# WARWICK FOX'S "TRANSPERSONAL ECOLOGY": A CRITIQUE AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

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Warwick Fox has done a service to both ceo-philosophy and transpersonal psychology in his attempt to "psychologize" eco-philosophy (Fox, 1990a). Although the two disciplines share common concerns and theoretical interests (e.g. interconnectedness, mind and earth, consciousness, etc.) they had not, until Fox's article, "talked to each other." Fox has opened a dialogue between the two which promises to enrich each.

What are these concerns and theoretical interests which transpersonal psychology and ceo-philosophy share? Fox's answer is "the idea of the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible." The expansion of self is accomplished, according to Fox, via a process of identification (or recognition of one's commonality) with all that is. Fox's expectation is that once such an expansive sense of self is achieved one will "naturally be inclined to care for the unfolding of the world in all its aspects" (Fox, 1990a, p. 93). In this paper we summarize Fox's proposal for development of a transpersonal ecology, point out what we feel are its limitations, and then we outline an alternative approach for a transpersonal ecology. Throughout we attempt to spell out the implications of the rapprochement of ecology and transpersonal psychology for both disciplines.

*interests transpersonal psychology and ceo-philosophy share*

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In 1990 Fox published, in this *Journal,* "Towards a transpersonal ecology: Psychologizing ecology:' The paper was a milestone in the growth of transpersonal psychology because it demonstrated the relevance of transpersonal psychological concepts to major issues in eco-philosophy. Conversely, the paper also showed how eco-philosophical work could enrich theory in transpersonal psychology. The central idea in Fox's attempt to psychologize eco-philosophy is his equation of transpersonal ecology with a "this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible" (Fox, 1990a, p. 59). Fox showed that a transpersonal sense of self was compatible with an ecological perspective of Self as an organism embedded in a network of ramifying relationships which in turn define an ecosystem.

*the concept of "Self-Realization!"*

In referring to a self of the widest extent, Fox is applying the concept of "Self-Realization!" offered by the founder of "deep ecology," Arne Naess (Naess, 1989). Both the capital "S" and the exclamation point are significant in the presentation of *this* term. Little "s" self is the item of everyday discourse contained in (or constituting) the individual's physical body and contrasted in experience with other persons and things. On the other hand, big "8" Self is the outcome of an identification process in which the individual grows to experience the whole world-plants, animals, climate, terrain, watersheds, and all-as interwoven with or componential of herself or himself. The exclamation point functions after the fashion of the factorial marker in mathematical notation: full realization (growth, development) of the self requires recursively reaching for greater richness and inclusiveness in one's self-definition. "Identification" in this formulation is similar to the developmental psychology meaning of the term (Kagan, 1971). One comes progressively to perceive a commonality with, relatedness to, and involvement with the rest of creation. A Self-Realized! individual would not experience confusion over what is his or her own body or person and what is a sparrow, tree, brook, or stone.

> What is being emphasized is the tremendously common experience that through the process of identification my sense of self (my experiential self) can expand to include the tree even tbough I and the tree remain physically separate" (Fox, 1990a, p. 81).

Identification is not identity in Fox's philosophy. Rather, a Self-realized person would experience discomfort or loss when some part of the ecological environment is damaged or destroyed contra-ecologically, presumably in recognition of the commonality between the person and the environment

Fox presents Self-Realization as the basic transpersonal concept of deep ecology to contrast with the standard personal division of the (little "s") self into desiring-impulsive, rationalizing-deciding, and normative-judgmental aspects, corresponding closely with the Freudian id, ego, and superego. An individual without access to the transpersonal self experiences inner tension due to the disparate leanings of these aspects with respect to inner impulses and elements of the surrounding world. She or he performs behavior deriving from a process of inner negotiation, debate, deception, and power manipulation. Right action, whether refraining from overeating, giving aid to a needy person, or caring for the ecosystem, is performed because the normative-judgmental aspect commands enough influence to dominate. One does one's duty.

