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George Conesa  
nanimuquest@yahoo.com

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**Anthropocentric Tautologies: The Ape Who Mistook His Jabbering for a Self**

George Conesa

intljournal.ecopsychology@gmail.com

“If a man has lost a leg or an eye, he knows he has lost a leg or an eye; but if he has lost a self—himself—he cannot know it, because he is no longer there to know it.”

~Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*

## 1. Introduction

Pertinent to an understanding of anthropocentric perceptions, fabrications, and their projections is the degree to and the conditions under which a language producing ape (i.e., humans) conjures up and justifies a “self,” and then does something extraordinarily and fractally dumb: incorrectly “names” an entire universe after itself. In *perpetuum*, yet another *rue humaine* lies ahead.

Conforming to the ideas presented in this writing, it is a case of *the ape who mistook his natural world for an illusory idea of “himself”* (and also “herself” when an ecofeminism perspective is emphasized), arriving at many situations during their evolution where/when towns, cities, societies, and surrounding landscapes (e.g., the tortuous, barren and denuded Mediterranean basin, the stale-pastoral and visually endless English countryside) become a telling expression of its tautological vision and obsessive self-centered reiteration: mirrors facing mirrors.

The illusion of a coherent “self,” as Daniel Dennett elucidated (2003: 40), being, rather, “the dynamic and shifting resultant of competitions between all manners of structures...a recursive and self-referential process on a hair-trigger,” leads to, if accepted as sound neuroscience, deeper questions that are intrinsically tied to *the exteriorizing of agency into tautological existence*: “Given the literal chaos brewing in our brains, given the manifest absence of any King Neuron or Boss Nucleus, why and how does it *seem* to us that we are unified selves, and, come to think of it, who is this *us* that it so seems to in the first place?” (Dennett, 2003: 40).

It is rare, still today, that a handful of thinkers like Dennett dare to peek behind the magician’s curtain and ponder these questions. The results of these discoveries are likely to be unsettling to professional psychologists who imagine a “self” existing as something tangible or *ethereally magnificent* that they can, nevertheless, forge or tend like tools and gardens into “better selves.”

From here on, the sleight of hand of passing for a *connoisseur* of exquisite mentality degenerates into all sorts of weird enterprises which share some axiomatic foundations. In an earlier edition of this journal the author stated that when it comes to the manipulation and juxtaposition of two empty signifiers, “self” and “nature,” all hell breaks loose resulting in absurdities of monumental proportions, as in when, “*looking to embrace ‘the whole of nature’ with the ‘totality of one’s self’* [also becomes] *a gluttonous impossibility ... [betraying] the real non-trope insatiable consumerism.*” The contradiction is lost to many “Earth lovers” in ways that are disturbing.

Much of “I-Nature” navel gazing runs the risk of sounding like *pseudo-profound bullshit* (Pennycook et al, 2015), such as in the statement, “The timelessness of self inhabits Earth consciousness.”<sup>1</sup> Confused or self-imploding “wisdom” might lead to further confounds.

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<sup>1</sup> A declaration made up for this occasion by the author

Many of our simplistic assumptions are rotten-ripe for revision. To wit, as newer scientific approaches are employed and additional evidence gathered, relatively *un-muddled* from past anthropocentric human ecological wishful thinking, a clearer picture emerges about the effects that so-called ‘ancestral wisdom,’ associated with religious practices, have had on prehistoric and long-past historic landscapes: abundant pinyon juniper woodlands denuded within six-hundred years (Lentz et al, 2021).

