
Ecocriticism, Ecophobia and the Culture of Fear: Autobiographical Reflections



R. Michael Fisher

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Technical Paper No. 67

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

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Abstract – This second of five Technical Papers on ecocriticism, and in particular with a critical focus on discourse(s) on ecophobia (e.g., Estok’s “Hypothesis of Ecophobia”), is intended to assist the author and reader to integrate the basics from the postmodern field of ecocriticism. The author utilizes a brief autobiographical and historical ‘coming out’ as an early ecocritic and eventual academic critic of the larger phenomenon of the “culture of fear” as central to the author’s project (since 1989). He contends that despite not having accessed the ecocriticism scholarship over the past three decades or so, he has been attracted ‘naturally’ (from his late teens) to critiquing the very environmental and ecological (‘green’) movements he so loved. Though, mostly, he critiqued the mainstream society and media in how it depicted these movements. Within this autobiographical narrative the author brings in several theoretical guides (e.g., primary influence of the integral philosopher Ken Wilber) and shares his own theorizing on the “culture of fear” (and its critics), and ‘Fear’ Studies.

Ecocriticism: Ethical & Epistemic Problems

The first of five Technical Papers (No. 66) offered the beginning (easy) definition and background material on the nature and role of “ecocriticism” as a relatively new form of postmodern and poststructuralist literary criticism. That paper also pointed to an important contentious “split” in the discourses within ecocriticism re: *ecophobia* theorizing (e.g., Sobelian vs. Estokian). Readers of Technical Paper No. 67 would do well to read No. 66 first if they have not already. I have openly declared in that first paper my preference for the Estokian version of ecophobia and see that it has resonance and analogies with my own work (and that of Desh Subba, founder of the philosophy of fearism). The more encompassing braiding of the three of us (Fisher, Subba, Estok) unfolds slowly throughout the entire series and thus readers will have to be patient to all of how I am attempting to find a ‘unifying’ set of threads to bring into a powerful formation to advance the postmodern (and post-postmodern) work on “*fear*” as a central topic to critical thinking, theorizing and philosophy today and in the future.

Before I dive into my autobiographical reflections on the ‘natural’ attraction I have had to ecocriticism before I knew that was a field of inquiry, let me confirm an essential distinction and initiative behind everything I am writing and teaching. This is perhaps summarized best in the recent co-authored book, where Subba and I wrote of our mission:

We are living in unique times to study fear from a fearist perspective. Today, we need an expanded and upgraded *vocabulary of fear* (‘fear’) and set of concepts, as methodological and epistemological tools. We also need to question ourselves—that is, our motivations and agency...[in] pursuit of an *epistemology of fear*.¹

In this nascent stage of study of the field of ecocriticism, and especially Estok’s “Ecophobia Hypothesis,” there is an intuitive sense that grabs me swiftly with passion and an ethical zeal. Estok’s focus on ecophobia (literally, albeit reductionistically, as *home fear*,” on a planetary scale) reads for me as a great channel of thinking that is itself a praxis and ‘call’ for a new epistemology of fear (‘fear’). His calling is contextualized on what I will heretofore call the *Eco Camp* world of knowing and ethics. Later, I’ll unfold the integral theory (*a la* Ken Wilber) that re-conceptualizes “Eco” in an expanded way with great epistemological implications that have influenced my thought for over 35 years.

And, if *epistemology* is a word you are unfamiliar with, I suggest you study its meaning in philosophy, which more or less is simplified to: *the study of the ways we come to know and know that we know*. The above block quote reflects the mission of improving the *epistemology of fear*—that is, how we study fear to know it, how we reproduce that knowledge/power and how we can critique epistemic adequacy for the tasks we assign it to. Of course, this all gets very complicated by the imposing of the notion of ‘fear’ in the mix, a strategy that I implemented in my own work since late-1989, more or less (e.g., see Technical Paper No. 66 and Fisher & Subba, 2016).

In the meantime, before I expand the meaning of “Eco” in an ontological and epistemological manner (*a la* Wilber) we can proceed with the simple and modern common meaning of “*eco*” (without the capitalization) more or less referring to *ecological* and environmental issues and interests. At times I’ll use “eco-folks” as a generic label for those advocates of ecologi-

¹ From Fisher, R. M., & Subba, D. (2016). *Philosophy of fearism: A first East-West dialogue*. Australia: Xlibris, p. 67.

cal awareness, environmentalists, “greens,” etc. Ecocriticism itself utilizes exclusively this latter meaning, as does Estok in his brand of ecocriticism.

