

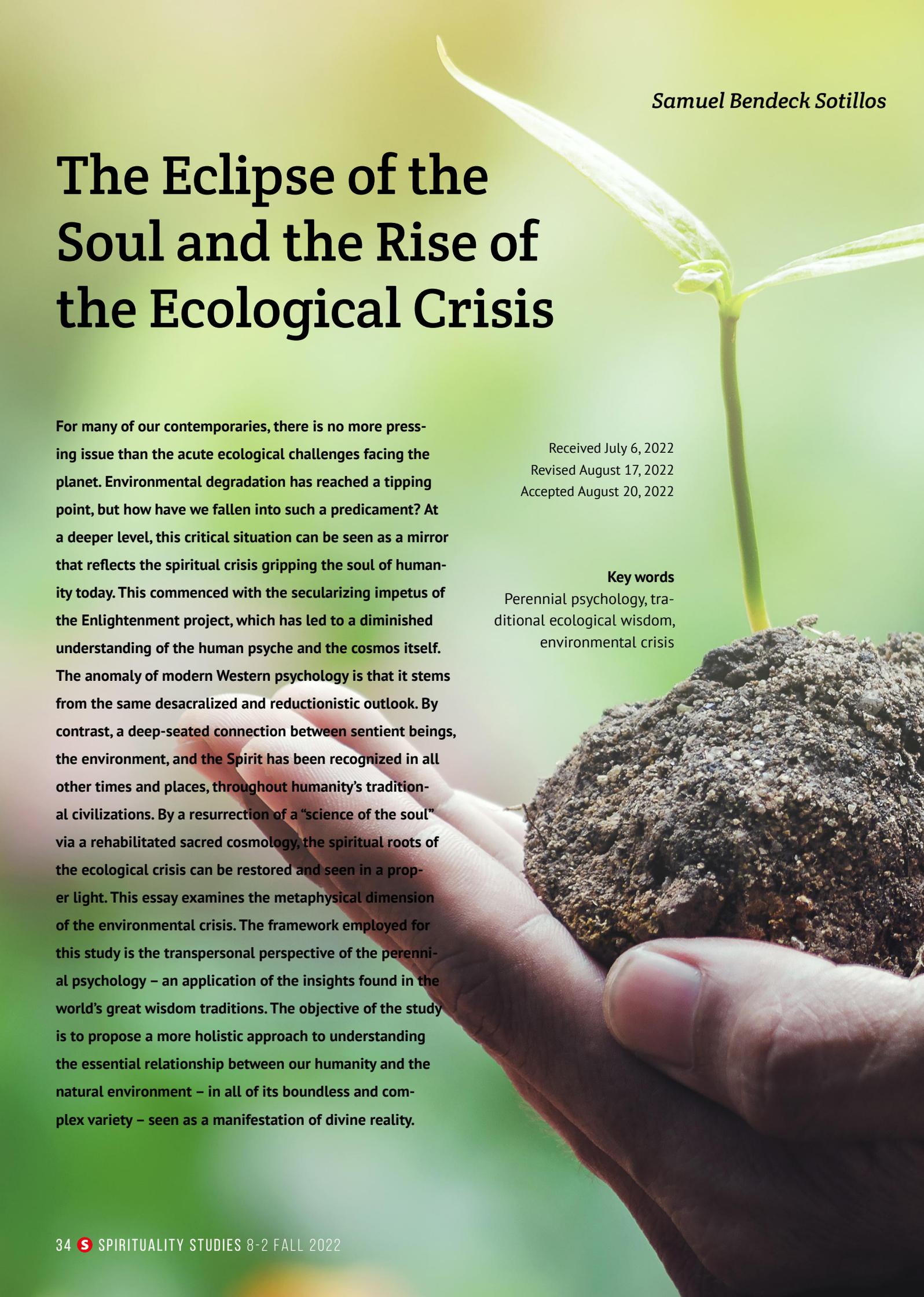
# The Eclipse of the Soul and the Rise of the Ecological Crisis

For many of our contemporaries, there is no more pressing issue than the acute ecological challenges facing the planet. Environmental degradation has reached a tipping point, but how have we fallen into such a predicament? At a deeper level, this critical situation can be seen as a mirror that reflects the spiritual crisis gripping the soul of humanity today. This commenced with the secularizing impetus of the Enlightenment project, which has led to a diminished understanding of the human psyche and the cosmos itself. The anomaly of modern Western psychology is that it stems from the same desacralized and reductionistic outlook. By contrast, a deep-seated connection between sentient beings, the environment, and the Spirit has been recognized in all other times and places, throughout humanity's traditional civilizations. By a resurrection of a "science of the soul" via a rehabilitated sacred cosmology, the spiritual roots of the ecological crisis can be restored and seen in a proper light. This essay examines the metaphysical dimension of the environmental crisis. The framework employed for this study is the transpersonal perspective of the perennial psychology – an application of the insights found in the world's great wisdom traditions. The objective of the study is to propose a more holistic approach to understanding the essential relationship between our humanity and the natural environment – in all of its boundless and complex variety – seen as a manifestation of divine reality.

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Perennial psychology, traditional ecological wisdom, environmental crisis





*The Tao is the hidden Reservoir of all things.*

– Tao Te Ching (2017, 69)

*He who sees Me everywhere... sees everything in Me.*

– Bhagavad Gītā 6:30

*They should not see Buddha in just one thing, one phenomenon, one body, one land, one being – they should see Buddha everywhere.*

– Avatamsaka Sūtra (1993, 983)

*I have set the Lord always before me*

– Psalm 16:8

*The earth has been made [a mosque] for me.*

– Prophet Muhammad (quoted in al-Bukhārī 1997, 280)

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# 1 Introduction

Each day, with growing urgency, the reality of the ecological crisis is confronting us everywhere, so much so that the World Health Organization has identified it as the “*greatest threat to global health in the 21st century*” (World Health Organization 2019). Consequently, millions of people around the world – one in eight individuals or 970 million people worldwide – live with mental illness (Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation 2022). The profound connection between self, other sentient beings, the environment, and Spirit has been recognized in all previous times and places.

In the present day, the truth that “*no man is an island*” (Donne 1923, 98) and that all of existence is interconnected – consisting of an irreducible unity – is often ignored. However, the human psyche is an integral part of the web of life and its underlying cosmic order. With the heightened levels of alienation that we experience today, it is difficult to discern any apparent wholeness. Isolated and disconnected, the human psyche remains fractured, unable to find psychological health and well-being.

The experience of being in our body and mind is intimately connected to what is going on in the world around us, and likewise, we are influenced at the psycho-somatic level by what occurs on earth. The word *ecology* derives from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning “home” or “dwelling”, and the Latin *oeco* or “household”. Thus *ecology*, in its truest sense, is the study of earth as our home. But what we see today is the very destruction of this home. Incidentally, the word *economy*, which has the same prefix as *ecology*, signifies the management of our home. If we explore the environmental crisis through the traditional ecological knowledge of the world’s cultures as informed by their spiritual traditions, it is not a great leap to see that anxiety and depression – even extreme states such as psychosis, suicidal ideation, sleep disorders, and other serious conditions that are so prevalent today – are a reflection of the plight of our terrestrial abode. The demise of the planet is reflected in the escalation of violence as mirrored in humanity today.

Ronald David Laing (1927–1989) urged us to acknowledge: “*If we can stop destroying ourselves, we may stop destroying others*” (1972, 76). We might add that many of the somatic illnesses of the human body closely resemble what is happening to the body of the earth. Although we are rarely cognizant of the soul’s many facets and how these influence our thoughts and behavior with respect to ecological degrada-

tion, we must not forget our kinship with the earth. Any true therapy must acknowledge this affinity.

The relationship between our human microcosm and the environment is arguably more perceptible today than in any previous era. One can stand in a busy megalopolis anywhere in the world and feel a pronounced sense of dislocation. Even when one is alone in nature, we can sense that all is not well – even in the midst of tranquility.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr delivered his Rockefeller Foundation Lectures at the University of Chicago in May 1966, where he stated the following: “*Because of the intimate connection between man and nature, the inner state of man is reflected in the external order*” (1968, 96). The environment, both ecological and societal, is mirrored in the human being, and the person is correspondingly a mirror of society and the world that surrounds them.

