Beating "Love" to Death: Emotion Junkies, the Unnatural Affectations of "Loving Earth," and other Ghostly Infatuations

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George Conesa

An 'Ecopsychology' Monograph

"Love loves to love love."

~James Joyce, Ulysses

Introduction: Beating "Love" to Death

Socrates employed a built-in process of irony (so-called 'the Socratic method') when attempting to draw out ultimate meaning from his frustrated interlocutors. The problem, then and today, it seems, lies in our individual interpretation of constructs that most of us take for granted, and particularly, asserting instead their vernacular arbitrariness. In a previous work, the author has argued, for example, that confounding the constructs of 'biophilia' ('love'), 'self,' 'nature,' 'spirituality,' and/or 'consciousness' -- some of which, practically speaking, often operate as false or empty signifiers (they are imprecise or ambiguous categories) -- might account for our collective inefficacy in tackling major environmental challenges and problems (Conesa, 2021). We take singular words to mean many-a-thing, grow accustomed to mostly never thinking about their original etymologies, and then, with astounding overconfidence, make one-to-one correspondences from their ephemeral and translucid arbitrariness to fleeting or vague feelings, standing *ipso facto*, oddly enough, for the superiority of 'a subject.' Voila! Metaphysics proliferate into untenable ecological ontologies.

As Socrates might have said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." *A 'feeling' and/or strongly felt 'emotion' are the beginning, not the end of psycho-biological inquiry – of the story.* Otherwise, neither literature, nor the cinema, nor clinical psychology or psychiatry are relevant pursuits from/with which to inform a full-fledged humanity.

More to the point, virtual demonstrations of 'love' have become our present-day 'quick-and-dirty' epistolary. From having one email account, some folks have gone to maintaining a virtual presence across multiple social media platforms and in some instances to maintaining several accounts of each! On one social media account, a person might ponder about the unfairness of love or might chastise a particular lover. On another, a meme-marquee goes on about the capriciousness of earthly love. And the same person, on a different media platform, curates a visual jungle of snapshots where they present themselves happy as hell and bathed in inexhaustible and unmeasurable bliss (Tromholt, 2016; Grieve, March, & Watkinson, 2020). What is one to do with all these outpourings of emotion?

It is also very common, as an aspect of hyper-emotionalism or new age *pamphletism*, for example, to find amalgamations of inchoate infatuation and other juvenile forms of emotionalism, including romantic love, with aspects of the natural world, further romanticized

with the possible existence of an actual 'mother Earth.[1] When these and many other concoctions of 'love' or 'loving' come under critical scrutiny (refer to Bode and Kushnick in this issue), a real overlap between characterizations of romantic love, for example, and aspects of addiction become clear. 'Love' can also be propagandized as *virtue signalling* leading to *affective polarization* (see below).

In short, it seems as impossible (unreal, misguided) to love the deceased singer Elvis (the totality of who this person was when he was alive) as it is to love an entire planet (the totality of Earth processes requiring extensive scientific training and experimentation). Euphemisms for the phrase 'loving Earth' abound and so do explications solely in terms of 'feelings,' or about what 'connection' could mean for that individual or for several individuals over their lifespans.

And that is the recurring challenge: *What do people mean, precisely, when they use the word 'love'? What feelings and other cognitive processes occur when a very generic word (an empty signifier) supplants any number of, and often confounded, ideas?* A closer look at what characterizes love,' in medical terms, is underway and explained by the effects that some fungi have on human behavior (psychology). Anthropologist Peter Frost observes the following (personal communication; 2020: 598-599):

> Different social environments may have thus favored different pathogenic strategies for manipulation of human behavior. For example, in hunter-gatherer societies, a pathogen may pursue a strategy of creating gifted individuals—shamans—who, as community healers, can spread it to other community members. In tropical horticultural societies, a pathogen may pursue a strategy of increasing its transmission from one household to another via sexual relations.

The implications of this type of inquiry are manifold and very relevant to an analysis of what motivates strong emotional declarations and behaviors when folks profess 'love' for one another, non-human animals, inanimate objects, or abstractions – 'Mother Earth.'

Quizzically, folks who might be interested or invested in ingesting fungal psychedelics or believe in new age theories about *transcendental fungi neurogenesis* would discount (a case of 'cherry picking') the notion that many species of *Candida* could diminish their agentic possibilities in questions of 'love.' Or the very same *miconauts* might end up making illogical declarations (a case of cognitive dissonance) such as "Okay, if so, then *Candida* knows best." Indeed, tell that to the desiccated zombie ant whose body has just exploded releasing hundreds of *Cordyceps* spores. Lest we forget, this is 'nature connection' at its raw-best (Brignoli, 2019).