A poignant emphasis for this entire Technical Paper No. 66 is to inquiry into the ways both Estok and myself have rubbed up against ‘a good thing’ (even an emancipatory “movement”) that has turned (perhaps, unwittingly) to become the very ‘bad thing’ (even an oppressive “movement”) that the ‘good’ was trying to eliminate in the first place. I have often cited this over the years as a problem connected to at least a few other critical thinkers and their similar concerns:

- (a) Albert Einstein’s famous quote (paraphrasing) often used by futurists in the 1960s-90s, and by ‘new agers,’ eco-folks and human potentialists: *“we cannot solve the problems we face by the same level of thinking which created the problem in the first place.”*
- (b) Carl G. Jung’s theory of *enantiodromia syndrome*, which is a deep psychic (individual and collective) problem whereby (paraphrasing): *Those who try to do the most good to fight evil often end up creating the opposite (evil, in the extreme).*

Estok (2016) opened his ecocriticism of *ecomedia* today by arguing there are many reasons why *ecomedia* (perhaps, unwittingly), tries to do a good thing but it,

...has had limited effects on pushing people to change their behaviors and thereby halt or slow the warming of our atmosphere [as one eco-example]: (1) it reproduces what it critiques; media reiterates and perpetuates the ecophobic ethics [aka fear-based means] that are so central to the [eco-]problem in the first place...[he adds three other reasons].²

I won’t go further into these critical thinkers and their explanations (theories), other than to put my own interpretive spin on them. I claim that basically, each thinker is fairly accurate in their perceptions of reality and history. The simple explanation for this problem of duplicity (hypocrisy) is that people and the organizations they work within are typically unconscious of their deepest motivations—and, typically “do-gooders” avoid

² Excerpt, p. 127, from Estok, S. C. (2016). *Ecomedia and ecophobia*. *Neohelicon*, 43, 127-45.

such deep critical analysis. In their quickness and superficial analysis of a problem they trot off to ‘save,’ ‘rescue’ and ‘do good’ without having a means (praxis) of “seeing” (correcting) their own worst manifestations of their shadow-sides. In my view, this enantiodromia dynamic reflects the current dominating consciousness (and values) by which these do-gooders operate. Ultimately, I’d argue it is because their deepest motivation is *fear-based*.³ The last quote in Technical Paper No. 66 from Estok’s work, is all about a crisis in consciousness and why he advocates a critical analysis of *ecophobia* (aka, a fear-based epistemology, my terms) on the way to allowing “us to develop an entirely new ethical paradigm within which to house our thinking about nature.”⁴

Ecocriticism the Autobiographical Way

Overall, my project is the development of a new ethical Fearlessness⁵ paradigm. Now, I’ll move on to the autobiographical narrative of my ‘coming out’ as an ecocritic beginning in the early 1970s and articulate my desire to move myself and humanity along the spectrum from Fear to Fearlessness. My favorite early memories are of playing in the dirt in the garden, catching and examining and classifying the many-colored legs of grasshoppers—that is, their differences. I was not satisfied that “grasshopper” was conceptually adequate to the diversity I experienced in the Natural world. That’s a metaphor for my innate passion to learn everything about “nature” before I could hardly speak. I also developed the artistic sensibility of observing carefully and that went well with my naturalist-orientation. Thanks to my dad who was born and raised, under a new immigrant father from Russia, on a farm (in Alberta, Canada) and was an avid fisherman who taught to me to be patient in “nature” so as to learn how to work with it and ‘catch’ the fish you really wanted. I know deeply what it means to be a

³ I have extensively written about the problem of identifying what “fear-based” means, depending on individuals, and discourses—see Fisher, R. M. (2013). The problem of defining the concept of “fear-based.” Technical Paper No. 48. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

⁴ Estok (2016), cited in Fisher, R. M. (2017). Why ecocriticism now?: Pathways to the Eco-Fear Problem and ecophobia. Technical Paper No. 66. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute, p. 21.

⁵ One ought to stay open-minded as to what “fearlessness” means overall, otherwise they will misconstrue my work (see Fisher, 2010, for e.g.) and reduce the broad and deep conceptualization of Fearlessness. It is not the purpose of this article to go into the details of what is behind the notion of a Fearlessness paradigm, other than to say, it is *not* fear-based (or ‘fear’-based)—at least, theoretically.

predator (a top-predator on the ecological food chain). I also learned that to be good at ‘catching’ anything you have to fail catching it many many times. Thanks dad, for that teaching.