### *1.b The Problem(s)*

The idea that the perception of a “self” is a social and linguistic construction (semiotics) is evident in the work of the American psychologist and sociologist George Herbert Mead (Conesa-Sevilla, 2005). Oriental philosophies, in various ways, deal with the “problem of self” by paying attention to and then addressing its social and linguistic origins as obstacles to achieving a “higher self.” Other sects, like Zen Buddhism, go further in imagining a *no-self* as a more authentic expression of being (and not-being). It is possible to ascertain whether a new formulation of “higher selves” is yet another instantiation of anthropocentrism. Whether found in oriental or occidental religions, these new formulations have in common a psychological mapping of human characteristics supposedly existing in metaphysical planes. Diverse descriptions of “heavens” or “hells” abound from literal (virgins and honey, fire and pitchforks) to diaphanous.

The social etiology of the manufacturing of a “self” and its subsequent shaping might explain why, collectively, people are willing to accept false information in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary. A recent study by Lin, Zhang, and Oyserman (2021: 20-23) provided evidence that a primed “collectivism” orientation (belonging to and identifying with a group) causally gave rise to a willingness to accept false beliefs even when other factors were controlled.

Moreover, the very fact that signifying categories such as “self,” “mind,” “consciousness,” “nature,” “god,” and “spirit” can be warped into interchangeable constructs (“empty” signifiers—Conesa-Sevilla, 2018), suggests that they are instantiations of anthropocentrism. Simply put, to the extent that a human agent speaks from “self,” they are already restricted in their ability to gaze outside the proverbial anthropocentric box. Bipedal vectorial walking and ill-improvised topologies erect additional inductive rails.

Apropos, an instance of what is termed here as *Hochberg’s Principle* is coined after Julian Hochberg’s question; “When should [we] talk about form perception [?]” His answer was: “When we can predict and explain the subject’s responses to the world that confronts him more simply and elegantly with the aid of such a construct than without it” (2007: 71 & Hochberg, 1956).

Phrased differently, one might ask: “When should we talk about ‘nature’?” (i.e., decide that the very word “nature” is either singularly causal [an independent variable] or an effect [a dependent variable].) The same answer remains, however, and to the extent that “nature” is an empty signifier, one can conclude, decidedly and often, never!

The implications to “ecopsychological” counseling and therapy are such that without a thorough examination and understanding of what clients and “therapists” believe and mean by (before, during, and after “some practice”) “self,” “mind,” “consciousness,” “nature,” “god,” and “spirit,” it is likely that *they operate in tautological semiotic spaces* that could further degenerate into various forms of *precausal thinking* or *transductive reasoning*: “I have not been to the forest lately, therefore I have been away from god.”

In sum, the problems addressed in this paper, include:

1. Empty signifiers such as “self,” “mind,” “nature,” “god,” and “spirit,” are clearly, wholly anthropocentric or include aspects of anthropocentrism (Conesa-Sevilla, 2018).
2. To exist in the natural world as a natural product who also signifies a “self” (or “mind”), with or without “language,” means to project “humanity” in *pareidolical* fashion (Maranhão-Filho & Vincent, 2009).
3. An assessment of which form of anthropocentrism is more “valuable” (allows for continued natural diversity, social cooperation and harmony, etc.) can be somewhat achieved, for example, through inquiry methods found in philosophical pragmatism. Because of their anthropocentric nature, these can only be relative evaluations.
4. Moving away from the absolute and empty singularities “self,” “mind,” and/or “nature” opens the door for greater construct specification and ease of empirical testing as when one investigates *how and what mental processes interact with specific natural processes in order to produce/give rise to reports of well-being (or lack thereof)*.
5. For reasons of physical health and mental stability, *cognitive-emotional hyperarousal* (Fernández-Mendoza, 2012) based on individual proclivities or cultural demands, is a shaky foundation from which to critically assess the semiotic complexity of “meaning” as it pertains to ideas of “self,” “nature,” “consciousness” and the like, precisely because its subjective and immediate-gratification-ends often degenerate into unhelpful anthropocentric and anthropomorphic assertions.<sup>2</sup>

The following sections are running arguments with examples of the preceding points. Although the subject matter of these discussions is very serious, addressing as they do, factors that are now affecting our very survival and the survival of uncountable other species, the next section is presented in a humorous tone. Coincidentally, to have a sense and understanding of humor, a distancing and perspective-taking orientation, correlates negatively with measures of authoritarianism and anthropocentrism (Lefcourt, 1996). Conversely, a high score on measures of authoritarianism highly correlates with anthropocentric profiles as measured by *The New Environmental Paradigm* (NEP) scale (Lefcourt, 1996).