Apropos, the handful of studies that specifically look at the relationship between the use of psychedelics and a potential increase in *nature relatedness* are difficult to interpret (Lyons, & Carhart-Harris, 2018; Kettner, et al., 2019). The reason for this may be that the construct *nature relatedness* is ill-defined; in some cases, the subjects themselves might not be neuro-typical, or little is known about the sort of experiences these subjects had before the studies were conducted, making it likely that the only notion about 'nature-connection' that emerged, did so

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[1] Invariably, at times, these homeopathically diluted forms of worshipping lead to, by irrational-superstitious cause-effect *malabarism*, some notion of 'spirituality' -- and yes, equally juxtaposed with esoteric and quite unprovable ideas about 'consciousness expansion.'

artificially as part of the study. In one study, a poke in the eye of easy notions of shamanism, there was no association between the use of psychedelics and a desire to help animals (Pöllänen, Osika, Stenfors, & Simonsson, 2022).

Ironically, even if positive results abounded in the literature, it would be quite the sad story that one could not 'relate to nature' (i.e., 'love nature') unless sufficiently chemically disturbed (or, unless one is female and from an indigenous group, or born before the Industrial Revolution, etc.,).

'Love': A Working Definition

For the purposes of this monograph, the author shall fall back on Albert Ellis's definition of love, which is general enough to accommodate the many sentiments, feelings, and strong emotions which characterize 'it' (1985:32), from neuro-typical cases to its dysfunctional aberrations:

> Any kind of more or less intense emotional attraction to or involvement with another. It includes many types and degrees of affection, such as conjugal love, parental love, familial love, religious love, love of humanity, love of animals, love of things, self-love, sexual love, obsessive-compulsive love, etc. (Ellis, 1954, p.117) Some of the many appropriate synonyms for love-and especially for healthy love-are: fondness, liking, regard, esteem, closeness, intimacy, friendship, caring, concern, tenderness, kindliness, and ardor.

Ellis himself admitted to the challenge of defining 'love' as when he wrote (1985:32): *"What is love? It is a feeling that is so varied and pervasive that it is hard to define."* However, there is enough in the above definition and his concerns about, in particular, "romance" ("*Devotees of romance tend to create and maintain a number of irrational beliefs (iBs) or myths that interfere with intimate …*"), that can be applied to even many more complex and diverse conjugations of 'love.' A closer look at 'self-nature' intimations reveals that its excepting as a purer form of human development and expression might instead reveal all sorts of mixed types of 'love,' including a projection or a need for 'self-love,' the sexualization of 'nature,' and/or obsessive-compulsive attachments toward non-human animals and things.

Alas, no Platonic ('canonical') perfect-singular 'love,' 'nature,' or 'self' exists.[2]

'Ecopsychological' Deontology

Much of what is presented as environmental philosophy, deep ecology, and even 'ecopsychology,' takes the form of deontological ethics, the *do's and don't's* of human<>human, human animal<>non-human animals, or human<>nature relations. However, as in other forms of deontological arguments, these stances are not always or necessarily logically consistent nor have pragmatic value to the extent that their deontology is based on idiosyncratic, ego-centric, and/or anthropocentric ontologies (arbitrary). As Albert Camus observed in The Rebel (1956: 302-303), reformers end up establishing even more draconian systems once in power due to humanity's never-ending quest for the ineffable quality "unity," which often disguises itself as 'love':

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[2] Instead, the author reiterates the reality of 'many selves' (moment-to-moment and throughout the lifespan) interpreting 'many natures' as seen in Figure 3 and shared in "*Ecopsychology Revisited*" (2019): https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=monographs

> Life is this dichotomy itself, the mind soaring over volcanoes, of light, the madness of justice, the extenuating intransigence of moderation … Man can master in himself everything that should be mastered. He should rectify in creation everything that can be rectified. And after he has done so, children will still die unjustly even in a perfect society … There is an evil, undoubtedly, which men accumulate in their frantic desire for unity.

According to Camus, some degree of foresight toward moderation makes for more acceptable forms of rebellion. Oftentimes, conversations about devotional investment ('love') in ideas or feelings of 'self' in 'connection' with 'nature,' the latter often mischaracterized or singularized as a breathing-living entity, elude self-criticism (moderation). A critically moderated, 'ecopsychology' might proceed as follows:

1) *To inquire further into the degree to which professionals, itinerant participants, and clients infuse or project their own psychological shortcomings and aspirational needs onto natural processes* – to clarify what the constructs 'nature' and 'connection' mean.

2) *To tease out constructs that are often bundled together in quizzical causal and casual fashion, like in supposing that a certain feeling, at a certain time or place, justifies an esoteric and tangled weaving of, say, 'consciousness,' 'love,' 'spirituality,' and 'something else,' idiosyncratically interpreted by a given individual* – again, clarify constructs.

3) *To continue the necessary work of serious interdisciplinary consilience that some 'ecopsychological' approaches have lacked and continue to lack to the extent that these often oversell either generic and confusing notions, or anomalous interpretations of eastern and/or native American religions entangled with pseudo-scientific claims* (i.e., *pseudo-profound bullshit*)[3], a serious issue if research university groups are themselves contributing to esoterism -- confusing constructs.

