

Review of *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos: Complexity Theory, Deleuze|Guattari and Psychoanalysis for a Climate in Crisis* by Joseph Dodds

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As suggested in the ambitious title of Joseph Dodds' new book, this work covers a lot of ground. In fact, it is likely to feel like two books in one for most readers. And in some ways it is. Dodds presents a welcome, much-needed contribution to the evolution of ecopsychological and "ecopsychanalytic" thought (a term he introduces here) and in his ambitious analysis attempts to connect several disparate theoretical orientations into a new formation. In so doing, Dodds performs what he is asking his readers to do: be brave, critically interrogate our current theoretical frameworks, ditch what is no longer useful, and creatively engage with emerging concepts. It is a refreshing, almost entrepreneurial spirit to environmental thought—examine deeply held assumptions and move forward in the quest for what is most effective in meeting the enormous challenges ahead.

The larger project of this book is to suggest that it is high time the various fields and branches of eco-oriented psychological thought—ecopsychology, psychoanalysis, chaos theory, and the "high theory" of Deleuze and Guattari—recognize that no one approach is adequate for addressing the human-ecological crises we face. The first half of the book is an excellent review, useful for newcomers as well as scholars in the field, of how psychoanalysis and ecopsychology both offer valuable insights and contributions to how we address psychological dimensions of ecological crises. Specifically, the chapter "Classical Psychoanalysis" helps situate the reader with basic concepts, and the chapter "Eco-Anxiety and

Defence" leads specifically into how a psychoanalytic perspective can be so valuable for our work in the environmental sectors. It is one of the more astute arguments for why our field would benefit tremendously from a more open and explicit engagement with psychoanalysis as a viable field of research, theory, and practice. Dodds writes,

Psychoanalysis cannot provide the answer to how we should respond, but it can help us to think about the difficult questions and to avoid overly simplistic and reassuring answers. It is important to study not only the defensive aspects of anti-environmentalist beliefs, phantasies and behaviors, but also those found in the green movement itself, including flights into superego moralism, reaching for comforting pseudo-solutions, or the collapse into despair. In whatever form they take, social phantasy systems are constructed incorporating differing individual and collective needs, anxieties and defences. (p. 53)

Implicit in Dodds' arguments is a critique of the overwhelming tendency to frame psychological dimensions of environmental threats in terms of "behavior change." While he may not address this outright, his arguments for why psychoanalysis is so vital for our conceptual orientations, as well as providing rich material to support further research (often pointing out the lack of empirical research—a huge issue in social science research, that goes beyond the scope of the book), imply what we miss when we focus almost exclusively on behavior, metrics and measurements of attitudes, views, beliefs, or values. Dodds' contributes to and joins a growing community of scholars (Jordan, 2009; Lertzman, 2012a; Randall, 2009; Rust, 2008; Weintrobe, 2012) who are beginning to articulate

the depth, richness, and insight offered by decades of psychoanalytic thought.

However, Dodds doesn't rest easy with psychoanalysis entirely. As others have pointed out (Lertzman, 2012b; Žižek, 2010), psychoanalysis has its blind spots as well. Specifically, going back to the legacy of Freud's exclusive focus on the human-populated world—intersubjective and the intrapsychic dimensions, also referred to as object relations—psychoanalysis runs the great risk of being too disconnected with the physical, breathing, and natural world, and frankly too caught up in its own intricate theories of the human psyche to take notice of concurrent streams of ecological thought over the past several decades. In other words, when psychoanalysts come to ecological topics, there can be a lack of acknowledgement and recognition of related bodies of work and research that can both support and complement the psychoanalytic contributions. As a result, the risk of appearing “out of touch” and in a bubble continues to be negotiated.

That said, there is no question Dodds recognizes the beauty and profundity of psychoanalytic thought, and as others have before (Lertzman, 2004; NicholSEN, 2003; Searles, 1960, 1972). But in recognizing its limitations, he moves us quickly into a thoughtful review of where ecopsychological thinking has brought us. While his analysis may have some gaps, his synopsis of ecopsychology is balanced and acknowledges how this work has helped advance the incorporation of ecological concerns into a psychotherapeutic framework. As with others, Dodds is deeply concerned with the tendency for ecopsychological thought to retain a naïve, romanticized conception of the human-nature relationship, a legacy stemming in large part from its deep ecological roots. While ecopsychology has indeed grown and evolved as a field (evidenced by this journal, for example), Dodds draws our attention to the potential blind spots inherent in the ecopsychology project. In so doing, he rather abruptly jettisons the reader from a discussion of “ecopsychology and the greening of psychotherapy” to “ecology without nature”—all within Part III of the book.

This is bound to be a jarring transition for many readers; as Dodds is bound to realize, many who are familiar with ecopsychology are less likely to be conversant in postmodern and poststructural theories of nature, and those involved with psychoanalysis less familiar with ecopsychological literature. And that is exactly his point. In shuttling the reader—at times abruptly—between these worlds, he is performing the move he is hoping (I suspect) the reader to make herself. It is a move of forging networks of connection, rupture, and affiliation where they may not currently exist. It is a harrowing ride, however. No sooner does he discuss environmental despair than he takes us

into the “dark side” of what he calls “dark ecology”—a veritable deconstruction of romanticized notions of nature, through the work of contemporary theorists such as Timothy Morton (2007, 2010). It is here he somehow quietly takes us into the territory of Deleuze and Guattari, whose theoretical contributions have become quite enshrined in the enclaves of film and literary studies, something Dodds is quite chagrined about.

The remainder of the book, as he swiftly takes us into increasingly esoteric theoretical landscapes, is a tour de force of ecological psychoanalytic and poststructural thought, through the lens largely of Deleuze and Guattari's work. Therefore, the reader will encounter sections on “Bakhtin, the grave-womb, and the grotesque body of comedy” and “Psychoanalysis and the phobic animal object.” This may send a casual reader of ecopsychology running, but it shouldn't. In fact, in taking us through these “worlds” of psychoanalytic thought and into chaos theory (Part IV, “Nonlinear Ecopsychanalysis”), Dodds loses some of the coherence of the previous sections (notably Part I) but gains something more important. As noted, it feels and reads like two books in one. This can be seen as a bonus to the reader or a sly trick to lure us into reading high and esoteric theory many of us wouldn't touch outside of a literary criticism of film studies graduate seminar. It is up to the reader to decide. What is most important, however, is to recognize more broadly what Dodds is performing in this work. In his call to recognize the limitations of these disparate bodies of research and work, he is attempting a synthesis and a “rhizomatic” move of the sort we most require at present. The costs of staying in our worlds and maintaining ideological comfort are extraordinarily high. What a critical ecopsychology, or what Dodds calls “ecopsychanalysis,” requires of us is to interrogate our own assumptions and be open to dismantling the dualisms we unconsciously may be enacting in our work, ideas, and practices. Ultimately, this is what psychoanalysis, chaos theory, ecopsychology, and Deleuze and Guattari's work is about—the art, practice, and skill of living, working, and thinking systemically, nonlinearly, and as networks. To do so, we may be called upon now to innovate and forge modes of thinking that are entirely new. As Dodds writes in his final chapter,

Ecopsychanalysis, which draws on the tools and ideas of nonlinear science, understands that our world is governed by nonlinear dynamics, to the extent that the prediction and control promised by Enlightenment rationality will always remain to some degree illusory. Instead, we need to engage with the creativity of the Earth, and follow the lines of flight we uncover ... (p. 199)

This is a challenging book but an essential reading for any scholar of ecopsychology who wishes to extend his or her thinking into new lines of flight and take some risks along the way.

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