

**Thoughts about  
*The Life of Things:*  
*Therapy and the soul of the world.***

**By Bernie Neville**

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**Guest Essay  
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### Thoughts about *The Life of Things*

You don't have to read Bernie Neville's wonderful book to realize that our environment is sick—just follow the media reports. “Global climate change” is a somewhat polite term for the fact that our world is beginning to fall apart. In the United States, this past summer was dramatically hotter than any we can recall, in whichever state in the country you happened to live.

According to *The Week*, (2012/2013, p. 22) in March of 2012, a particularly hot month, temperatures in the lower 48 states were over 8 degrees above the historic norm. We read in our media how the sea ice is melting faster than scientists predicted (over 40% since the 1970s). “And since the Arctic ice cools polar regions and influences climate patterns for the rest of the planet,” continues *The Week*, (p. 27) “its decline could rapidly accelerate the rise of global temperatures.”

Neville's book, *The Life of Things*, reports that our world suffers from “degradation ... stockpiles of deteriorating nuclear weapons waiting for terrorists ... corruption of political life ... [and] an out-of-control financial system.” (Neville, 2012, p. 23) So what can we advocates of the person-centered approach learn from this deeply thoughtful book?

In his boyhood, Rogers (1980) was impressed with the vitality of potatoes sprouting in his basement “in their bizarre, futile growth, a sort of desperate expression of the directional tendency,” (p. 118) a model he later used to characterize the individual's tendency to self-actualization. Bernie Neville brings to our attention Rupert Sheldrake, (1990) who argued that the cosmos has a similar tendency, not the breakdown of entropy, but rather the build-up of syntropy (p. 188) or, as Nobel prize-winning Albert Szent-Gyorgyi (1966) put it, “a drive in living matter to perfect itself.” (p. 154) Then there's James Lovelock's (2010) concept of Earth as Gaia, a living organism, as author Neville brings these three writers to a shared focus.

It is common knowledge among scientists, I believe, that we humans are latecomers to this world, arriving about 125,000 years

ago, our technology beginning about 40,000 years ago—apparent microseconds in the lifespan of this Earth. What we humans brought to the magical process of evolution, in my opinion, was to take the intricate information of life hidden in our genes and manifest it outward beginning with the use of symbols that became language. Then culture, through art, stories, and ultimately technology, proceeded to magnify that vital knowledge from communities to nations to global electronic communication systems—telegraph, radio, TV, computers.

Most microbiological species, i.e., germs, given a finite environment such as a Petri dish and limited nutrients, according to my understanding, will grow and expand their populations, until they consume all the available food and then, as toxins build up, fairly quickly die off. Is the human species, in this finite Earth, due such destiny? In this case, it's not the lack of nutrients, but rather the carbon dioxide "toxins" inherent in global climate change that might eventually kill us.

I sometimes feel that we've become too smart for our own good. Our industrial technology has changed the composition of the air and consequently, the temperature of the fragile "shell" of our Earth. As snowcaps melt at an accelerated rate, trees, birds and insects migrate away from the equator; and as insurance companies raise their premiums because of the increased frequency of natural disasters, we gaze around at our less friendly environment in wide-eyed disbelief.

The Earth itself, I fear, a host to us as a species only a brief scintilla of its time since the Big Bang, will survive, with or without humans. But, when viewed in its Gaia-organic mode, as Neville does, our Earth is sick. Where does it go to receive aid from its toxic human "germs?" Will some divine being, I wonder, viewing through the myriad galaxies, seemingly infinite in number, even detect this infinitely small planet, hidden in the Milky Way, and come to its aid?

Neville says we can't wait for such aid, and can take fate in our own hands. But how? Decades ago, Jung wrote, "Through scientific understanding, our world has become dehumanized. Man feels isolated from the cosmos ... Thunder is no longer the voice of a

god, nor is lightening his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit.” (Cited in Read, Fordham & Adler, 1979, 18)

Can we save ourselves by trusting Gaia to respond to its human guests, by trusting Prometheus as we become responsible masters of our fate, by trusting Hermes who “tells us to listen to the voices of all the gods—in our heads and in our gut—and respect them all?” (Neville, 2012, p. 174) Can we disprove James Lovelock’s opinion that it is too late to save Gaia?

*The Life of Things* is one person’s attempt at bringing to the table what Carl Rogers said decades ago: “We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life.” (1980, p. 134) If we can see ourselves as part of the organic Gaia, then we have the responsibility to take care of ourselves and the Earth. According to Gebser, (1986) only a new kind of consciousness will save us from catastrophe.

Lovelock (2010) claims it may be too late to wait for such a new consciousness. Dare we try to prove him wrong? In this book, Neville makes a strong argument that we can. We must.

Neville’s book integrates our mythological and psychological thinking with this intractable challenge. It is a book that cannot be ignored if we care at all about the life of things, particularly this thing called Earth.