Self-criticism (Camus's "moderation") is most warranted today when media misinformation is rampant. Most academics, teachers, students, and democratically-oriented thinkers are, at this moment, in various states of dismay -- very distraught -- by pernicious cultural trends, by the *missing democratic fundamentals* of civility, tolerance, reasoned judgement, and do-as-little-harm-as-possible pragmatism. Progress toward common sense goals of pursuing a valuable and fact-based education, undoing the damages that humans have inflicted upon our planet, and seeking sustainable solutions that address thoughtless or arbitrarily conceived exploitative enterprises, seems to have, if not stalled at a perilous crossroads in the history of our species and planet, at least been challenged in ways that make most honest efforts nugatory.

It serves no purpose to add to the unclarity and incoherence of our times yet more fanciful tales whose only purpose seems to arouse people into "lock-stock-and-barrel" ideological positions and emotional states which might operate as *virtue signalling*, and might lead to *affective polarization* and culture cancelling for, it seems, self-serving or ignorant reasons. A great degree

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[3] Gordon, P., Cheyne, J.A., Barr, N., Koehler, D.J., & Fugelsang, J.A. (2015). On the reception and detection of pseudo-profound bullshit. *Judgement and Decision Making*, 10(6), 549-563.

of intellectual skepticism and modesty, frugality, temperance, and resilience are needed to offset the rampant and aimless consumerist excesses which have for too long become the norm.

Emotion Junkies

Past and more recent political events, particularly of the conspiracy kind, are proof that humans relish experiencing even psychologically corrosive emotions as part of identification and tribal belongingness processes (Lexhagen, Lundberg, & Chekalina, 2020). Emotions burst out and blend in from activity to activity, making clear causal connections quite difficult: Do I overeat because I am in love or because I was just dumped by my lover, who also ate for confusing reasons? Did eating this delicious meal on an alpine meadow and falling in love, simultaneously, precipitate a profound feeling of 'nature connection'? Most likely, yes, "all of the above."

The particular case of relishing noxious emotions (e.g., high arousal with anger) seems to adhere to models which also describe addictive behaviors (Christensen, 2017). That is, the human reward system operates via a complex interplay of paleo-mammalian and neocortical neuronal circuitry that, at times, is apt to confuse the subjective agent and could explain addictive behaviors, as described by Christensen (2017:4):

> The human reward system evolved to respond to natural rewards (rewards we find in nature; foods like meat, vegetables, crops, sex, shelter, etc.). These contain a deeper 'meaning' to human psychobiological health: the nutrients of food, the shelter before the cold, reproduction for sex, etc. The reward system does not differentiate between natural and artificial rewards … In the addicted brain, pleasure is experienced, but no satiety, because no actual biochemical imbalance is re-established. This continuous pleasure stimulation over time induces the amygdala to be hyper-activated, while the insula is hypo-activated. This is the basis of the problematic and inadequate decision-making of addicted individuals: they have little access to the top-down regulatory control processes acquired through socialization mediated by frontal and prefrontal networks, which would help signaling the long-term implications of different choice options.

As reported elsewhere (Pennycook, Fugelsang, & Koehler, 2015), cognitive executive functions, including our habitual use of analytical thinking in order to better assess the context and nature of our emotional lives, requires training and conscious diligence *("An unexamined life is not worth living.")*. At the extreme end of thinking are the ineffectual and even dangerous effects of addiction. Again, quoting Christensen (2017:4), *"... [addicts] have little access to the top-down regulatory control processes acquired through socialization mediated by frontal and prefrontal networks, which would help signaling the long-term implications of different choice options."*

But what might one say about strongly felt emotions that seem to be part of social norms?

During a visit to Spain, and while staying with friends, there was a very strange moment (for an unprepared American) where their family members reunited: grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren. At some point, in an abrupt, strident and hysterical fashion, one of the grandkids asked their grandmother to confirm that she (the eldest) was her favorite child – that she was loved the most. In unison some of the others, including adults, asked the same question, making the poor grandmother and visitors feel quite uncomfortable. The poor woman finally said, "I love you all equally" ("*Los quiero a todos igual*"). The almost narcissistic necessity to vie for

attention as 'love,' or establish some birth order pecking hierarchy as 'love,' seemed quite medieval – immature for sure.

During the same visit, aunts kept repeating to various (favorite) nephews, in a strident and hysterical manner, different versions of "I love you too much," "I love you so much that I could eat you," or "Don't forget that I am your favorite aunt!" (Bajoghli, et al., 2014) Frank Sulloway would have had a field day analyzing and following through with these declarations as indicators of birth order effects and their products: undeserved favoritism, personal vendettas and social unrest (Sulloway, 1997).

Birth order effects and their medieval consequences to self and society aside, it is an empirical question whether this emotional amplification and familial pedigree sorting itself produces emotion junkies who go on to enable their descendants in iterations of many types of psychological insecurities. If so, it is the sort of transgenerational affective disorder that keeps on chipping away at full-fledged agency.

