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Editorial and Clarification

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Editorial and Clarification

Our call for papers and requests for this “*Foundations*” (I) issue was met with a wide range of submissions necessitating at least two volumes. In this issue, we highlight the empirical work of Dr. Daniela Boero on the question of evolutionary preferences to naturally occurring sounds, their incorporation into musical scores, and effects on emotions. The other two works focus on basic interpretations of the “foundations” of food and our relationship to eating in various cultural settings – a look at the ontology of eating and nourishment.

We look forward to additional submissions (empirical and theoretical works, essays) for our next volume and installment of “foundations” for our late summer/early fall issue. We are grateful to all who contributed.

Clarification

For years now, the E-i-C has had many “brain-to-brain” and “heart-to-heart” conversations with all sorts of “psychologists.” (The designation is in quotes because it is not always clear who these professionals are or what their university backgrounds were.) Scientifically trained psychologists are usually the first to grasp the implications of a “serious ecopsychology” (i.e., human ecology, evolutionary psychology) proffering the usual and necessary caveat: “But do verify.”

However, many other “psychologists” who had no compunctions sharing clearly ideological agendas, openly so, had personal axes to grind, were and had always been, even before becoming “psychologists,” self-described creatures of the “spirit,” often reacted quite emotionally to the very notion of an “ecopsychology” rooted in human ecology or evolutionary psychology (you know, with statistics!). One of their most frequent arguments ran/runs like this: “Surely, mental health practitioners (i.e., psychologists, counselors), in the course of the last hundred years, have helped thousands if not millions of people lead better and fuller lives.” When asked to supply corroborable statistics to support this claim, nothing is forthcoming, or there is some grumbling about “statistics.” What does science know, right? (To be fair, it should be granted that many people, for many reasons, do benefit from mental health approaches.)

At times, and for some folks, it seemed as if the very tag “ecopsychology” acted as a projective panacea allowing for a new identity nexus, a quilting of affect-needs, conveniently amorphous or generic and hinting at some oblique teleological specificity – a lifesaver with Maypole ribbons. Much like in astrological psychobabble, whatever shape their idiosyncratic nexus took, it gathered ‘round it, precise universalities, or open-ended specificity: “Gaia cares for me and praises my indefatigable warrior spirit.” Let’s crack the next fortune cookie and see what the gluten I-Ching says.

The go-to argument from the E-i-C is to point to what he thinks is the obvious: generally speaking, clinical psychology and other mental health therapies are methodologies forged in cities and oftentimes by individuals (scholars, medicine men, speculators, and philosophers) who were/are urban born and raised. In effect, they are therapies that deal with, to use an analogy, zoo monkeys and ways of adapting these creatures to their sad and evolutionarily sterile habitats. In

effect, it is as if one caged monkey-psychologist is helping his or her caged monkeys, for a feed-fee, by helping them see the “better side” of their awful conditions: “You have plenty to eat, they pair us up ... vet services.” When four walls and a play yard are the life-scope of one’s world, hopeful theories about spiritual unfolding and positive psychologies become almost necessary: “*Wink, wink*, there is self-transcendence in all of this. Think beyond the bars! Behold the stars!”

The following passage in Isaac Asimov’s original work Foundation, is both poignant and apropos: “*If you're born in a cubicle and grow up in a corridor, and work in a cell, and vacation in a crowded sun-room, then coming up into the open with nothing but sky over you might just give you a nervous breakdown.*” The previous passage can be taken to be a modern version of Plato’s Cave Allegory.

At best, if the above analogy is accurate enough, and to the extent that agency is not fully liberated and evolutionarily contextualized, the psychologist monkey is mostly cajoling or encouraging his caged patients out of their straw beds to walk with crutches. *Whether this is merely a pointless exercise or another profound cultural error contributing to the awfully and carelessly weaved intersectionality of soon-to-be-visited doomsday scenarios remains to be seen.* Certainly, walking with crutches inside the same old zoo is nothing like running wild in a savannah. And if one turns out to be one of the few zoo-bound monkeys who is generally happy and adapted to an impoverished habitat, can we even call it a *bona fide* “monkey”—or “happiness”?

In this context, many “therapy” formulas fail to “follow through” with full-fledged agentic liberation -- are truly revolutionary or emancipatory. Victorian ladies and gents remain incarcerated in oppressing garments under panoptic eyes; client-centered proposals become an illusory-smoke-and-mirrors-sleight-of-hand to temporarily fabricate (pump up) a very restricted sense of agency; and yes, forest gurus and drumming shamans do the same or worse—and they all take your money! And who’s ever heard of an “ecopsychology” webinar?!

Generally speaking, the contention here is that “psychology” might be in need of (and in some ‘division’ quarters, awaiting) fully formulated and testable “ecopsychologies.” Meanwhile, others make do with common sense, when common sense is amply and empirically tested--the ancient’s version of “positive psychology”: All these, together, might amount to a healthy life worth living: transitioning from city to countryside; from idiosyncratic complexity to true-and-tested frugality; from overcrowding to the company of family members and a few friends; from spoiled foods to wholesome ones without having to pay a premium imposed upon by fancy and exclusive markets; from chronic illness to health; from intemperance to salubrious habits; or from slave labor to crafts-people-shift. In reality, these cognitive-behavioral-ontological progressions and/or regressions are existentially complex and very challenging, as figures 1 and 2 suggest.

