

## Bookology – Opinion and Reflection

### Plants As Persons: A Philosophical Botany by Matthew Hall

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#### Plants as Persons

A PHILOSOPHICAL BOTANY



MATTHEW HALL

*“A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.  
The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the  
eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the  
way” –*

**William Blake**

In this intriguing book, **Matthew Hall**, influenced by his professor back in the undergraduate years as a plant scientist, made him think about the wider social and ethical implications of plant intelligence, which eventually, with a lot of effort, wrote this book according to him *“as my response to the thought-provoking ideas”*. From a scientific point of view, plants underpin the primary productivity of agricultural, ecological and human ecosystems through their ability to produce primary biomass by photosynthesis.

Matthew went further incorporating Eastern, Western, Pagan, and Indigenous thought for attitudes toward plants, challenging the reader to reconsider moral aspects of plants, and arguing about their individuality and *other-than-human* personality, as he mentioned along with this thrilling elegant concept. With his ability to captivate plant lovers, he reinforces the idea that plants possess many of the capacities of sentience and mentality traditionally denied by a pure sense of hierarchy on behalf of humans, disfavoring plants role in the natural world as mere immobile beings. Matter of fact, this concept was well-accepted during Ancient Greece by **Aristotle** where he identifies plants as simple as that.

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According to Matthew, *“this dogmatic acceptance of plant passivity and insentience can also be detected in the development of Enlightenment philosophies, which are pinpointed by environmental philosophers as being at the heart of destructive Western attitudes toward nature”*, clarifying indeed plants position in the ancient world.

This book sheds light on plants intelligence with an astute viewpoint leaving a bold message that it is a term *“fraught with difficulties in the definition”*, although *“as species, we are more intelligent than other animals, it is unlikely that intelligence as a biological property originated only with Homo sapiens”*, mentioned by professor **Anthony Trewavas** on his paper called *“Aspects of Plant Intelligence”*.

Apart from this book stance about complicated subjects as plants intelligence, discussions among population ecologists as to whether plants should be regarded as individuals or not, are still floating up in the air. Along his book, Matthew touches important points to reconsider plants and how normal people could not just improve their ability to identify it as important beings but also to comply with them as important to our biosphere, which a dialogue involving plants establishing connections between species communication is always viable.

Moreover, according to Matthew, these connections allow the sprouting of life, both for the self and for. Even more challenging for most readers, is the fact Matthew brings religion and tribal ancestry into the game and their vision about plants presence and importance of their survival. He points out that with plant kinship and recognising its position in the natural world and restoration can allow nature to engage in its autonomous restitution. As he well said: *“Increasing the area of plant habitat that is unavailable for transformation to human ends will be a practical step toward maintaining biodiversity and mitigating climate change”*.

Furthermore, his view towards a better reality in the natural world is due to a shared ancestry that creates a reciprocal responsibility with the other creatures at the basis of a specific relationship within humans and plants.

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Nonetheless, his last words open a new tunnel vision towards a reality of heterarchy of related beings. He quotes: *“The seed of an understanding that plants are active, self-directed, even intelligent beings can be sown by science... working closely with individual plant persons also has the potential to shift the view of nature as an organic, homogenized whole-which by blanking individual personalities contributes to the backgrounding of nature”*.