

“From Ego to Eco”: The Contribution of Ecopsychology to the Current Environmental Crisis Management

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Abstract

In this paper I explore some new directions to tackle contemporary environmental problems, and I discuss the benefits of adopting a psychological point of view. Indeed, I argue that an exclusive focus on the ego dimension, one that is unable to grasp the connections with its surroundings, is deeply connected with an insensitive and merely utilitarian attitude towards the environment, its resources, and the biosphere. I outline a path of personal growth that leads to developing respect and empathy towards others, and I show that such a path facilitates a qualitative leap towards the widest eco dimension. Embracing the eco dimension, in turn, promotes a revolution in the perception of oneself and towards the world, one that is comparable to the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Ecopsychology results from the encounter and collaboration between ecology and psychology and lays the foundation for an evolutionary challenge, by helping people consolidate a deeper awareness of themselves and to interact in a dialogic way both with the human and non-human environment. This discipline also contributes to develop an active and attentive attitude to one's own impact on the world, and to promote a process of personal growth (i.e., from ego to eco). Through this evolutionary leap toward a wider and more mature identity, we become aware of our role and responsibilities towards life and the world. In this paper I illustrate how this shift in perspective has been defended by many philosophers and thinkers through different notions and concepts – e.g., terrestrial identity, biospheric consciousness, ecological citizenship. I also show how embracing an ecopsychological perspective can make a difference in facing current problems with maturity, creativity and hope, as younger generations expect from us.

Key words: ecopsychology; ecology; psychology; environmental crisis; biophilia; personal growth; reconnection; mindfulness; ecological citizenship; terrestrial identity; sustainability; evolutionary challenge.

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Introduction

The growing complexity of the world requires an interdisciplinary vision in the service of contemporary needs. As a species, we are now active participants in designing the evolution of human society, its living community, and the planet itself. It is indeed not possible to face the current global challenges, as described in the United Nations' *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, only from a technical point of view. The ongoing processes in our societies – which include economics, politics, environmental questions – follow rationales that are not necessarily rooted in the scientific sphere. While acting on climate, life under and above water, by preventing water pollution, air toxicity, forest destruction, and mass extinctions, it is also extremely urgent to act on more impalpable elements such as values, behaviours, attitudes and basic worldview. To maintain a human presence on Earth and allow it to flourish within terms today defined as 'sustainable', it is thus imperative to recruit knowledge and practices from the humanities, and especially from philosophical and psychological perspectives. This implies that environmental issues must be faced, first of all, as epistemological issues. "What we need, then, is a new 'paradigm' - a new vision of reality; a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values" (Capra, 1990, p. 16) "to counterbalance our cultural orientation towards controlling and subduing nature rather than honoring that we are an intimate part of it" (Kabat-Zinn, p.15).

"Ego" as a stage in the personal growth process

Trapped in a narrow view of ourselves, it is increasingly difficult to feel the interconnection between one's own existence and that of others. This results in the so-called *skin encapsulated ego* (Watts, 1994, p. 76), focusing exclusively on the *I* dimension while otherness is seen only as an instrumental variable, functional to one's own well-being. Such state of consciousness is currently the most widespread among the members of our *Homo sapiens sapiens* species. As Metzner puts it: "We have forgotten something our ancestors once knew and practiced, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world" (1995, p. 61). We have lost the perception of "being part of" – a family, a group, a society, the planet itself – as well as the sense of connection with the web of life. Once the *other* becomes only an object, no rules limit our actions, no ethical considerations constrain them, as we lack

attention to the implications and knock-on effects of what we do. Once we lose sight of the interdependency, our focus narrows down to the immediate effects, short-term policies, material advantages, for this is the only visible horizon at this level of maturity.

But what if we tried to see the current environmental crisis as an *existential crisis*? At the very beginning of his or her life, a child completely identifies with the mother, to the point that the concept of "I" has not yet developed. After a couple of years, the sense of self consolidates and sets itself apart from everything else. In this initial phase of discovery and consolidation of the *ego*, the child is predominantly selfish. In order to develop his own individuality and to start experiencing the world as a separate entity, he would tend to affirm himself as being separate from the rest, first of all from the mother. Such an evolutionary stage is, in fact, healthy and necessary, although it should be seen as a developmental stage which is instrumental to further growth. During adolescence, the sense of self consolidates and a deeper connection with the world must be regained, by integrating self-awareness with some awareness of the existence of others.

