

# *Ecopsychology and the Environmental Revolution*

*An Environmental Foreword*

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Environmentalists sometimes despair at the magnitude of the task their movement has taken on. When we consider all that remains to be done to bring a sustainable way of life to our global society, we can easily forget how much has already been accomplished. No more than a generation ago, most Americans had no idea what global warming was, or the ozone layer, or acid rain. The distinction between renewable and nonrenewable resources was all but unknown. Concepts like "endangered species," "recycling," and "carrying capacity" were known only to a handful of environmental specialists; they did not exist in the public vocabulary. No such thing as an "environmental impact statement" existed.

We have the hard work and political savvy of environmentalists to thank for overcoming this condition of terminal ecological illiteracy. Over the past forty years, the environmental movement has succeeded in turning the health of the planet into a major political issue in every industrial society. When it comes to raising the collective consciousness about the liabilities of industrial "progress," we have done a remarkably good job of sounding the alarm. The number of dangers and disasters we have identified is daunting to say the least; in many ways, the dimensions of the problem appear overwhelming.

It is easy to see how this has come about. The environmental move-

ment has grown to become the largest, most densely organized political cause in human history. From lofty government agencies to grass-roots citizens' groups, it has engaged people at every social level. Everybody seems to be protecting some piece, big or little, of the biosphere—from the worldwide tropical rainforests down to the local streams passing through our communities. Everything we turn our hand to becomes infused with an impassioned sense of urgency. Each group that takes up the cause understandably addresses its issue as *the* issue, the problem that needs to be solved *first*. One of the weaknesses of the environmental movement is that few groups can stand back at a sufficient distance to see the big picture and establish priorities.

Every political movement has its psychological dimension. Persuading people to alter their behavior always involves probing motivations and debating values; political activism begins with asking what makes people tick. What do they want and fear and care about? How do we get and hold their attention? How much can people take—and in what order of priority? Have we overloaded them with anxiety or guilt? How do we make credible the threats we perceive? Movements that fail to think carefully about this may fail to persuade.

The environmental movement is no exception. Once upon a time, environmentalists seemed to be idealists who were fighting on the side of the angels—at least in the eyes of the general public, if not the corporate and governing establishment. Now antienvironmentalists seek to undermine the credibility of the environmental cause, and some politicians show signs of taking them seriously.

Ecopsychologists like those you will find in this book believe it is time for the environmental movement to file what Theodore Roszak has called a “*psychological impact statement*.” In practical political terms that means asking: *are we being effective?* Most obviously, we need to ask that question with respect to our impact upon the public, whose hearts and minds we want to win over. The stakes are high and time is short.

From the global vantage point, we see a world economy that is unsustainable, one that is slowly destroying its underpinnings. We live on a planet that is deteriorating ecologically and inhabited by people who are psychologically troubled.

We know that we cannot continue to deforest the planet at the current rate without eventually getting into trouble. Similarly we cannot con-

tinue to lose topsoil far faster than natural soil formation without eventually facing impoverishment. If we continue to lose plant and animal species at the rate of the past few decades, we face eventual ecosystem collapse. We also know that we cannot continue to pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere without eventually producing economically disruptive climate change. Nor can we continue to add ninety million people to the world each year without eventually destroying the natural systems and resources on which we depend for sustenance.

What we are now looking at is nothing less than an environmental revolution, an economic and social transformation that ranks with the agricultural and industrial revolutions. Like the agricultural revolution, the environmental revolution will dramatically alter population trends. Whereas the former set the stage for enormous increases in human numbers, this revolution will succeed only if it stabilizes population size, reestablishing a balance between people and nature. In contrast to the industrial revolution, which was based on a shift to fossil fuels, this new transformation will be based on a shift away from them.

The two earlier revolutions were driven by technological advances—the first by the discovery of farming and the second by the invention of the steam engine, which converted the energy in coal into mechanical power. The environmental revolution, while it will obviously use new technologies, will be driven primarily by the restructuring of the global economy so that this economy does not destroy its natural support systems.

The pace of the environmental revolution will be faster than that of its predecessors. The agricultural revolution began some ten thousand years ago, and the industrial revolution has been under way for two centuries. But if the environmental revolution is to succeed, it must be compressed into a few decades.

Ecopsychology addresses the problem of effective communication with the general public that will have to meet the demands of the environmental revolution. However, the issues it raises amount to more than a matter of public relations and personal therapy. There is an underlying philosophical issue. It has to do with our understanding of human nature—or, if you will, the nature of the soul. Psychology is, after all, the study of the soul in all its complexity and contradiction. It is the study of what people love and hate and fear and need. At some point,

both psychologists and environmentalists need to decide what they believe our human connection is with the planet our species has so endangered.

