



RELIGIOUS NATURALIST ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

created by religious naturalists for religious naturalists

September 2023

In This Issue

News and Events:

- RNUU Discussion Group
- United Nations International Day of Peace
- September Equinox

Music of the

Month: Homecoming by Vienna Teng

Monthly Article: In-person and Artificial Intelligence by Todd Macalister

Forum Topic of the Month:

Can Natural Accounting Save the Planet?

Video of the Month: Natural Accounting

Nature Image of the Month:

The Hyrax's Unexpected Relatives

Book of the Month: A Wild and Sacred Call

RN Links: Members' Projects and Contributions

News and Events

Religious Naturalist Unitarian Universalist Discussion Group--

(Fourth Thursday of the month at 5:30 PM Central Time). Next meeting: September 28th, 5:30 CDT. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89422158312>

Are you a Religious Naturalist Unitarian Universalist (or RNUU adjacent) and looking for fellow travellers to explore this path? In our inaugural meeting this fall we will discuss the Rev. Alison Wohler's sermon, "Spiritual, and Yes, Religious" from the Religious Naturalist Association's website <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/>

[spiritual-and-yes-religious/](https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace). Join us for what we hope will be a lively and enriching conversation as we explore what it means to be on this path.

United Nations International Day of Peace
September 21

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace>

September Equinox
September 23, 06:50 UTC

<https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/everything-you-need-to-know-september-equinox/>



Taking
Nature to
Heart

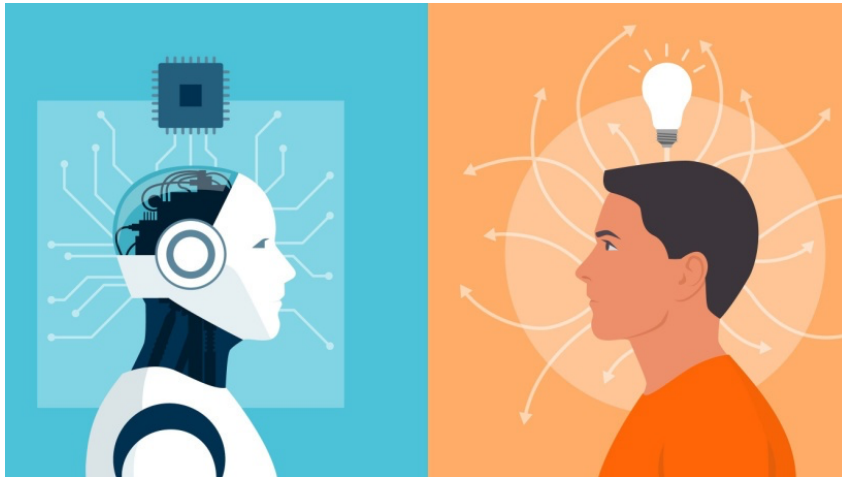


Article of the Month - September 2023

In-person and Artificial Intelligence by Todd Macalister

A recent RNA connection led to an interesting combination of in-person and artificial intelligence.

This started with music, where after learning that Vienna Teng was performing near Boston, a couple of us met for dinner before the first show. Then, a day later, on a Saturday afternoon, I attended a free climate action workshop that Vienna led (as she often does on tours). This was a small (10 person) group which, by design, made it easy for us all to talk with one another – to discuss what, if anything, we each were doing to try to respond to the climate challenge, or why we might not have been doing much.



Along with sharing thoughts about what individuals could do, one theme was to show the value of doing what we were then doing – in simply talking with people, in person and in small groups (or one-on-one), where asking what others think or feel or do, and listening (vs. trying to persuade) has been shown to be useful in prompting people to reduce defensive responses, and better consider views they might not have started with.

A related point, for me, grew from considering the phrase, an “act of faith,” as part of why (for personal actions related to climate and other large-scale concerns), even though we know that the impact of our personal acts will be very small, we may still feel that these are worth doing because they fit with what we value and believe. This view of “faith,” while simple, may be enough. But I started to wonder about what more might be involved when viewing “faith” when applied to this topic. So, having recently started to explore a new tool for getting information or new perspectives, I typed the following question into ChatGTP.

“In what ways can personal actions, directed at contributing to reduction of climate change, be seen or described as ‘acts of faith’?”

The full response can be seen at <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ChatGPTQA.pdf>. But the gist was that, despite uncertainty (in what can be known, and what should be done, and how effective actions might be), a type of faith that might prompt personal action involves faith in several things, including:

trust in science as a way of knowing
(and, with this, accepting the consensus that human activities are causing global warming),

caring about future generations
(to a point of making sacrifices, today, to create a better world that will come after us), and

belief that, with collective efforts, and with knowledge and advocacy as tools, positive change can

Article of the Month (continued)

occur.

