

New Foundation Course in Goethean Science *2018 Summer Intensive*



In July we began, for the first time, a year-long, low-residency course. Called “Encountering Nature and the Nature of Things,” it offers a foundation in the science of phenomena. This is an approach that is contextual, qualitative, and holistic — what we often call “Goethean science.” We accepted twenty-two applicants into the program. The participants come from diverse professional backgrounds — high school and university education, science, farming, and others. Most are from the U.S., but others reside in Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Switzerland, and Australia.

The course began with a two-week intensive at The Nature Institute and continues now that the participants have returned home. There they are carrying out individual research projects, studying texts from a reader we created for the course, and engaging in correspondence and conversation with mentors and classmates. Participants will then return in July 2019 to conclude the course with another two-week intensive.

Each day of this first intensive followed more or less the same rhythm. When participants arrived at 8:30 a.m., we met briefly and then went to our “places.” Each of us had

found a spot on the grounds of the Institute where we would spend about half an hour. One of the program’s facilitators, Jon McAlice, a Waldorf educator and consultant with an interest in the psychology of learning, provided guidelines for ways of experiencing the place differently each day over the course of the two weeks. One day we attended to what was close by and then shifted to the larger environs; on another we paid attention to sounds or smells. All this helped us to live in our senses and dwell in what the world revealed.

After the place observations we worked for an hour with short texts by Goethe, Rudolf Steiner, and the late Henri Bortoft, a leading interpreter of Goethean science. These texts addressed fundamental characteristics of the consciousness we need in order to develop a participatory relation to the world.

In two sessions each day we explored a specific phenomenal domain and considered the associated methodologies. For example, Henrike led us into the world of light, darkness, and color. She encouraged us in the practice of careful and ordered observation of the visual world, together with concrete thinking that does not draw heavily on models



and theoretical constructs. In this way the phenomenal experiences themselves gained greater meaning and depth. Craig led plant studies, with a focus on the phenomena of metamorphosis. We spent many hours observing different plants. Gradually the living qualities of plants, and especially the transition from vegetative growth and transformation in the green leaves to the radically new formation of the flower, came into clearer focus.

In the afternoon, between these two sessions, we worked artistically. During the first week we modeled with clay to immerse ourselves in the realm of form and forming, and the second week we deepened our experience of color through watercolor painting exercises. Each day concluded with a gathering of questions that were alive in the group, and then a communal cleaning of the Institute.

The course facilitators, in addition to Jon, Henrike, and Craig, included John Gouldthorpe, who studies the relationship between perception, conception, imagination, and identity. All the facilitators commented on the high degree of commitment, openness, and enthusiasm the participants showed in all the activities. At the end of the course, participants were asked to reflect on the two weeks. One question was, “What has changed for you?” Here are some responses:

This course opened a door for me on how to see this world. I was wondering how I lived these years without noticing so many amazing phenomena. This course also refreshed me and inspired me for my teaching.

My understanding about nature and science has changed. The approach to nature that I had before was far from nature itself.

Consciously discovering the playfulness of nature/life and realizing how much is overlooked when I am not acting/engaging as part of the life process around me. Now I am not taking things for granted and saying “oh yes, I know that field.” Instead I say “What can be revealed today? What processes are here?” I feel more sensitive to that which comes toward me, a new interest in the world and my participation in/with/ among it.

Due to our positive experience of this first intensive, and the fact that more people applied than we could accept, we have decided to offer a new class in 2019 that will start with a first intensive from June 24 to July 6. For more information, please see our website.

At Home and Abroad

- In April, ten students from the first-year class at the Alkion Center for Adult Education, which is an initiative of our neighbor, the Hawthorne Valley Association, came to The Nature Institute for three Saturday afternoons. Henrike worked with them on a training of thinking through projective geometry, while Craig dealt with plants and plant metamorphosis.
- At The Nature Institute this past June, Craig and Henrike led a group of twelve participants — many of them teachers — in a week-long intensive in sustainability education called “Let the Phenomena Speak!” During this time the group immersed itself in the natural world and explored questions around how to deepen their own perceptive capacities and help to guide others along this path.
- This August, Henrike led two mornings of professional development work with the faculty and staff at Green Meadow Waldorf School in Chestnut Ridge, New York. They focused on the challenges and potentials of science teaching in the middle school: igniting interest in the natural world; opening and closing windows of understanding; the effects of media consumption; and where a successful phenomenological science can lead.
- In September Craig taught for one week in the Masters in Holistic Science Program at Schumacher College in England. He introduced the students to Goethean methodology and focused on the study of plants.
- On September 21, The Nature Institute celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its founding in 1998 with an evening talk and day-long workshop. Craig's talk was on



Studying examples of leaf metamorphosis during the June sustainability education intensive.