As Fabbrini and Melucci underline: "Adolescence is a catastrophic change, in the sense that is characterized by a discontinuity due to the leap in the perceptive plane, to the transformation of the look that the person is able to bring about his own existence" (1992, p. 34). As the outside world breaks into the life of the young human being, a feeling of shock caused by the new quality of "self-witnessing" forces the adolescent to rework his personal and social identity, while acquiring a broader point of view about himself and the world. Catani and Morgagni underscore the point effectively: "It is this phase of the life cycle in which the individual acquires the competencies and the requisites to assume the responsibilities of the adult; the period in which he faces tasks and duties for the first time, and in which for the first time significant choices are made, supporting the exclusive weight on his own shoulders" (2012, p. 17).

When the process is adequately supported by the external environment, a new need spontaneously emerges, namely to connect with "whoever is there" in addition to the self, on a level of equality rather than dependency. In this moment, parents are acknowledged – perhaps for the first time – beyond their role, as people, and the young human being may become a partner in the family management

process, as happens in traditional societies. Generally speaking, the psychological process of development outlined above is an optimal one as far as the individual and his or her relationship with society are concerned.

We can thus draw a parallel between such developmental process and our current historic moment. Indeed, we are in dire need of a transition from a rigid and limited sense of the *ego*, which appears still unable to grasp the connection with its surroundings, to a wider and more mature identity, in which we become aware of our role and our responsibilities towards life and the world. From this perspective, the environmental question takes on a new meaning and can be reformulated in psychological terms. In other words, how can we bridge the gap towards an adult stage of maturity in which, once the *I* dimension is honoured, we take a step towards the *We* dimension?

"Eco" as a broader horizon

Once we reach the stage described above, environmental commitment and psychology must proceed hand in hand. As Clinebell puts it: "It is crucial that those of us in the healing, teaching and helping professions, along with parents, understand the complex interrelationships of personal health and sickness with the wholeness and brokenness of the biosphere" (1996, p. 2). Yet, for such a connection between disciplines to work properly, psychology must also overcome an impasse and start focusing on the relationship between individual and environment, especially when it comes to natural resources. Indeed, Hillman has expressed the following worry about psychology: "I don't 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 interiority of biochemistry, genetics, and brain dissection." (1999, p. 52). In Ancient Greek, "eco" means "home" and it thus denotes our surroundings and our planet. This perspective could also be interpreted as a state of mind and a level of consciousness, where "eco" characterizes the awareness of the interdependency, connectedness, and belonging to the Earth. Roszak defines the *ecological ego* as this further step in the individual's growth process as well as in our species' evolutionary path: "The ecological ego matures towards a sense of ethical responsibility with 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" (1992, p. 321).

All these authors see the exclusive focus on the *ego* dimension as limited. On the one hand, we are gregarious animals by nature, on the other hand we are spiritual beings who possess an ethical and value dimension that needs to be acknowledged and translated into action to generate an authentic sense of fulfilment.

To overcome the limitations of the *ego* dimension and to open ourselves to a further progression towards maturity, i.e., towards the *eco* dimension, we need to work on reconnection on three different levels. These levels of reconnection would help us gain a wider state of consciousness as well as a more mature attitude towards ourselves and the world:

1. Downward reconnection: recovering the awareness that all living beings are members of ecological communities linked to one another in a network of interdependent relationships (Capra, 1997).

2. Inward reconnection: opening up to the self-actualization process, getting in touch with "who I really am", beyond stereotyped images proposed or imposed from outside; building an inner dialogue, developing critical sense, the awareness of one's talents, needs and real desires, strengthening an active will (Assagioli, 1977).

3. Upward reconnection: discovering and training mindfulness, *our ability to be in the present moment* (Kabat-Zinn, p. 19) and opening up to the higher level of the psyche, the seat of the most advanced human potentialities (Wilber, 1985); acquiring a clearer and more effective perception of reality, greater availability to experience, increased unity of the person, spontaneity and expressiveness, firm personal identity, greater detachment and transcendence, objectivity with respect to self, ability to merge concreteness and abstractness, democratic structure of character, ability to love (Maslow, 1971, pp. 158-9).

By facilitating reconnection on each of these levels, a synergic process may be activated among them, and this in turn promotes the necessary step from a vision focused only on the *ego* dimension to an opening towards the wider *eco* dimension.

Such is precisely the challenge of Ecopsychology, a new discipline born from the encounter between ecology and psychology with the goal of providing practical tools for the peculiar and critical cultural moment we are experiencing.