Virtue Signalling (*Moral Grandstanding*) *and Affective Polarization*

The examples shared above suggest that many declarations of 'love' fall into the category of *virtue signalling* (*moral grandstanding*) and can lead to situations of *affective polarization* (Hill & Garner, 2021). Almost any human thought, emotion, or act can be said to be 'virtuous' if a given culture deems it so. Obviously, not every product of 'love' or 'loving' results in actions that are consistent with even its western European agreed upon descriptions or ideals – are virtuous. Also, that consensus changes over time. Additionally, cross-cultural notions of 'love' vary even more widely. It is the 'devotional' aspect of 'love' which could be (has been) misconstrued as virtue. When a person claims that "they love Jesus" (or The Buddha), for example, they might be also virtue signalling to the extent that they deem this relationship to be 'sacred' and superior in some form – more virtuous than other types of relationships. Any other person who fails to declare the same, by default, must be less virtuous, even blasphemous. Virtue signalling is intrinsic to human societies to the extent that norms determine conduct, and feedback on ideal behaviors keeps folks on "the right path." In a biosemiotic sense, meaning, valuing, and evaluating are inescapable of life:

> … natural systems are intrinsically evaluative from within precisely because signification occurs at all levels … The stronger biosemiotic argument asserts that because meaning and signification are widespread in the natural world, all creatures are relative evaluators with respect to their *umwelten* and each other (Conesa-Sevilla, 2006: 26).

Circling back to Spanish grandmothers and syrupy loving aunties: Is the necessity to monopolize 'grandma's love' a form of virtue signalling to the extent that she might be seen as sage-like in the family's eyes? By association, if grandma 'loves me best, I must also be virtuous' – even the most virtuous! If three aunties compete with each other with their hyperbolic expressions of 'love' and 'loving,' are they also virtue signalling and, to boot, engaging in affective polarization? Playing favorite may be as old as human societies, but its advertisement, 24/7 while employing multiple platforms of social media, is a more recent phenomenon.

Affective polarization comes into play when competing ideologies of which sage is 'truer' delineate imaginary and actual battlefields. According to Hill and Garner (2021:14834):

> We are worried about *affective polarization*—the phenomenon whereby partisans on opposing sides come to view one another more negatively.

> No human society is composed of an ideologically homogeneous population. Or to put it otherwise, human societies require people who disagree to cooperate and trust each other. They must also allow for disagreement and productive discussion of competing views. Yet, virtue signalling undermines all of this.

> On the one hand, we saw that virtue signalling seems to prevail in contexts where conformism is rewarded. Yet, a serious discussion about difficult moral questions is not helped by an environment that punishes dissent or rewards hyperbole for the sake of homogeneity. We strongly encourage the reader to consider how a need to constantly signal that one was a good Marxist and the corollary fear of being denounced affected the quality of moral and scientific debate. We would suggest that growing worry, occasionally expressed by academics in the popular press, about the increasingly difficult task of debating certain issues is in part a product of virtue signalling and the context it creates.

> On the other hand, phenomena like affective polarization generate resentment and anger between fellow citizens. Rather than treating fellow citizens as partners in search of good ideas and policies for the nation, one starts to view others as obstacles or enemies.

And now we come to address the mammoth in the room with interconnected questions: Is the person who says 'I love the Earth' an emotion junky? Is that person also virtue signalling and possibly contributing to affective polarization? Put another way, is the person who feels as though a sunset 'spoke to her' personally an emotion junky, virtual signalling, and potentially, starting on the path of affective polarization? Can we tell on the surface, whether this person is speaking metaphorically or literally?

These are not trivial questions to the extent that some ecofeminists (Cuomo, 1992), for example, have in the past axiomatically confounded privileging a particular sex with an exalted view of 'love' or 'loving,' and by extension engaged in virtue signalling, implying, also, superiority statements that logically led to affective polarization.[4] The mainstream cultural pushback to these types of moral grandstanding, worldwide, results in even more radical forms of affective polarization operating in a never ending vicious (uncivil) positive feedback loops.[5]

Now to the whole herd of mammoths: Is a purely humanistic 'ecopsychology' (egocentric, anthropocentric, idiosyncratic, and uncritical) – as opposed to *posthumanistic* – condemned to confuse (confound) a complex and in some cases unknowable multifactorial 'nature' (natural processes) with personal 'feelings'? If so, how does this translate in the ambit of 'healer' –

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[4] Is it surprising, then, that some American males, to name one sex and country, retaliate with admixtures of vitriol and despondency?

[5] This is a different issue than the rights of individuals or groups to address and correct injustices past and present. However unjust or wrong, it does not help anybody's cause to privilege any sex, or bramble strange notions of 'self' with even stranger ideas of 'nature.' (See Wernitznig, 2021, in this Journal – Vol. 3(1), Article # 6)

patient relations, or for that matter, anytime any person makes a declaration about 'nature' intending to impress or teach eager devotees?

The Unnatural Affectations of Loving "Earth"

The way philosophers, computer scientists and semioticians might go about elucidating and predicting the consequences of believing '*P*' could help us track the intricacy of "relations" given certain, known parameters. The exacting work of Kurt Lewin, more precisely his topological force-fields dynamics work (1936), can be taken to be one of several foundational antecedents of applied psychology.

