I first met John in Warsaw, Poland where we attended an environmental conference hosted by the Polish Senate. We met again at the biannual conferences of the International Society for Universal Dialogue; a society dedicated to philosophical dialogue across differing cultural traditions. John was later elected President of that organization. His impact was strong and lasting. His love for constructive political dialogue was matched only by his love and commitment to Green politics. I got to know John better when he visited my university to lecture on the positive role of third parties. We found time to drive across the last great stand of never-plowed Tallgrass Prairie in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Plenty of time to talk about politics, ecology, and dialogue.

I was honored when John asked me to review and comment on his manuscript, subsequently published in 2017 as *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*. Like many timely books *Ecological Politics* reminds us of what we already know while shaping a new vision of how to better make sense of what we already know. John argues that “big action” is needed to change the current direction and destiny of our species and planet. This sort of “big action” requires an inclusive and communal deliberation for the common good, i.e., politics. John argues that the promise of politics continues to fall into cynicism and hopelessness by ever-more jaded sections of the population. Rather than a noble and shared pursuit of the common good, politics has become a tragic source of conflict.

John reminds us of the cultural and ecological consequences of this now degraded form of politics—a politics that glorifies and magnifies our individuality, our uniqueness, and our separateness at the cost of concealing our communal nature, our sameness, and our togetherness. The glorification of competition, conflict, struggle, winner take all economics, and radical individualism (all underwritten by what John calls “the ontologies of separation”) too often appear as virtues rather than the social pathologies they are. Our degraded political world increasingly matches our degraded ecological world as the state of each is continually “normalized” in rhetoric and practice.

The “big action” needed to change the direction and destiny of our species requires an overcoming of this tragedy of politics. Serious reflection on the great issues of our times and our seeming inabilities to constructively deal with these issues leads many to pessimism and hopelessness. Ubiquitous pollution, mass extinction, rising seas, climate disaster, growing economic inequality, and
pernicious forms of ethnic and exclusionary nationalism too often lead to despair and the withdrawal from public life.

Unlike some others, John expresses no sense of gloom or despair but rather a confident optimism that a new and transformational politics can be cultivated as an instrument of thriving and healing. John gave us reason to believe that a politics built on community, care, cooperation, and a shared sense that we are all in it together is still within our reach. John argued that this radical possibility (of a transformational politics) arises from an ecological way of looking at the world. He argued that an ecological way of seeing the world has the power to teach us that our constant pursuit of self-interest depends on a world already structured by shared, interrelated, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

An ecological way of looking at the world teaches us that our pursuit of private self-interest it is only possible (and sustainable) when our shared interests, the common good of all, is recognized, respected, and cultivated. An ecological way of looking at the world has the power to shape and inspire a politics rooted in meaningful and constructive dialogue; a form of politics desperately needed to overcome the Hobbesian roots of our current ecological, cultural, and political condition.

There is little doubt that the world is a better place because of John Rensenbrink and that he will be remembered, admired, and respected for all the right reasons.

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**JOHN RENSENBRINK, THE MAN I KNEW**
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John Rensenbrink was one of the early, founding members of the Society for Universal Dialogue who exemplified its humanistic spirit and ideals in the way he thought and lived: enlightenment, peace, dialogue, justice, freedom, cooperation, and especially respect for the natural environment. During my active years in the Society, I noticed that John was not physically visible much during the social and formal activities of the Society, but he was an active, productive, caring, and loyal presence in its work. I frequently, and whenever I could, read his contributions to *Dialogue and Universalism*.

In a long conversation I had with him in the early days of the Society, he told me that he retired early as a professor of philosophy and decided to devote the