What follows is a purportedly impressionistic analogy in order to elucidate a simpler point: anthropocentric myopia leads us astray from more careful examinations of important constructs.

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<sup>2</sup> An empirical question is the extent to which each generation, when subjected to a new class of stressors (e.g., so-called “eco-anxiety”), shifts away from adjusted-to neuro-typical patterns of existence towards intolerable and unmanageable complexity, leading to an increase in frequent sleeplessness and insomnia, both known causes for diminished cognitive capacity—rational, measured, or self-critical thinking (Salfi, et al, 2020); that is, a pernicious *Flynn Effect* (Flynn, 1984, 2012).

## The self as a cake

Let's side with most of verifiable cognitive psychological science of the last sixty years. Let's also include the known psychophysics of sensation and perception. Additionally, let's travel back in time to revisit Freud's first model of the "mind" where rationality, the Ego, is a minuscule portion of the totality of "personality." Finally, let's agree with Zen Buddhism in being at least apathetically agnostic and deeply suspicious about bloated or imaginary notions of "self."

Considering all the above, one can posit a probable and educated guess of what "self" might be about, as an analogy: The self-radiant 'self' sits atop a gigantic and many-layered wedding cake like a singular red and shiny cherry. For reasons that are not at all clear, so-called "self-experts" ignore the whole of the cake: what kind of cake it is (chocolate, vanilla, or strawberry, other flavors), how many layers there are, how these layers interact with one another, what flavor frosting it has, and what atmospheric or cooking conditions gave rise to its batter.

For reasons that are not at all or always clear, so-called "self-experts" cannot see the cake for the self-cherry. Either they think it unimportant or the brightness of red cherries blinds them to alternative discoveries. Under these conditions, fantastic ideas about the self-cherry are put forward. Whole schools of psychology, sociology, and philosophy emerge that make the self-cherry their object of fascination and argumentation. It is the obsession of bipedal, wingless fruit flies, one could say, in jest. The classic view has been that the self-cherry is the soul, consciousness, spirit or "mind." Others posit that the self-cherry is an earth-bound material imperfect representation of a bigger self-cherry no person can ever see (*a la* Plato). If one is into gluttonous "spirituality" one must have the cake and eat the self-cherry too. Finally, other schools of fancy make the argument that the self-cherry must be transcended: a semi-spherical configuration, a red that shines luminescent, with a funny stem hat, must be left behind atop a gigantic cake that never enters their conversations.

Debates about the color and brightness of the self-cherry permeate many discussions and arguments. That this self-cherry is an afterthought and insignificant detail of the confectionary of cake making is rarely assumed. Those who espouse some notion of "mindfulness" seem blindly preoccupied with the self-cherry. Never mind that the whole cake offers infinite possibilities of exploration, contemplation, and even, adoration—mindfulness to last a lifetime.

Infrequently, and in keeping with a Zen Buddhist perspective, does one encounter the grateful and hungry monk eating the whole cake and leaving the pesky self-cherry to the flies. "Beware," might say the monk, "of sweet-sounding theories about self-cherries which do not speak of a wide, great, and towering cake as the foundation for a complete feast."

"Beware," might say the monk, "of troubles, ails, and guilt that center on a singular red and shiny cherry, for these tribulations are pitted and petty. Surely, one is more (and less) than a lonely red and shiny cherry. Be particularly suspicious," might warn the monk, "of decomposing cherries that claim 'nature' is another cherry of a bigger wedding cake nobody understands, particularly scientists."