Ecopsychology is born

The encounter between these two different and relatively young disciplines, ecology and psychology, took place a little over a century ago. Initially lacking any connection with one another, they were proceeding in parallel: the former focused on the environment's well-being and the latter on human well-being. Perhaps it was precisely their youth that made it easier to overcome the boundaries between them, and to venture into a new direction together. The official marriage between ecology and psychology took place in the late 1980s, thanks to a study group at the University of Berkeley focused on the relationship between human beings and nature and led by the students Alan Kanner and Mary Gomes.

This research group began to address the increasingly pressing need to connect environmental health with social and individual well-being. Elan Shapiro, also part of the same group, sought to involve Robert Greenway, who had been his psychology professor at Sonoma State University where he had been teaching psychoecology since 1968, exploring 'mind' and 'nature' interactions. The participation of Greenway in the group brings about the contribution of some of the main figures of the ongoing revolution within psychology. At the time he had already met Maslow, Skinner, Erikson, May, Rogers, Huxley, and he had studied enthusiastically the works of Jung, Buber, Watts, Shepard, and Bateson, along with the emerging field of transpersonal psychology. Greenway will end up participating in the group for one year, before returning to his homeland on the Olympic Peninsula.

Shortly thereafter, Theodore Roszak, historian of the counterculture and professor at Hayward (now California State University), will join the group. His addition to the group proves particularly fruitful as he brings together what emerges during the meetings with views he had already developed in previous publications, as well as with other synergistic lines of thinking emerging in those years (Greenway, 2000). This rich and dynamic set of ideas, attentive to the needs and problems of contemporary life, comes to be known as Ecopsychology and popularized through the book *The Voice of the Earth* (1992). The term "ecopsychology" well captures a trend that was very much alive in those years. Ralph Metzner, clinical psychologist and Professor Emeritus at the California Institute of Integral Studies characterizes *green psychology* as the quest to heal the relationship between humans and nature. The Australian

philosopher Warwick Fox calls *transpersonal ecology* the study of connections between environment and consciousness (Fox, 1995), while the pastoral counsellor Howard Clinebell uses the term *ecotherapy* to promote concrete practices aimed at cultivating the awakening of personal awareness and environmental ethics (Clinebell, 1996). The '90s are also the first time – historically speaking – that allows for the possibility of meeting and exchanging ideas online, and this greatly contributes to further expand the field of ecopsychology. As the International Community for Ecopsychology aptly summarizes: "Ecopsychology is situated at the intersection of a number of fields of inquiry, including psychology, ecology, spirituality, and environmental philosophy, but is not limited by any disciplinary boundaries. Put simply, Ecopsychology explores the synergistic relation between personal health and well-being and the health and well-being of our home, the Earth" (ICE, 1998).

Ecopsychology goes even further and rapidly broadens its field of interest and action range, to the point that it actually challenges three key assumptions of modernism: our exclusive identification with ego-centred subjects, our belief that world and self, or humans and nature are dualistically separated, and the anthropocentric belief that humans are the exclusive locus of meaning and value (Adams, 2005). Ecopsychology is thus a young science that "gets in the game to offer a concrete contribution in this particular historical juncture in which environmental emergency and psychological emergency are closely connected and the work on each of these fronts is functional to the resolution of what happens on the other" (Danon, 2006, p. xvii). In 1992, when The *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* was held in Rio de Janeiro, Roszak perceived the relative absence of psychology in the debates on sustainability. Indeed, he saw the environmental crisis and the contemporary productive organization as *deep symptoms of unhealthiness that could be explained only by psychology or psychiatry* (Carvalho, 2013, p.11). The Jungian psychoanalyst and physicist Andrew Fellows has recently launched the following appeal: "We desperately need a wider alternative worldview that is plausible, intelligible and appropriate". This plea introduces ecopsychology as "an original approach to this metanoia that the current predicament of humankind and the planet demands" (Fellows, 2019, p. 6). This discipline thus appears today as a new vision: "By awakening an Earth awareness, we approach the environment in a

spontaneously respectful way, feeling ourselves an active part of ecosystems that are increasingly recognized to be wider and more complex. Furthermore, the reconnection with our deepest terrestrial identity promotes the ability to work in groups with creative and constructive synergies, indispensable for our future of sapiens" (IES, 2018).

The ecocentric vision

Ecosophy is one of ecopsychology's core philosophical tenets. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, also founder of Deep Ecology, uses this term to overturn the anthropocentric paradigm that sees human beings at the top of a pyramid, and rather characterizes them as part of a cycle and a living community. In other words, he supports an *ecocentric vision*.