On the other hand, a person who does have access to the transpersonal self, who is Self-Realized and well-identified with the nonhuman world, will behave in harmony with the human and nonhuman worlds, acting from inclination rather than duty.

*acting from inclination rather than duty*

Because right action derives naturally and without effort from the marriage of selfhood to the lively and mutually inter-connected world beyond the self, Fox explains that traditional philosophical concerns with instrumental and intrinsic value theory are irrelevant as they bear upon ecological concerns. Eco-philosophy need not build an elaborate logical scaffolding to justify ecologically favorable human behavior. Such conduct grows organically out of one's enlightened awareness of one's active role in the living dance of matter and energy when one attains Self-Realization!

Fox then suggests that transpersonal ecology amounts to a maximally expansive sense of self that includes the ecological web of the nonhuman world integrated with one's own being. Possessors of this sort of Self will as a matter of course make choices and take actions that are ecologically positive. Philosophically, this position constitutes a reorientation of value theory from instrumental and intrinsic value explanations to ecological values as axiomatic.

TfIE TRANSPERSONAL SELF AND THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION

The reorientation of value theory away from instrumental assumptions and towards ecological values requires, according to Fox, the development of an expansive sense of self. He distinguishes the expansive self from a non-transpersonal tripartite conception of self. As summarized above the tripartite self consists of a desiring-impulsive self, a rationalizing-deciding self and a normative-

judgmental self. Fox's description of the expansive self, on the other hand, crucially includes more than just that self which is the center of volitional activity:

> [O]ur *sense* of self can be far more expansive than that of being a center of volitional activity. For example, I can experience my volitional self as part of a larger sense of self that includes aspects of my *own* mind and body over which I do not experience myself as having particularly much control. ... In turn, I can experience this larger, but still entirely personal, sense of self as part of a *still more* expansive, transpersonal sense of self that includes my family, friends, other animals, physical objects, the region in which I live, and so on (Fox, 1990a, p. 69).

Although Fox touches here on what we feel to be central to a transpersonal vision of psychology-namely those aspects of the self outside of volitional control-Fox does not pursue the matter. He chooses instead to focus on what he calls the process of identification. We will argue below that Fox's reliance on processes of identification as forms of, or roads to, transpersonal experience, as opposed to emphasis on non-volitional aspects of "self" prevents him from developing a truly transpersonal eco-philosophy. We need to first examine Fox's analysis of identification in order to see clearly its limitations for a transpersonal approach to ecology.

*the process of identification*

*The* defining characteristic (for Fox) of the transpersonal expansive self is the ability to make wider and deeper identifications-"How does one realize, in a this-worldly sense, as expansive a sense of self as possible? The transpersonal ecology answer is: through the process of identification" (Fox, 1990b, p. 249). By identification Fox means the experience of commonality between my self and the world. An ecologically sound life would be one that "sustains the widest and deepest possible identification" (Fox, 1990b, p. 249).

Fox delineates three types of identification: personal, ontological and cosmological. "Personally based identification refers to experiences of commonality with other entities that are brought about through personal involvement with these entities ... " (Fox, 1990b, p. 249). Personally based identification is the most common form of identification. Transpersonal ecology, however, is more concerned with the other two forms (the transpersonal forms) of identification. Fox implies that unless personal identification is placed in the context of the transpersonal forms of identification, then it is likely to be destructive:

> ... although the *positive* aspects of personally based identification are praiseworthy and fundamental to human development, *the negative* aspects that go with exclusive or primary reliance upon this form of

identification *(my* self first, *my* family and friends next, and so on) are costing us the earth (Fox, 1990b,p. 267).

