

Ecopsychology

Winter 2015

PSYCH 448A (4 credits)

Instructor: Professor Peter Kahn

Monday/Wednesday

3:30-5:20PM

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HINTS Lab Website: <http://depts.washington.edu/hints>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ecopsychology seeks (a) to reshape modern psychology by showing that it cannot stand apart from an intimate human connection with the natural environment, and (b) to integrate our connection with nature with our scientific culture and technological selves.

As a species, we came of age with nature, and a need for nature still resides within the architecture of our bodies and minds. Abundant research demonstrates physical and psychological benefits of interacting with nature. And ecological sustainability may well be impossible without people experiencing nature, and feeling its depth, space, and bounty. At this moment in history – as we degrade, pollute, and increasingly destroy so much of the natural world so quickly, and live in increasingly sophisticated and pervasive digital worlds – ecopsychology seeks a new vision of the human-nature relationship. Specific topics include:

- Evolutionary origins of the human relationship with nature, and of human tool use
- Human-animal interaction
- Physical and mental health benefits of interacting with nature
- Ecotherapy
- Children and nature
- Indigenous cultures
- The rediscovery of the wild
- Responsibility for protecting natural places and other species
- Environmental education
- Urban sustainability
- Biophilic design and Interaction Pattern design
- Technological nature

Required Readings:

1. Course Reader. The readings will be sent as pdfs.
2. Kahn, P. H., Jr., & Hasbach, P. H. (2012). (Eds.). *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
3. Kahn, P. H., Jr., & Hasbach, P. H. (2013). (Eds.). *The rediscovery of the wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

The books can be found used in various online venues, such as Amazon (around \$20-25).

Grading

- 10% Class participation
- 10% Presentation and discussion leader of at least one article
- 20% Quizzes (usually at the start of every class on that day's assigned articles)
- 30% 3 short papers
- 30% Final term paper

Section 1 – Conceptual Investigations of the Human-Nature Relationship

At the start of this course, we broach two questions: Why care about nature? And, What does environmental philosophy (and common sense) have to say about our relationship with nature? Our readings begin with two selections from analytic environmental philosophy. Kohak and Dean next move us from argument to metaphor as we read personal narratives of nature experience. We then broach environmental epistemology with Malidoma Somé's account of the Dagara culture.

Baxter, W. F. (1986). People or penguins. In D. VanDeVeer and C. Pierce (Eds.), *People, penguins, and plastic trees* (pp. 214-218). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (Original work published 1974)

Regan, T. (1986). The case for animal rights. In D. VanDeVeer and C. Pierce (Eds.), *People, penguins, and plastic trees* (pp. 32-39). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (Original work published 1985)

Kohak, E. (1984). *The embers and the stars: A philosophical inquiry into the moral sense of nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (pp. ix-xiii)

Dean, B. (1992). Hunting a Christmas tree. *Orion*, 11(1), 9-15.

Somé, M. P. (1995). *Of water and the spirit: Ritual, magic, and initiation in the life of an African Shaman*. New York, NY: Penguin. (pp. 1-13; 232-248)

Section 2 – Sociobiology, Evolutionary Psychology, and the Biophilia Hypothesis

The evolutionary origins of the human relationship with nature have their recent foundations in classic 1970's sociobiology, as articulated by Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene*. By the 1980's, Wilson extended this evolutionary account to what he refers to as biophilia: An innate predisposition to affiliate with life. In this section, we engage this early material, recent amplifications of it, and current strengths and conundrums of what has become known as the biophilia hypothesis.

Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. New York: Oxford University Press. (pp. 13-21, 117-131)

Wilson, E. O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (pp. 1-37; 119-140)

Kahn, P. H., Jr. (2011). Chapter 1 (Biophilia) in *Technological nature: Adaptation and the future of human life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (pp. 11-25)

Section 3 – Rewilding the Modern Mind

Many people who currently advocate for the importance of nature in human lives focus on what is close at hand: domestic, nearby, everyday nature. It might be a local park, one's garden, one's dog, a nearby walking trail, or birds finding sustenance in urban feeders. But domestic nature is only part of what we need. The other part is wild nature. For as a species we came of age in a natural world far wilder than today, and much of the need for wildness still exists within us. Wildness often involves that which is big,

untamed, unmanaged, not encompassed, and self-organizing, and unencumbered and unmediated by technological artifice. We can love the wild. We can fear it. We are strengthened and nurtured by it. In this section, we read current writings and debate on these issues.

Eisenberg, C. (2013). Quantifying wildness: A scientist's lessons about wolves and wild nature. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *The rediscovery of the wild* (pp. 1-25). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Turner, J. (1996). *The abstract wild*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press. (pp. 19-37; 107-125)

Turner, J. (2013). The wild and the self. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *The rediscovery of the wild* (pp. 27-50). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Thomas, E. M. (2013). The old rules. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *The rediscovery of the wild* (pp. 51-69). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bradshaw, G. (2013). Living out of our minds. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *The rediscovery of the wild* (pp. 119-138). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Foreman, D. (2013). Five feathers for the cannot club. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *The rediscovery of the wild* (pp. 181-232). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kahn, P. H., Jr. (2009). Cohabiting with the wild. *Ecopsychology*, 1, 38-46.

Kahn, P. H., Jr., & Hasbach, P. H. (2013). The rewilding of the human species. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *The rediscovery of the wild* (pp. 207-232). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Section 4 – Children's Relationships with Nature

How do we form environmental commitments and sensibilities? One answer seems obvious: in childhood. So what's happening with children today? Richard Louv argues that children have what he calls a nature-deficit disorder, and are suffering from it. We then examine how children's understandings and values of nature are mentally structured, and develop. We focus on my early research on the environmental views and values of Black children in Houston, Texas. Finally we draw on constructivist psychology to ground constructivist environmental education.

Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder* (pp. 1-36; 48-54). Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin.

Kahn, P. H., Jr. (1999). *The human relationship with nature: Development and culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

-- Chapter 3: The Psychological Framework: Structure and Development

-- Chapter 5: Structural Developmental Methods

Transcripts of two interviews with children. From Kahn, P. H., Jr., & Friedman, B., in collaboration with G. Mundine, Principal, Blackshear Elementary School (1991-1992). *Environmental science and values education for low-performing students in a black community*. Funded by the Texas Education Agency.

Kahn, P. H., Jr. (1999). *The human relationship with nature: Development and culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

-- Chapter 9: Environmental Education

Section 5 – Revisioning Ecopsychology

What if it's the case, and there is good reason to believe it true, that the overarching problem of the world today is that we see ourselves as dominating over nature rather than cohabiting, coexisting, and affiliating with it? There are many different ways to cast the newly energized field of ecopsychology. This one has

merit. Here we discuss current essays on new visions of the field. We include a focus on urban sustainability and the role of technology in human-nature interaction.

Kahn, P. H., Jr., Ruckert, J. H., & Hasbach, P. H. (2012). Introduction. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 1-21). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sampson, S. D. (2012). The topophilia hypothesis: Ecopsychology meets evolutionary psychology. In P. H. Kahn, Jr., and P. H. Hasbach (Eds.). *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 23-53). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fisher, A. (2012). What is ecopsychology? A radical view. In P. H. Kahn, Jr., and P. H. Hasbach (Eds.). *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 79-114). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Frumkin, H. (2012). Building the science base: Ecopsychology meets clinical epidemiology. In P. H. Kahn, Jr., and P. H. Hasbach (Eds.). *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 141-172). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hasbach, P. H. (2012). Ecotherapy. In P. H. Kahn, Jr., and P. H. Hasbach (Eds.). *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 115-139). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kellert, S. R., Heerwagen, J. H., & Mador, M. L. (2008). (Eds.). (Introduction). *Biophilic Design*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Kahn, P. H., Jr., Ruckert, J. H., & Hasbach, P. H. (2012). A nature language. In P. H. Kahn, Jr. & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 55-77). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kahn, P. H., Jr., Severson, R. L., & Ruckert, J. H. (2009). The human relation with nature and technological nature. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18, 37-42.

