

## **Introduction to Special Topic Section: Ecopsychology's Roots in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, the Deep Ecology Movement, and Ecocriticism**

**E**copsychology's roots are deeply entwined with those of transpersonal and humanistic psychology, as well as the deep ecology movement and related impulses toward positive social change. This Special Topic section presents both contemporary work in this arena and historically-oriented papers that help to clarify where and how ecopsychology is situated relative to its near academic neighbors. It also provides support for the development of closer ties between ecopsychology and transpersonal and humanistic approaches.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the need for more empirical work in all transpersonally-related areas of study, the journal gives precedence to articles reporting on research. The first paper in this section, entitled, *Connectedness and Environmental Behavior*, by Robert Hoot and Harris Friedman, reports that a sense of interconnectedness with nature and consideration of future consequences, as measured by relevant scales, predicted self-reported pro-environmental beliefs and behavior. This suggests that interconnectedness, a central tenet of transpersonal views, may be quite relevant to the environmental crises facing humanity. In this context, transpersonal is not merely "beyond the ego" in some transcendent, other-worldly manner, but also in a way that is immanently interconnected with this-worldly community and

environment (Friedman & Pappas, 2006; Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007). An immanent more-than-ego view of self calls the individual to both social and environmental engagement as a natural course of self-expression. In harmony with this, Friedman (1983) has long argued that transpersonal psychology understands the self in a way that is "inextricably embedded in the universe" so that "ultimately, self and non-self are equivalent" (p. 38)—a concept that he has called self-expansiveness. Personal transformation, a process close to the heart of transpersonal approaches, can arguably be understood as a process in which the self expands from its identification with a limited personal ego into a lived understanding of its interconnectedness with the larger world.

While current research by Hoot and Friedman helps to validate the contemporary relevance of self-expansiveness as a construct, their work offers one particularly noteworthy result. They report that the Connection to Nature Scale (Mayer & Frantz, 2004), representing an immanently-oriented self-expansiveness, predicted pro-environmental behavior, while a scale measuring expanded self-identification with somewhat remote elements such as "atoms in their body or future descendents who may not even have human form" (SELF-

TS; Pappas & Friedman, 2007, p. 331) did not predict such behavior. This latter scale arguably represents a more transcendent view of self-expansiveness, which tends to emphasize hard-to-define ultimates rather than practical engagement in tangible relationships. Given that communities focused on transformation through transcendence have been criticized for tending toward insular elitism (Goldman, 2012) rather than involvement in practical transformational causes such as social and environmental justice, Hoot and Friedman's results point to a need for additional research that discriminates more finely between the impact of immanently- and transcendentally-oriented self-expansiveness.

The next set of papers grew out of conversations over the past 25 years between guest Special Topic Editor Mark Schroll and Miles A. Vich, Ralph Metzner, Stanley Krippner, Robert Greenway, Kathleen Damiani, Kevin J. Sharpe, James Fadiman, Jan Lee Ande, John Tallmadge, Katherine MacDowell, Alan Drengson, among others. Several of these continuing conversations are represented in this section as a means of articulating its core message that is summed up in the question: *How, and in what directions, can humanity move beyond simply treating the symptoms of the world's growing number of social and environmental crises?* For Schroll, the motivation to ask this question was the result of reading Roger Walsh's (1984) book *Staying Alive: The Psychology of Human Survival*. Pondering this question represented a real turning point in his thinking:

It allowed me to realize that healing the world's social and environmental crises was not going to come about simply by creating new technologies and discontinuing the use of fossil fuels, nor by rejecting the development of new technologies and trying to live more simply. It is not a matter of philosophers envisioning a better environmental ethic to guide the practice of conservation biologists and urban planners, allowing us to serve as better stewards of the land. Nor would a concentrated effort of protest by eco-activists employing guilt, fear, and letter writing campaigns, urging politicians to enact stiffer environmental laws, create the kinds of changes needed in our behavior. Necessary as all these approaches might be, I believe that the real starting point toward healing the social and environmental crises begins with self-confrontation and self-examination. We need to examine the worldview

influencing our attitudes and our behavior (Schroll, 2007, p. 30).