As Panikkar puts it, *ecosophy* is a new word to express an ancient wisdom. It expresses the very traditional awareness that the Earth is a living thing, both in its parts and in the whole (2015, p. 13). Similarly, science subscribes to this view of the human being as part of the evolutionary process on Earth, notably through the ideas expressed by the Gaia Theory. This theory developed through the work of the independent scientist James Lovelock and the biologist Lynn Margulis, and led to the definition of the Earth as a single living system, endowed with its own metabolism: "The living substance of the earth, the air, the oceans and the emerged surfaces form a complex system, which can be seen as a single organism with the capacity to maintain the right conditions for life on our planet" (Lovelock 1981, p. 8). The Gaia Theory also highlights the presence of feedback loops between life and environmental conditions: on the one hand life has the effect of stabilizing environmental conditions, while on the other hand, due to the constant process of evolutionary change, new life forms emerge together with novel effects on environmental conditions and thus new feedback loops. In the philosophical considerations which can be read between the lines of his scientific text, Lovelock suggests we see human beings as partners of the Earth, and even as parts of Gaia's nervous system. In this sense, metaphorically speaking, humans would be able to anticipate environmental changes and to prevent disasters in case of planetoids in collision orbit with the Earth (Lovelock, 1981). Gaian theory contributes to create a truly new vision of the relation between human beings and Nature, one in which humans are neither masters nor parasites but rather integral parts of the evolutionary process on

Earth. Similarly, the following Biblical passage portrays the human being as a custodian of the Earth: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis, 2.15). Finally, we may start reading this passage as an invitation to creativity and responsibility towards the Earth, and no longer in a paternalistic and conservative sense. Many of the current environmental problems arise from exploiting resources in a way that is disconnected from the awareness of the consequences that actions have on the ecosystem. It is precisely here that psychology may become a strong ally of ecology.

The approach provided by ecopsychology consists in intervening from an unexpected direction, by curbing the process of current degradation through collectively healing both the social and the physical environment and through increasing awareness of individuals and groups. As Brown rightfully and concisely puts it: "We cannot restore our health, our sense of well-being, unless we restore the health of the planet" (1995, p. xvi).

Ecopsychology can therefore be interpreted as a form of ecologically committed psychology, which takes into account a broad network of significant relationships including the family circle, friendships, society, and crucially the Earth itself. This approach has its roots in an epistemology that sees the human and social world as deeply continuous with the natural world. This is how Maturana and Varela, both biologists and philosophers, describe their approach: "There is no discontinuity between the social and the human and its biological roots. The phenomenon of knowledge is a single whole, and all fields have the same foundation" (1992, p. 47). Subscribing to these epistemological tenets opens us up to a new perspective: "If you will think of ourselves as coming out of the Earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, you see that *we are the Earth, we are the consciousness of the Earth*. These are the eyes of the Earth. And this is the voice of the Earth" (Campbell, 1991, p. 40). Recently, the Canadian researcher and educator Mark Hathaway, and the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff coined the term *ecopsychosis* to describe the result of a dysfunctional lifestyle in contemporary societies. One of the issues connected to *ecopsychosis* concerns the perception that we somehow exist as isolated ego-selves who are utterly disconnected from others, and that we have no real ethical obligation to people, other living beings, or the Earth herself (Hathaway and Boff,

2009).

A possible antidote to this collective disconnection from the web of life would be a fine-grained work at the psychological level, one that would make us reconsider our identity in terms of being “part of the community” and thus responsible for the connection between different parts, as opposed to being isolated and disconnected.

Ecopsychology in practice

First and foremost, the mission of ecopsychology is a practical one, and it points to the development of personal growth, along with a sense of belonging and active citizenship. It does so through a work that encourages reconnecting with Nature and, at the same time, with our personal identity. By acquiring familiarity with the dynamic, changing and surprising natural world, we exercise vital skills in daily life among human societies – such as resilience, emotional intelligence, initiative, systemic thinking, synergistic action. When these skills are lacking, we are thus left with significant gaps to fill (see Danon, 2019, p. 19).