## 2. Anthropocentric tautologies

Anthropocentric tautologies (e.g., Callicott, 2013) could occur anytime one argues, in a circular manner, for human agentic properties, these supposedly emanating from vague notions of “self,” vis-à-vis other concepts, organisms and inanimate objects, which cannot be proven to possess even remotely similar properties. It may not always be as simple or obvious as the tautology, “If it is in stock, we have it,” however, after a closer examination, many assertions adopt some version of this form (e.g., several forms of animism; Read, 1915). What makes them tricky to spot at first is that, oftentimes, a portion of the proposition is left out:

1. The tree is my lover or the rock a brother. I am theirs too—lover or brother.
2. I have/am a “self.” If as an insignificant and puny human I possess a “self” (oftentimes understood to be “the soul”), then planet Earth (Gaia) must also (projection). So, if Gaia has a “self” I must also—even rocks and rainbows.

The above claims rest on the subjective experience of considering *oneself* as possessing a “sense of self.” The problem, not considered in Oliver Sacks’ quote, is that we view having “selves” pretty much the same as having eyes and legs. If we did not view the “self” this way, death or dementia would not be tragic at all. Insofar as almost anything in the universe can be a human projection (anthropocentrism and hubris), we then work backwards to justify a “sense of self”—our existence (Washington, et al, 2021).

Let’s try to illustrate the difficulty of excising “self” from “nature” and “other things.” Let’s consider the position of an ecofeminist claiming that their sex or view of “themselves” (the conditions under which the actual biology of sex is shaped by culture into “gender” and a privileged claim of a relational aspect about sex and gender) is a superior construct for thinking about “self” and “nature” relations. Clearly, to the extent that a “feminist perspective” is similarly or equally based on the assumption of “selves,” it is also anthropocentric (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia, 2018). Seen this way, some problems in environmental ethics are then restricted to an examination of which anthropocentric view is better for our planet (itself a suspiciously teleological presumption).

Before we get ahead of ourselves, let’s all agree with the valid criticism of how particular males and their access to power has all to do with the imminent and ongoing reconstitution of our planet in ways that our species has never known. To be fair, let’s also agree that *both males and females* drive cars and fly in airplanes, eat meat and ingest palm oil, use personal hygiene and cleaning products that clearly damage natural environments, dispose of diapers, abuse their AC units, ride ATVs and sand buggies, own pets, and in general, knowingly or not, contribute to the deteriorating state of local and faraway ecologies. Equally, let’s all agree that, at least, both males and females are known to be sincere advocates for a healthy planet—and that any one person might speak for “ecocentrism” when in fact theirs is another anthropocentric brand!

To wit, various proposals of ecocentrism may be suspected of being alternate forms of anthropocentrism and/or anthropomorphism, the latter, nuancedly defined (Airenti, 2018), to the extent that human emotional, utilitarian, or magical projections are found to be motivating forces. For example, it might be genuinely thought, felt, and expressed that all species have *intrinsic rights* to “something” (a perceived set of optimal existential parameters which might also ensure ecological diversity). That is, until one tries to define what the intrinsic rights of any individual or species are, without their feedback or consent—without an understanding of scientific ecology. The very projection “intrinsic rights” is already cloaked in anthropocentric tones and intentions. In this light, the distinction “anthropocentric” vs. “ecocentric” can only be determined, if at all, by excising the human mind (feelings, ethics, and constructs) from natural systems. And if a tree falls in a forest and there is no human to hear it, did it make a sound?

Admixtures of ideas, intentions, and behaviors work their way from person to person in familiar groups (information bubbles), to larger social structures and information producing organizations (and people) which become harder to manage (see Figure 1, after references). *Uncontrolled heterogeneity*—people are not ants—has not made a planet better. And some admixtures make no sense whatsoever, making conspiracy theorists and the gullible sound quite zany-deviant.

