

Welcome to _____, the new podcast from the Jesus College Intellectual Forum. I'm so excited for you to join me, Noah, as we unpack and explore the human-nature relationship.

In the previous episode, I spoke to Philip Lymbery, Global CEO of the charity Compassion in World Farming. We spoke about the unsustainability of intensive factory farming and agriculture and recognised it as a symptom of our society's wider disconnect with nature. I finished by reflecting upon the tension between recognising ourselves as selfish consumers or as more interconnected citizens within our societies and the wider web of life.

This is a theme I continue to explore in this, the final episode of the podcast. I spoke with Dr Sam Gandy, a self-described nature lover and academic who is now working in the field of nature recovery. He also works as an independent researcher, particularly on nature connectedness and often on the capacity of psychedelic substances to affect people's relationship with nature.

And so I start by asking Sam, what is nature connectedness? Are there any metrics to measure it?

Dr Sam Gandy: So there are many different metrics and scales for assessing people's psychological relationship with nature, which is essentially what nature connectedness or nature relatedness is. It's a measure of someone's subjective and personal relationship with nature. In particular, it's hinging on the awareness an individual has of their interrelatedness with nature, their experiential sense of oneness with nature and being part of a wider interconnected web that makes up the natural world. But it also encompasses other things as well as that sense of oneness and being part of something bigger. It encompasses the value you place on having contact with nature. It also links to what we would term pro-nature conservation attitudes, awareness, behaviours. So actions or awareness people have or undertake that are in some way on nature's behalf.

Noah Rouse: So it's so much more than simply being in nature.

Dr Gandy: Yeah, very much so. It's an important thing to emphasize actually, because it gets sometimes lumped with nature contact or nature immersion, you know, which is kind of going out into nature and, you know, that's great obviously. There's a lot of research to demonstrate that that has a variety of positive effects on physical and mental health.

But nature connectedness is something else. It's not that afterglow you might feel from having had a nice walk in the woods. It's something deeper and more sustained than that. And it's totally possible to be outside in nature and not be connecting to it in any way. For instance, passive superficial time in nature or contact with nature is not associated with

Noah: We've talked in previous episodes about this idea of the sublime, which sounds very similar to what you're saying there, but I really want to just hammer home that this idea of nature connectedness is definitely felt on top of the mountains, but it's something which one brings with oneself. And obviously making natural spaces accessible to people in different areas is quite problematic in some cases, but it's not just the woods and the trees and the fields. It's maybe this is my house plant, or this is the tree near me, or this even is the weeds or the birds in the sky.

Dr Gandy: Oh yeah, totally. It's an interesting point regarding urban environments and cities, which obviously tend to contain less nature. It doesn't mean you can't get great nature in cities, in parks and other areas within cities. For instance, [in Berlin](#), loads of the parks are teeming with nightingales at certain times of the year, a bird that has become very rare here in the UK.

That's part of the relationship one has with nature, if they're quite high in nature connectedness, is it's the appreciation for forms of life that don't directly materially benefit you in any way. You appreciate their existence for their existence's own sake, without sort of needing anything from it. You can just appreciate the sense of wonder or awe or appreciation of the aesthetics of something. So people who rate higher in nature connectedness are probably going to be more plugged in and aware of what plants and other animals are around them in an urban environment. Yeah, good point you make in the sense that you take your nature connectedness with you wherever you go, you know. So even if you're somewhere that maybe contains less nature, you're still more likely, if you're already quite nature connected, to probably pick up on it and be aware of it. Because that's the core foundation, really, of nature connectedness, is awareness. It's where you're choosing to put your awareness and your attention.

That really is the first foundational stone of nature connectedness, because it's quite a complex and multi-dimensional construct, if you will. It's aspects of personality, of cognition, of emotions, of direct experience, all meld together to form your relationship with or connection to nature.

Noah: So when we talk about nature connectedness, it's very easy to leap onto words like awe or the sublime or the wondrous stuff. And I think there's a whole other conversation to be had about this, about immediately wanting to qualify and quantify the benefits of something, the benefits of this connectedness, as if it's some sort of material relationship,

And so immaterial things or immaterial aspects of our being, of our humanity, have, I feel, somewhat been forgotten about and kind of left in the dust. And that's part of the reason we've got a global mental health crisis right now, is because we've kind of forgotten or overlooked the immaterial aspects of our being. Among them is connectedness, not just to nature, but connectedness more broadly, connectedness to self, connectedness to others, connectedness to world, nature, universe. But what's quite interesting about nature-connectedness is that it has a really strong association with well-being, and in fact both forms of well-being. So particularly one form of well-being called eudaimonic well-being, and this form of well-being encompasses finding meaning in life, living a meaningful life, self-actualization, vitality.

There are a number of studies that show this really strong relationship between nature connectedness and this form of well-being. In fact, one study looked at a variety of different aspects of people's kind of relationships with nature or contact with nature. So time spent in green spaces, proximity, living next to green spaces, nature documentary viewing, nature connectedness obviously, and then it looked at other things like socio-demographic factors as well. And what was interesting in this study is that it found an association, so that nature connectedness had an association with eudaimonic well-being that was four times stronger than socio-economic status, which is usually a fairly reliable predictor of various well-being metrics. But nature-connectedness left that in the dust.

Separate research looked at the association with nature-connectedness and hedonic well-being. So hedonic well-

all about happiness, and that was seen as an alternative to virtue theory and ethics. And yet here we are saying that there's something which covers everything, covers like, and both sides of the equation. I think it's really interesting.

And just on that holistic covering of everything which nature connectedness does achieve, if I'm right it's quite powerful community values, if that's what you want to call them, or connection with other people and more social welfare on the other side, is that correct?

Dr Gandy: I

I think the first Covid lockdown was particularly lovely weather at the time, so it was extra nice to get outside. So it was nice because usually I'm quite happy not to see people when I'm out in nature, but then it was like nice to actually see people getting out into it.

And I think there is generally, Covid aside, even before Covid hit, there's been a growth of interest and awareness in so-called green prescriptions and the potential value of having contact with nature for mental health. So I think the kind of medical establishment is increasingly aware of its importance. And I think there's a general growth of interest and awareness in the public. I mean it's interesting, my mum is big time nature nut as well, she really loves her birds, she's a keen bird watcher. But she said when she was young, nature was very much kind of this fringe, geeky, niche topic. And she's amazed at how much of a

as well. And it seems to me that this must be partly built on a foundation of nature connectedness, because at its core, that's the kind of awareness that nature connectedness gives rise to, is being part of a larger interconnected whole, and the importance of that to health and well-being.

But in terms of like integrating it more societally, so I've read an interesting book recently by Professor Miles Richardson, who heads the Nature Connectedness Research Group at the University of Derby. He is like a big kahuna in the field.

Noah: Just to jump in there, his blog is great, if anyone is interested.

Dr Gandy: Yes, he does have a good blog that breaks down and makes more accessible some of the published literature and papers and stuff. And what I found interesting in his recent book, because it's something that I've also thought about, and it was interesting to see someone else give it some thought. 09041565(t)690TJETQ.000009120622e2eW'n issa trecc it benl'ven it

So, if anything, it's made me more wanting to keep that as part of my life moving forward.
So, I think when I kind of started to find out more about nature-connectedness, it really