Transpersonally based identification prevents or at least puts a check on the destructive tendencies of narrow egoistic forms of identification:

> When personally based identification is set within the context of ontologically and cosmologically based forms of identification (i.e, within the context of forms of identification that tend to promote impartial identification with *all* entities), then it is expressed in terms of a person being, as Naess says, more *reluctant* to interfere with the unfolding of A than B in those situations where a choice is unavoidable if the person is to satisfy nontrivial needs of their own. However, considered in the absence of the overarching context provided by ontological1y and cosmologically based identification, personally based identification is expressed in terms of a person having no desire to harm A in any way (say, their child) but having few or no qualms about interfering with-or standing by while others interfere with-the unfolding of B (where B is an entity of any kind-plant, animal, river, forest-with which the person has no particular personal involvement) (Fox, 199Gbp. 267).

Transpersonal ecology therefore attempts to promote the proper integration of the three basic forms of identification.From a theoretical point of view the objects of inquiry are ontologicallybased identification and cosmologically based identification.

*integration of three forms of identification*

> In contrast to personally based identification, ontologicallyand cosmologically based identification are transpersonalin that they are not primarily a function of the personal contacts or relationships of this or that particular person (Fox, 1990b, p. 250).

Transpersonalforms of identification are impartial insofar as the object is to identify impartially with all that is, to experience all that is as "unity in process."

> Ontologically based identification refers to experiences of commonality with all that is that are brought about through deep-seated realization of the fact *that* things are.. .. it [ontological identification] properly belongs to the realm of the training of consciousness (or perception) that is associated, for example, with Zen Buddhism ... " (Fox, 1990b,p. 250).

If we interpret Fox rightly, ontological identification apparently allows one to experience the "suchness" of phenomena,to let them stand forth without attempting to change or manipulate them in any way.

> The basic idea that I am trying to communicate by referring to ontologically based identification is that the fact-the utterly astonish-

ing fact-that things *are* impresses itself upon some people in such a profoundway that all that exists seems to stand out as foreground from a background of nonexistence, voidness, or emptiness-s-a background from which this foreground arises moment by moment (Fox, 1990b, pp.250-51).

The other type of transpersonal identification extends the awe and astonishmentone feels towardexistenceas such to *the* realization or insight that all is one.

> · , . cosmologically based identification refers to experiences of commonality with all that is that are brought about through the deep-seated realization of the fact that we and all other *entities* arc *aspects* of a single unfolding reality. , " this realization can be brought about through the empathic incorporation of mythological, religious, speculative philosophical, or scientific cosmologies (Fox, 1990b, p.

Although cosmological identification seems to depend on some kind of cognitive event (realization, insight) as opposed to the experiential content of ontological identification, Fox makes it *more* clear that cosmological identification is more than just a *cognitive* *than* accomplishment:
*just*
*a* 
cognitive
*accomplishment*
> , . , cosmologically based identification means having a lived sense of an overall scheme of things such that one comes to feel a sense of commonality with an other entities (whetherone happens to encounter them personally or not) . , . (Fox, 1990b, p. 257).

Since transpersonal forms of identification involve a sustained growth and deepening of these self-same identification processes, i.e., *in* the gradual development *of* a lived sense *of* the unity of all that is, we may be justified in conceiving of the process of the integration of personally based forms of identification with the transpersonal forms of identification as nothing less than a spiritual transformation of the individual. Fox, in fact, asserts that cosmologically based identification issues in

> · .. an orientation of steadfast (as opposed to fairweather)friendliness. Steadfast friendliness manifests itself in terms of a clear and steady expression of positive interest, liking, warmth, goodwill, and trust; a steady predisposition to help and support; and, in the context of these attributes, a willingness to be firm and to criticize constructively where appropriate (1990b, P:256).

Nevertheless "steadfast friendliness" does not necessarily imply nonviolence:

> · , . if a particular entity or life form imposes itself unduly upon other entitiesor life forms, an impartially based [read "cosmological"]sense of identification may lead one to feel that one has no real choice but to

oppose-in extreme cases, terminate the existence of-the destructive or oppressive entity or life form (1990b, p. 256).