One way to track important features of, let's call it, the epistemological background of a certain thinker and speaker who also makes *affect* declarations about 'her relationship' to or 'her connection' with 'nature,' is to first assess what sort of reasoner they are. One would be inclined to do so, if for no other reason than to save time later on during a conversation and to cut to the proverbial chase when it comes to the more relevant points. As Socrates found himself, it is the case that a person, a reasoner, may not even be aware from whence their thoughts come. Figure 1 employs the diagrammatic analysis of semiotic squares with which to contrast four different types of reasoners (please refer to the work of Dormandy in this issue for a full explication of doxastic logic applied to various ideas of 'love').

Without calling it 'ecopsychology,' one can find even professors of 'nature connectedness' who are quite happy to hold onto such vague phrases in order to, one imagines, attract impressionable students. For example, at the University of Derby, UK, there exists a "nature connectedness research group," their slogan: "*Our nature connections research aims to understand people's sense of their relationship with the natural world. We create everyday interventions in order to improve this relationship for the wellbeing of humans and nature. Our research is good for nature and it is good for you. Let nature be your story … Our story is nature.*" Self-assured but without providing an iota of construct analysis or validity, they declare: "*Nature connectedness captures that relationship between people and the rest of nature. Nature connectedness is a measurable psychological construct that moves beyond contact with nature to an individual's sense of their relationship with the natural world.*" Is that truly so? The statements assume that the variables 'nature' and 'connectedness' have been clearly defined and can be manipulated.

Figures 2 and 3 would be familiar to computer scientists (computer modeling): Entity Relationship Diagrams (ERD). Figure 2 is an example of basic and selected attributes that could be assigned to two 'agents' who differ in three attributes each and their degrees of agentic freedom, while also interacting with each other ("R"). Figure 3 fleshes out these relationships so that one can better judge the value of their respective contributions toward an as-accurate-description-of-reality-as-possible. Clearly, Entities (agents) A and B are perceiving and living very different realities and their relationship (R) is affected by their unique perspectives. "N" signifies their relationship to 'nature," however each agent comes to define 'it.' Depending on how disjointed their respective realities happen to be, efforts to establish common ground, outside a few practical activities, might be incommensurable (Conesa, 2020). Figures 2 and 3 do not take into account how the passage of time affects attributes or relations, short or longer term,

however, originators of ERD modeling later revised their constructs to account for these early shortcomings (Chen, 1976; 2006).

An example: Entity/Agent A, a forester, might believe in and practice controlled burning in order to reinvigorate forests and provide food resources for fauna, based on scientific evidence, whereas Entity/Agent B may feel that burning even one tree is the cruelest of acts, because trees 'feel' like people do, or so they believe. In semiotic terms (*Semantics, Syntactics, Pragmatics* …) meaning relations between agents A and B lead to any number of interactive situations (Rα X Rβ; Rα + Rβ; Rα < Rβ; or Rα > Rβ) with agonist and antagonist results. (Refer to caption for Figure 3.) The actual range of all probable relationship states is vast to the extent that both agentic attributes and circumstances vary, themselves and also across time, thus making simple 'self-nature' statements provisionary at best (José Ortega y Gasset's famous observation: "*Yo soy yo, y mis circunstancias*," "I am I and my circumstance.")

Despite the fact that Entity/Agent A enters in a communicative relationship with Entity/Agent B and 'nature' from an 'eyes wide open' perspective, and Entity/Agent B might come to the same relationship, for lack of a better term, from *an unnatural affectation of loving "Earth."* To be fair, both could accomplish a set of similar ends: they can both plant trees, recycle, named their children Sequoia, and raise goats for milk and cheese without killing them for meat.

Figure 3 represents a fairly typical dynamics, as inferred from present day political tensions in the Unites Sates between groups of agents who have different educational backgrounds, belief systems, or thinking and emotional dispositions. Both groups might engage, equally, in virtue signalling.[6] But there exists also *true malevolence* of the kind we are witnessing at the moment of this writing, when one nation invades another, cruelly kills or tortures peaceful people, and systematically increases pollution out of personal vanity or sadistic satisfaction. Malevolence also includes the intentional and long-term destruction of entire ecologies for profit. The catastrophically swift or incremental results of malevolence act as social catalysts for events much worse to come, or so it seems at the moment.

Finally, some form or another of the above relationships (points of congruence and disagreements) are part of integral ecology communication and moderator models employed, oftentimes, in order to identify the various motivations represented in divergent interlocutors (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2011). To those of us who have participated in these sessions, it is quite discouraging, but not all that surprising, that extreme ideology and tribal identification, more often than not, win the day. Most participants go home as grumpy as, ever each holding onto their preferred bag of colored marbles. "We did our best," say the Hatfields and the McCoys.

A Perambulation: Other Ghostly Infatuations

It is anybody's guess what the many prehistoric symbols found deep in caves or cliffs might mean exactly, without asking the original artist. Their circles, spirals, and crosses, as far as we know, may be akin to 'hugs and kisses' that are today bestowed in virtual emoji simplifications

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[6] … leading to affective polarization and 'cancel culture.'

and representations of planet Earth, the icons themselves anthropomorphized as returning their love. These archaic psychological vestiges might follow the meme rule and heuristic "no harm, no foul." In other words, iconizing our existence in terms of a preferred identity and guessing or establishing a relation to the natural world is likely to be an archaic psychological vestige, too irresistible not to continue exploring without detrimentally affecting other means of 'knowing.'