The relationship between the human psyche and the environment is difficult to fully discern given modernity’s repudiation of a cosmology and psychology grounded in the Sacred, i.e., connected to an underlying metaphysical order. The tripartite structure of the human being – consisting of spirit, soul, and body – is mirrored in the spiritual, intermediary, and corporeal realms. The three fundamental degrees of manifestation – the formless, subtle, and gross – are ontologically present in both the microcosm and macrocosm. The soul is a mystery, as it is immersed in time while also being rooted in the timeless. The human psyche belongs to the intermediary realm between body and spirit, but it partakes of both dimensions. The environment is therefore inseparable from the soul, which, in turn, is rooted in higher degrees of manifestation, all of which comprise an irreducible wholeness. To fathom the ecological degradation, we find today requires a metaphysical understanding of the human soul, along with an ability to see an abiding unity between the environment and all sentient beings.

## 2 Human Psyche as a Mirror of the Environment

To be clear, there can never be a sharp delineation of humanity's welfare from the concerns of the planet and its life forms. The lack of harmony between us and the natural environment is a reflection of the lost equilibrium between person and Spirit. It is crucial to recall that “[w]e often refer to an environmental crisis, [note: but] the real crisis lies not in the environment... but in the human heart” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew 2012, 172). This predicament arises from our flawed engagement with reality: the way we think, the way we see ourselves, and the worldview we construct. The uniqueness of the person can be better appreciated if we see humanity as a “bridge” or *pontifex* – thus a “bridge-maker” between heaven and earth. The human being's true purpose then is to live in accordance with the Sacred and to better integrate our outward and inward dimensions. In fact, a flourishing environment depends on the stability of the human psyche: “*The state of the outer world does not merely correspond to the general state of men's souls; it also in a sense depends on that state*” (Sirāj ad-Dīn 1996, 21).

Prior to modernism, the ecological knowledge of the world's traditional cultures viewed human beings as the intersection of the horizontal and vertical dimensions: which is to say, as both *geomorphic* (of the earth) and *theomorphic* (of the Spirit). In fact, as Kathleen Raine (1908–2003) observes, “*the sense of the holiness of life is the human norm*” (1991, 28). Although the intertwined nexus between humanity, the natural world, and the Divine has been a central insight of all sapiential traditions, contemporary psychology still does not fully grasp this essential relationship. The discipline does not realize that it is the very loss of a sense of the Sacred that lies at the core of the environmental degradation that fuels the spiritual crisis of humanity. Theodore Roszak (1933–2011; 1972, xxiii) addresses this crisis as follows:

*What, after all, is the ecological crisis that now captures so much belated attention but the inevitable extroversion of a blighted psyche? Like inside, like outside. In the eleventh hour, the very physical environment suddenly looms up before us as the outward mirror of our inner condition, for many the first discernible symptom of advanced disease within.*

## 3 The Loss of Sacred Vision

All religious traditions are in agreement that it is the obscuring of our transpersonal faculty, of the Intellect or the “eye of the heart,” that is the source of our spiritual illness. This is a mode of perception that discerns the Divine (or our true Self) in all phenomena. According to the Bhagavad Gītā, such a vision “*sees the one Indestructible Reality in all beings, inseparable in the separated*” (18:20). With the eclipse of the Intellect, all other faculties and modes of knowing become fragmented and myopic, for “*the soul of man has become hardened*” (Standing Bear 2006, 172).

Such a view fosters a distorted vision of reality, which inevitably leads to innumerable problems and immense suffering: “*Where there is no vision the people perish*” (Proverbs 29:18). Because of this, our noetic faculty is reduced to a one-dimensional or tunnel-like vision, which makes us forgetful of who we truly are, and of our fundamental relationship with all that is. The limited scope of our vision has been described in the following manner: “*They know only an outward appearance of this lower life*” (Qur’ān 30:7). This ubiquitous darkening of the “eye of the heart,” coupled with an exclusive reliance on reason alone, has done us great harm. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882; 1836, 91) addresses the need to look within to restore the human psyche to health, in order to truly see and relate to the natural world:

*The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty, is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself.*

What we need to do, according to Lewis Mumford (1895–1999), is “*to restore a human balance upset by our patholog[y]*” (1962, 217). As Laing points out: “*The condition of alienation... is the condition of the normal man*” (1972, 28), in the modern world and correspondingly, “*the corruption of man must necessarily affect the whole*” (Sirāj ad-Dīn 1996, 21).

The imperative task at hand for any valid “science of the soul” is to restore our transpersonal vision to recognize that the ecological environment, from which we are inseparable, is sacred and very much alive. We are called to see the Divine everywhere, which is to see everything through the Divine. This is, most assuredly, not pantheism. The spiritual traditions view the Divine in all things, yet the Divine – while imma-

nent in all phenomena – also transcends them. The human psyche, and its interdependence with all sentient beings, is essential for understanding the Divine Unity: “*Your creation and your upraising are as but a single soul*” (Qur’ān 31:28).

The human soul is fundamentally linked to the “world soul” (Lat. *anima mundi*). When the former suffers, all other souls suffer as well, including that of the world. According to traditional cosmologies, the world soul is to the universe as the human soul is to the human body. Plato (429–347; 1981, 55, 57) articulates the traditional doctrine of the living cosmos as follows: “*Thus... we must declare that this Cosmos has verily come into existence as a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason... a Living Creature, one and visible, containing within itself all the living creatures which are by nature akin to itself.*”

Plotinus (204/5–270; 1991, 318, 319) addresses the affiliation of the world soul with all living beings in the Absolute: “*All is one universally comprehensive living being, encircling all the living beings within it, and having a soul, one soul, which extends to all... every separate thing is an integral part of this All.*” The First Peoples everywhere have revered our living planet as Mother Earth. In a Pawnee ritual, the following words are sung (quoted in Fletcher 1997, 335):

*Behold! Our Mother Earth is lying here.  
Behold! She giveth of her fruitfulness.  
Truly, her power gives she us.  
Give thanks to Mother Earth who lieth here.  
Behold on Mother Earth the growing fields!  
Behold the promise of her fruitfulness!  
Truly, her power gives she us.  
Give thanks to Mother Earth who lieth here.*

The demise of traditional cosmology marked the end, not only of the “world soul” (Lat. *anima mundi*), but that of humanity. The cosmological model of the “great chain of being” was ultimately expunged from the Western worldview. This refers to the hierarchy of ontological degrees that make up the cosmos, from the most basic elements to the most complex forms of life. As the cosmos is a living entity, each sentient being honors the Divine according to its own ontological station. The great Neoplatonist Proclus (c. 410–485) writes: “*Each thing prays according to the rank it occupies in nature and sings the praise of the leader of the divine series to which it belongs*” (quoted in Corbin 1981, 105–106). The sacred cosmologies everywhere have upheld the unity of the created order: “*The very root of ‘creation’ is the ‘singleness’ of the Absolute*” (Izutsu 1984, 198). This is affirmed in the Kabbalah which recognizes that: “*Everything was brought into existence from the Root of all Roots*” (quoted in Dan 1986, 105).

## 4 Reviving Sacred Cosmology

The gradual collapse of traditional cosmology gave rise to modern science, and its empirical modes of knowing have proved to be catastrophic; there cannot be a remedy or a way forward until this is clearly understood. Without a cosmology that accounts for the entire web of existence – and a recognition of its irreducible unity – the discipline of psychology remains ill-equipped to deal with the degradation of both the human psyche and the environment.

The bifurcation of human consciousness, or the mind-body dualism attributed to René Descartes (1596–1650), is embedded in the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of mainstream psychology and has had unforeseen but inevitable consequences for the ecological crisis. Cartesian dualism, as the exclusive division of the world into *res extensa* (extended entities) and *res cogitans* (thinking entities) reduces all human experience to the private and subjective realm, thus obliterating objective reality or, at an ever-higher level, that which is ultimately Real. The split between the Self and the natural world is evident in the very foundations of modern psychology. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) observed: “*Ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else*” (1989a, 12) and, elsewhere, he remarks on the “*boundary lines between the Ego and the external world*” (1989a, 13). It cannot be stressed enough that, without being able to transcend this bifurcation, there cannot be a true “science of the soul.”

