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TACIT KNOWLEDGE, THE ECOLOGICAL UNCONSCIOUS, AND NARRATIVE

Alan R. Drengson, Editor

In contemporary analyses of technical skills and knowledge, it is recognized that even simple skills usually involve complex knowledge and techniques which cannot be explicitly described. There is much that we know, which we cannot state, not because it is inexpressible, but because much of this knowledge is tacit. Although we recognize its necessity to complex skills, we are not consciously aware of all that it involves. This is partly because much of our knowledge is not presently before our conscious awareness, although some of this can be intentionally brought to awareness. There is also much that resides at the unconscious level, which we cannot easily recover. However, in our dream, imaginative and mythical experience this unconscious knowing and understanding can surface. It comes forth sometimes spontaneously, not as a result of focussed intention,

but indirectly. How to interpret and consciously understand the symbolic and poetic language of the unconscious, which thus speaks poetically and mythically, is not readily apparent. This material represents a complex mixture of personal, cultural and human elements, whose symbols and language are metaphoric. Its elements have no one, single meaning. Instead, they are rich in interpretive possibilities. Here we also encounter the ecological unconscious with which we are intertwined.

Recent explorations of consciousness have helped us to appreciate the degree to which human consciousness is part of this larger ecological unconscious. Each of us is capable in dreams, through guided imagery, through extraordinary events and experiences in our lives, to gain access to this deeper wisdom. Each of us, to repeat, knows far more than we are ever presently aware

that we know, and we each have deep connections with the whole of personal, cultural, species and ecological history. We know enough about this to appreciate that we also have vast ignorance, at the explicit, conscious, rationally articulated level of knowledge.

Modern culture proceeds as if we can develop a fully abstract, useful, and articulated, value-neutral description of our problems and spell out strategies and plans for solving them. Some assumptions upon which this narrow view of knowledge and action rest come from positivist theories of experience and knowledge. These assumptions hold that there are theory free facts and value neutral theories. The analyses of logic and language underpinning these views assume that meaning is something which can be explained without reference to stories and narratives, that the least unit of meaning is the single word, and that language consists of names, logical constants and modal operators. Some investigators think that we can give a complete analysis of meaning free of ambiguity and totally precise. Under the sway of such an approach, however, we lose meaning, values, the sacred, and access to a larger wisdom. The reasons for these results are many, but one relevant here is that meaningful human activity and life can be appreciated in all its richness only by means of narrative forms, arts, and extra-linguistic activities.

Humans have a need to seek and create meaning. Our cultures, their unique histories, our places of dwelling, our relationships to others, to other beings, to the world and the universe, are all created, made explicit and characterized through narratives. Without narratives there would be no human history. Without narrative the self-reflective, individual human consciousness could not emerge. Character could not define itself. How we see ourselves is a function of both personal and cultural narratives. Without narrative there even could be no science. Scientific theory, no matter how abstract, formal, and removed from everyday stories, is nonetheless dependent upon narrative themes and stories. The Big Bang theory and the theory of evolution are both narratives, stories which make sense of certain events and changes.

The smallest unit of meaning is not a single word, but a sentence which compresses significant narrative themes and stories. Words and sentences exist only in the larger linguistic context, which itself is part of and helps to constitute a whole way of life, a culture and its forms of meaning and character development. (Consider the compression of meaning in bumper stickers which contain whole philosophical narratives, such as "Subvert the dominant paradigm.") If we understand the main story and themes of any subject, we are able to understand the individual words and sentences. Each sentence in a novel is interconnected with the other sentences. In some respects, we understand a book only by seeing it as a whole. At a level of tacit knowledge, we are already connected with the book as a whole, and a whole human language, when we begin to read the book. Through the title, the opening sentences, the fundamental metaphors, themes and story lines, we gain a sense of what the whole is. And yet, all great works, and many lesser ones as well, have no final interpretation which enables us to say that we have exhausted and fully understood the text. Plato's Republic, for example, is a text so rich that its interpretative possibilities are

practically unlimited. This is true for human life generally, and our attempts to understand Nature, ourselves, and other beings. This is why one access to the heart and human Being is through silence.

Profound silence holds all possibilities, such as unlimited perspectives on reality, and endless poetic and narrative appreciations of multiple meanings. Out of silence comes new narrative forms and expressions, which reflect the fundamentally creative, self-organizing, endlessly changing nature of reality. Freedom, creativity, and self transcendence all come out of this deep silence. Spiritual life, in terms of opening to the larger, inexhaustible reality of the sacred, provides an endlessly rich source of new forms of meaning and narrative.

The above observations are connected to the aim of this journal to contribute to the celebration, understanding, communication and practice of ecosophy. Ecosophy is ecological wisdom and harmony. Ecosophy can be realized in many ways. There is no single doctrine and way of life that is **the** one and only way to realize ecosophy. The platform principles of the deep ecology movement articulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions imply this multiplicity. Naess and others emphasize that diversity and richness are intrinsic values and this applies to both biological and cultural diversity. Thus, a person can support the platform principles of the deep ecology movement from Buddhist, Christian, or other ultimate premises. The way persons, communities and cultures come to understand, articulate, celebrate, practice, and appreciate ecosophy is dependent on the places they dwell in, their history, and so on.

It is often erroneously thought that the deep ecology movement consists of a single doctrine and philosophy, but its philosophical supporters have emphasized over and over, that the movement is unified by broadly stated platform principles which are consistent with a wide range of differing philosophies and ultimate premises, and a wide range of practical actions which can lead to sustainable cultures. It is also erroneously thought that the environmental crisis is just a technical challenge and that there can be a single global technological solution. But this is a crisis of character and culture which damages Nature, and it cannot be solved by technical means alone. It requires self-understanding, understanding of ecological principles, of our culture and history - of the stories we live by. It requires the creation of new cultural forms and practices, as well as new possibilities for self-realization and creation of community. These are not technical challenges. We can appreciate what these involve if we think of them as a challenge to create new patterns for meaningful lives through creating new narratives and practices, informed by an ecological consciousness which draws from our tacit understanding and the ecological unconscious. Ecosophy is practical knowledge and comprehensive understanding fused in actions which work on several levels at once, whether these actions are in e.g. an art, in planting, or in work on one's character. These dimensions of culture and character can only be adequately worked with comprehensively, which necessarily includes the spiritual. Narrative can take us into all these dimensions and connect us with others, the manifest and unmanifest, the sonic and the silent, the empty and the full.