At this writing, the very talented actor and singer Demi Lovato was quoted in CNN (Respers France, 2021) saying that, “...*we have to stop calling them [imagined extraterrestrials] aliens because aliens is [sic] a derogatory term for anything. That's why I like to call them E.T.s! ... we need to learn how to expand our consciousness.*” If there were extraterrestrials, the word “alien” is fitting in so many senses and uses of that word (alien species, alienated, alien insects, etc.). Only Demi Lovato could project these exceptions. Some “E.T.s” may find that designation offensive if they had/have inhabited our planet longer than humans. It also suggests an infantile affinity with certain movies meant to elicit emotional sympathy with made-up beings (Conesa-Sevilla, 2022). Also, one thinks that Demi Lovato meant “awareness,” “knowledge,” or “understanding” when she said “consciousness” (another empty signifier). The latter is also closely related to unproven and amorphously and/or privileged formulations of “self” as read in the “ecopsychological” new age and even pseudo-philosophical literature (Parry, 2016).

In toto, thoughtless, good, or blatantly bad ideas, intentions, and behaviors, all, are at risk of reverting back to some form of anthropocentrism, even within a scientific community. It is only a ‘risk’ to the extent that one seeks, as much as one can, an objective model of reality (i.e., the natural world) that is practically useful, but then insidious factors prevent accomplishing this (any number of cognitive biases, including the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic biases).

More than unfortunate is the fact that, given the multiplicity and complexity of our human-caused woes, it is difficult to envision a soon-enough-foreseeable-future when we will be able to understand these challenges, be motivated by this understanding so that then we can act in a timely fashion, in locally and globally coordinated efforts, so that we can avert the most serious consequences of catastrophes that are now unfolding—have been unfolding for a while.

*Hochberg's Principle* might explain why persisting in imagining that the very word “nature” is either singularly causal (independent variable) or an effect (dependent variable), could blind us to astutely matching specific natural processes and their effects to a variety of mental processes.

### 3. Uncontrollable heterogeneity

Uncontrollable heterogeneity (UH), coined here in a semiotic sense, defines idiosyncratic (superficial, selfish-egocentric, banal) trends and internalized expressions (meaning found in forms of identification and in activities/habits) that are part of a globalized “culture” of consumerism, to be sure. To the extent that inherent in capitalistic-consumerism oriented economies are the forces of entertainment, competition and innovation, then the number of products and “experiences” available to the populace rises to psychologically overwhelming levels.<sup>3</sup> Not the greatest at multitasking, the human ape is confounded by untethered complexity.

The impact of undeterred growth of these activities on a global scale as mass production, feverish transcontinental transportation, and waste is such that human psychology is more often than not enfeebled and powerless to cope—disoriented and distracted (see Figure 1).

Uncontrollable heterogeneity, when it comes to our prescribed or perceived sense of “self,” allows for at least two “ecopsychological” formulations and sets of predictions:

1. UH-Strong (pessimistic) version/argument: Our ‘virtual’ senses of “self” are inherently fickle and unstable, prone to adapting or organizing “themselves” around the whims of “the market” (society), making it problematic to differentiate what aspects of who we are can be said to be authentic (e.g., have independent agency). From this shaky baseline, ideas about “nature” or “nature connection” also tend to be superficial and/or irrelevant (uncreative, impractical, only superficially subversive, ill-informed, or transient).
2. UH-Weaker (optimistic) version/argument: Our ‘virtual’ senses of “self” are redeemable and resilient enough given the chance to distinguish between credible and reliable information and propaganda (misinformation) and with support of a continuing (sustained) plan of scientific or ‘ecocentric’ acculturation (keeping in mind the previous caveat about ‘ecocentrism’ turning out to be another instantiation of anthropocentrism).

Depending on the political and social orientations and resilience of a given country, either formulation is more or less likely to be in place. However, realistically speaking, on average, the present state of our planetary and collective woes suggests that the first formulation more accurately represents gross “self,” “nature,” and “society” disunions and mismatches.