Psychology’s inability to fully discern the transpersonal aspect, that unifies all dimensions of a human being with the environment, clearly lies behind our environmental calamities today. This is evident in the following description provided by American psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011): “*There is only one core issue for all [note: modern] psychology. Where is the ‘me’? Where does the ‘me’ begin? Where does the ‘me’ stop? Where does the ‘other’ begin?*” (1995, xvii). While a split between “in-here” and “out-there” – is ultimately a play of appearances due to the obscuration of the “eye of the heart,” this is not a problematic binary according to the sacred cosmologies. However, a metaphysical framework is needed to reconcile them in the Absolute.

The sacred relationship between “I” and “thou” has been reduced to an “I–it” relationship, creating a scission between human beings and nature which can only sever their transpersonal roots and render desacralized nature as the norm. Descartes’s dictum (2003, 68) “*I think, therefore I am*” (Lat. *cogito ergo sum*) not only reduces objective reality to sub-

jective reason but imprisons it therein. It solidifies our true identity with the empirical Ego or separate self. To assert reason's independence from the Intellect is to occlude the "eye of the heart" as our sole means of knowing spiritual reality directly.

The organic union between our human psyche and the planet's integrity needs to be recognized within the field of mental health, for it has profound implications for the ecological crisis. Wendell Berry (2002, 118–19) writes:

*The earth is what we all have in common, that it is what we are made of and what we live from, and that we therefore cannot damage it without damaging those with whom we share it... There is an uncanny resemblance between our behavior toward each other and our behavior toward the earth. Between our relation to our own sexuality and our relation to the reproductivity of the earth, for instance, the resemblance is plain and strong and apparently inescapable. By some connection that we do not recognize, the willingness to exploit one becomes the willingness to exploit the other. The conditions and the means of exploitation are likewise similar.*

The difference between sacred and secular mindsets has consequences for how we relate to one another and to the world around us. If we take this for granted unthinkingly, we risk not discerning the full implications of our predicament (Peck 1994, 46):

*The person with a secular mentality feels himself to be the center of the universe. Yet he is likely to suffer from a sense of meaninglessness and insignificance because he knows he's but one human among [note: seven] billion others – all feeling themselves to be the center of things – scratching out an existence on the surface of a medium-sized planet circling a small star among countless stars in a galaxy lost among countless galaxies. The person with a sacred mentality, on the other hand, does not feel herself to be the center of the universe. She considers the Center to be elsewhere and other. Yet she is unlikely to feel lost or insignificant precisely because she draws her significance and meaning from her relationship, her connection, with that center, that Other.*

A crippling blind spot in the vision of modernity is its attempt at what has been called "immanentization of the eschaton" (Voegelin 1952, 163). This is the pursuit of a utopian ideal in our impermanent and imperfect temporal reality: in other words, *heaven on earth*. No matter how many technological advancements are deployed to create a terrestrial

paradise (including attempts to indefinitely extend human life and even cheat death), such efforts are artificial and deeply flawed.

Utopianism is a fundamental distortion of the universal and timeless wisdom recognized by humanity's diverse cultures, which recognizes the transient nature of our earthly existence. The unseen informs the visible world – and not the other way around – "*the infinite, conceived the finite*" (quoted in Waters 1977, 3). This reality is seen as but a pale reflection of a greater realm: "*The real world... is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world*" (quoted in Neihardt 1988, 85).

Our soul longs for Paradise and cannot find peace outside divine Reality. The ecological environment is itself a foreshadowing of the hereafter, and therefore our soul discovers peace therein: "*Nature inviolate is at once a vestige of the Earthly Paradise and a prefiguration of the Heavenly Paradise*" (Schuon 1984, 143). This is why the loss of religion in the modern world has led to nature becoming – not only a sanctuary due to this void – but a substitute for transcendence itself. Yet this is not to suggest that our purpose on earth is to make the temporal eternal, as this can never be possible given the fleeting conditions that are inherent to life in this world.

The goal of the spiritual traditions was never to establish a utopia on earth, for Christ said: "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36). To envision "*a new earth*" (Revelation 21:1), or to enact "*on earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10), is to be transformed so that the Intellect or "eye of the heart" is restored to see, once again, all phenomena through the Divine. A final point that needs to be made here is that all attempts to erect a man-made paradise on earth (usually through technology) appear to have failed because they are but the extension of our insubstantial Ego and its fundamental impotence in the face of old age, sickness, and death such efforts can only contribute to a veritable *dys-topia*. Although the Divine can be intuited everywhere, we always need to recall the ephemeral nature of conditioned reality: "*All things are perishing except His Face*" (Qur'ān 28:88).

Attempts to "immanentize the eschaton" have been witnessed in the discipline of psychology. The theories of Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904–1990) reached their acme in his controversial utopian novel *Walden Two* (1948); the title is taken from Henry David Thoreau's (1817–1862) work *Walden*, published in 1854. Skinner's book describes an experimental community informed by scientism that seeks to engineer

an ideal society based on behaviorist principles. Rollo May (1909–1994) explains (1967, 218–19):

*If you want a fairly exact picture in contemporary psychology of a modern Garden of Eden, you have only to read Professor Skinner's Walden Two. In Walden Two there is freedom from anxiety, guilt, and conflict; you are good and wise without trying or choosing to be, and like Adam and Eve under the trees, personal relationships are 'under the most favorable conditions,' as Professor Skinner phrases it. Under the benevolent dictator of Walden Two, the people are said to be happy. But it is a post-human, animal happiness, with the capacity to question and constructive dissatisfactions lost. Though I disagree with Walden Two, I am not worried about it, for all that I know about human beings as a therapist or as a student of human history leads me to be confident that if there were a next chapter in the book, it would be a resounding revolt against the dictator and the system; and whether the dictator is malevolent or beneficent is irrelevant.*

Since its inception, modern Western psychology has gradually cut itself off from its metaphysical roots. This is evidenced, in part, by a shift away from the use of the word *soul* or *psyche* to the term *mind* being increasingly adopted. This process of severing the transcendent dimension from the human soul is due, in large part, to the modern world's secularizing and reductionist outlook. In its desiccated condition, modern psychology cannot provide psychic stability – let alone wholeness or healing – as it lacks a sense of the Sacred.

Modern science appears to be “neutral” or “value-free”, but this is not the case. Its totalitarian position asserts that what truly exists is only that which can be empirically verified through the five senses. This is none other than *scientism*, the ideological belief that only the scientific method can provide exclusive criteria for establishing truth or reality. It is a fundamentally pernicious worldview that has blighted the relationship between human beings and the cosmos not to mention the far-reaching psychological harm that has ensued from this rupture.

Psychology today repudiates the metaphysical foundations that, alone, can give it access to a tripartite understanding of the human being as Spirit, soul, and body (along with its corresponding modes of knowing and healing). Accordingly, the modern form of this discipline has, by and large, been relegated to a study of merely mental phenomena with no reference to the transpersonal reality that abodes in all beings.

If psychology wishes to restore the spiritual dimension to a proper “science of the soul”, it first needs to contend with the undeniable truth that “*having first bargained away its soul and then gone out of its mind, seems now, as it faces an untimely end, to have lost all consciousness*” (Burt 1962, 229) and, likewise, “[t]he soul or consciousness, which played the leading part in the past, now is of very little importance; in any case both are deprived of their main functions and glory to such an extent that only the names remain... [note: Modern psychology] sang their funeral dirge while materialism – the smiling heir – arranges a suitable funeral for them” (quoted in Kornilov 1930, 268). This desacralized outlook in contemporary psychology is further underscored by John B. Watson (1878–1958), founder of behaviorism or behavioristic psychology:

*One example of such a religious concept is that every individual has a soul which is separate and distinct from the body. This soul is really a part of a supreme being. This ancient view led to the philosophical platform called 'dualism.' This dogma has been present in human psychology from earliest antiquity. No one has ever touched a soul, or seen one in a test tube, or has in any way come into relationship with it as he has with the other objects of his daily experience... (1970, 3). When the first psychological laboratory was established, that psychology at last had become a science without a soul (1997, 5).*

Without situating ourselves in this arc of human history, it is difficult to obtain sufficient context to understand the relationship between the soul and the ecology, and to see how we have gotten to where we are. In order to comprehend the calamitous events that have catalyzed today's ecological degradation, we need to recall the emergence of humanism and the gradual secular trajectory of the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, which ultimately gave rise to the European Enlightenment. These developments have unleashed the destructive forces that continue into the present. The traditional world, which was rooted in metaphysics and the Sacred, was usurped, which could only happen if something had been substituted in its place. Here, we can observe that the Sacred was displaced by a profane understanding of nature, which has had irrevocable consequences for humanity.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD) provide numerous refined categories; however, they do not recognize the interconnection of the psyche with the ecology, or the quality of our relationship to the environment. The inability of DSM and ICD to account for the spiritual dimension, its potential to balance the human psyche, and its connection to the natural world is a serious shortcoming for the discipline.

