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THE VOICE OF THE EARTH: DISCOVERING THE
ECOLOGICAL EGO

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Ecopsychology: A Reconnaissance

In 1901 Sigmund Freud delivered a famous series of lectures titled "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life." His purpose was to acquaint the public with the new and still mysterious science of psychoanalysis. He went about this in a clever way. He used jokes, double-entendres, and slips of the tongue to show how these familiar experiences reveal the repressed sexual and aggressive drives of the unconscious mind.

Today, a similar series of lectures might draw its material from reports of ozone depletion, toxic waste, and the greenhouse effect. These commonplace environmental problems have become the psychopathology of *our* everyday life. They reveal a condition for which Freud would not have had a name. While sex and violence continue to smolder in the depths of the mind, the anguish of what I will call the "ecological unconscious" has emerged as a deeper imbalance. At this level, we discover a repression that weights upon our inherited sense of loyalty to the planet that mothered the human mind into existence. If psychosis is the attempt to live a lie, our psychosis is the lie of believing we have no ethical obligation to our planetary home.

In the century since psychology was first staked out as a province of medical science, we have learned a troubling lesson. The sanity that binds us one to another in society is not necessarily the sanity that bonds us companionably to the creatures with whom we share the Earth. If we could assume the viewpoint of nonhuman nature, what passes for sane behaviour in our social affairs might seem madness. But as the prevailing reality principle would have it, nothing could be greater madness than to believe that beast and plant, mountain and river have a "point of view." We think that sanity - like honour, decency, compassion - is exclusively a social category. It is an attribute of the mind that can only be judged by other minds. And minds exist, so we believe, nowhere but in human heads.

This is an essay in ecopsychology. In search of a greater sanity, it begins where many might say sanity leaves off: at the threshold of the nonhuman world.

These days we see the prefix "eco" affixed to many words. *Ecopolitics, ecophilosophy, ecofeminism, ecoconsumerism, even ecoterrorism...* The result is not always graceful, but the gesture is nonetheless significant as a sign of the times. This tiny neologistic flag flies above our language like a storm-warning meant to signal our belated concern for the fate of the planet. Its often awkward connection with words from many sources - politics, economics, the arts - reveals our growing realization of how many aspects of our life that concern will have to embrace.

The goal of an ecopsychology is to bridge our culture's long-standing, historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet

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and the person as a continuum. I hope to show that in a sense that weaves science and psychiatry, poetry and politics together, the ecological priorities of the planet are coming to be expressed through our most private spiritual travail. The Earth's cry for rescue from the punishing weight of the industrial system we have created is our own cry for a scale and quality of life that will free each of us to become the complete person we know we were born to be.

Once upon a time, all psychologies were "ecopsychologies." Those who sought to heal the soul took it for granted that human nature is densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable, mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos. Just as all medicine was in times past understood to be "holistic" - a healing of body, mind, and soul - and did not need to be identified as such, so all psychotherapy was once spontaneously understood to be cosmically connected. It is peculiarly the psychiatry of modern western society that has split the "inner" life from the "outer" world - as if what was inside of us not also inside the universe, something real, consequential, and inseparable from our study of the natural world.

Turn, for example, to the modern psychiatrist's constant companion, the *DSM*, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. This is our society's canonical listing of all officially recognized neuroses, universally used for all medical, legal, and insurance purposes. In the *DSM*, one finds such exotic categories as "Schizoaffective Disorder in a Narcissistic Personality," or "Childhood Onset Pervasive Developmental Disorder." The categories for drug dependency are especially refined. "Hallucinogen Affective Disorder," "Hallucinogen Delusional Disorder," "Hallucinogen Hallucinosi." But with the possible exception of "Zoophilia" (buggery, as it is more commonly known) there is not a single disease of the psyche that connects insanity to the nonhuman world where our environmental responsibility is grounded.