A corollary of the above is that uncontrollable heterogeneity can be the source of greater anxiety making well-thought-out choices harder to come by. Erik Erikson was concerned about this in his *Childhood and Society* (1964, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) when he wrote about processes of identification during adolescence: “Adolescents need freedom to choose, but not so much freedom that they cannot, in

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<sup>3</sup> It might be possible to work out additional analogies (other than a semiotic explication) with respect to constructs found in social ecology and biology (e.g., ecological drift) (Fisher-Kowalsky, 2015; Gilbert and Levine, 2017).

fact, make a choice.” Confusion and uncertainty are the slippery roads to anxiety: “Anxieties are diffuse states of tension which magnify and even cause the illusion of an outer danger, without pointing to appropriate avenues of defense or mastery” (Erikson, 1964, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). And one can safely conclude that mass anxiety, our collective sense of “outer danger,” engenders all sorts of social ills: suspicion, discrimination, hate, violence and the collapse of social systems along ideological lines, in other words, our daily news.

In sum, to the degree that past and present-day cultural trends contribute to and foster uncontrollable heterogeneity, then these factors are likely to produce a mixed or patchy developmental pattern of continued adolescence well into the middle-age years—and beyond. This was one of Paul Shepard’s central arguments in *Nature and Madness* (1982).<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. The jabbering ape

A default anthropocentric projection is closely tied to animism. The inert forms or ideas that humans “animate” end up being speech acts. As long as I keep talking there is a sense that there is *someone* who talks, therefore I might as well give in and agree with phenomenological experience that someone inside *me* is entity-like, has substance. Even when I take my turn listening, “I listen.” On the other hand, I forgot where I put “my-self” last night when I fell asleep.

Although it may be a form of anthropocentrism to think *animistically*, it does not follow that everything perceived as being animistic is always or clearly anthropocentric. I may assume that some type of energy turns a rock into a “being,” without having a precise conceptual framework for understanding what this energy is, or how it does what it does. While trying to keep track of the equivalences between anthropocentrism and animism, it pays, with Read (1915: 5), to understand the relationship between beliefs and animism:

To be clear about Animism, it is necessary to bear in mind several modes of belief:

- 1) Hyperphysical Animism, that things have, or are possessed by a conscious spirit, and that this spirit is a separable entity
- 2) that things are themselves conscious, but their consciousness is not a separable entity
- 3) that things are not conscious, but are informed by a separable essence, usually called soul (better, soul-stuff), which may be eaten by spirits, or may go to ghost-land with them
- 4) the extension or limitation of these beliefs to more or fewer classes of things

A rock form or a burning bush that responds to our queries in audible English is an altogether different experience than having a vague feeling or even a definable emotional intuition that a

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<sup>4</sup> To be determined is whether the distinction “serious” vs. “silly” *people* becomes so offensive to the latter that *cancel culture mobs* begin to question the validity of making reasonable personality attributions. “Be gone conscientiousness! Hello unbounded florid oversharing!”

rock or a tree “communicates” with us. A burning bush bossing us around in the desert, and for centuries to come, belongs to Read’s first instance of animism, whereas believing that cats but not dogs have ‘souls’ is an example of #4.

We take some time elucidating these distinctions only insofar as these might correspond to empirically testable psycho-epistemological orientations. Implied in all instances of Read’s classification is the notion of “logos” or that an entity that possesses consciousness or is possessed by something that does, inhabits a *semiotic* space. To the extent that meaning is exchanged, then *linguaging* is not far behind. And language some sort of “self” creates. The reason why this might be important is that whether one sells oneself as an “*ecotuner*,” nature-guru, tree whisperer, Ayahuasca gobbler, or goat enchanter, the implication is that, eventually, these mediations can or will be communicated to others with language. Through language, one can ascertain by empirical means what sort of “self” speaks.