By bringing individuals and groups closer to wilderness and beautiful natural areas, as far as the operation is conducted appropriately, we activate a process of wellness. Indeed, empirical evidence shows that positive emotions, mental restoration and other benefits can occur after as little as 5-20 minutes of immersion in nature (Brown, 2013). Similarly, restorative environments can restore depleted attentional capacities as well as improve performance on an attention task (Berto, 2005). In these cases, ecology and psychology work together in a straightforward way: “Environmental restoration work can spontaneously engender deep and lasting changes in people, including a sense of dignity and belonging, a tolerance for diversity, and a sustainable ecological sensibility. This art and science of helping the web of life in a particular place heal and renew itself can serve as a mirror and an impetus for individual and community renewal” (Shapiro, 1995, p. 225). In other words, as Barbiero puts it: “Protecting Nature is an expression of our biophilia” (2017, p. 159).

By developing a greater sensitivity, presence and awareness, we allow ourselves to initiate a novel relationship with the natural environment and to live experiences that would not have been noticed and enjoyed had our connection been more shallow. This renewed openness and disposition to sensing and feeling, which becomes integral to thinking, has real implications for growth on a personal and relational

level. Indeed, both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are facilitated when individuals and groups are invited to be gently in touch with themselves, when their attention is steered towards their inner dialogue, and when they are guided towards listening and sharing of feelings (see Danon, 2006). Methodologically speaking, the combination of outdoor, group and personal work proves to be particularly effective, powerful and enjoyable. The purpose of ecopsychology’s exercises and activities is therefore to guide towards the development of empathy and dialogic skills, through the awakening of our innate Biophilia and our wider sense of identity and commitment toward life.

The term *ecotuning* describes the process of creating, designing, organizing, and conducting these activities. The term was coined by the *International Ecopsychology Society* in 2006 (then *European Ecopsychology Society*), precisely to define the activity of professionals who are trained in applied ecopsychology, although not necessarily psychologists themselves. The person in charge of ecotuning (known as *ecotuner*) acts as a facilitator in the process of regaining confidence with Nature, accompanying to resume direct contact with her. At the same time the ecotuner fosters and encourages high-quality relationships, (i.e. “ecological relationships”), with oneself, other people and the environment.

From a different perspective, Nature herself may be actively involved in a direct psychological work, by acting as a setting or a metaphor that facilitates the expression of one’s sensing, feeling, thinking, or even healing. As some prominent ecopsychologists have put it: “It is when we know who we are, why we are, and where we belong, that the ever-present problems of living become easier to bear, and make more sense” (Sutton Chard, 1994, p.17); “The healing of the human-nature relationship must be included in the scope of the therapeutic practice” (Buzzel, 2009, p.20). When ecopsychology’s exercises and activities are conducted by therapists and psychologists, they are characterized as ecotherapy, or - in some contexts - as ecopsychotherapy. New branches of ecopsychology and new applications of its vision and practices are now emerging in different professional fields. Within education, ecopsychology has been used to facilitate communication between teachers and students and to emphasize the importance of experiences in contact with the natural environment also to enhance school performance. Similar practices have been applied to the organization of

nurseries so that they would include some significant experiences of Nature from an early age. Within leadership training and team building, ecopsychology works *as a basis for creating quality social ecosystems* (see also Danon, 2010, p. 376). Within coaching, it is used to supplement the practices aimed at facilitating the achievement of personal goals with a broader systemic and ecosystemic vision, so that one would learn to integrate one's own activity with the broader community. Within the practice of mindfulness, the natural setting enhances the efficacy and benefits of meditation and facilitates the achievement of a wider state of consciousness: "*While Mindfulness is a conscious presence to oneself, here we progress to Green Mindfulness which characterizes the Ecopsychological approach, that is the expansion of one's individual boundaries towards a broader sense of sharing with the world and, in particular, with the natural world to which we belong* (Danon, 2018, p. 56).

Facing an evolutionary challenge

Once activated, the process of personal growth leads to an increased awareness of one specific feature potentially exhibited by *Homo sapiens sapiens*, although not exclusively. Philosophically, this feature is known as free will: the possibility to oppose instinctual drives – i.e., the compulsion to repeat habitual patterns of behaviour – and develop functional new ideas, behaviours, realities, alongside a constantly changing context.

Free will can be first discovered, then strengthened; it must be appropriately cultivated and directed towards an ethical and responsible perspective, together with the ability to think and feel like one is as a "part of something".

Jeremy Rifkin characterizes this next evolutionary step as "The Age of Empathy". On his view, we are headed towards this goal and our awareness will emerge as beings who are part of the planet. He defines such process as the emergence of Biosphere Consciousness (see Rifkin, 2010). This is the core knowledge required today to lay the foundations for a sustainable future. Edgar Morin talks about this necessary leap in terms of "terrestrial identity" that is the awareness of our common destiny: "By the end of this century, we discovered Earth as system, as Gaia, as biosphere, a cosmic speck-Homeland Earth. Each one of us has a pedigree, a terrestrial identity card. We are from, in, and on the Earth. We belong to the Earth which belongs to us" (Morin, 1994, p. 187).