According to mainstream therapies, psychological health has been defined as “a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life” (American Psychological Association 2020).

Some may recall the following passage from Sigmund Freud and might think that he took into account ecological and even transpersonal considerations: “Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the Ego and the world about it” (1989a, 15). Yet this notion is not only flawed but also problematic because the Freudian system is vehemently anti-metaphysical and anti-spiritual in essence the very foundations on which contemporary psychology is founded. In fact, a series of lectures that Freud delivered in 1901 – titled *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* – reveals the collective illness of the human soul in our time, to which *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) may be added as an expression of the psyche’s gradual flight from the natural world.

The full-scale assault of the psychoanalytic revolution is clearly evident in Freud’s parable of the “three blows”, when he attacks what he diagnosed as “human narcissism” or the traditional belief that we are “made in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Human beings were traditionally recognized as a reflection of divine reality, being inseparable from the world of Spirit: “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

Philip Sherrard (1922–1995) explains why this decisive attack was detrimental to both humanity and the planet: “Our understanding of man is intimately related to our understanding of nature. Indeed, so much is this the case that our failure to perceive the divine in man has gone hand in hand with a failure to perceive the divine in nature. As we have dehumanized man, so we have desanctified nature” (1991, 90). The first is the *cosmological blow*, more commonly known as the Copernican revolution attributed to Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), which unmoored the human being from traditional understandings of the cosmos: in particular, from a conception of the person as a microcosm: “Man is a little cosmos, and the cosmos is like a big man” (Ibn ‘Arabī 1975, 11).

The second is the *biological blow*, or what has been dubbed the Darwinian revolution attributed to Charles Darwin (1809–1882), which reduced humanity to mere animality. The following statement by Skinner (1965, 7) situates the

theoretical ground from which behavioristic psychology, not unlike psychoanalysis, was able to solidify the worldview of modernity:

*Primitive beliefs about man and his place in nature are usually flattering. It has been the unfortunate responsibility of [note: modern] science to paint more realistic pictures. The Copernican theory of the solar system displaced man from his pre-eminent position at the center of things. Today we accept this theory without emotion, but originally it met with enormous resistance. Darwin challenged a practice of segregation in which man set himself firmly apart from the animals, and the bitter struggle which arose is not yet ended. But... Darwin put man in his biological place...*

The third is the *psychological blow* – the Psychoanalytic revolution attributed to Sigmund Freud, who attacked traditional modes of knowing. He undermined the traditional distinction between “reason” (Lat. *ratio*) and the “intellect” (Lat. *intellectus*), thus proclaiming that human beings are governed by unconscious or instinctual forces that exist beyond the normal reaches of our awareness. Freud writes: “Man’s intellect is powerless in comparison with his instinctual life” (1989b, 68). This subverts the notion of the Intellect or “eye of the heart” as a transcendent faculty that directly apprehends “the Ego is not master in its own house” (Freud 1955, 143). This served to further undermine the metaphysical symbolism of our kinship with the cosmos.

It was not only behaviorism and psychoanalysis (the two key pillars of modern Western psychology) that eroded the spiritual foundations of the human psyche. Starting with the first European psychological laboratory established by Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) in 1879 at the University of Leipzig, the soul has steadily lost its centrality in psychology. Wundt’s “new psychology” announced the death of the soul as follows: “The... soul can no longer exist in the face of our present-day physiological knowledge” (1924, 192). Nevertheless, across the Atlantic, William James (1842–1910) had set up a laboratory, four years prior to Wundt, at Harvard University in 1875.

While James was a pioneer of transpersonal psychology, which attempts to reclaim the role of spirituality in psychology, he wanted to appeal to the secular mindset within the field by emphasizing the following: “The Soul-theory is, then, a complete superfluity, so far as accounting for the actually verified facts of conscious experience goes. So far, no one can be compelled to subscribe to it for definite scientific reasons” (1913, 348). James thus defined psychology by including the

mind but eradicating the soul: *“Psychology is the Science of Mental Life, both its phenomena and of their conditions”* (1913, 1). The figure who initially formulated the notion of a *“psychology without a soul”* (Lange 1881, 168), which aided in forming the secular foundations for modern psychology, was Friedrich Albert Lange (1828–1875), a German philosopher and sociologist.

The revolution brought about by behaviorism and psychoanalysis sought to overthrow Medieval epistemology, which defined knowledge as *“adaequatio rei et intellectus – the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing... known”* (Schumacher 1977, 39). This is to say that the traditional or pre-modern world recognized that there were levels of reality that corresponded to modes of knowing at those levels.

Sacred tradition resisted the scientific materialism of modern psychology: *“Mediaeval Tradition Has Kept Psychology from Becoming a Science. – Psychology, up to very recent times, has been held so rigidly under the dominance both of traditional religion and of philosophy – the two great bulwarks of mediaevalism – that it has never been able to free itself and become a natural science”* (Watson 1924, 1). To discard the “mediaeval conceptions” is to essentially abandon metaphysics and the spiritual dimension as the foundation of psychology. It is to overturn the timeless wisdom of the religions and their perennial psychology: *“The kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:21), *“I am the Self... seated in the heart of all beings”* (Bhagavad Gītā 10:20), or *“[m]y earth and My heaven contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me”* (quoted in Nicholson 1914, 68). This inversion of traditional norms contributed to the rise of “therapeutic” culture and the “psychological” man in modernity.

The emergence of modern Western psychology began with John Locke (1632–1704), one of the most influential thinkers of the European Enlightenment to whom was attributed, among other things, the development of empiricism [1]. It was the eclipse of the transpersonal faculty within the human being that culminated in the Enlightenment, which marked the beginning of a desacralized cosmos with its psychological imbalance and ecological degradation. This marked the triumph of reason over the Intellect or the “eye of the heart”.

The levels of reality that apply to the human microcosm are also applicable to the macrocosm; yet they are hierarchically ordered and unified in the Absolute. In the same way that the human microcosm is tripartite – consisting of Spirit, soul, and body – so too the cosmos at large, according to traditional

cosmologies, is tripartite in its ontological structure, consisting of the celestial or spiritual realm, intermediary realm, and the terrestrial or corporeal world. Sacred cosmology is integral to all of humanity’s spiritual cultures. The Hindu tradition speaks of the “three worlds” (Sa. *tribhuvana*): “heaven” (Sa. *svar*), “atmosphere” or “air” (Sa. *bhuv*), and the “earth” (Sa. *bhū*).

## 5 Restoring Ecological Wisdom

Traditional ecological knowledge informs us that human beings are both of the earth and the Spirit: *“Man, the transient [note: in his form], the eternal [note: in his essence]”* (Ibn ‘Arabī 1980, 51). We are not only in the cosmos, but the cosmos is in us. Within Jewish mysticism, it is framed as follows: *“God... made this [note: terrestrial] world corresponding to the world above, and everything which is above has its counterpart here below... and yet all constitute a unity”* (quoted in Schaya 2014, 90). The mystic and physician Paracelsus (1493–1541), expressed the link between the human microcosm and the macrocosm as follows: *“there is nothing in heaven or in earth that is not also in man”* (1988, 45). Within the Islamic tradition, this interrelation is also recognized: *“We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves, until it be manifest unto them that it is the truth”* (Qur’ān 41:53). The Buddha phrased it this way: *“Verily, I declare to you... that within this [note: fathom-high] body... is, the world, and the waxing thereof, and the... passing away thereof!”* (Dialogues of the Buddha 1899, 273).

To return science to its origins in metaphysics, humanity – collectively – must tread one of the time-worn paths of a legitimate religion. It is worth noting that the etymological root of “religion” is the Latin word *religare*, which means to “re-bind” or “bind back” – by implication to the Divine, which is at once transcendent and immanent. Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), the Romanian historian of religion, writes: *“The man of the traditional societies is admittedly a homo religiosus”* (1987, 15). Mainstream psychology reduces the human being to *homo natura* devoid of any transcendent frames of reference, which cannot but radically alienate the person from the Spirit and the created order. This decisive turn to reduce people to terrestrial measures alone is an unparalleled form of dehumanization.

Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), a renowned scholar of Native American traditions and world religions, conveys an expansive conception of religion that includes an entire way of life as understood by diverse indigenous communities (2007, xiii–xiv, 84):

*Religion... is not a separate category of activity or experience [note: but] is in complex interrelationships with all aspects of the peoples' life-ways... Shared principles underlie sacred concepts that are specific to each of nature's manifestations and also to what could be called sacred geography... In addition, a special understanding of language in which words constitute distinct units of sacred power... Sacred forms extend to diverse architectural styles, so that each dwelling... is an image of the cosmos. Mysticism, in its original and thus deepest sense, is an experiential reality within Native American spiritual traditions.*

Furthermore, Eliade states: "For religious man, nature is never only 'natural'; it is always fraught with a religious value... for the cosmos is a divine creation" (1987, 116). For this reason, religion is essential for resolving the environmental crisis and the restoration of an integral cosmology that upholds the sacredness of creation. Any resolution to the plight of the natural world is going to require an adequate ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, anthropology, and psychology, which are all part and parcel of a valid spiritual tradition.

The acute myopia of our present condition has led to the predicament that humanity faces today: "Whatever calamity may befall you will be an outcome of what your own hands have wrought" (Qur'ān 42:30). There are some who view religion to be the problem itself and hold it responsible for the planet's ecological degradation [2]. Take, for example, the biblical verse: "Be fruitful and subdue the earth" (Genesis 1:28), which is often misinterpreted and conveniently exploited to place the blame for the environmental crisis on religion. This citation needs to be reconciled with St. Paul's advice to "use the world without abusing it" (1 Corinthians 7:31) and "[h]urt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees" (Revelation 7:3).

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (2012, 99) declared that the desecration of the environment is none other than a sinful betrayal of the Spirit:

*To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For human beings to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to injure other human beings with disease... [note: and] contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air... with poisonous substances – these are sins.*

The importance of striking a balance between all dimensions of a human being was known by the ancients, who saw us as a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm. "The perfect balance of the primordial soul depends on the harmonious union of the domains of inner and outer man" (Lings 1975, 54). According to Zhūangzi (Chuang Tzu, c. 369–286), "[i]f the equilibrium of the positive [note: yang] and negative [note: yin] is disturbed... man himself suffers physically [note: and psychologically] thereby" (1889, 120).

By contrast, *disequilibrium* on an egregious scale has become the norm for contemporary humanity. What has elicited this situation? A very important detail lacking from the principles that drive the environmental movement is the role of the psyche in sustaining a healthy human ambiance. Our ecological predicament needs to be recognized as an external unfolding of the spiritual crisis that afflicts us. As Nasr writes: "For a humanity turned towards outwardness by the very processes of modernization, it is not so easy to see that the blight wrought upon the environment is in reality an externalization of the destitution of the inner state of the soul of that humanity whose actions are responsible for the ecological crisis" (1990, 3). Sherrard also underscores this predicament: "The ecological crisis... is primarily a crisis about man and not about his environment" (Sherrard 1991, 70).

Due to our *samsāric* or fallen consciousness, we have lost sight of our essential nature and have neglected to recognize the sacredness of creation and our vital connection to it. The Buddha's cautionary words declaring that all phenomena are "burning" also calls attention to this disequilibrium. The disarray of our inner life is due to the dominance of the "three poisons" – *greed* (Pāli *raga*; Sanskrit *lobha*), *hatred* (Pāli *dvesa*; Sanskrit *dosa*), and *delusion* (Pāli *moha*; Sanskrit *moha*) – which is precisely what we are seeing today. Within the Christian tradition, we see that "the whole creation has been groaning in travail... until now" (Romans 8:22) and observe "the mourning of the land" (Hosea 41:3). Our fallen condition is mirrored in our natural surroundings which has been profoundly debased in the wake of the Fall. Within the Islamic tradition, it is said: "Corruption has appeared on earth and at sea because of what the hands of men have wrought; thus does God make them taste some of the consequences of their actions, so that they might return" (Qur'ān 30:41). There is a message of hope here, in that a way through this predicament can be found by restoring our lost harmony with the Divine.

In the 1990s, the Kogi Indians of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta of Colombia delivered a powerful warning to the world at large about the ensuing ecological crisis (further quoted in Ereira 1992, 10). It has become imperative, they said, to con-

tact the outside world in order to urgently bring our attention to the environmental plight and its cataclysmic effects, should a radical change in direction not be taken in time.

*Up to now we have ignored the Younger Brother [note: people of the modern world]. We have not deigned even to give him a slap. But now we can no longer look after the world alone. The Younger Brother is doing too much damage. He must see, and understand, and assume responsibility. Now we will have to work together. Otherwise, the world will die.*

The sole purpose of all knowledge, according to the Kogi, is to obtain a balance known as *yuluka* which means to be in “agreement” or “harmony” (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976, 269). A general Kogi response to the question, “How are you?”, is, “I am well seated”; in other words, the person “is at ease in [note: their] proper place, in balance and harmony with the world” (quoted in Ereira 1992, 50). To live in equilibrium with nature, Kogi ecological lore and cosmology teach the importance of living in moderation so as to avoid overindulgence in any form. The Kogi term *kuivi* – “abstinent” – is a reminder to rely on the Sacred and to be in a proper relationship with all that is (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976). Incidentally, we recall the Hopi term *koyaanisqatsi*, meaning “life out of balance” or “life of moral corruption and turmoil” (Hopi Dictionary Project 1998, 154). All forms of traditional wisdom recognize that what we do to nature we do to ourselves, and that our inner disequilibrium will have a detrimental impact on the environment. It is through active engagement with the spiritual realm – including participation in sacred rites – that the balance of the world is maintained.

Hehaka Sapa or Black Elk (1863–1950), an extraordinary sage of the Lakota Sioux, gives voice to how the Sacred permeates all facets of traditional life (quoted in Brown 1989, 59, xx):

*We regard all created beings as sacred and important, for everything has a ‘wochangi’ or influence which can be given to us, through which we may gain a little more understanding if we are attentive... We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples; and even more important, we should understand that He is also above all these things and peoples.*

The perceived boundary between the Self, others, and the environment requires a metaphysical framework to be fully

understood, for they are at once separate on the horizontal plane and yet ultimately united in a vertical dimension. The problem is that modern science and its derivative psychology are limited to the horizontal and relative levels and do not have access to the transcendent. As the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886–1951) writes: “*The whole of nature amounts to no more than a symbol of the transcendent realities*” (2001, 22). However, because of the obscuration of our Intellect, we cannot see nature as a manifestation of the transcendent. Ibn ‘Arabī explains that “[*The World*] is to itself its own veil and thus cannot see God, due to the very fact that it sees itself” (1975, 17). Christian writer William Law (1686–1761) states: “*There cannot be the smallest Thing, or the smallest Quality of any Thing in this World, but what is a Quality of Heaven or Hell, discovered under a temporal Form*” (Law 1893, 116). In the Bhagavad Gītā (9:4) it is written: “*By Me all this world is pervaded, My form unmanifested. All beings dwell in Me; and I do not dwell in them.*” Through the recovery of our transpersonal vision, we can see – as Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) makes clear – the immeasurable in the finite: “*For the sage every star, every flower, is metaphysically a proof of the Infinite*” (2007, 4).

## 6 Discerning the Sacred Signs

With the loss of a sense of the Sacred, our spiritual vision has become fragmented and myopic. Having lost our ability to see the theophany of nature, we can no longer discern the “signs of God” (Latin *vestigia Dei*; Arabic *āyāt Allāh*) within the cosmos and in ourselves. We are interested here in the connection between a science of the cosmos (as informed by the signs of God) and a science of the soul. The distinction between empirical science and sacred science is being underscored here: the former “*seeks to derive principles from phenomena, the other seeks to see phenomena in the light of their metaphysical principles*” (Northbourne 2001, 46). These signs are of a supra-individual or archetypal order; they transcend the human psyche but, at the same time, include it. As St. Paul says: “*For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead*” (Romans 1:20).