## 5. Conclusion

It is not often that a self-proclaimed “ecopsychologist” has or makes the time to critically examine the very words they use as part of their art (e.g., “self,” “nature,” “consciousness,” “mind”). Critical analyses of “text” are often avoided in preference to the practical nature of counseling work and/or the sense of communal joy while partaking of some “exercise.” In some occasions one hears a putting down of “science” or critical thinking as obstacles to an authentic “nature connection” – whatever that means.

This is very odd to the extent that many so-called “ecopsychologists” have university training—of various kinds—and insofar as various forms of “therapy” are rooted in in-depth clinical analysis of language usage, checking against unhelpful forms of speech or cognitive biases would seem the norm. But it takes all types. At the time of this writing, many chiropractors oppose vaccination against Covid-19 and are actively putting out disinformation (Smith, Bauer, and Catalini, 2021). This is not at all surprising considering past trends (Campbell, Busse, and Injeyan, 2008). That is to say, past trends matter.

Instead, we take the cautious approach that mental processes and, in particular, the making and undue adoration of our “sense of self” is, quoting Daniel Dennett earlier in this text, “a recursive and self-referential process on a hair-trigger.” Assuming so allows for *a more humble and honest enterprise of attempting to ascertain what specific mental processes are interacting (and how) with some subset of external natural processes, and given shared and unique genetic profiles, as well as cultural proclivities, result in various conditions that are optimal or less ideal for mental health. An extension of this exploration would be to ascertain how environmentally embedded and embodied cognition becomes ‘less’ or ‘more’ in natural versus built-in environments.* When almost everything is said, the human-body-complex is as natural a system as they come despite our best efforts to trick these systems by conjuring a “self-that-jabbers” and then sending it to do our dubious bidding in *anthro-tortuous* ways (as seen in Figure 1). As students of natural

processes, our existences, are in actuality, humbler, cognitively provincial, and *cosmogonically* tightly circumscribed. In the poetic words of the great Loren Eiseley (1969/1979):

The one great hieroglyph, nature, is as unreadable as it ever was and so is her equally wild and unpredictable offspring, man. Like Thoreau, the examiner of lost and fragile surfaces of flint, we are only by indirection students of man. We are, in actuality, students of that greater order known as nature. It is into nature that man vanishes (p. 237).

A more fitting and enduring tautology might be that our body systems are, indisputably so, an evolutionary product, sharing mental and affective processing features with other species. There is a measurable genetic legacy in some of our genomes (West European or Asian) of interbreeding with other species (respectively, Neanderthal and Denisovan; Rogers, Bohlender, Huff, 2017). Our cells, too, are the products of ancient co-opting by other micro-organisms (Yong, 2018). All these adaptations and exchanges occurred in ever-changing and unimaginable landscapes--in actual, geophysical and biochemical environments. All sexes and genders, and their excepting or negation, are ruled by the irrevocability of existing in physical form: all are eating and defecating machines. They will all die, and will remain dead. Decomposing and restructuring processes will not give a fig (if they knew figs) if their past “selves” had adopted this or another form of personhood identification. (One of the characteristics of *amoeba-centrism* is not naming the thing-bits they thoroughly engulf.)

Anthropocentrically speaking, to assert, invent or resuscitate some odd form of “nature connection,” usually means that the experiential, affective, or cognitive components of a profound misunderstanding lag behind an existential tautology that already exists—has always existed: We are “nature.” “Nature” is *us*.



*Postscript:* Over two-hundred and sixty-two years ago, the Scottish philosopher David Hume observed:

“[...] There is a universal tendency amongst mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice and good-will to everything, that hurts or pleases us. Hence the frequency and beauty of the prosopopoeia in poetry, where trees, mountains and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion ... And a river-god is not always taken to be a mere poetical or imaginary personage, but may sometimes enter into the belief-system of the ignorant vulgar; while each grove or field is represented as possessed by a particular spirit or invisible power that inhabits and protects it. [...]”