“Where Does an Animal End? The American Bison” preceded by an introduction from Henrike.

- Craig went to Middlebury College in Vermont this October to talk to students in an innovative course focused on “perennial thinking,” taught by Middlebury instructors Marc Lapin, Nadine Barnicle, and William Vitek. Their course is exploring how to transcend the mind-set of agricultural monoculture and extend the research and vision of polyculture to other domains of human activity. As the course description explains, this involves “an emerging story of thinking more like a prairie than a plow.” So it’s fitting that Craig’s book, *Thinking Like a Plant*, is a text for the class. In his talk Craig spoke about the phenomena-based approach to understanding plants and the relevance of that understanding for enlivening the qualities of our human thinking.

Still Ahead

- This November Craig and Henrike will travel to Brazil, where they have been asked once again to offer a course on “Seeing Nature Whole — Foundations of Goethean Science.” Hosted by the Associação Sagres, a center for adult education in the city of Florianópolis, the program includes two two-week modules, one in November, 2018, and one in November, 2019.
- In December Craig will participate in a four-day conference in Kassel, Germany, for Waldorf high school students. It

will offer engaged students the possibility of dealing with important current issues in the sciences and humanities. Craig will give four keynote talks on contextual approaches to understanding life. He will also co-teach a course on evolution for those students with a special interest in biology.

- Information about our 2019 Winter Course is now available. We will also begin a new Foundation Course in 2019. See announcements on the back cover.

Publications and Resources

Our first podcast. Last year we shared a number of Craig’s talks as videos on our website’s “Other Media” page. Now we’ve added our first podcast — a recording of a talk that Craig gave this spring entitled “Cultivating the Roots of Earth Stewardship.” Speaking with an audience consisting mostly of educators, Craig took up the question, “How can we help our children grow up to become caring and responsible stewards of the earth?” You can listen to it online at <http://natureinstitute.org/media>.

In process: A new book from our *Biology Worthy of Life* project. Steve is working on a new book tentatively called *Whole Organisms and Their Evolutionary Intentions*. It represents the culmination of his efforts to date in our *Biology Worthy of Life* initiative. An introductory chapter providing some glimpses into the wonders of life is a feature article in this issue of *In Context*. Steve has also posted an article on our website summarizing some of the themes he will be exploring. While his perspective departs radically from conventional thinking, he suggests that it might also be considered mere common sense. Stay tuned for other individual chapters, which will appear on our website as they are written.

And praise for a previous book. Steve found himself in good company recently, sharing favorable recognition from the journal *Plough Quarterly*. In its Winter 2018 issue, which focused on “Staying Human” in a technological world, the quarterly recommended five books that its editors consider of “enduring” value for understanding technology. The five included Mathew Crawford’s *Shop Craft as Soul Craft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, C.S. Lewis’ *The Abolition of Man*, Neil Postman’s *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, and Steve’s 2007 book, *Devices of the Soul: Battling for Our Selves in the Age of Machines*.

Celebrating Two Decades

In 1998, on Sept 20, The Nature Institute's founding celebration took place in our community. Craig Holdrege, Steve Talbott, and Henrike Holdrege, backed by a Board of Directors, an Advisory Board, and the office assistance of Penelope Lord, started on a journey. The journey's destination was, and continues to be, the practice of Goethean science in North America through research, publications, and adult education offerings.

Today, twenty years later, Craig, Steve, and Henrike continue their collaborative efforts, and the work is supported by an able staff — currently Linda Bolluyt, Colleen Cordes, Seth Jordan, and Veronica Madey. We have had colleagues who joined the work at the Institute for a period of time, and more colleagues located throughout the world who bring the same impulse to life in their own work.

The work has intensified and developed. We at The Nature Institute have learned and continue to learn, as do the participants in our courses and workshops, and also our readers (so we hope!).

At this point we want to say “Thank you.” We are grateful for the widespread community of people who recognize, value, and support our work. We are grateful that the Institute's work finds an echo in the work of many others.

Looking back, we can say that our journey has brought us to places near and far, and that the work is fruitful and necessary — even more so today than twenty years ago.

At the founding celebration in 1998, I cited the philosopher Friedrich Hegel: “Thinking inflicts the wound, but also heals it.” The wound — modern civilization's estrangement from the natural world and its riches and teachings — is inflicted by modern abstract, intellectual, and purely materialistic thought. We at The Nature Institute hope to continue working toward healing the wound. *HH*



As part of the celebration of The Nature Institute's twentieth anniversary on September 21, 2018, Craig gave a talk on the American bison. Over seventy people attended the festive evening, which was framed by music improvisations by Peter Alexanian.