It is through the visible world of forms that we can glimpse the unseen realities of the Divine. Luther Standing Bear (c. 1868–1939) explains: “*Wakan Tanka [note: the Great Spirit] breathed life and motion into all things, both visible and invisible*” (Standing Bear 2006, 197). And St. Basil (330–379) remarked: “*Things visible infer things invisible*” (Basil 1888, 76). Empirical modes of knowing are in fact, as St. Gregory of Sinai (†1346) notes, based on ways of knowing that

transcend the mundane order: “A right view of created things depends upon a truly spiritual knowledge of visible and invisible realities. Visible realities are objects perceived by the senses, while invisible realities are noetic, intelligent, intelligible, and divine” (1998, 217). This idea is expounded in the Heart Sūtra (in Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra*): “form is emptiness... emptiness is form” (quoted in Conze 1959, 162). The mystery and theophany of the created order is disclosed in the familiar *hadīth qudsī*: “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known; therefore I created the creation in order that I might be known” (quoted in Nicholson 1914, 80). Yet such insights demand that we restore our sapiential wisdom as conferred through the “eye of the heart”.

St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) speaks about the *logoi* of creation which pre-exist in the divine Logos. Although there is only one Logos, there are many *logoi*. The created order arises from the Logos and is mirrored and expressed in all things through the *logoi*. While it transcends creation, the Logos also abides in all things through its immanent *logoi*. Maximus addresses this interplay between the uncreated and the created via their unification in God (quoted in Chryssavgis 2019, 102):

*He is mysteriously concealed in the interior causes [note: logoi] of created beings... present in each totally and in all plenitude... In all diversity is concealed that which is one and eternally identical; in composite things, that which is simple and without parts; in those which had one day to begin that which has no beginning; in the visible that which is invisible; and in the tangible that which is intangible.*

Although it seems an elusive quest in our currently degraded conditions, it is still possible to discover the Sacred in our surroundings. This is because the transpersonal dimension both embraces (as manifestation) and surpasses (as source) all phenomena. By a noetic discernment of the *logoi* in the created order, we are always reminded of the spiritual signs and symbols that have their origin in the Divine.

## 7 The Unity of the Created Order

Having sundered its metaphysical roots, modern psychology simply cannot fathom the sacred foundations of phenomenal reality. A divine unity pervades the multiplicity of our everyday world: “We are [note: all] members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25), or as a Lakota saying reveals: “We are all related” (*Mitakuye oyasin*). Brown (2007, 39) brings to light the metaphysical dimension of this relationship:

*This sense of relationship pertains not only to members of a nuclear family, band, or clan. It also extends outward to include all beings of the specific environment, the elements, and the winds, whether these beings, forms, or powers are what we would call animate or inanimate. In native... thought no such hard dichotomies exist. All such forms under creation are understood to be mysteriously interrelated. Everything is relative to every other being or thing; thus, nothing exists in isolation. The intricately interrelated threads of the spider’s web are used as a metaphor for the world... This is a profound symbol when it is understood. The people observed that the threads of the web were drawn out from within the spider’s very being.*

Black Elk affirms our integral relationship with one another and all sentient beings, including the environment and the Great Spirit: “It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit” (quoted in Neihardt 1988, 1).

Within the Hindu tradition, it is recognized that the Spirit pervades the entirety of the cosmos: “The whole universe is filled by the Purusha” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 3:9). For “[i]t is not for the love of creatures that creatures are dear; but for the love of the Soul in creatures that creatures are dear” (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad 2:4:5). Through a transpersonal vision, we can see the sacredness of all sentient beings: “In a Brāhmana endowed with wisdom and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, as also in a dog and in a dog eater, the wise see the same” (Bhagavad Gītā 5:18). We recall the oneness of all existence that is contained in the Sanskrit verse *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* translated as “the world is one family”, originally found in the Maha Upanishad (6:72) and which also appears later in the Panchatantra (third century) and the Hitopadesha (twelfth century).

According to the sutras of Mahāyāna Buddhism: “Grasses, trees, and land without exception attain Buddhahood: Moun-

*tains, rivers and the great earth all disclose the Dharma-body*" (quoted in Abe 1997, 74). The Japanese Zen Master Dōgen (1200–1253; 2012, 6–7) asserted that there was not a single phenomenon that did not radiate Buddha-nature:

*Earth, grass, trees, walls, tiles, and pebbles in the world of phenomena in the ten directions all engage in buddha activity... Grasses, trees, and lands... radiate a great light and endlessly expound the inconceivable, profound dharma. Grass, trees, and walls bring forth the teaching to all beings...*

Kūkai (774–835), the founder of Japanese tantric Buddhism (Shingon), maintains that the Buddha body not only extends to include all life forms but is essentially synonymous with the body of all bodies (quoted in Yasuo 1987, 156):

*This body is my body, the Buddha body, and the bodies of all sentient beings. They are all named the 'body.' ... 'This' body is, no doubt, 'that' body. 'That' body is, no doubt, 'this' body. The Buddha body is no doubt the bodies of all sentient beings, and the bodies of all sentient beings are no doubt the Buddha body. They are different, but yet identical. They are not different, but yet different.*

A profound ecological vision can also be found in the Taoist tradition, as we see in Zhūangzi (Chuang Tzu): "*Heaven and earth spring from the same root as myself, and all things are one with me*" (quoted in Wu 2003, 199). Taoism asserts: "*The ways of men are conditioned by those of earth. The ways of earth, by those of heaven. The ways of heaven by those of Tao, and the ways of Tao by the Self-so*" (Lao Tzu 1997, 26). The Tao is the origin of all that is and, for us to preserve harmony with the rest of creation, human beings need to maintain unity with this principle: "*The World has a First Cause, which may be regarded as the Mother of the World. When one has the Mother, one can know the Child. He who knows the Child and still keeps the Mother, though his body perish, shall run no risk of harm*" (Lao Tzu 1904, 23).

In Judaism, we find: "*The whole earth is full of his glory*" (Isaiah 6:3). In restoring our spiritual vision, we will be able to discern the works of the Creator: "*For, all things look to [note: His] face... which renews the face of the earth*" (Psalm 104:27), including: "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork*" (John 1:3). Through the Divine Unity, everything derives and receives its sustenance (Psalm 104:10–14):

*He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the*

*wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth.*

Our sacred duty to look after the natural world is communicated here: "*God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it*" (Genesis 2:15).

Within the Christian tradition, it is recognized that the Divine is present "*in all things*" (Colossians 3:11) and "*may be all in all*" (1 Corinthians 15:28), for the Divine is "*in Him through whom all things live, move, and have their being*" (Acts 17:28). The transcendent glory of each thing in the created order is recognized: "*There is one glory of the sun, and another of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory*" (1 Corinthians 15:41). Hugh of Saint Victor (c. 1096–1141) speaks of a traditional ecological knowledge imparted through divine wisdom: "*Every nature tells of God; every nature teaches man; every nature reproduces its essential form, and nothing in the universe is infecund*" (1991, 145). St. Paul of the Cross (1694–1775) urges us to learn directly from creation: "[Note: Listen] *to the sermon preached by the flowers, the trees, the meadows, the sun, the sky, and the whole universe. You will find that they exhort you to love and praise God; that they excite you to extol the greatness of the Sovereign Architect Who has given them their being*" (1893, 89). Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) writes (1920, 212–13):

*Every particular thing, be [note: it] herb, grass, tree, beast, bird, fish, worm, or whatsoever it be... has proceeded from the separator of all beings... from the Word... For this visible world with all its host and being is nothing but an objective representation of the spiritual world, which spiritual world is hidden in this material, elemental world, like... the tincture in herbs and metals.*

The entirety of the created order is united in the Divine (Colossians 1:15–20):

[Note: Christ] *is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*

*and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

In fact, nothing must be excluded from our heart's compassion, as Isaac the Syrian (c. 613–c. 700) powerfully instructs: *"The burning of the heart unto the whole [note: of] creation, [note: for] man, [note: for] fowls [note: birds] and [note: for] beasts, [note: even for] demons and [note: for] whatever exists"* (1923, 341).