*Do we believe people want to do the right environmental thing?* Do we believe people *care* about the future of the living planet? Ecopsychologists believe there is an emotional bond between human beings and the natural environment out of which we evolve.

The major contribution ecopsychology promises to make to environmental politics is the identification of the irrational forces that tie people to their bad environmental habits. For example, some ecopsychologists believe that our consumption habits are connected to deep addictive attractions. Little wonder. The advertising industry is a contingent of talented "pushers" working to make us compulsive consumers. That is psychology working *against* environmental sanity. Ecopsychology seeks to redress that balance. It wants to know how to free people from the addictions of the shopping mall and to encourage values that serve the life of the planet rather than imperiling it.

At its most ambitious, ecopsychology seeks to redefine sanity within an environmental context. It contends that seeking to heal the soul without reference to the ecological system of which we are an integral part is a form of self-destructive blindness. Ecopsychologists are drawing upon the ecological sciences to reexamine the human psyche as an integral part of the web of nature. Having the support of so influential a profession would be a welcome gain for the environmental movement.

At the heart of the coming environmental revolution is a change in values, one that derives from a growing appreciation of our dependence on nature. Without it there is no hope. In simple terms, we cannot restore our own health, our sense of well-being, unless we restore the health of the planet. It is against this backdrop that we find the emerging new field of ecopsychology so exciting.

Ecopsychology brings together the sensitivity of therapists, the expertise of ecologists, and the ethical energy of environmental activists. Out of this rich mixture may arise a new, more effective, more philosophically grounded form of environmental politics.

## *A Psyche the Size of the Earth*

### *A Psychological Foreword*

JAMES HILLMAN

There is only one core issue for all psychology. *Where is the "me"?* Where does the "me" begin? Where does the "me" stop? Where does the "other" begin?

For most of its history, psychology took for granted an intentional subject: the biographical "me" that was the agent and the sufferer of all "doings." For most of its history, psychology located this "me" within human persons defined by their physical skin and their immediate behavior. The subject was simply "me in my body and in my relations with other subjects." The familiar term that covered this entire philosophical system was "ego," and what the ego registered were called "experiences."

Over the past twenty years all this has been scrutinized, dismantled, and even junked. Postmodernism has deconstructed continuity, self, intention, identity, centrality, gender, individuality. The integrity of memory for establishing biographical continuity has been challenged. The unity of the self has fallen before the onslaught of multiple personalities. Moments called "projective identification" can attach distant objects to the "me" so fiercely that I believe I cannot live without them; conversely, parts of even my personal physical body can become so dissociated that my fragmented body image regards them as autonomous and without sensory feeling, as if quite "other." How far away is the "other"? Is it Wholly Other and therefore like a "God," as Rudolf Otto believed? Or, is the "not-me" an inherently related other, a "Thou" in Martin Buber's

sense? If we can no longer be sure that we are who we remember we are, where then do we make the cut between "me" and "not-me"?

So long as we cannot ascertain where the "me" ends (is it with my skin? with my behavior? with my personal interfacing connections and their influences and traces?) how can we establish the limits of psychology? How do we today define the borders of this field—as we must, since the first task of psychology is to explore and give an account of subjectivity?

By "psychology" I mean what the word says: the study or order (*logos*) of the soul (*psyche*). This implies that all psychology is by definition a depth psychology, first because it assumes an inside intimacy to behavior (moods, reflections, fantasies, feelings, images, thoughts) and second, because the soul, ever since Heraclitus twenty-five hundred years ago, has been defined as immeasurably deep and unlocatable. I therefore see all psychologies as ultimately therapies by definition because of their involvement with soul.

A clear example from psychology's history may serve to show the arbitrariness of the cut between "me" and "not-me." French rationalist psychology following Descartes, Malebranche, and La Mettrie declared animals to have no consciousness, not even the sensation of pain. A radical cut separated them from humans. The cut gradually softened: Kant allowed animals to possess sensation but no reason. Darwin's work on the expression of emotion demonstrated deep similarities between humans and animals. The gap grew even narrower and more blurred with later theories of instinct and inborn release mechanisms that allowed animals limited reasoning power. Today more and more "human"-like attributes, some even superior to human consciousness, are being teased out of animals, so that the cut itself has come into question.