None of these points were surprising. But none, also, had initially come to mind. And, after seeing these types of specific examples in the ChatGPT response, my sense of this type of faith shifted from vague and general to something more multi-faceted and clear.

These two experiences lifted up benefits in the very old and the very new, where:

in-person conversations include facial expressions, feelings, and tone of voice that can enhance understanding and trust, and

AI tools (where we receive messages from machines) do have a type of “intelligence” that can help us see things that we might not otherwise have considered.

They also prompted thoughts about RNA, as part of a middle ground; where,

while most of our communications occur online, these have often given a start for in-person connection, and

as information is provided online, it includes pieces that range from introductory/brief to state-of-the art/in-depth, with links that encourage active exploration.

Fascinating world - with old and new social settings and tools, and a wish to try to gain the best from both.

Todd Macalister

Song of the Month

As thoughts that prompted this article started with music, it can also end with music, where clicking [this link](#) (and “Skip Ad”) will play a recorded version of “**Homecoming**”, which Vienna Teng played for the small group at the end of

Forum Topic of the Month Impressions of ChatGPT

<https://religious-naturalist-association.org/forums/topic/using-chatgtp/>

Nature Image of the Month The Hyrax’s Unexpected Relatives

The hyrax or “dassie” is the most interesting animal in the world. The hyrax looks like a cross between a **rabbit** and a **guinea pig** and looks like it should be either a lagomorph or a rodent. Found in East and Southern **Africa** and the Middle **East**, it is neither. Its closest relatives are the **elephant** and, amazingly, the **manatee**. It even grows tusks that keep growing throughout its life (average 9-14 years), and its cheek teeth are like those of a **rhinoceros**.



Video of the Month Natural Accounting



This video breaks down the concept of natural capital accounting, showing how accounting for nature can help reveal many of its hidden values.

Natural capital accounting is a core part of the European Commission's Green Deal, the new EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykzFmT4rhM>

Can natural accounting save the planet?

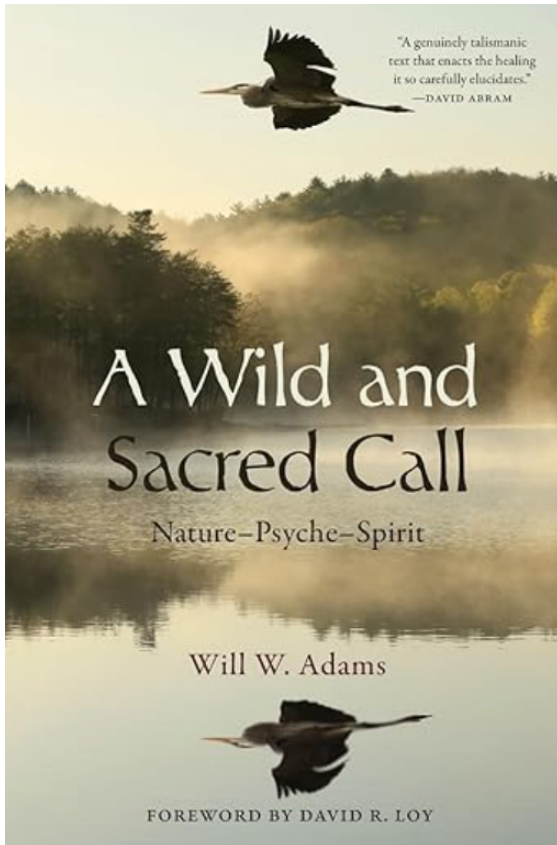
<https://religious-naturalist-association.org/forums/topic/can-natural-accounting-save-the-planet/>

Book of the Month

A Wild and Sacred Call by Will W. Adams

An ecopsychological, ecospiritual exploration of humankind's relationship with the rest of nature.

[View on Amazon](#)



RN Links

Members Contributions: Our members contribute sermons, articles, videos, music and other material related to the Religious Naturalist orientation. Go to <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/members-contributions/> to check them out. Please consider contributing your own material. There is a link on the page for submitting items.

Members' Projects

The RNA website has a section called [Members' Projects](#). This page provides links to projects of RNA members. If you have a project related to RN that you would like included on this webpage please email a description to projects@religious-naturalist-association.org.

RNA Website

Visit the Religious Naturalist Association website <https://religious-naturalist-association.org>



Taking
Nature to
Heart