In the Islamic tradition, there are pronouncements in the Qur'an about maintaining equilibrium with the created order *"that you transgress not in the balance"* (55:8) and how human behavior supports inner and outer equilibrium: *"Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order"* (7:56). The whole of reality abides in the Divine to keep the earth stable: *"Do you not see that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among humanity?"* (Qur'an 22:18). It is also said that *"[t]here is nothing that does not glorify Him in praise"* (Qur'an 17:44). Yūnus Emre (1238–1320), a Turkish poet and Sufi mystic, speaks about invocation of the Divine Name that reverberates throughout the created order: *"The rivers all in Paradise / Flow with the word Allah Allah, / And ev'ry loving nightingale / He sings and sings Allah Allah"* (quoted in Schimmel 1982, 150). No matter how dire outward circumstances may be, the Prophet Muhammad urges individuals to apply their ecological awareness to tangible acts: *"It is a blessed act to plant a tree even if it be a day before the end of the world."* (quoted in Nasr 2004, 143).

Due to the limitations of mainstream psychology, some have suggested alternative approaches – such as ecopsychology, environmental psychology, and climate psychology – in an attempt to address the loss and destruction of biodiversity, including a rise in concomitant anxiety and depression. Rozsak (2001, 14) explains that all traditional forms of sacred psychology are essentially anchored in ecology and the Spirit:

*Once upon a time, all psychologies were 'ecopsychologies'. Those who sought to heal the soul took it for granted that human nature is densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable, mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos. Just as all medicine was in times past understood to be 'holistic' – a healing of body, mind, and soul – and did not need to be identified as such, so all psychotherapy was once spontaneously understood to be cosmically connected. It is peculiarly the psychiatry [note:*

*and psychology] of modern Western society that has split the 'inner' life from the 'outer' world – as if what was inside of us was not also inside the universe, something real, consequential, and inseparable from our study of the natural world.*

Contemporary approaches largely ignore the fact that *"ecology needs psychology [note: and] psychology needs ecology"* (Rozsak 2001, 323). In fact, any psychology that does not include a deep-rooted connection with the environment, including all sentient beings, is fundamentally flawed, and cannot be considered a true "science of the soul." The reason that mainstream psychology does not include an ecological perspective has to do with the reductionistic science on which the discipline has been constructed (which is none other than the legacy of the Enlightenment project).

With that said, ecopsychology (including humanistic and transpersonal psychology) has asserted similarities between modern science and the traditional wisdom of indigenous and shamanic peoples (or indeed with any of the world's religions); this does not, however, indicate that their points of departure are the same as those of the First Peoples. Additionally, any parallels found between them do not rectify the many errors of modern science and do not demonstrate that they are on the same level.

Contemporary psychology and psychiatry recognize, to some degree, the threats that climate change presents to public health and mental well-being. Although they maintain that individuals struggling with mental illness are disproportionately affected by climate change, they do not appreciate the spiritual dimension of this dilemma. The notion of "biophilia" has been proposed to account for the innate relationship between human flourishing, geographical location, and the environment (Wilson 1984, 85). In contrast, *solastalgia* designates a form of emotional or existential distress produced by ecological change and uncertainty (Albrecht 2005, 41–44). There have been a host of conditions attributed to the impacts of climate change. A key term used is "eco-anxiety" (Albrecht 2011, 43–56), yet we also find "eco-angst" (Goleman 2009, unpaginated), "eco-distress" (Windle 1992, 363–6; Kevorkian 2019, 216–226), "environmental distress" (Higginbotham *et al.* 2006, 245–254), "eco-paralysis" (Albrecht 2011, 43–56), and "eco-guilt" (Mallett *et al.* 2013, 9–16). These are noteworthy developments within the discipline of psychology and psychiatry; however, any measures advocated by these modern disciplines are extremely limited due to their lack of an ontological foundation that allows for a way of knowing that is rooted in metaphysical wisdom. Although use of the word "anxiety" may imply references to diagnostic categories

found within the DSM or ICD, these wide-ranging affective reactions should not be pathologized. Rather, they are a natural response to the destruction of our human habitat and ought to be looked at as an opportunity to deepen our sacred connection to the planet.

The attempt to outline an ecologically informed psychology – without referencing the spiritual domain as its foundation and center – is misguided. This is the crux of modern psychology’s quandary. While comprehensive ecological knowledge is sorely needed in mainstream psychology, this does not mean that we have to reinvent the wheel, even if this were possible.

The dualism of modern science, and its psychology, was never part of the ecological knowledge found in traditional religions. The natural environment was not perceived as separate from the human realm or the domain of Spirit. Likewise, the human psyche has been viewed as inseparable from the ecosystem, and it is this vital relationship that bridges the natural world with the human soul. Schuon (1990, 13) illuminates the consequences of the human psyche’s severance from the Sacred:

*This dethronement of Nature, or this scission between man and the earth – a reflection of the scission between man and Heaven – has borne such bitter fruits that it should not be difficult to admit that, in these days, the timeless message of Nature constitutes a spiritual viaticum of the first importance... It is not a question of projecting a supersaturated and disillusioned individualism into a desecrated Nature – this would be a worldliness like any other – but, on the contrary, of rediscovering in Nature, on the basis of the traditional outlook, the divine substance which is inherent in it; in other words, to ‘see God everywhere.’*

Psychological health and well-being – even sanity itself – are dependent on the harmony of the environment and the human psyche. But what is often overlooked is that the soul, of which the natural world is an extension, relies on the spiritual domain for wholeness and healing. A central tenet of perennial psychology is affirmed by the Sufi Abū Nasr as-Sarrāj (d. 378/988): “*The outward cannot get by independent of the inward*” (quoted in Renard 2004, 83). It is through the transpersonal order that human beings can obtain a lasting equilibrium because body and soul are contingent on what surpasses them. For this reason, only what transcends the psycho-physical order can bring balance to the physical body and its human soul. The web of life consists of both the

cosmos and the human microcosm, consisting of a tripartite structure made up of Spirit, soul, and body.

If we fail to grasp these truths, a full comprehension of the sacred dimension that unifies us with our environment and, at the same time, with what transcends the psycho-physical domain, will be obscured (Griffin 2011, 79):

*Regardless of this profound ‘psychology,’ and to suit the particular purposes of environmentalism, deep ecology is apparently advocating the expansion of the sense of individual selfhood, a very different thing. Isolated from a metaphysical framework that describes and guides the process of transformation, this might well be a prescription for either delusion or disaster. Identification becomes very much like the attempt to swallow the sea rather than be part of it. In a ‘this-worldly’ expansion of self, it is hard not to see an expansion rather than diminishment of the ego.*

## 8 The Need for Metaphysics

It is by realigning all forms of knowledge back to the transcendent that we can redress the shortcomings of present-day science. As Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has observed: “*The logic that led to the destruction of the environment is precisely the same logic now as that concerning the protection of the environment*” (2012, 66). Modern science continues looking for answers to the ecological crisis in the corporeal realm. Yet this problem cannot be understood in ways that are limited to the empirical order. This is because we are confronted by consequences that have their genesis in a spiritual (not environmental) crisis, and these are to be found in our very own psyche.

Resolving the ecological crisis is going to take nothing short of a fundamental transformation of consciousness or *metanoia*. What needs to occur is a far-reaching re-examination of ourselves in light of the sacred patrimony of humanity. According to Guénon: “*The true causes of everything that happens to a being are in the final analysis always the possibilities inherent in the very nature of that being*” (2004a, 83). It is through such a transformation that a corrective process can occur at the deepest levels. This will require mindfulness of the distinction between needs and wants so that our limitless desires can be curbed.

Through the example of humanity’s saints and sages, we can learn how to live a balanced life marked by simplicity, ethical conduct, and right livelihood. For it has been said: “*As we have food and clothing, let them suffice to us*” (1 Timothy

6:8). We are also given the following instruction: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*” (Matthew 22:39); yet we need to understand “neighbor” as extending to all life: “*There is not an animal on earth nor a flying creature with wings which does not belong to communities analogous to you*” (Qur’ān 6:38).

