Proposal for Inspiring Earth Ethics Conference November 2017

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Three Keys to Personal and Planetary Wellbeing: An Ecopsychological Perspective

We have been sold the idea that consuming material goods brings happiness (aka psychological wellbeing). What does it mean to be “happy” and psychologically healthy at this point in human history, however, and how can we support each other to be so?

When pondering the question “how do we inspire and build Earth ethics?”, it’s useful to consider some of the psychological resistances to doing so, and the psychological effects of holding earth ethics if they are successfully engendered. What are the psychological impacts of valuing the natural environment, caring about the state of the world, and witnessing the destruction of planetary ecosystems, climate change, and feeling increasing fear about the future? No wonder denial and apathy are so common!

The predominant state of mind and associated ways of living in industrialised nations can be characterised as: denial of, or distraction from, the intersecting ecological, social and economic crises in which we are currently embedded; individualism/isolation; and apathy/inertia towards addressing the crises we are facing. Understanding this situation can foster compassion for ourselves and others, enabling us to become more effective change agents, and can also help identify the psychological antidotes to this unhealthy culture.

This paper presents three key avenues for increasing our psychological and planetary wellbeing, the social scientific research behind them, as well as tools for fostering these abilities. 1) Staying awake to both the “bad” and the “good” things that are happening in the world, without sinking into denial of the extent of our challenges, or into nihilism that our attempts towards change are futile. 2) Connecting with nature, others and our deeper selves in order to find strength inspiration and wisdom. 3) Engaging in effective, compassionate and collaborative action to change the status quo and create a sustainable future.

Bio

Dr Eshana Bragg is an ecopsychologist, a director of Sustainable Futures Australia, and senior lecturer for the School for International Training’s program in Sustainability and Environmental Action. She has 25 years of experience in social research focusing on the way we experience and understand our relationship with nature, and how that affects our behaviour and well-being. Eshana has been facilitating the integration of environmental values and deep ecology into mainstream society through workshops, organisational change, interpretive design and community education since 1997. She has recently cocreated The Joyality Program, an online ecopsychological toolkit and experiential program for empowerment, connection and conscious action.