**BOOK REVIEWS**


In reviewing Andy Fisher’s work, *Radical Ecopsychology*, I found myself confronted with an interesting situation. First, 12 years ago, Warwick Fox had written the first cogent statement for a transpersonal ecology on these pages (*JTP*) (Fox, 1990), which had been carefully debated shortly thereafter (Stavely & McNamara, 1992). Since then, the field of transpersonal psychology has been pretty quiet about the environmental collapse we are facing as a human species; not that the field has been totally silent, but that we have not written or dialogued in *these* pages since then. (Bache, 2000) was the sole voice to enter that discussion in the last decade. More importantly, as I read about the state of our planet on a daily basis, I am aware that we as a human species are rapidly heading toward an extinction of our own soon, and I am wondering what the transpersonalists think about that. I wonder if Andy Fisher, in *Radical Ecopsychology*, might give us an eloquent response to that query.

So we are here with a new book, written by this Canadian psychotherapist, and I want to say, “Every transpersonal psychologist needs to read this book.” This is not an objective statement, clearly, and it reflects my own bias from teaching Ecopsychology and Deep Ecology at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology for the last 7 years. This rash statement comes from my own careful reading of this text and my sense that: a) transpersonal practitioners may not fully grasp the level of environmental collapse we are facing today and need to understand that we all must become ecopsychologists in some manner; b) Fisher has presented the psychological dimensions of the ecological crisis we are in, in a way not articulated previously; and c) Fisher has included the transpersonal dimensions of this psychological and spiritual response in a cogent and decisive manner.

Ecopsychology has been around for the last 40,000 years or so, given what Leslie Gray (cited in Roszak, 1995) clearly demonstrates in her work (i.e., shamanic practitioners and primary people have been practicing ecopsychology since the earliest records of human culture). The last 15 years, however, have witnessed a revival. Approximately a decade ago, Theodore Roszak (1992) had coined the term ecopsychology, to describe the interface of psychological and ecological concerns. This area of study looks at how the environmental crisis affects psychological practices, and how psychological theories can enhance our response to the state of the planet. Simply put, ecology needs psychology, and psychology needs ecology.

Fisher has written one of the newest books in this field, which has set the mark for the field to follow. In this work he articulates what he sees as the four tasks of ecopsychology: the psychological, the philosophical, the practical, and the political. He talks about ecopsychology as being the psychological approach to ecological
activism. This statement captures the breadth of this work. Basing his understanding on phenomenology, notably Heidegger, he demonstrates that the separation of humans from the more-than-human world is an inherent aspect of being human at this time. In fact, this is the quintessential element of our human suffering. Fisher points out that our sense of awe and wonder are crucial aspects of how we relate to the more-than-human world; how we make contact with that world. Too, this may be the start of a way toward reconnection. Now this is quite a place to begin a discussion, and what I found compelling is that he labels this a spiritual issue as well, noting ways that humans have always struggled to create that sense of oneness, or unity, and this harkens back to that fundamental split we all experience. He describes the split between humans and the planet as an inherent part of our make-up, and suggests that this is a spiritual crisis as well as an ecopsychological crisis. He notes that this split is what underlies our anxiety, our neuroses, and also our pathological societal values and practices. As I read this book I realized that the description of our society as addicted (to consumerism), which has been identified by others before Fisher (notably Macy, Glendinning, and Metzner—in Roszak, Gomes and Kanner (1995)), is proving even more prescient. Not only are we addicted to consuming, and culturally in denial about the dangers of this behavior, but it appears that as a society we are continuing with our addictive behavior at an even more alarming level now that information is coming forward that the environment is in a state of severe collapse. Just as an addict will further entrench himself in his drug addiction when first confronted with the facts, our society is consuming more oil, burning more fossil fuels, wasting more paper products, and buying more consumer goods (like SUVs) than ever before. We are acting as though we are completely addicted to our lifestyle, and the dangers are literally staring us in the face. Fisher has worked to identify and address these issues in this work. He shows us that this behavior is to be expected, as we continue to deny the problem we are facing, and the pain of becoming aware of it.

Fisher works his way through developmental theory, history, and existential philosophy to construct a cogent rationale for this self-destructive behavior, and demonstrates how connection to the wild, and wild nature, is clearly the way to end this insanity. He has continued the discussion, begun some time ago, on what this new field might look like and what its challenges are. This is the interface for the transpersonal community. Fisher makes it clear that healthy spirituality includes developing right relation to the planet.

Fisher sees that spirituality must include nature (seen as a process and not a reified entity), and so when discussing spiritual values or practices, we must include the more-than-human world in this discussion. This coincides with the idea that the more-than-human world contains a vast intelligence from which we remove ourselves at our own peril. He accepts that ecopsychology needs to veer away from science (environmental science) and work with the poetic, the imaginal, and the feeling level of existence in order to help us reconnect with the ground of our being. He makes an important point that using science to attempt to convince others of changing behavior often lacks the impact and persuasion of the artistic, or poetic.

The book is very well referenced, and documented, with extensive footnotes to keep the reader clear on phenomenology, Buddhist philosophy, humanistic psychology,
and focusing practices and theory (Fisher’s psychotherapy practice includes a considerable component attributable to Gendlin). For the serious reader, this book will provide endless theoretical discussion on the origin of human suffering, and the need for a reconnection to nature as an integral way to relieve that suffering. Fisher deftly demonstrates that psychological healing must include the reconnection to nature or face failure, since our basic human experience of separation originates with the separation from the more-than-human world. His arguments are well founded, and clearly presented. He does not shy away from lengthy philosophical presentation in order to solidify his point.

What I emerged with from this book (aside from lengthy underlining and margin notations, as well as realizing that this is the major text for the next Ecopsychology class I teach) is the sense that the Buddhist and existential philosophy which underlie Fisher’s theories make the bridge between ecopsychology and transpersonal psychology very clear. Whereas transpersonal psychology is concerned with spiritual development, ecopsychology per Fisher integrates that aspect of development in a seamless manner, and helps us understand that we cannot afford as practitioners to ignore the environment any longer—and this is a psychological issue.

“Every transpersonal psychologist needs to read this book.”

REFERENCES


The Author

*Andy Fisher* is a psychotherapist in private practice in Toronto. This work began as his doctoral dissertation at York University.

Reviewer

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