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Ecopsychology in the Symbiocene

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The “eco” in ecopsychology reveals to us a lot about the future direction that ecopsychology can go in. With the integration of *oikos* and *psyche* we have the emergence of a transdisciplinary space, the study of which can inform us about our deep interconnectedness with the earth, our home. While *oikos* was originally relevant to the economic management of the ancient Greek household, it is now integral to the ecological management of the whole earth. This is because human failure to understand and respect our organic connections to ecology will ultimately lead to failure of our globally interconnected economy and culture.

The combined collapse of biophysical, cultural, and economic systems will have profound implications for the human psyche. Indeed, the pressure already put on our ecology and the climate has exerted stress on many people worldwide as climate change, extreme weather, radically altered landscapes, and various forms of pollution hit hard. Within a period of earth history now known as the Anthropocene, the dominant role humans play at a planetary scale has enabled us to exceed many of the biophysical limits that would have us conduct our economies within what has been described as a “safe operating space.” The “unsafe” biophysical space that we are creating for ourselves will have its correlates in a self-generated unsafe psychoterratic (psyche-earth) space. Identifying and documenting the negative impacts of the Anthropocene on the psyche will be one of the important roles for ecopsychology.

In order to avoid further transgression into unsafe spaces and to retreat from those already entered, we need to move out of the Anthropocene as soon as possible. Ecopsychology can help us do that by showing the way for a positive reintegration of the psyche and the ecology. Such positive reintegration will only become possible if children and adults currently alienated from nature and natural processes can see the benefits of rapidly moving out of the Anthropocene and playing a constructive role in the creation of what I have called the Symbiocene. The Symbiocene will be that period in the earth's history where humans symbiotically reintegrate themselves, psychologically and technologically, into nature and natural systems.

The reintegration of psyche and nature comes with humans having direct contact with the earth and its forms of life. Ecopsychology can help humans see the mutual benefits that come to both nature and the psyche when they work together. In addition, from evolutionary psychology comes the supporting argument that humans are “hard-wired” to enjoy connection to the organic forms of life, living landscapes, and living things. Our currently repressed biophilia and ecophilia can spontaneously come to the fore when our psyches are given a chance to commune with the organic forms and processes of nature. From direct experience of “wild-life,” humans can be taught (and teach themselves) what it means to be a living being on this living planet.

With a psyche organically connected to life, positive psychoterratic emotions can be experienced and given expression in powerful ways in art, nature play, literature, drama, nature writing, and organic/holistic science. These positive emotions have yet to be fully articulated within psychology and the many disciplines that have had something to say about earth-psyche relationships. I therefore argue that a new psychoterratic language is needed to fully articulate the nuances of our rediscovered psychoterratic world. There are many more positive and negative psychoterratic concepts that will need to emerge from ecopsychology to

more accurately describe our deeper, more intimate relationships to each other and the rest of life in the Symbiocene.

Another, equally valid way that the psyche can embrace the Symbiocene is for designers, engineers, and creative people to apply the “idea of life,” its organic form, in architecture and technology (the built environment). The mimicking of ecological and biological form and process in technology and the built environment helps heal the divide between humans and the rest of life. The positive psychoterratic states derived from eco-technologies and organic design ought to be indistinguishable from those derived from nature. Research that explicates the psychic benefits of a dose of eco-mimicry will be as valuable as those that reveal the mental health benefits of “a dose of nature.”

A major task for psychoterratic ecopsychology will be to help children, young adults, and alienated adults identify and empathize with life and living things. In the process of getting to really know life, people might also learn to love it. Only then will their positive, earthly psychoterratic emotions and values find creative outlet. We are beginning to see evidence of a creative ecophilic turn in popular culture and all forms of art, but for it to flourish it will need further support from ecopsychology and cognate domains. Otherwise, the eco-apocalyptic turn we have also seen in recent popular culture might overwhelm any tentative emergence of positive expressions of psychic hope.