In summary, Fox offers us a relatively coherent framework for development of a transpersonal ecology. The central idea revolves around Self-Realization! and the process of the growth of identification. Personally based forms of identification need to be integrated with transpersonal forms of identification, namely ontological and cosmological identification, if we are to prevent destruction of ourselves and the earth. Ontological identification centers around the experience of existence as such, while cosmological identification constitutes the lived sense of a meaningful unity of all that is. Transpersonal forms of identification promote a stance of steadfast friendliness towards the entities with which we identify while not precluding violent opposition in extreme situations.

LIMITATIONS OF FOX'S APPROACH

Our major objections to Fox's ideas center around two issues: 1) the emphasis placed on the process of identification as the basis for a transpersonal ecology, and 2) the idea that transpersonal forms of identification promote "steadfast friendliness" towards the earth. We begin with the first issue concerning Fox's emphasis on processes of identification.

While it is clear that ontological and cosmological identification (as Fox presents them) can be experienced as transpersonal processes, many if not most transpersonal events involve a process opposite to that of identification. Otto (1968), for example, described deep religious and mystical experience as essentially experience of the "wholly other" *(ganz andere)-something* fundamentally and totally different from self. EHade asserted that "the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane" (Eliade, 1961, p. 10), the profane being our everyday worlds. C. G. lung thought of the transpersonal realm as the experience of all those psychic contents outside of the volitional control of the subject. "The most amazing fact about the unconscious is that it is unconscious!" (lung, 1959). lung thought of the experience of the objective psyche as the experience of something totally foreign, uncanny, numinous and strange (lung, 1959). For Jung transpersonal events came to us unbidden, involuntarily and as gifts. Dreams, for example, should be conceived as "visitations" or "possessions" rather than as products of the dreamer. Dreams happen to us. We cannot voluntarily stop dreaming. Even the contents of our dreams come to us involuntarily. Transpersonal events, then, seem at a minimum to be non-volitional states. Yet

*a process opposite to that of identification*

Fox's transpersonal forms of identification depend on the efforts of the human subject to "identify."

Besides the emphasis of transpersonal states as creatures of human agency rather than as non-volitional states, there is another and related problem with Fox's philosophy of identification. Ironically, in Fox's philosophy of identification there seems to be a strain of anthropomorphism since the crucial event(s) in *his* philosophy take place within the human individual (e.g., realization of oneness, awe and wonder for existence itself and so on). This anthropocentric strain in Fox's philosophy is ironic because of the strenuous efforts of the deep ecology philosophers to avoid anthropocentric biases.

The human self, in Fox's philosophy, acts on "natural" objects (trees, animals) until the human experiences a commonality between him/her and them. Identification, in short, is a human accomplishment. Indeed Fox points out that transpersonal forms of identification are achieved through discipline such as the "consciousness disciplines." Integration of personal and transpersonal forms of identification implies work to accomplish the integration. In this philosophy, human agency is required for the all important work of integration. Integration, in turn, is required to prevent further destruction of the earth.

Now, clearly, it makes sense to focus on human agency if one is interested in preventing ecological disaster. But from a purely theoretical point of view it may not be wise to center a transpersonal psychology solely on human agency or events occurring within the individual.

*an alternative conception of the self*

We wish to urge an alternative conception of a transpersonal self as that self that is shaped by the wild world, by the Earth, by wilderness, nature, etc., as opposed to that self shaped by human effort. The transpersonal self is not a creature of human agency. It *is* transhuman. In our perspective wilderness and the wild, non-humanized world is the active agency. Nature is no longer the passive set of objects awaiting the human imprint. Rather, the crucial set of events in development of a transpersonal self depends on natural forces outside of volitional control of the subject.

If the transpersonal self is not a creature of the volitions of the subject, then identification (which is an achievement of the individual) cannot be central to transpersonal experience. If we are right, the task is not so much to integrate personal and impartial forms of identification as to submit to the experience of those transpersonal energies we come equipped with at birth, to undergo a transformation which is out of our control.