The question of establishing the limits to the psyche, and to psychology, is further complicated by the notion of the unconscious. We cannot accurately set borders to human identity since it trails off from the light of focused awareness into the shadows of dreams, spotty memories, intuitions, and spontaneous eruptions whose point of origin is indefinite. Since the "discovery of the unconscious," every sophisticated theory of personality has to admit that whatever I claim to be "me" has at least a portion of its roots beyond my agency and my awareness. These unconscious roots may be planted in territories far away from anything

I may call mine, belonging rather to what Jung called the "psychoid," partly material, partly psychic, a merging of psyche and matter. This psychoid source refers to the material substrate of life: like calcium, inorganic by category, but, like bones, animated by activity in living beings. From the material perspective the psychoid substrate has effects; from the psychological perspective these effects may be discussed as intentions. The pharmaceuticals, legal and illegal, we take to alter psychological conditions demonstrate the psychoid view of material intentionality, the "liveliness" of matter, to millions of ordinary citizens who would be hard-pressed to accept the idea as a theory. So, again, where does psyche stop and matter begin? For the pioneers of psychology as therapy, the deepest levels of the psyche merge with the biological body (Freud) and the physical stuff of the world (Jung).

I am reviewing these well-known basics of psychological theory to show that the human subject has all along been implicated in the wider world of nature. How could it be otherwise, since the human subject is composed of the same nature as the world? Yet psychological practice tends to bypass the consequences of such facts.

In *The Voice of the Earth*, an exploration of ecopsychology, Theodore Roszak does face these facts. He extends Jung's collective unconscious and Freud's id and draws the rational conclusion that what these terms imply is "the world." Adaptation of the deep self to the collective unconscious and to the id is simply adaptation to the natural world, organic and inorganic. Moreover, an individual's harmony with his or her "own deep self" requires not merely a journey to the interior but a harmonizing with the environmental world. The deepest self cannot be confined to "in here" because we can't be sure it is not also or even entirely "out there"! If we listen to Roszak, and to Freud and Jung, the most profoundly collective and unconscious self is the natural material world.

Since the cut between self and natural world is arbitrary, we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like—to the deep oceans and distant stars. But the cut is far less important than the recognition of uncertainty about making the cut at all. This uncertainty opens the mind to wonder again, allowing fresh considerations to enter the therapeutic equation. Perhaps working on my feelings is not more "subjective" than working on the neighborhood air quality. Perhaps killing weeds on my lawn with herbicides may be as repressive as what I am



doing with my childhood memories. Perhaps the abuses I have unconsciously suffered in my deep interior subjectivity pale in comparison with the abuses going around me every minute in my ecological surroundings, abuses that I myself commit or comply with. It may be easier to discover yourself a victim than admit yourself a perpetrator.

We do need to see, however, that the cut between me and world, arbitrary as it is, nonetheless has to be made. It is a pragmatic convention that establishes the borders of a field, in this case the field of psychology. The field then develops its own paradigm of what takes place in the field. But the map called "psychology" is only part of the terrain of uncertainty; in fact, that map may be a gross enlargement of but a small section blown up way out of scale. Therefore, psychology is bound to encourage us to take human emotions, relationships, wishes, and grievances utterly out of proportion in view of the vast disasters now being suffered by the world.

The subjectivist exaggeration that psychology has fostered is coming home to roost, because the symptoms that are coming back to the consulting room are precisely those its theory engenders: borderline disorders in which the personality does not conform to the limits set by psychology; preoccupation with subjective moods called "addictions" and "recovery"; inability to let the world into one's perceptual field, called "attention deficit disorders" or "narcissism"; and a vague depressed exhaustion from trying so hard to cope with the enlarged expectations of private self-actualization apart from the actual world.

One could accuse therapeutic psychology's exaggeration of the personal interior, and aggrandizing of its importance, of being a systematic denial of the world out there, a kind of compensation for the true grandness its theory has refused to include and has defended against.

In brief, if psychology is the study of the subject, and if the limits of this subject cannot be set, then psychology merges willy-nilly with ecology.

For depth psychology this merger implies that alterations in the "external" world may be as therapeutic as alterations in my subjective feelings. The "bad" place I am "in" may refer not only to a depressed mood or an anxious state of mind; it may refer to a sealed-up office tower where I work, a set-apart suburban subdivision where I sleep, or the jammed freeway on which I commute between the two.

Environmental medicine and environmental psychiatry have begun to look at actual places and things, like carpets and drapes, for their effects on human disorders. When some cancers are hypothesized to begin in people suffering recent loss, what loss? Is it only personal? Or does a personal loss open the gates to that less conscious but overwhelming loss—the slow disappearance of the natural world, a loss endemic to our entire civilization? In that case, the idea that depth psychology merges with ecology translates to mean that to understand the ills of the soul today we turn to the ills of the world, its suffering. The most radical deconstruction of subjectivity, called "displacing the subject," today would be re-placing the subject back into the world, or re-placing the subject altogether with the world.

