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2005-05-13 PCA Eight Principles of Ecopsychology

Pennsylvania Counseling Association

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Eight Principles of Ecopsychology

1. The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious. For ecopsychology, repression of the ecological unconscious is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society. Open access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity.
2. The contents of the ecological unconscious represent, in some degree, at some level of mentality, the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time. Contemporary studies in the ordered complexity of nature tell us that life and mind emerge from this evolutionary tale as culminating natural systems within the unfolding sequence of physical, biological, mental, and cultural systems we know as "the universe." Ecopsychology draws upon these findings of the new cosmology, striving to make them real to experience.
3. Just as it has been the goal of previous therapies to recover the repressed contents of the unconscious, so the goal of ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious. Other therapies seek to heal the alienation between person and person, person and family, person and society. Ecopsychology seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the recently created urban psyche and the age-old natural environment.
4. For ecopsychology as for other therapies, the crucial stage of development is the life of the child. The ecological unconscious is regenerated, as if it were a gift, in the newborn's enchanted sense of the world. Ecopsychology seeks to recover the child's innately animistic quality of experience in functionally "sane" adults. To do this, it turns to many sources, among them traditional healing techniques of primary people, nature mysticism as expressed in religion and art, the experience of wilderness, the insights of Deep Ecology. Thus, for example, Wordsworth's hymns to the child's love of nature are basic texts for the developmental ecopsychology, a first step toward creating the ecological ego.
5. The ecological ego matures toward a sense of ethical responsibility to the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people. It seeks to weave that responsibility into the fabric of social relations and political decisions.
6. Among the therapeutic projects most important to ecopsychology is the re-evaluation of certain compulsively "masculine" character traits that permeate our structures of political power and which drive us to dominate nature as if it were an alien and rightless realm. In this regard, ecopsychology draws significantly on the insights of ecofeminism with a view to demystifying the sexual stereotypes.
7. Whatever contributes to small scale social forms and personal empowerment nourishes the ecological ego. Whatever strives for large-scale domination and the suppression of personhood undermines the ecological ego. Ecopsychology therefore deeply questions the essential sanity of our gargantuan urban-industrial culture, whether capitalistic or collectivistic in its organization. But it does so without necessarily rejecting the technological genius of industrial power we have assembled. Ecopsychology is postindustrial, not anti-industrial in its social orientation.
8. Ecopsychology holds that there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being. The term "synergy" is chosen deliberately for its traditional theological connotation, which once taught that the human and divine are cooperatively linked in the quest for salvation. The contemporary ecological translation of the term might be: the needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet.

What is Ecopsychology?

1. Ecopsychology is a combination of ecology, "the science of the relationship between organisms and their environments," and psychology, "the science of mental processes or behavior." It attempts to facilitate healing of the planet and its inhabitants by delving deeply into core personality issues and understanding environmental behavior. Its premise is that our planet's ecological health is directly related to the mental health of its inhabitants. Our destructive environmental behaviors stem from our sense of disconnection to the natural world. We have an "ecological unconscious" that is repressed in some individuals. If we recover our sense of connection to our natural world, we will begin to be more environmentally conscious people. Ecopsychology questions our notion of sanity in this growth-oriented culture. Ecopsychology follows some of the psychological premises of Freudian psychology, except that it adds an "ecological" dimension. It believes in an ecological unconscious and that individuals should develop an "ecological ego." This ecological ego would encourage individuals to be responsible to others and our environment. In childhood, the ecological animism is consciously present. As adults, we begin to repress our ecological self in response to our cultural experiences. Ecopsychology has not been proven scientifically, as has not the psyche, or soul or many other concepts adhered to by indigenous peoples throughout history. It has only been in the aftermath of the industrial, technological and communication revolutions that we have almost lost sight of our connections to the earth. 1
2. Ecopsychology is a field that is developing in recognition that human health, identity, and sanity are intimately linked to the health of the earth and must include sustainable and mutually enhancing relationships between humans and the non-human world. It places human psychology in an ecological context and is aimed at healing the divisions between mind and nature, humans and earth. The central concern of ecopsychology is the health of both the human and the nonhuman and an understanding of the psychological processes that either bond us to the natural world or alienate us from it. Ecopsychology brings psychology and ecology together to create a healing context for and new understanding of the human-nature relationship. 2

1. Kineavy, C.H. Ecopsychology: connecting our mental health to our environmental behavior. Online. 4/97.
3. Naropa University. MA in Transpersonal Psychology Ecopsychology Concentration. Online. <http://www.naropa.edu/eonline/faq.html>. 5/13/05.