

Wow, I'm having a really hard time figuring out what to say about naturalness -- this is my third or fourth try. Co-dependent arising is such a tidy, well-defined term with very few correlates in common-use English language, whereas naturalness has so many connotations -- cultural, personal, context-specific (romantic literature, science, food labeling, environmentalism) -- I'm feeling flummoxed by all the things that could be said, and all the corrections and clarifications that could be layered on top of that. I don't want to say I love trees, and have that mean I hate Vegas or something like that.

Luckily, Eliza has posted a very expressive and lovely piece on naturalness as a starting point (http://ways-of-knowing.wikis.org/wiki/6Writings%2f%2fEssays/Thoughts_on_Naturalness). I'm in an analytical mood, and the list that follows won't do justice to what she's written, but it'll help me sort my thoughts so here goes...

*) Naturalness as directness/authenticity: The teachers love to remind students that it's more important to investigate directly, rather than cling to a notion of teachings that "should be realized" or, more broadly, any notion of right and wrong and how things should be. I have no quibble with this -- just a note that words like no effort can make it sound like nothing happens, but actually it's a very dynamic and activated situation -- vivid.

*) Acknowledging our connection to nature as a way of including and respecting body and world in our experience of self / lived presence / mind: Weirdly, I'm getting stuck on this point in particular -- it was the focus of all previous attempts. There was a blurb in there about how the use of the eyes connects to the quality of mind, for example, or how the movement of a human body can be the direct expression of the surrounding space of trees and sky, or how the presence of a river outside the window can make available a sense of no contention, no movement in movement, the unborn. But somehow, with each attempt, it sounded like I was trying to make a distinction between natural and man-made environments (not what I meant to say!). I also didn't mean to imply that this more inclusive sense of self was the same as the ground of being. Help! Maybe Eliza can provide some clarification?

(A possible angle: On Sunday, Eliza described a "genetic" shyness, and how openness/sunyata helped to make this a much lighter burden, a less coercive feature of her life. It could be said that this shyness was natural (at least we Westerners recognize genetics as a part of the natural order of things), but the way she described it, dropping or releasing that shyness was also quite natural. It's probably unfair to ask for a comparison of the two kinds of natural, but I wonder if Eliza would like to add anything. For example, one feature that seems common to both kinds of "naturalness" is a recognition that it's not "your" doing or your fault, but that in both the cause of shyness and the release of it, a larger dynamic is in play.)

*) [more in a bit!]