What I am saying here was said far better by Hippocrates twenty-five hundred years ago in his treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*. To grasp the disorders in any subject we must study carefully the environment of the disorder: the kind of water; the winds, humidity, temperatures; the food and plants; the times of day; the seasons. Treatment of the inner requires attention to the outer; or, as another early healer wrote, "The greater part of the soul lies outside the body." As there are happy places beneficial to well-being, so there are others that seem to harbor demons, miasmas, and melancholy. The early Gestalt theorists, Kohler and Koffka, located emotions such as melancholy in the field; a landscape could be sad by its expressive formal qualities (its gestalt) and not because sadness is projected onto it from the subject's interior. The strict thinkers of the Direct Perception school of J.J. Gibson of Cornell University locate memory as much in the world as in the interior brain of the subject. Landscape affords information to an animal; it is not simply stored in the mind. The animal—and we humans are animals—perceives what is there in the environment, given with the environment if we attend to it carefully. Do not these schools, as well as the recent publications of Edward S. Casey on the phenomenology of place, suggest a nonhuman subjectivity, precisely what non-Western cultures have known and lived by for millennia, but which ours has denigrated as superstitious animism?

The paradigm shift in psychology places it at a crossroads. It may go along the well-worn track, declaring subjectivity to consist essentially only in human nature, thereby making its cut close to the skin and regarding as secondary what lies outside its bell jar. No doubt this path

has its virtues, for it allows a special culture to bloom in the bubble, a culture today called egocentric, self-referential, and narcissistic by critics, but valuable for the meticulous analysis of the psyche as narrowly defined. In fact, the narrow definition intensifies the culture within the bubble, making it all the more effective on the one hand, yet ironically, perhaps, all the more wrongheaded on the other. The traditional argument of psychology says: maintain the closed vessel of the consulting room, of the behavioral lab, of the field itself, for this tradition is born from nineteenth-century science, which continues to define psychology as the "scientific" study of subjectivity. And science works best in controllable situations, *in vitro*, under the bell jar, where it can carefully observe, predict, and thereby perhaps alter the minutiae of the subject.

Psychology may take the wider road, however, extending its horizon, venturing to the interior in a less literal manner: *no cuts*. The interior would be anywhere: anywhere we look and listen with a psychological eye and ear. The whole world becomes our consulting room, our petri dish. Psychology would track the fields of naturalists, botanists, oceanographers, geologists, urbanists, designers for the concealed intentions, the latent subjectivity of regions the old paradigm considered only objective, beyond consciousness and interiority. The wider road is also a two-way street. Besides entering the world with its psychological eye, it would let the world enter its province, admitting that airs, waters, and places play as large a role in the problems psychology faces as do moods, relationships, and memories.

Sometimes I wonder less how to shift the paradigm than how psychology ever got so off base. How did it so cut itself off from reality? Where else in the world would a human soul be so divorced from the spirits of the surroundings? Even the high intellectualism of the Renaissance, to say nothing of the modes of mind in ancient Egypt and Greece or contemporary Japan, allowed for the animation of things, recognizing a subjectivity in animals, plants, wells, springs, trees, and rocks. Psychology, so dedicated to awakening human consciousness, needs to wake itself up to one of the most ancient human truths: we cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet.

I write this appeal not so much "to save the planet" or to enjoin my fellow therapists to retrain as environmentalists. I do not wish to urge another duty on you, another region of phenomena for your care. Yes, I

worry over the disruption of the natural environment—as a citizen, as a father and grandfather, as a human animal. My concern is also most specifically for psychotherapy, for all of psychology. I do not want it to be swallowed up in its caverns of interiority, lost in its own labyrinthine explorations and minutiae of memories, feelings, and language—or the yet-smaller interiorities of biochemistry, genetics, and brain dissection. The motivation behind this appeal to my colleagues is to keep our field from narrowing into a specialty only. Professionals do have specialized skills, but even a dentist cannot confine her or his focus to the mouth. Careful observation always leads beyond the immediately observed, and we must follow the phenomena, the pathologies, rather than be hemmed in by our own "cut." The way out of specialization and professionalism, the isolation they breed, and the unreality that eventually follows upon self-enclosure is to entertain fresh ideas. Today such ideas are blowing in from the world, the ecological psyche, the soul of the world by which the human soul is afflicted, to which the human soul is commencing to turn with fresh interest, because in this world soul the human soul has always had its home.