~David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (1757, Sect. 3, paragraph 2).

*Photo credits:* “A.K. Kuznetsov, standing inside [a] greenhouse with a tripod-mounted camera, as seen through his reflected image in a mirrored sphere. ca. 1885.” Library of Congress free copyright media (digitally altered).

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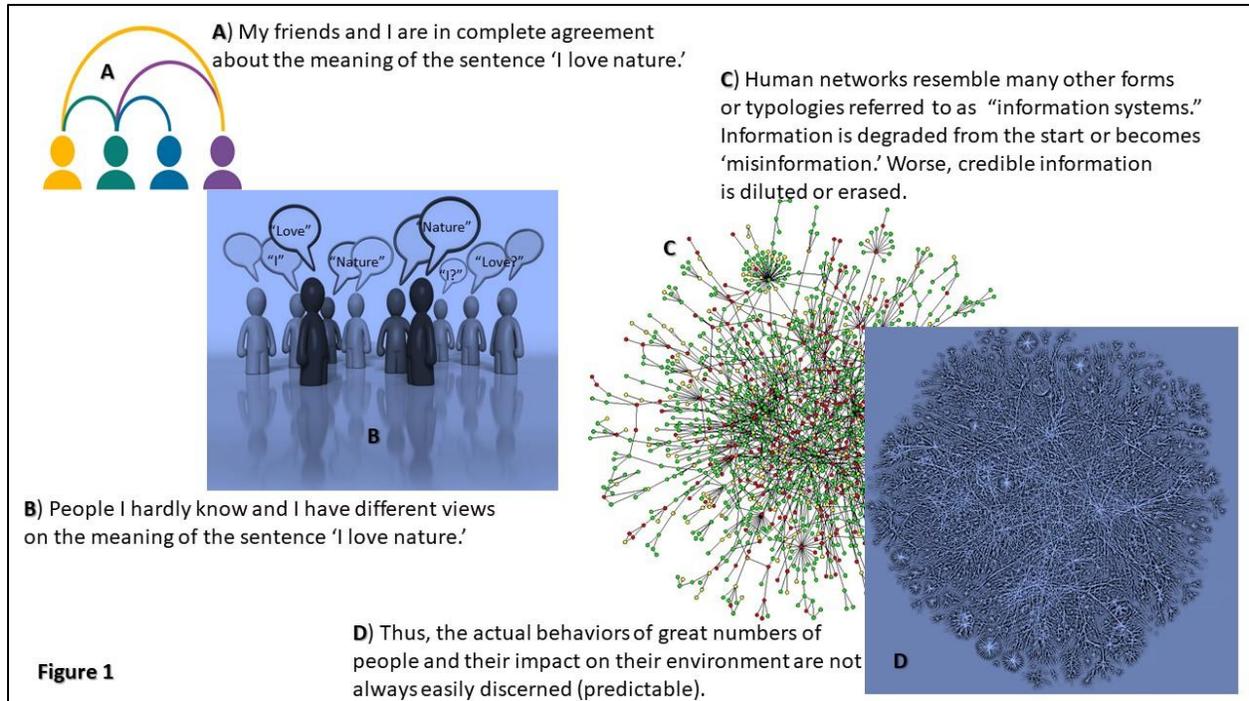
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Conesa-Tautologies



**Figure 1:** A) Insular knowledge, that is, unconfirmed by the experience of many others, can lead to “information bubbles” (groupthink). B) Within families and at the village level, diverse opinions are likely to emerge. C) Once information is shared (memes) it is examined and thought about by larger social circles with the likely result of this information being augmented, challenged, distorted, corrected—critiqued. D) Admixtures of ideas, intentions, and behaviors work their way from person to person in familiar groups (information bubbles), to larger social structures and organizations producing and sharing information, these more complex interactions becoming harder to manage—a situation of *uncontrolled heterogeneity*.