The conceptions of a transpersonal self as shaped by the earth independent of personal agency carries with it, we believe, some startling implications for both transpersonal psychology and eco-philosophy: There can be no transpersonal self (and therefore no transpersonal psychology) without wilderness, since the transpersonal self is precisely that self which has its origins in interactions with the wild world. Also, there can be no theoretically coherent ceo-philosophy without a transpersonal psychology, since the most important product of the ecosystem (from the point of view of an environmental ethic) is the transpersonal self.

## FOX'S PSYCHOLOGIZATION OF ECOLOGY: THE MISSING PSYCHOLOGY

We turn now to a discussion of what we believe is the second major shortcoming of Fox's philosophy, namely Fox's assertion that transpersonal forms of identification promote a "steadfast friendliness" towards the earth and its creatures.

As previously discussed, Fox's proposals concerning the integration of personal, ontological and cosmological forms of identification imply a fundamental spiritual transformation of the individual who accomplishes the integration. Fox argues that the spiritual transformation, in turn, will promote a change in the transformed individual's values such that the individual will exhibit a form of steadfast friendliness towards the earth. We believe that the idea that a stance of steadfast friendliness towards the earth will prevent or even slow the destruction of the earth is, unfortunately, mistaken.

*a stance of "steadfast friendliness" questioned*

If we translate Fox's term of "steadfast friendliness" or spiritual transformation into the more common term "enlightenment," it becomes clear that, as with the case of enlightenment, steadfast friendliness is no guarantee of social change. Enlightenment is the uncertain fruit of persistent and dedicated hard work. Zen masters state that *kensho* (enlightenment) may come at any moment on one who practices *zazen* (sitting meditation) diligently and that "any moment" may be no moment (Kapleau, 1980). Once again we see that enlightenment is not a function of human agency despite the paradoxical necessity of human effort. Accounts of other paths to enlightenment suggest similar effort and uncertainty (Tart, 1975). Not all members of a Buddhist or yogic culture undertake the quest and not all who set out on the path continue for the duration. Furthermore, having enlightenment as a central cultural value does not guarantee that the culture as a whole will abide by the precepts of the discipline, nor that the population at large will succeed in behaving well. Warfare and social injustice are to be found in

Buddhist South- and East-Asia as wen as in the West where self-aggrandizement is a central cultural value. One can predict with confidence that relatively few of the world's people will spontaneously choose to pursue Self-Realization! and that, of those, few will attain it.

To anticipate *spontaneous* pursuit of this goal is a bit unfair, however. Paul Shepard (1973) proposes that the great majority of civilized humanity (those who live in agricultural and industrialized cultures) are incompletely developed psychologically. People whose ancestors gave up hunting, gathering, and/or village-scale gardening also gave up the experiences and practices that connected them with the world of animals and plants. With that abandonment of the wild world went the wisdom to care for others, one's community, and one's nourishing environment while at the same time taking from the ecosystem only what is needed and leaving no mess behind. The archetypal equipment is available in each person's neuro-endocrine systems to attain full (transjperson-hood, but she or he will live out life bereft of this wisdom unless her or his culture provides the requisite initiation challenges and celebrations.

*the support of group and community*

Mentioning the communal rites required to release the archetypes of Self-Realization l opens *the* way to another problem with Fox's account of transpersonal ecology. that is, his continuing focus on the individual to the exclusion of the group. In fact, humans are creatures of culture, and are not fully human without enculturation. Participation in family, clan. community, work team, lodge, or coffee klatch constitutes the warp and thread of life's tapestry. Individual personality is a social object as much as it is a congenital and a self-created one. The attainment of personal wholeness in cultures that support it is a social activity. Youths may go on vision quests alone, but their community sends them off and welcomes them warmly when they return. The quest would not exist without the community (and the archetypes) offering up the form and substance of practice. Shepard's (1973) concern is that contemporary society develop beliefs and practices sufficient to literally bring out the (untapped) spiritual wealth in us. Only by moving from the individual level to the group can the transpersonal possibilities for ecological survival be realized.

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