Some mainstream environmentalists may take offense with this turning point in his thinking, believing that he no longer supports the work of environmental activists, or those involved in resource management, conservation biology, environmental psychology and conservation psychology. But this is not correct. Schroll continues to actively support the work of environmental activists; and the research contributing to resource management, conservation biology (France, 2008), environmental and conservation psychology. Nevertheless, he remains unconvinced that these (including APA Division 34) go far enough (MacDowell & Schroll, 2009/2010). His assessment of this problem continues to be confirmed in the *American Psychologist* perspective toward addressing these concerns (Swim et al., 2011). The consequences of this focus on treating or healing the symptoms, as Ralph Nader (1990) has pointed out, result in the tremendously high burnout rate among environmental activists. Why? Because:

[T]he motivation that ignites most environmental activists are simply reactionary and symptom focused. Trying to heal each one of these separate symptoms is a never-ending task because the system keeps breaking down amidst our efforts to heal it; meaning, absent from such a focus is a coherent philosophy of life that enables people to sustain and nurture themselves. This symptom-oriented approach can be compared to a field surgeon trying to mend all of the wounded in an ongoing war without end. Thankfully we are able to save some of the wounded, but many others die. With each new day greeting us there is the need to care for more wounded, and that eventually results in burnout. Similarly, we as surgeons trying to heal the wounds of our culture will never see an end to our labors merely by trying to heal all of its symptoms of decay. Instead, the only way to truly heal the wounds of our culture will be to find a way to stop all of the fighting and end our war with nature. (Schroll, 2007, p. 31)

But how do we as humans end this war? How do we move beyond simply treating symptoms? How do we shift the focus of the problem and move toward its solution? Asking himself similar questions, Edgar D. Mitchell concluded that what we need to solve the eco-

crisis “is a transformation of consciousness” (Roberts, 2011, p. 6). In other words we need a positive vision of the future and ourselves as inhabitants of this future based on a cultural (anthropological) and personal (existential) understanding of what it means to be human. Only the most skeptical continue to deny that we are now in the midst of the eco-crisis that Rachel Carson (1962) predicted nearly 50 years ago. Skeptics and believers arguing for and against the reality of the eco-crisis have nevertheless missed a more essential point—Carson warned against relying on a “technological fix” as a solution to the eco-crisis, yet this does not mean that technological innovation is not important; it is. What Carson meant was that by itself new technologies will not be enough to solve the eco-crisis (Drengson, 1995). Schroll is therefore in complete agreement with Mitchell that what is needed to solve the eco-crisis is a transformation of consciousness, and, furthermore, he has argued:

This begs the question as to how we will be able to motivate ourselves to initiate this transformation of consciousness. Indeed the criticism many have had regarding the hypothesis that “we need a transformation of consciousness” is we lack a specific operational definition of what this actually means. Here too is where the importance of humanistic and transpersonal psychology come into play in this conversation, because it is these schools of psychology that have focused on motivational techniques and methods to change consciousness more than others. In his film *MindWalk* (Capra, 1991), Fritjof Capra echoed this concern, suggesting that we are suffering from a “crisis of perception.” *MindWalk* is Capra’s vision of an alternative paradigm; moreover this film itself is a demonstration of how the motivation to initiate a transformation of consciousness is possible through dialogue. I examine both of these perspectives in my review of Capra’s film [Schroll, 2011c]. Capra’s vision in *MindWalk* represents a precursor to what many are now referring to as *ecopsychology* (Roszak, 1992; Schroll, 2008/2009), that I have suggested can be more accurately called *transpersonal ecosophy* (Schroll, 2009, 2009/2010, 2011a).

Still, in conversations I have had with ecopsychologists who support the hypothesis that a transformation of consciousness is needed, many have asked if it will take some serious apocalyptic

environmental catastrophe to motivate most of us. Ram Dass raised this same concern in his interview with John Seed ... (Ram Dass & Seed, 1991). Ram Dass asked: “Will it take incredible trauma to trigger this transformation of consciousness?” To which Seed replied (paraphrasing): “We have already had so much trauma this does not seem to be a sufficient means to trigger a change in our awareness. In fact trauma often has the opposite nullifying influence on us.”<sup>22</sup> Instead Seed suggested that what we needed was some sort of miracle that would allow us to “wake up one day different.” This brings us back to my previous comment that humanistic and transpersonal psychology have contributed to methods and techniques associated with consciousness transformation. (Schroll, 2011b, pp. 1-2)

All of this leads back to the current issue of *IJTS*, and the paper entitled, *The Deep Ecology Movement: Origins, Development, and Future Prospects (Toward a Transpersonal Ecosophy)*, which clarifies ecopsychology’s origins in humanistic and transpersonal psychology. It also connects ecopsychology with the historical development of the deep ecology movement, identifies its relationship with literary ecology (otherwise known as ecocriticism), and suggests that all this has evolved into something that could be called transpersonal ecosophy. The paper was originally written by Alan Drengson and (the late) Bill Devall, and to which Schroll later added.