Kahn, P. H., Jr. (2011). *Technological nature: Adaptation and the future of human life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Chapter 12)

Guidelines for Your Short Papers

I don't have a fixed format in mind, but in some way find a way that allows you to engage the main ideas of one or more articles. I'm looking for interesting ideas. Often ideas you're passionate about, or troubled by, or ideas that you're trying to find your way through. Quote from critical passages in the article(s) to develop your ideas in a scholarly way. Use American Psychological Association style with your formatting and references. I'm looking for polished writing, too.

I'm attaching a short essay to highlight an example of my own writing where, with a co-author, I'm trying to say something that matters to me with few words. Notice how we draw on other authors to help make our point. These authors help give voice to what we're trying to say. They deepen us. But we don't let them *substitute* for our own voice. This is just one approach to your short paper. Other options include:

1. Directly critique an author. Perhaps show where, at the core, you disagree, and why, and how you would offer a different way to deal with the issues at hand.
2. Pick a topic in the news today, and draw on one or more of our authors and show how they would analyze the problem and how they would propose solutions. Provide your own perspective as a counterpoint.

3. Write a letter to one of the authors. Perhaps start with something positive to say, and then move to the substance. I have done this hundreds of times over the years, as I've sought to develop my ideas, and to reach out to people. Sometimes they write back, and you start building your intellectual community.

4. Imagine that you invited an author over for a nice dinner. An intellectual dinner. These happen. Let's say you invited Tom Regan, Barbara Dean, or E. O. Wilson. Good eats. A nice bottle of wine. The discussion then turns to... What? Frame your topic. A few examples:

- "Does it Really Make Sense to Think of Animals as Having Rights?" (Tom Regan)
- "You Shouldn't Have Cut the Christmas Tree After all!" (Barbara Dean)
- "Don't you Think Sociobiology is Too Reductionistic to Ground an Environmental Ethic in Today's World with Today's Environmental Problems?" (E. O. Wilson)

And now generate the imaginary dialog between this person and yourself. Maybe get into the writing and intellectual "style" of the author, and mimic it a little. At least nail his or her way of seeing the issues. Quote one or more key passages for the author. Have fun with it! It can be lively! Remember, there is wine around the table. You both are having fun. But you are both committed to your respective ideas, too. Perhaps you will have the last word. That is, you will bring the reader along to see the strengths of the various positions, but the way you are seeing it ends up the strongest. Or maybe you will develop a position that is more cautious, not sure about some ideas. Whichever way, be honest! How would you really engage in this sort of conversation? What would you say? Where do you stand?

I'm asking for a 2 page response (single-spaced, 1 ½ inch margins) to one or more of the readings. Don't write stilted. No one likes to read stilted writing. I doubt anyone likes to write it, either.

I'll be reading and providing comments on each of your papers. I'm your audience, at once appreciative and critical. At times, we will use your papers to structure our class discussions. Choose your ideas wisely. It's here that you'll be shaping a good deal of our time together.

At times I may decide to share one of your papers with the class as a whole, to highlight things that are working very well in your paper. I'm not going to share papers just to point out flaws. But if any of your papers contain personal ideas that you specifically do NOT want shared with the class, please note that clearly on your paper, and I'll of course respect your wishes.

My grading of your writing will be based on the following criteria, among others:

- Ability to map out the basic ideas of a reading.
- Ability to recognize an important and difficult passage, and to offer a compelling interpretation of it.
- Ability to synthesize ideas (and different readings).
- Ability to write concisely and eloquently.