

## **Article 4 - We Are All Special**

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Franciscans view all as equal brothers and sisters, but if we stopped there, we might fall into the error of seeing all as the same because all are equal, overlooking the importance and sacredness of the individual. Franciscan thinking emphasizes this uniqueness and sacredness and prevents us from falling into either the attitude that "I am just another one of us" or that "she, he or it is just another one of them."

In the Franciscan view, each person and each creature, animate or inanimate, has a unique and unrepeatable existence. Each existence is a unique reflection of the Creator, who can never be fully reflected in creatures, no matter how many and diverse they may be. Each has what Duns Scotus calls "haecceitas" or "thisness." Each creature is a "this" and there is no other "this." Each of us is not merely "not the other," but "this," the only one. Every creature, animate or inanimate – even a leaf or a blade of grass, every whoever or whatever is a "this." As a unique existence each of us has our own unique right to existence. No other person, cat, dog or rock has the same existence as "this;" there has never been another one of "this," or is there now, or will there ever be.

This perspective may seem very abstract, like some cloudy head trip or word play; however, if we really embrace this point of view, we will approach everyone/thing in a different way – as due respect and deference because of its special existence. One day while I was studying this concept and reflecting upon it, I saw a little spider run across the altar in front of me. My thumb went into an automatic "crush it" response, pausing for a moment just above it. At that moment, I recognized its beauty and uniqueness and let it continue on its way. We may too readily forget each creature's unique existence and the respect for which that calls.

As a society, we should take the unique existence of each person into account as we determine the goals and directions of social and public policy. Individuals cannot lightly be eliminated or dismissed as merely a member of a group; nor can individuals rightfully be disregarded in promoting some social goal or good. Social good does not have some higher right over individual good. Social Justice must never lose sight of the individual's needs, rights, or existence. "Thisness" holds an important place in our criteria for Social Justice.

Considering the "thisness" of all creatures will also affect how we approach the whole issue of the "integrity of creation." All creatures have their "thisness" and, therefore, a right to existence that needs to be respected and preserved.

