinoza meant by the Conatus, which sustains all being. This sentience is ignored by our amazing technology but is making itself felt in the many environmentally aware movements all over the world. In Damasio's words, it is more than just consciousness: perhaps we should call it conscience.

I think a BFG needs to engage people at this level, which is where we truly realise that we need help. It seems to me that the DHO commitment is an expression of this need to support each other.

My big leap into the world of natural farming came about through the lens of permaculture. This gave direction and a way of moving into the complexity of working with Nature and not fighting against Nature, which has always been one of the core principles of permaculture. I came at it from a very practical, functional perspective. I and other Africans who attended permaculture gatherings in the North in the early 90s found the New Age spiritual activities at these gatherings rather mystifying. We weren't sure what we were doing dancing in circles to strange sounding music. For us permaculture provided a practical way to manage the land.

Gradually over the years I've come to realise that commitment to looking after the land, to being in tune with Nature (if one can ever be, in all humility), has to come from deep within one's soul, the ***Feeling*** that Michael is referring to, the feeling that my real, authentic being ***is*** Nature, that deep place where one feels, throughout one's nervous system, in harmony.

I now believe that not so long ago this was a part of African cultures across the continent. The Sacred Natural sites that used to exist, and still do (just) in some places, bear testament to this. I suspect this applied to cultures across the World. I know the African situation better. It's time to revive those cultural practices that bonded people closely to their land, to Nature, to their history on that land, to their ancestors who handed over responsibility for caring for the land. This is not about going back but about looking back to go forwards. This is about re-rooting in landscapes with feeling. And this does not need to clash with existing faiths, as some fear. I remember speaking in depth to a devout Christian woman in Kivaa in north east Kenya in 2012, who expressed her joy at reconciling her Christian faith with her community's efforts to revive Kivaa Hill as the Sacred site it always used to be.

Revision #2
Created 2021-06-21 16:05:36 UTC by michael
Updated 2021-06-26 02:40:52 UTC by john