They are *ghostly infatuations* in the sense that we encounter these symbols in deep caves and cliff walls as apparitions and with little cultural context to make them fully explicable; and they do affect us so. One supposes, also, that there is an element of sympathetic magic or concordance to the extent that that which the seer cannot fully explain but only feels, deeply and ephemerally, matches an equally obscure ochre-drawn spiral, aloft midway between the muddy cave floor and shiny stalactites.

Both open-ended projective opportunities and top-down perception prove to be irresistible if not inescapable. Seeing ghostly figures in clouds, scary goblins and dancing fairies behind bushes, or hearing ghosts chattering in the dark, are cases of *pareidolia* running amok, as visual or auditory stimuli, past and present (Maranhão-Filho, & Vincent, 2009; Liu, et al., 2014; Ness & Phillips, 2014; Kato & Mugitani, 2015; Mulroy et al., 2019; Mavrogiorgou, et al., 2021). Face-like forms are easily seen because our perceptual system evolved to resolve actual, real potential friends or foes. One can conjure any sort of universal and personal meaning as in seeing a Jesus-look-alike shape on a piece of toast (Liu et al., 2014) or a fairy-like image appearing above the water falls. From here on, basic perception and top-down processes can easily turn into magical thinking.

Apropos, magical thinking endures, to this day, even in the most unlikely places, to the point that even some academicians are not at all shy about declaring themselves followers of Amazonian shamans or members of a pagan society. Popular shows have proliferated that exploit the idea of, more than explore, natural magic while resorting to perpetuating talismanic adoration of known and newfound sigils.

Conclusion

In other works (2020, 2021) the author has argued that confusing notions of 'self' and 'nature,' for example, describing the former solely (arbitrarily) in terms of affect, or the latter as a singular sentient being, actually diminishes a wider and more inclusive range of 'connection' possibilities – it is more revealing of the person who "feels that way" than it is of the true diversity of selves or natures. A more honest and exacting description of the 'self' was evident in Santiago Ramón y Cajal's observations, ninety years ago. Quoting Cajal, Benjamin Ehrlich (2022:312) writes:

> Believing that a representation is the self is like thinking that a photographic lens depicts itself. Maybe if there were a mirror in front. But in man the self has no mirror. The self is absolutely inaccessible. That which we take for a mirror, consciousness, only show us the product of the selection […] thought to be the object but what is thought to be the object is not what we think, but rather yet another image about which one thinks.

Rather stubbornly, and mostly without evidence, generations since have been bent on dressing up 'the self' as many-a-thing, proving Cajal's point. In this sense to claim that "self is love" is another *ghostly affectation*. (See also Dennett, 1991.)

If the sentiment, or more precisely, an emotion that one identifies as 'love' becomes the protagonist of and footnote to almost everything we do, that is, if that thing 'love' reigns supreme and is definitive of what most humans do or want, then grinding and packing everything else into the same 'love' sausage casing becomes commonplace if only to add provenance to 'our feelings' – in order to, unnecessarily perhaps, validate them.

As James Joyce declared in Ulysses, *"Love loves to love love."* In the context of this text, the sentence is understood to be a fitting description of emotion addiction ('the emotion junky').

However, so stumping about and stamping every other 'self-nature' association as inevitably a thing of love, or for love, runs the risk of rendering every such feeling, whatever it might have been, shallow or circumspect. When we beat 'love' to death (virtual signalling) it is more likely, it seems, that we are in the shadows of its scarcity. In its clamoring we know it is a thing lost to us that, perhaps, could be if only one recited the right incantation holding one's mouth right.

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Figure 1: Semiotic squares applied to doxastic logic. Four potentially antagonistic reasoning modalities are contrasted.

Figure 1. Semiotic Squares: Types of Reasoners

Accurate Reasoner

Never believes in a false proposition.

"The Earth is globe-like. Sailing ships will not fall off a disk's edge."

Inaccurate Reasoner

Believes in at least one false proposition.

"Humans have bred many varieties of plants and animals. However, it is inconceivable that natural selection processes, over longer periods of time, have done so."

Semiotic Squares Applied to Doxastic Logic

Timid Reasoner

Afraid to believe p if and when doing so contradicts any other beliefs.

"I shan't believe in the evidence of plate tectonics and drifting continents because the Bible says the earth is 6K years old."

Peculiar Reasoner

Believes p but also does not believe p.

