

The Anthropocosmic Vision of **Psychedelic Environmental Ethics**



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As public awareness of the global ecological crisis has risen in recent decades, many theorists and activists have begun articulating the challenges of environmental ethics. While the field of environmental ethics has deep roots in the philosophical and religious traditions of the world, the field can be said to have officially started with Richard Routley’s frequently anthologized 1973 essay, “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?” Answering affirmatively, Routley and many others defended the value of nature against the narcissism and chauvinism that pervade the destructive attitudes, beliefs, and practices with which humans relate to nature.

Many environmental ethicists have shown that the ecological crisis is due largely to human-centered or “anthropocentric” ethics, whereby the human (anthropos) has acted as if it has special privileges and values that are absent from the plants, animals, elements, and ecosystems of the natural world. Humans have placed themselves at the center of all value, and the rest of the planet has been marginalized and reduced to a mere means for achieving human ends, a mere heap of objects for humans to use and consume.

To counteract anthropocentrism, many environmental ethicists have proposed non-anthropocentric theories and practices, wherein the center of value is not placed on the human, but on living organisms (biocentrism) or on whole ecosystems (ecocentrism). Although biocentric and ecocentric environmental ethics oppose anthropocentrism and its manipulative and exploitative relations to the environment, these non-anthropocentric perspectives tend to foster misanthropy and social irresponsibility by marginalizing humans and ignoring social problems of poverty, sexism, racism, and injustice.

Psychedelic research presents an alternative to the dichotomy between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. This alternative is the anthropocosmic vision, which sees meaning and value emerging from the intimate intertwining of humans and the world (kosmos) in the seamless fabric of Being. Whereas varieties of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism perpetuate dualisms that dissociate humans from the world, anthropocosmic perspectives envision a complex and flowing whole, where humans and the world are entangled with one another in co-creative correspondences, such as the correspondences that connect the maternal womb with other manifestations of generative openness (e.g., cave, house, chapel, biosphere, galaxy, cosmos).

The word “anthropocosmic” has been used by various twentieth-century scholars of phenomenology (Gaston Bachelard, Paul Ricoeur, and Gabriel Marcel) and of religious studies (Mircea Eliade, R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, and Tu Weiming), and it has been applied to ecological issues by scholars in the emerging field of religion and ecology (Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim). The anthropocosmic

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vision has also been articulated by Alex Grey in lectures on sacred art and architecture, including a lecture I attended in October 2007 at an Entheocentric Salon held in San Francisco.

With various accounts of the profound role of psychedelic experiences in his visionary art, Grey provides an indication of the way in which psychedelics can facilitate experiences of anthropocosmic relations and thus transform ecological consciousness and conscience. For instance, in a psychedelic journey in 1976, Grey experienced with his wife Allyson a vision of the fundamental structure of reality, which they each subsequently painted. His expression of this vision appears in *Universal Mind Lattice*, which depicts a field of interconnected flows of energy, wherein the human body has dissolved, becoming a fountain and drain through which these flows pour. Grey's psychedelic journey disclosed an anthropocosmic vision of the complex and flowing unity of Being, in which the human and the world are intimately intertwined. *Universal Mind Lattice* is part of Grey's series of *Sacred Mirrors*, which reflect the multiple levels that compose our anthropocosmic relations, including material, biological, psychic, and spiritual systems, the underlying latticework in which these systems are embedded, and the elemental void from which the lattice emerges.

Furthermore, Grey's anthropocosmic vision appears in many other paintings. In correspondences of Earth with womb, galaxies with eyes, and universal latticework with the veins, nerves, and psychospiritual energies of humans, Grey frequently shows macrocosm and microcosm in mutual reflection and interpenetration. He conveys the ecological implications of such correspondences in his depiction of the divine mother Earth in Gaia, where Gaia, represented as the tree of life, is connected to the grid of the universal latticework. On one side of the tree, human power and greed are transforming Gaia into a technological wasteland, and on the other side, humans understand their roots in the natural world and have created a civilization that lives harmoniously with Gaia.

The anthropocosmic vision of psychedelic environmental ethics is not restricted to Grey's work, but is affirmed by many others who have witnessed the power of psychedelics to amplify the interconnectedness of humans and nature. For example, in *LSD: My Problem Child* (2009, recently republished by MAPS), Albert Hofmann describes how his experiences with LSD resemble his childhood experiences of "euphoric moments" in nature, and how the effects of such "magic drugs" happen at "the borderline where mind and matter merge" (pp. 30, 165). Other examples abound. In her mushroom veladas, Maria Sabina sings of being a hummingbird, whirlwind, wolf, mushroom, Jesus Christ, eagle, water, and more. John Seed, a practitioner of deep ecology, often mentions the importance of psychedelics for his efforts to help people reconnect with their ecological and evolutionary identities. Stan Grof's psychedelic psychotherapy contains numerous accounts of anthropocosmic identification with cells, plants, animals, Gaia, and the cosmos, including an account in which Grof learned the evils of fossil fuels and petrochemicals by becoming petroleum during a series of ketamine sessions (*When the Impossible Happens*, 2006, p. 262).

The anthropocosmic vision overcomes the narrow perspectives of anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. By catalyzing engagements with the anthropocosmic relations that compose one's set and setting, psychedelics can catalyze responsibility for oneself and one's environment, responsibility for the entanglement of human well-being and suffering with the well-being and suffering of nature and of all beings inhabiting the world. Ultimately, this means that the values and practices of psychedelic environmental ethics cultivate a comprehensive sense of care, which attends to the infinite multiplicity of beings dwelling in the complex and flowing latticework of Being. •