In the short response that follows this paper, entitled, *Reflections on the Need for a More Complete History of the Deep Ecology Movement and Related Disciplines*, philosopher Michael Zimmerman discusses its significance toward aiding understanding of the engagement of various disparate ideas, and how their continuing process of reconciliation has contributed to current understanding. Zimmerman also suggests that a more comprehensive history needs to be written, and has in his own work put forth a means of mapping these multiple perspectives to foster an *Integral Ecology* (Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009).

Further advancing transpersonal ecosophy’s clarification is the paper, *Clearing Up Rollo May’s Views of Transpersonal Psychology, and Acknowledging May as an Early Supporter of Ecopsychology*, that Schroll authored with John Rowan and Oliver Robinson—with comments by others. This paper explores Rollo May’s

1986 and 1989 rejection of transpersonal psychology—and his 1992 reversal of this position. The paper also shows that May was supportive of the concerns that led to the emergence of ecopsychology and transpersonal ecosophy.

This latter paper also explores how transpersonal ecosophy has encountered and embraced Kaisa Puhakka's (2008) antidote to the postmodern malaise of experiential deconstruction, and Jorge N. Ferrer's (2002) participatory turn toward "coevolutionary perspectives" that embody "pluralistic approaches to spirituality" (Ferrer, 2009, p. 142) to help assist in recognizing the "web of life as primary" (Puhakka, 2008, p. 16). Puhakka's and Ferrer's papers resonate with the *ecosophies of communication* and *ecology of mind* that were the concern of Arne Naess and Gregory Bateson<sup>3</sup> (Bateson, 2010; Drengrson, Devall, & Schroll, 2011); *Ecosophies* are the wisdom of place and the person's unique relationship to it, and *ecology of mind* reflects modes of knowing the co-evolutionary experience of Being.

John Davis, a long-time leading scholar in the area of transpersonal ecopsychology, picks up the thread of theory in the next paper, entitled *Ecopsychology, Transpersonal Psychology, and Nonduality*. Davis, who also brings a clinical background in wilderness therapy, suggests that the transpersonal concept of nonduality is key to understanding the self's interconnectedness with the world, a point that further reveals the deep connection between transpersonal psychology and ecopsychology. Yet it is important to recognize that Davis' use of nonduality is different than, say, the way this term is used in a nondual tradition such as Advaita Vedanta.

For Davis, nonduality is an understanding of reality based on states of consciousness in which a person feels immersed in a world that is dynamic process created anew each moment, one in which they themselves are an unfolding embedded within that flow. Here the self is experienced as distinct but not separate from the living whole. Relative to Western dualistic philosophies that hold mind and matter as distinct, this understanding of self and world as radically intertwined is decidedly nondualistic.

However, this position is significantly different from the Advaitin teaching of nonduality. In Advaita Vedanta reality is not interconnected, because ultimate reality is radically one: it has no parts to be interconnected, and it has no spatial domain within

which such connections could exist (Whitfield, 2009). Reality is one thing, with no parts, and no extension in space or time. From an Advaitin view, the appearance of interconnectedness described by Davis is a phenomenon that takes place within the samsaric, or illusory, realm of time and space: a dimension in which the oneness of reality seems to be separated into various distinct aspects.

This does not in any way lessen the import or accuracy of Davis' position; in fact, Davis employs the nonduality term in a way that is constant with its use in the contemporary nondual movement (e.g., Prendergast, Fenner, & Krystal, 2003). Rather, it is an opportunity to clarify the fact that the term nonduality can be and is used in a variety of ways within spiritual traditions and even within transpersonal psychology. The construct that Davis offers here is nondual relative to Western philosophical dualism, but less radically nondual than the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. It might be useful to term this intermediate position "nondualistic interconnectedness," or simply, "interconnectedness," so as to distinguish it from strong Advaitin nonduality.