"I believe dinosaurs existed and went extinct. But it could also be a just-so story that scientists tell us."
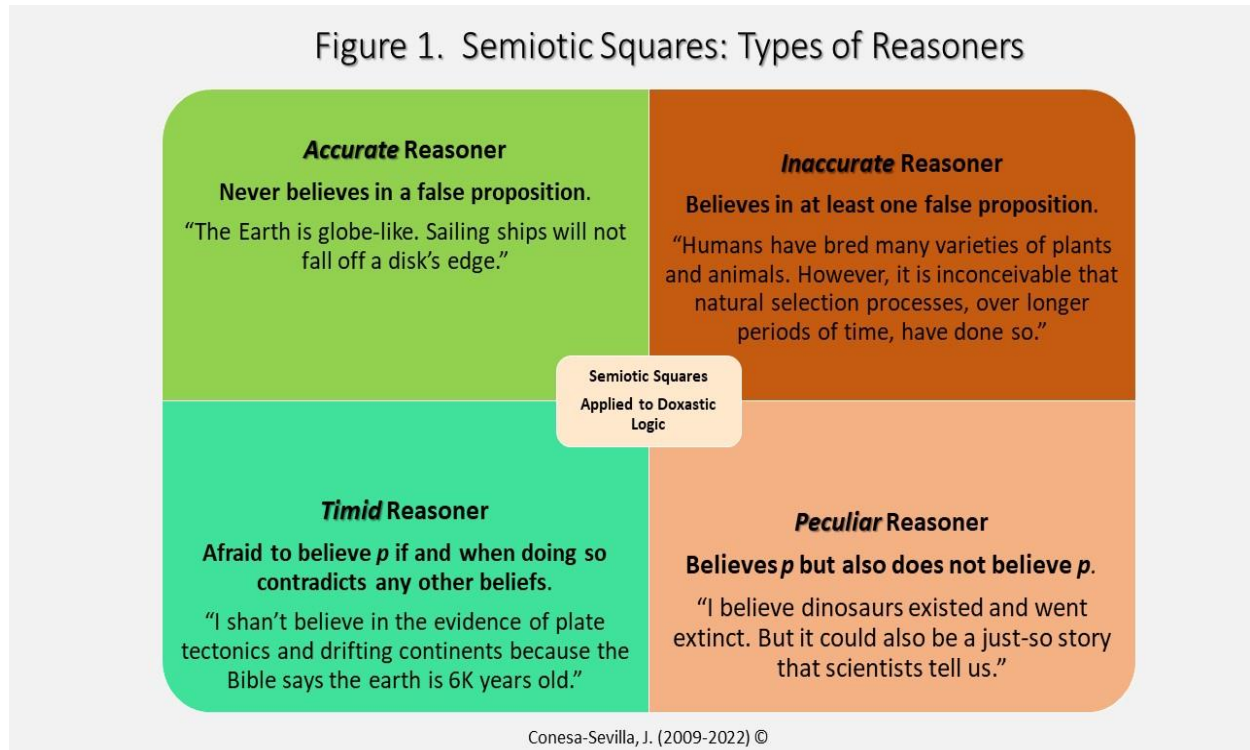
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Figure 2: An unlabeled (unassigned) example of an Entity Relationship Diagram (ERD) to be fully used in Figure 3.

Figure 2. ENTITY RELATIONSHIP DIAGRAM (ERD)