To understand human behavior, psychology needs to include a metaphysical awareness of the cosmic order. According to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947): “*The pattern of man’s behavior is not to be found in any code, but in the principles of the universe, which is continually revealing to us its own nature*” (1957, 147). If our perception of Reality does not radically change, no outward attempts to overcome these destructive forces will succeed. Martin Lings (1909–2005; 1991, 3) unfolds the implications of this radical vision:

*The openness of the Eye of the Heart, or the wake of the Heart as many traditions term it, is what distinguishes primordial man – and by extension the Saint – from fallen man. The significance of this inward opening may be understood from the relationship between the sun and the moon which symbolize respectively the Spirit and the Heart: just as the moon looks towards the sun and transmits something of its reflected radiance to the darkness of the night, so the Heart transmits the light of the Spirit to the night of the soul. The Spirit itself lies open to the Supreme Source of all light, thus making, for one whose Heart is awake, a continuity between the Divine Qualities and the soul, a ray which is passed from Them by the Spirit to the Heart, from which it is diffused in a multiple refraction throughout the various channels of the psychic substance.*

The restoration of our transpersonal faculty of spiritual knowledge will allow the Divine to be seen everywhere: “*Wherever you turn, there is the face of God*” (Qur’ān 2:115). How this applies to the created order is expressed as follows: “*When... I prayed with my heart,*” recalls the Russian Pilgrim, “*everything around me seemed delightful and marvelous. The trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, [note: and] the light*” (Anonymous 1991, 30). This is precisely what the English poet William Blake (1757–1827) confirms when he writes: “*For everything that lives is holy*” (1906, 47). He continues with these famous lines (Blake 1988, 493):

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.*

It is through the cleansing of the lower dimensions of the soul that we can, once again, learn to see divinity in the cosmos and in ourselves. Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) wrote (1926, 339):

*Love all God’s creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.*

By purifying the “eye of the heart,” the link between beauty and the created order is more fully disclosed. By contrast, Whitall N. Perry (1920–2005) tells us that “*the absence of beauty is metaphysically consonant with the very structure of the modern world*” (1971, 659). And we must not forget Plato’s profound insight that “*Beauty is the splendor of the Truth*” (quoted in Stoddart 2008, 73). Dionysius the Areopagite of the fifth- and sixth century, writes (1957, 95): “*Beauty... summons all things... unto itself,*” and the Prophet Muhammad remarked: “*God is beautiful and He loves beauty*” (Muslim 2007, 178). We recall the memorable words of a Cree song: “*There is only beauty behind me, / Only beauty is before me!*” (quoted in Laubin and Laubin 2014, 2). In the same vein is the following Navajo (Diné) prayer (quoted in Luomala 1938, 103):

*In beauty I walk.  
With beauty before me, may I walk.  
With beauty behind me, may I walk.  
With beauty above me, may I walk.  
With beauty below me, may I walk.  
With beauty all around me, may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.  
It is finished in beauty. It is finished in beauty.*

The spiritual traditions clearly understood what happens when our inner world becomes disconnected from its transcendent center. The tragic fracturing that ensues does not only apply to us but also extends, as Leo Schaya (1916–1985; 1971, 61) notes, to the created order itself:

*The whole of existence... is the expression of the one reality, that is to say the totality of its aspects, manifestable and manifested, in the midst of its very infinity. Things are no more than symbolic ‘veils’ of their divine essence or, in a more immediate sense, of its ontological aspects; these aspects are the eternal archetypes of all that is created.*

The original peoples that inhabited the earth were given clear directives about how to live in right relationship with the whole of creation, which continues to this day: “*I have given you this world to live on and to be happy. There is only one thing I ask you. To respect the Creator at all times*” (quoted in Waters 1977, 7). According to all spiritual traditions, not just the First Peoples, everyone is asked to abide by their sacred tenets, affirming: “*I shall obey [note: the] divine law*” (quoted in Reichel-Dolmatoff 1990, 14). This is recognized across the religions. For example, in the Islamic tradition, this law is known as *sharīah* and – in the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh traditions – it is broadly rendered as *dharma* (Sanskrit *dharma*; Pāli *dhamma*). In China, adherence to the sacred order of things is understood as conformity to the *Tao*.

By living in accordance with transcendent reality through a revealed religious tradition, we can discover the equilibrium that has long eluded us: “*Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which... hath [note: been] made crooked?*” (Ecclesiastes 7:13). Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984) compares the condition of the human psyche to water: “*When the balance of Nature is not disturbed, the earth’s waters themselves continually re-establish their purity, whereas, when this balance is lost, death and pollution are the result. It is thus not merely a coincidence that the ‘life’ of the waters is a symbol for the ‘life’ of the human soul*” (1987, 124). The perennial psychology supports the metaphysical foundations for the human psyche to be fully integrated with all its modes of knowing and associated ways of healing: “*The soul’s apprehension of the nature of things changes in accordance with its own inner state*” (Stithatos 1998, 92).

The Lakota Sioux tell the story of Pte San Win – the “White Buffalo Calf Woman” – who revealed the seven sacred rites and affirmed the unity of the created order: “*Wakan Tanka [note: the Great Spirit] smiles upon us, because now we are as one: earth, sky, all living things, the two-legged, the four-legged, the winged ones, the trees, the grasses. Together with the people, they are all related, one family*” (quoted in Erdoes and Ortiz 1984, 50). And we find this expression in another Navajo (Diné) chant (quoted in Dooling and Jordan-Smith 1992, 20):

*The mountains, I become part of it...  
The herbs, the fir tree, I become part of it.  
The morning mists, the clouds, the gathering waters,  
I become part of it.  
The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen...  
I become part of it.*

To the question of what it would take to turn things around in order to reinstate an integral ecological vision, Guénon offers a striking answer: “*If our contemporaries as a whole could see what it is that is guiding them and where they are really going, the modern [note: and correspondingly the postmodern] world would at once cease to exist as such*” (2004b, 4). This is due to the quite evident fact that “*Peace, security and planetary health, sanity, happiness, fulfillment are arguably less close at hand than they ever were in the past*” (Mander 1991, 190).

Another remedy proposed was by the English economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher (1911–1977) who spoke of an “*economics of permanence*” (1989, 34) to offset the rampant materialism and endless consumption compromising the health of the planet. He observed: “*An attitude of life which seeks fulfillment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth – in short, materialism – does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is strictly limited*” (1989, 30).

The saints and sages speak in unison about the first and foremost need to reform ourselves as the only way to change the world. Śrī Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) stated, without hesitation, that “*Realization of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity*” (1996, 15). Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981) said: “*You cannot change the world before changing yourself... Clarify your mind, purify your heart, sanctify your life – this is the quickest way to a change of your world*” (1999, 129). To be fully human is to recognize our fundamental relationship with the Absolute, which is to say that our true identity *in divinis* is the “primordial state” (Arabic *fitriah*), the “image of God” (Latin *imago Dei*), “Buddha-nature” (Sanskrit *Buddhadhātu*), or the “Self” (Sanskrit *Ātmā*).

## 9 Conclusion

It is through an awakening to our transpersonal identity that we can learn to, not only see once again how the ecology and all sentient beings are an extension of ourselves, but also to apply this traditional ecological knowledge in everyday life. At a more exalted level, we are reminded of the Boddhisatva’s vow to liberate all beings, down to “*the last blade of grass*” (quoted in Pallis 2008, 231).

To reverse the environmental crisis will require a complete transformation of the collective psyche, via a “science of the soul” that is rooted in spiritual tradition, metaphysics, and sacred cosmology. As Nasr explains (2004, 6):

*The environmental crisis is so critical that it is necessary to quickly go beyond what has been done during the past few decades to solve it. What is required is the re-examination of our very understanding of what it means to be human and of what nature is, along with the re-establishment of the harmony between man and nature.*

How different would things be if the reality of both ecology and economics reflected their original meaning; that is, living with a sacred remembrance of our collective home – the earth! The root cause of the ecological crisis stems from a sickness that has its origin in *amnesia* (amnesia) or forgetfulness of the Sacred. This requires that we heal our noetic faculty which allows us to perceive divine reality at the heart of all things – something that psychology today has completely failed to grasp due to its crippling epistemic limitations.

A true “science of the soul” – found in all times and places – cannot be restored at large until the discipline of psychology is no longer in the thrall of a pseudo-metaphysics and a desacralized worldview. Therefore, the degradation of our environment will continue unabated until its root cause is acknowledged and tackled directly: *“Truly God will not change the condition of a people until they change the condition of their own souls”* (Qur’ān 13:11). We close with an important message from Nasr (1993, 145): *“The solution of the environmental crisis cannot come but from the cure of the spiritual malaise of modern man and the rediscovery of the world of the Spirit.”*

## Notes

- [1] *“Locke, [note: is] the founder of modern psychology”* (Guénon 2004b, 92).
- [2] *“We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology – hitherto quite separate activities – joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt”* (White 1967, 1206).

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