The interconnectedness that ecopsychology holds is not simply an abstract realization, but an opportunity for relationship with a living world. This is illustrated in Judson Davis' paper, *Jung at the Foot of Mount Kailash*, in which he shares a personal experience of an unexpected personal encounter with a vast feminine presence while traveling through the Himalayas. Only later did he come to associate this presence with Tara, the goddess of compassion. Yet this encounter suggests that divinities of the great spiritual traditions might be more than mere theoretical constructs referring to a single ultimate creative power of the universe; if the world is an interconnected living process, then some of these deities might be living presences within that domain just as surely as human beings are. In the spirit of East-West scholarship, Davis situates this experience within the context of both Jungian thought and the narratives of Tibetan Tantra.

Turning to a far-eastern culture, authors Yukari Kuniue and Judy Schavrien offer a glimpse into Yamato Kotoba, the deeply embodied poetic language of ancient Japan. Drawing on language developed prior to the introduction of written language by the Chinese in the 5th-6th centuries CE, and the vocabulary that came with this shift, Yamato Kotoba conveys an intimacy with the natural world—an immediacy of interpenetrating

presence that holds human and landscape in intimate communion. This theme of inquiry is developed in conversation with the philosophy of Western writers such as David Abrams and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The cost of abandoning this intimacy with life is explored in Alan Pope's piece, *Modern Materialism through the Lens of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. Here Pope deftly applies the ancient concept of "hungry ghost" to the modern materialist consumer. The hungry ghost, in Indo-Tibetan tradition, is a being with a huge empty stomach and a tiny mouth, one who is always ravenously hungry, and who is incapable of eating enough to be satisfied. This image is remarkably apt as a metaphor for contemporary consumerist cultures, whose very economies rely on the fact that its members are never satiated. The answer, for Pope, is mental training in meditative practices that restore mental health by providing satisfaction from within, rather than through the acquisition of material goods.

While it falls in the Book Review section rather than the Special Topic section, a related offering is John Harrison's review of Stephan Beyer's (2009) book *Singing to the Plants: A Guide to Mestizo Shamanism in the Upper Amazon*. Shamans, of course, live within an interconnected world rather than the separate material world of Western culture. Among the significant contributions Beyer's book offers, two stand out: 1) Shamans are frequently portrayed as benign spiritual leaders, whereas Beyer reveals shamans make a decision whether to be evil sorcerers or healers; and 2) Beyer offers an insightful discussion of gender inequality within Amazonian shamanism and how an increasing interest among women in its practices are influencing a shift in its traditional views. In his review, Harrison aptly summarizes these contributions.

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#### Notes

1. In *AHP-Perspective* Dec 2009/Jan 2010 (p. 6), Schroll called for the merger of transpersonal ecosophy with Division 32 of the American Psychological Association, inviting people to join a growing

coalition that promotes experiential transformation: awakening awareness and empathy of universal suffering that internalizes a felt self sense of ethics. This code of ethics is also guided by an intellectual understanding of humankind's role in cosmic evolution. Healing inner and outer conflict is therefore the means of healing the person/planet that fosters peace (Metzner, 1998). Harris Friedman, chair of the APA Division 32 Transpersonal Interest Group, has voiced support for these efforts, saying that he "would be glad to try to awaken it [sic, this group] by incorporating 'ecosophy' somehow" (personal communication, June 12, 2011). Thus several of the papers in this Special Topics section represent a first step toward a new era that will make humanistic and transpersonal psychology especially relevant toward answering the question of how its knowledge of motivation and consciousness transformation can be applied to assist humankind toward living more sustainably.

2. Schroll has referred to this opposite nullifying influence of trauma as the reliance on *the fear approach or the rhetoric of catastrophe; the guilt approach or the rhetoric of shame; and the self-sacrificing/voluntary simplicity approach or the rhetoric of redemption* as negative motivating techniques (Schroll, Krippner, Vich, Fadiman, & Mojeiko, 2009).
3. Some readers may have known Naess or Bateson. Schroll has written a "Call for Papers" as Co-Editor of a special issue of *The Trumpeter* to explore the work of Naess and Bateson. Contributors are sought who will explore the merged conceptual spaces of these two outstanding philosophers and their boundary-dissolving investigations of the landscape of consciousness. Personal insights are welcomed, and readers are encouraged to breathe life into their memories.

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The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is published by Floragrades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at [www.transpersonalstudies.org](http://www.transpersonalstudies.org), and in print through [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) (search for IJTS).