The alchemists of the ancient world had a teaching. "As above, so below." Four words that contain an entire cosmology. In the alchemical tradition, the heavens above, the Earth below including its living cargo were seen as a grand cosmic unity, a harmony resounding in the mind of God. Centuries later, modern science would substantiate that teaching in several ways. We too perceive a unity to the world. We know that the stuff and logic of the universe are everywhere uniform. The same atomic rudiments, the same chemical constituents, the same laws and principles extend from the cellular substance of our blood and bone to the farthest galaxies. We have learned that our planet and all the life upon it are made from elements that were forged in the fiery heart of primordial stars. As the alchemists believed, the baser stuff of the world can be transmuted into precious elements; commonplace hydrogen can be changed into gold - if it is cooked in a stellar core to temperatures far beyond anything their primitive furnaces could achieve and for eons longer than they could imagine.

If the alchemists were right about that much, we assume it was simply a hunch. By our standards, their studies penetrated matter too shallowly to yield exact

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physical knowledge. But then they may have had something else in mind; a knowledge not of fact, but of the meaning behind the facts. For the, "above" was the *macrocosm*, the world of the heavenly spheres, the angelic hosts, and Dame Nature vast as all the planet Earth. "Below" was the *microcosm*, the human soul. Between these two - celestial intelligence and the inner being of man - there was said to be a vital link. Macrocosm spoke to microcosm; microcosm reflected macrocosm. The two were in living dialogue. Understanding the universe was a matter of listening, having ears to hear the music of the spheres, the voice of the Earth. Wisdom meant connecting.

In these pages, we will also undertake to connect the two realms of being, big and little, high and low, outer and inner. But for us the "macrocosm" has become the province of the exact sciences, the greatest collective intellectual enterprise of modern times, no longer one pursuit, but many fields of study: physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, each now subdivided into numerous specialized disciplines. And "microcosm," as the sphere of mind, soul, emotion, means psychology, the study of human experience as it can be gleaned from confessions made on a psychiatrist's couch or possibly from the introspective revelations of novelists or poets. For the better part of two hundred years, keeping these two realms divorced and not even on speaking terms has been the signal endeavour of rational thought and sound science. Matter to one side, mind to the other. *Out there*, the objective; *in here*, the subjective. The one a secure realm of mathematical certitude, the other a murky terrain of shifting emotion, dream, hallucination. Thoughts are not things, things are not thoughts.

Thanks to that separation, we have gained a wealth of knowledge about the structure and function of nature; and from the artists and psychologists, startling insights into the human heart. But the divorce of inner from outer, above from below could never be more than a temporary expedient, a way of getting on with fact-gathering. Ultimately science is a creator of continuities sometimes in spite of itself. Specialization narrows, but theory, which is the great adventure, reaches out; it aspires to wholeness if cautiously. More and more the discoveries of the sciences unite the myriad diverse areas of inquiry. Today, scientists have high hopes of achieving a Grand Unified Theory: a "theory of everything." Some even labour to include the cultural, the psychological, the religious within that project. Their effort is sincere, if tediously piecemeal. What often came to the mystics in a flash of inspiration, may yet return to us slowly and painstakingly by way of disciplinary convergence.

This modern synthesis is being sought along two lines, one cosmological, the other ecological. I give fair warning: the scientific concepts we will investigate here as contributions to that search - the Anthropic Principle and the Gaia hypothesis - are newly hatched and subjects of lively debate. They border on "wild science." Ideas still in the formative stage, susceptible to bizarre formulations. Some may feel the use I make of them here is premature, given their fledgling status. But both these ideas emerge as the culmination of a long-term trend

in modern science that cries out for philosophical elaboration. That trend is our deepening appreciation of hierarchical systems in nature. Gaia and the Anthropogenic Principle derive from insights into the intricately structured character of the universe at the most ambitious level of generalization. As rigorously professional as these new studies in ordered complexity may be, they carry science forward to the boundary of metaphysics. This is ground that many scientists understandably fear to tread. But sooner or later the greater implications of the evolving complexity of the universe will have to be faced. It may be that the deep systems of nature, from which our psyche, our culture, and science itself ultimately derive, are the new language through which the Earth once again finds its voice.