Leonardo Boff points the finger in the same direction by coining the term "Planetary Consciousness": "Now is the time to take care of things and the Earth. (...) We must all take responsibility for the life-system" (Boff, 2008). He suggests that science and religion work together to avoid tragedy and transform crisis into change towards another civilizing paradigm, one that is friendlier towards Nature and more respectful of the Earth. The same concepts clearly emerge from the following passage of the *Earth Charter*, first created after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and now adopted by thousands of international organizations: "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny" (The Earth Charter, 2000, preamble). The ecologist and theologian Thomas Berry talks about an "Eozoic Period" as the goal to achieve: such a society would be based on a relationship of care, respect and reverence towards the magnificent gift of the living Earth. As Swimme, a longtime collaborator of Berry, puts it: "The future of Earth's community rests in significant ways upon the decisions to be made by the humans who have inserted themselves so deeply into even the genetic codes of Earth's process. This future will be worked out in the tensions between those committed to the Technozoic, a future of increased exploitation of Earth as resource, all for the benefit of humans, and those committed to the Eozoic, a new mode of human-Earth relations, one where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the primary concern" (Swimme and Berry, 1992, pp.14-15).

Recently even Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, has called for an "ecological citizenship", thus sending a message which stands in perfect harmony with the one defended by ecopsychology. Once again, ecological citizenship is seen as a necessary evolutionary leap, an urgent invitation to renew the dialogue on the ways in which we are building the future of the planet. Quoting Pope Francis: "First of all it is humanity that needs to change. The conscience of a common origin, of a mutual belonging and of a future shared by all is lacking. This basic awareness would allow the development of new beliefs, new attitudes and lifestyles. Thus a great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge

emerges which will involve long regeneration processes” (2015, p. 179). Psychology may therefore play a crucial role at the juncture of this evolutionary challenge, by expanding the “I” boundaries towards the “We” boundaries. In other words, leading the change from *ego* to *eco*, in which the *ego* is not lost but rather finds a wider meaning for its individuality.

New mindset, new feelings, new lifestyles

Besides theoretical and philosophical change, the qualitative leap defended above must also generate an actual change in daily attitudes and lifestyle. As Barbiero rightfully puts it: “Human health and prosperity depend on the health and prosperity of the entire biosphere” (2017, p. 186). This implies that sustainability should not simply be seen as an outer layer of respectability in terms of recycling and waste reduction. In fact, sustainability implies an ecocentric vision equipped with the awareness that our gestures and choices have profound implications on the system. Daniel Goleman dubs this process *ecological intelligence* and focuses on the impact that individual awareness may have on consumerist society. First, ecological intelligence encourages each citizen to promote conscious consumption and social commitment without forcing her to give up on her own agency and influence on the evolution of life: e.g., from the general trend of markets and social processes, to community meetings, to the management of a company (Goleman, 2010). Madonna has also recently described a similar process: “The awareness of the biological foundations of knowledge, or of what connects us with other living beings, helps us to be more tolerant and respectful of all life forms, because *when one recognizes his own affinity with the rest of the world, he inevitably treats it more similarly to how he treats himself, that is, in a more ethical way*” (2003, p. 208).

In summary, this is exactly the goal of ecopsychology, which responds to Hillman's call to “wake up psychology” by redefining the human being and trigger the inner change which will produce novel behaviours, actions and lifestyles. “In its broadest sense, Ecopsychology has become the art of awakening in people the awareness of being an active part in the evolutionary process of life on planet Earth” (Danon, 2012, p. 218).

Ecopsychology should thus be seen as a direction to take. We are free to choose if we want to participate in, ignore, or even oppose a qualitative leap of our Planet. As humankind, we will keep destroying the environment only until we think of it in terms of

separation and we believe to be alone and isolated from it. We now have the option of choosing whether to remain grounded in the idea of a being only an “I” (*ego*), one that is separate from everything else, or we can aim at thinking and acting in a sharing and co-creating perspective, i.e., as a “We” (*eco*). Once we start grasping the meaning of our being alive on Earth in terms of belonging to it, it becomes apparent that caring for the environment and for others are intimately connected with taking care of ourselves. Acting in this direction would also be an answer to the demand of young people, one in which adults finally take responsibility for what is being done to today's Earth, which will also be tomorrow's Earth.

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