

## Frog Pond Philosophy: Essays on the Relationship Between Humans and Nature

By Strachan Donnelley. 2018. University Press of Kentucky. 248 pages, 38.17 CAD, Paper.

If you like baseball, *Frog Pond Philosophy* will intrigue you. If you like hunting and fishing, particularly fly fishing, *Frog Pond Philosophy* will appeal to you. If you like thinking about the natural world and how we relate to it, *Frog Pond Philosophy* will interest you.

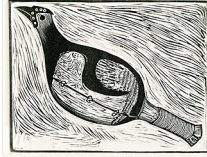
If you like music, sitting by the water in springtime, and listening to frog song, *Frog Pond Philosophy* will be certain to charm you—particularly the essay that inspires the title of the book. It was one of my favourite pieces in this collection of writings by the late Strachan Donnelley (1942–2008), an environmental philosopher and bioethicist who focussed on studying the intricacies of human-nature relations.

Donnelley was also the founder and first president of the Center for Humans and Nature (<https://www.humansandnature.org>), an initiative which portrays itself as exploring and promoting human responsibilities in relation to nature and the whole community of life. The Center's website describes Donnelley as rejecting reductionist, silo thinking, and bringing together ideas from many corners, including biology, ecology, economics, engineering, poetry, the arts, and philosophy. This breadth of perspectives is reflected in the subject matter of *Frog Pond Philosophy* essays, which span over four decades of work, and range from hard-core philosophical interpretations to reminiscences on personal encounters and outdoor experiences.

No wonder it took the editors—daughter Ceara Donnelley and colleague Bruce Jennings—so many years to publish the book. It is clearly a labour of love and respect. As Ceara explains in the Editor's Afterword, her father spent the final months of his life re-reading, mulling over, and assembling the manuscript from new and previously published pieces. Shaping the final collection was obviously a task that could not be hurried.

The editors organized the essays into four sections. The first two are introductory and more generally reflective; the last two are more intensely

### FROG POND PHILOSOPHY



Essays on the  
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STRACHAN DONNELLEY  
Edited by Ceara Donnelley and Bruce Jennings  
Foreword by Frederick C. Bechertsen

philosophical. The pieces vary in length, many of them short.

The content of the first two sections, aptly named Two Preludes and A Guide for the Naturally Perplexed, was the most compelling, and the essays were easy to read and comprehend. *Frog Pond Philosophy* was my favourite essay—partly because I love frog song and partly because the content lines were simple. The image of *Homo sapiens* singing alongside innumerable other organisms in a great planetary frog pond adds to the essay's appeal, along with the closing paragraph of the essay where Donnelley calls for insight from “bullfrog philosophers” in the “urgent business” of saving “our earthly frog pond” (p. 35). In the essay Bottom Lines and the Earth's Future, he describes the similarly urgent business of replacing the prevailing economic bottom line with an ecological “nature alive” (p. 51) bottom line—another important message in the current global context of biodiversity loss and climate instability.

The intensely philosophical essays in the final two sections of the book delve into diverse philosophical traditions. Connelly revisits them from different angles with the purpose, in the words of Jennings, of “thinking ‘humans’ and ‘nature’ together” (p. 219) and overcoming the separation of “human being” from “the rest of natural being” (p. 220) encouraged by dominant modern philosophical and scientific theory. I confess that I was less motivated to read those pieces thoroughly. I was easily discouraged from wading through them in detail because of their denseness and complexity. But you might not be.

The baseball and fly-fishing analogies introduced early in the book did not, unfortunately, resonate with me. They had, in fact, the opposite effect of alienation, and the feeling did not dissipate easily. But that might not happen to you.

I was pleased to learn that proceeds from the sale of *Frog Pond Philosophy* are being donated by the University Press of Kentucky to the Center for Humans and Nature. That fact, along with the essays in the first two sections of the book, and the second if you are so inclined, would make it worth the purchase.

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