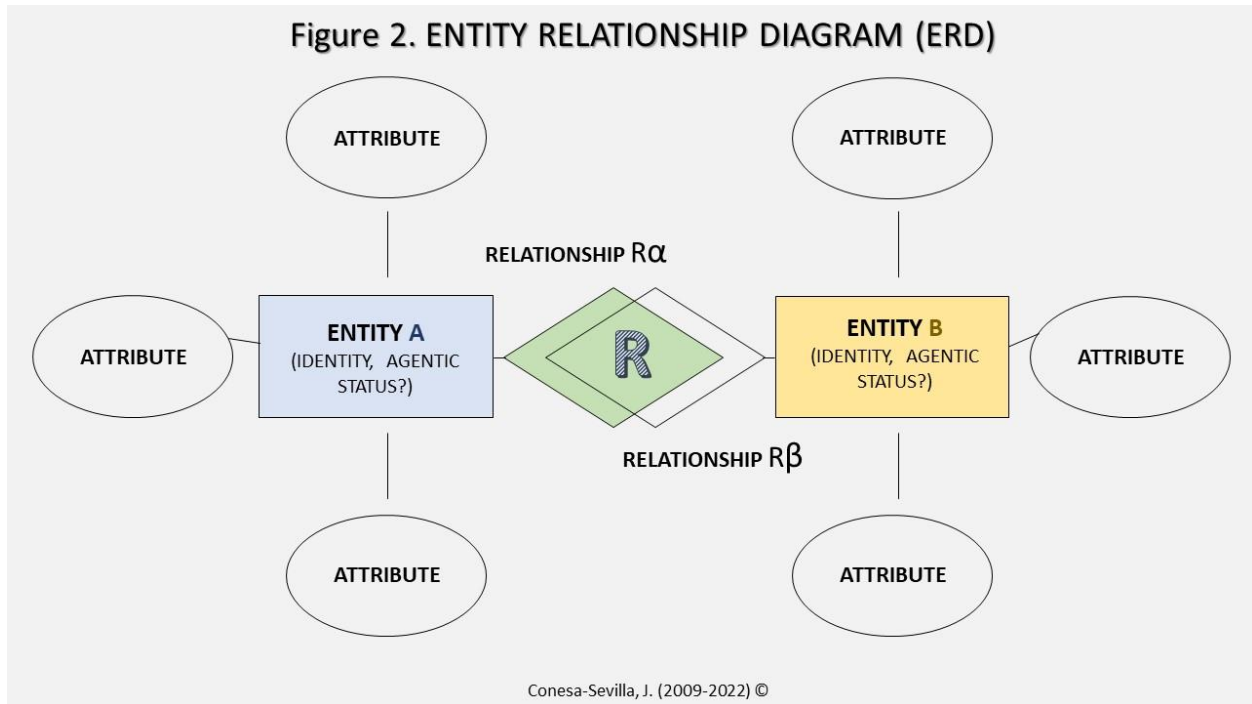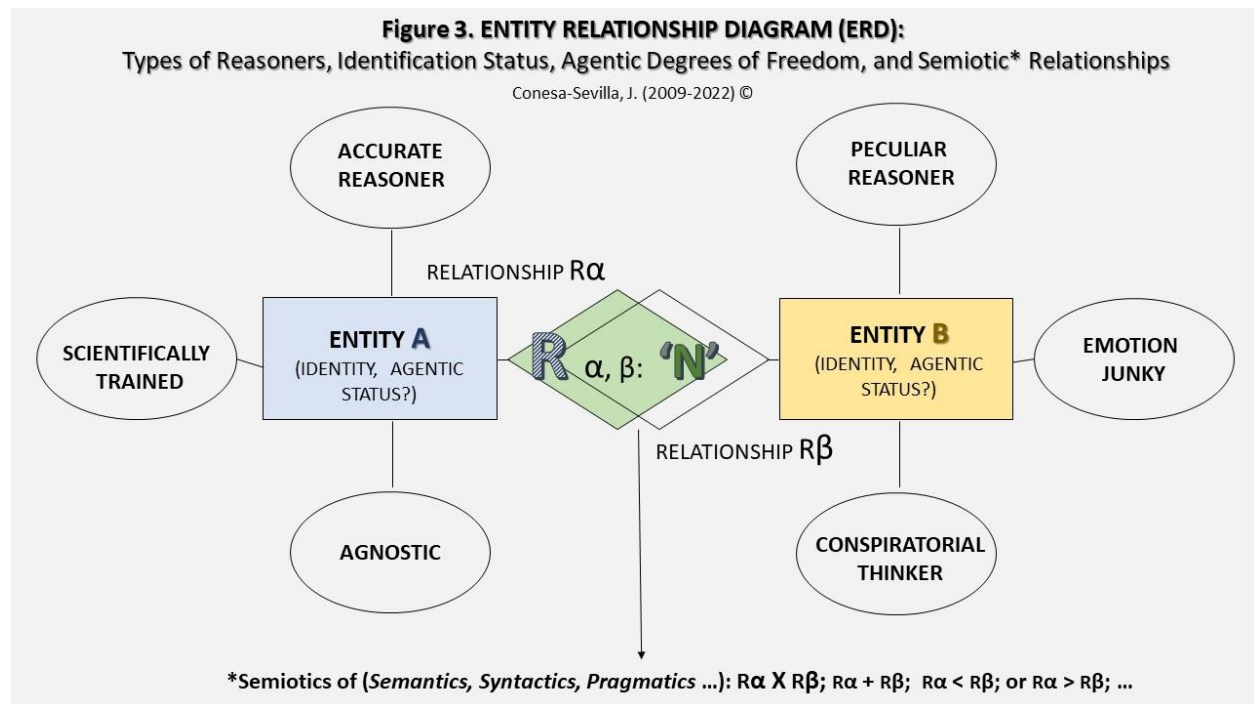Conesa-Sevilla, J. (2009-2022) ©

Figure 3: Entity Relationship Diagram (ERD) depicting the communicative dynamics between two types of reasoners, comparing their educational backgrounds and cognitive biases. The relationship nexus "R" and "N" includes both interpersonal dynamics between entities/agents A and B ("R" without "N"), their relational status to their ideas of 'nature' ("N" without "R"), and their overlap ("R" juxtaposed with "N"). Again, in semiotic terms (*Semantics, Syntactics, Pragmatics* …), meaning relations between agents A and B, lead to any number of potential interactive situations (Rα X Rβ; Rα + Rβ; Rα < Rβ; or Rα > Rβ …) with both agonist and antagonist results. For example, both entities/agents happen to interact while problem solving on an issue specific to their beliefs about "N" (Rα X Rβ). Under some circumstances, Entity/Agent A could affect and change specific attributes, agentic situations, or relationship status of Entity/Agent B. This ERD diagram is simplified to the extent that the factor time (*t*) is not shown (Chen, 2006).

Figure 3. ENTITY RELATIONSHIP DIAGRAM (ERD):
Types of Reasoners, Identification Status, Agentic Degrees of Freedom, and Semiotic* Relationships
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*Semiotics of (*Semantics, Syntactics, Pragmatics* …): Rα X Rβ; Rα + Rβ; Rα < Rβ; or Rα > Rβ; …

> "*Men ought to know, that from the brain, and from the brain alone, arise our pleasures, joys, laughter, and jests, our sorrows, pains, griefs, and tears.*"
>
> ~Hippocrates

> "*Existence is a blind and unshakable force indifferent to feeling.*"
>
> ~Giacomo Leopardi