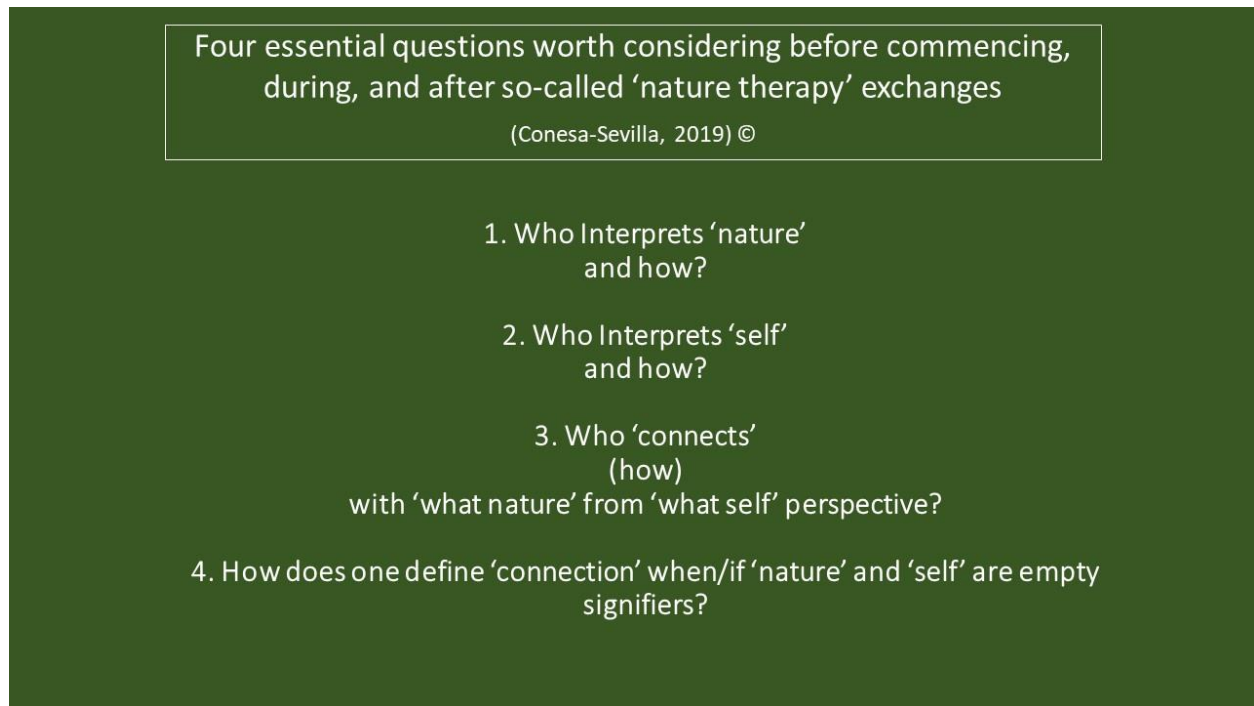
In short, it is “back to the future,” if one dares, to the original and unadulterated Epicurean ideal where sensible eating, the company of friends, and maximum agency make for a more content, if not a fuller human being without ever needing fairy dust theories.

On that note, and as a sobering temperance to the bloated multiplicity of conference poster works and similar forms of *pamphletism*, the following four books are both academically analytic and prophetic about the schism civilization--individual, and still worth consulting every now and then: S. Freud's "Civilization and its Discontents" (1929); K. Mannheim's "Ideology and Utopia" (1929); E. Fromm's "The Sane Society" (1956); and Paul Shepard's "Nature and Madness" (1982).

George Conesa, E-i-C, *IJE*, May 2022



Figure 1: Four essential questions worth considering before commencing, during, and after so-called 'nature therapy' exchanges.



Conesa-Sevilla, J. (2019). "Conexión" con la "naturaleza": ¿Cómo hacer semejante cosa? *Some Terra, Some Ebre: Un Viatge a la Sostenibilitat*. 20 juny – Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, España.

Note: As evidenced by the relevant literature and advertised practices (exercises, activities), it is seldom the case that efforts are made to ascertain, distinguish between, or critically address the implications of the above essential questions.

Figure 2: Four “self-nature” existential affiliations

Four “Self-Nature” Existential Affiliations
(Conesa-Sevilla, 2019) ©

 **1. The Citizen -- Civilized (arbitrary and/or idiosyncratic) agency:**
The natural world is observed and interpreted from an entirely subjective or “interior” perspective (within a cultural-urban setting) without firsthand or prolonged knowledge of untamed natural processes (in flesh and mind)

2. The Sportsperson -- “Natural” active agency:
The natural world is “lived” (outdoor sports) but the agent continues to be influenced by culture (civilization) with limited experience or total immersion, 24/7, “in nature” 

 **3. The Hermit-- Feral agency:**
Complete immersion in natural spaces (24/7) while working out (recapitulation) the last remaining vestiges of a psychologically impacted “self” by arbitrary and idiosyncratic culture

4. *Waldmenschen* -- Wild agency:
A diminished arbitrary “self”; consolidation or integration with natural processes to the point where the constructs “self” or “nature” are unnecessary, even meaningless categories. This final synthesis cannot be easily described (or at all) from levels 1 and 2 

Conesa-Sevilla, J. (2019). *Ecopsychology revisited: for whom the ‘nature’ bells toll?* Arcata, CA: CAL POLY Humboldt Press.

Conesa-Sevilla, J. (2019). “Conexión” con la “naturaleza”: ¿Cómo hacer semejante cosa? *Some Terra, Some Ebre: Un Viatge a la Sostenibilitat*. 20 juny – Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, España.

Note: Greater challenges for maintaining a more or less stable mental health life are predicted in 1 and 3 (the citizen; feral). The above list is a shorthand and highlight of a lengthier continuum, with horizontal dimensions branching out from each “self-nature” existential affiliations (“progressions” and regressions).