I realize there are scientific purists who object to seeing their intellectual property set upon by amateurs, even respectful ones. But great scientific ideas have rarely been allowed to preserve their virginal status for long. Galileo's astronomy, Newton's laws of motion, Darwin's evolution, all were rapidly appropriated by the greater culture; even more so Freud's would-be science of the mind. While pure science is not pursued with an eye to social or ethical significance, my purpose here is quite frankly to span the gap between the personal and the planetary in a way that suggests political alternatives.

That project is overdue. I suspect that historians of the future will look back in some astonishment at the last half of the twentieth century, wondering why so few thinkers of this period registered the full importance of the revolution in cosmology that took place in their lifetime. It would be no exaggeration to say that in the course of the last generation, we have passed into a postmodern cosmos as significantly different from the universe of Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton (or even Einstein, Hubble, and Shapley) as theirs was from the cosmos of Ptolemy. Many of the details of that transition may be familiar enough. The discovery of bizarre new astronomical objects like the quasar, the pulsar, the black hole, the measurement of microwave background radiation, the theory of the Big Bang have received the attention of the popular press and the occasional television documentary. But it is one thing to explain the technicalities, another to spell out the living importance of great scientific discoveries.

What the new cosmology lacks is the moral consensus that philosophers and artists once bestowed upon the Newtonian worldview. That consensus held for as long as science grounded itself in divine authority and vouched for the importance of human reason. Nothing has been more futile than our effort over the past few centuries to establish values and define sanity within a cultural context that finds no place for the sacred and views life as a marginal anomaly in the universe. The cosmology that gave us that picture of the human condition has now faded from the scene. The time is ripe for a new dialogue between scientific intellect and human need. I offer this as a beginning.

Ecopsychology: Principles

1

The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious. For ecopsychology, repression of the ecological unconscious is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society; open access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity.

2

The contents of the ecological unconscious represent the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to the distant initial conditions of the creative event we call the Big Bang. Contemporary studies in the ordered complexity of nature tell us that life and mind emerge from this evolutionary history as culminating natural systems within the unfolding sequence of physical, biological, mental, and cultural systems we know as the universe. Ecopsychology draws upon these findings of the new cosmology, striving to make them real to experience.

3

Just as it has been the goal of previous therapies to recover the repressed contents of the unconscious, so the goal of ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious. Other therapies seek to heal the alienation between person and person, person and family, person and society. Ecopsychology seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment.

4

For ecopsychology as for other therapies, the crucial stage of development is the life of the child. The ecological unconscious is regenerated, as if it were a gift, in the child's enchanted sense of the world. If the rearing and education of the young preserved and deepened this spontaneous experience, ecopsychology would be left without a therapeutic role.

5

Since, however, the effect of child-rearing in our culture is exactly the opposite - namely to repress the innate animism of children - the task of ecopsychology

is to recover this quality of experience in functionally "sane" adults. To do this, it turns to many sources, among them traditional healing techniques of primary people, nature mysticism as expressed in religion and art, the experience of wilderness, the insights of deep ecology. It adapts these means to the goal of creating the ecological ego.

6The ecological ego matures toward a sense of ethical responsibility to the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people. It seeks to weave that responsibility into the fabric of social relations and political decisions.

7

Among the therapeutic projects most important to ecopsychology is the re-evaluation of certain compulsively "masculine" character traits that permeate our political structures of power and which drive us to dominate nature as if it were an alien and rightless realm. In this regard, ecopsychology draws significantly on some (not all) of the insights of ecofeminism and feminist spirituality.

8

Whatever contributes to small scale social forms and personal empowerment nourishes the ecological ego. Whatever strives for large-scale domination and the suppression of personhood undermines the ecological ego. Ecopsychology therefore deeply questions the essential sanity of urban-industrial culture, whether capitalistic or socialistic in its organization. It counsels that we "scale down, slow down, decentralize, democratize."

9

Ecopsychology holds that there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being. The term "synergy" is chosen deliberately for its traditional theological connotation, namely that the human and divine are cooperatively linked in the quest for salvation. Or in contemporary ecological terms: the needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet.

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