Skipping forward to my late teens is the time when I was slowly developing a *critical consciousness* (a la Paulo Freire). I didn’t know I was doing this. It was just unfolding because of my keen observation skills and my attunement capacities of empathy for suffering; and, an irreducible lust for beauty and aliveness—that is, Quality. However, the moment of no return came when my dad and the family came home from a successful fishing trip and we fried up the fish in a pan as usual to eat, and a horrid oil smell filled the room and black stuff oozed out of the white flesh of the fish. Dad said, “It’s polluted by oil,” which came from the upstream gas wells and/or oil rigs along the river’s edge we had noticed being built and operating where before there were none. The connection was obvious, but my dad didn’t do anything about it. I recorded that horrifying scene upon my youthful soul. It would influence my eco-activism in the years soon to follow.

I joined various eco-folks and organizations and started campaigning with them for recycling in the City of Calgary and protection of wilderness just to the west in the mountain and boreal forest biome. I became an avid bird-watcher as well, thanks to my brother buying the first spotting scope. Yet, a turn around moment in paradox to my love of birds and nature came when I had my first b-b gun. I ended up killing a Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker (aka, at the time just “woodpecker”) on one of our fishing holidays in the foothills. I killed a few other wild creatures as well, and eventually I felt bad about all of what I was doing, not that anyone scolded me, that I recall. I just knew there was no need to do this killing. I’d learned what I needed to learn. Yes, I was capable to be a good hunter.

Inside the young environmentalist and protector of nature grew—it became my identity. One day, in my early 20s, after I had been going to college in Biological Sciences (Ecology Option), I attended a field trip to go out and stop these young male bikers from ripping up the natural prairie on Nose Hill—a potential site for a “Natural Area” in the urban N.E. part of the city. I had spent many hours in the Nose Hills as a sacred site of renewal for myself, especially, when I was suffering and when I wanted to be with nature—as my solace and best “friend.”

The field trip turned into a moment of no return. I watch one of the eco-folks in my group grab a young man on his motor bike, who was going 15-

20 miles an hour, and almost causing him to crash because he wouldn't listen to us telling him to stop. The "hatred" I felt from this eco-type person toward another human being, using the rationale that she was "right" for protecting Nose Hill ecosystems from destruction, left me with a very bad taste—which grew into ecocriticism. I started to see more and more hypocrisy, if not more fear-based hatred being projected on those who eco-folks don't agree with. The objectification and stereotyping of people based on behaviors was superficial and not helping. I saw this activism as not solving much of anything, even if there were some gains to protect the environment.

The world was having gross "wars" because of similar patterns of behavior. I eventually left all these eco-organizations and peace organizations which were pretty much the same in attitude towards their 'enemies.' It is not that I disagreed with their cause but I didn't feel I could talk within those organizations about any critique of our methods and attitudes. I felt the fear of betraying them, and I wasn't strong enough emotionally to handle what I predicted would come back onto me 'as a target' for their projected hatred (fear). Yes, I like them, was afraid of what was happening to the integrity of natural systems, but I was also afraid of what was happening to humans and humanity overall. Something was very wrong.

I didn't focus on the analysis of it being "fear-based" back then. I moved on to other careers—like education, and learned once more of the hypocrisy of "teachers" in the public education system (most of them). During my practicum I sat in the first teacher's lounge in a junior and senior high school, and what I witnessed as 'dark humor' and hatred (and fear) coming out of teachers' mouths towards teens, left a very bad taste in my mouth for so-called professional "educators" and what they say and how they feel inside. I know how difficult it is to work in the school systems—I did it for only two years, and then got out. I didn't like what that system (very fear-based) was turning me into. I also had various family and relationship crises during my 20s-30s and went on a long 10 year quest of personal healing and 'awakening' to a whole lot of things.

I became more and more interested in how people used fear to get people's attention, and to scare and convert people. I wrote a newspaper article on this, challenging men of the cloth (and religions) for their abuse of fear of the future (i.e., ecophobic ethics).⁶ I also was watching a lot of environ-

⁶ Fisher, R.M. (1984). Future not to be feared. *Olds Optimist*, Jun. 10.

mental films at the time on the potential ‘end of the world.’ I was critical of how nature and the environment were being cast in these ecomedia and their narratives. Sometimes “nature” (the Earth) looked like the “victim” and sometimes, almost in the same breath (representation) to follow, “humans” looked like the “victim” to “nature”—and, back and forth. The ecomedia narratives have influenced my way of relating to nature and environmental problems since the late 1960s—and, I really don’t know what the accumulated impact has been, both on the good side and the bad side. My first courses on environmental problems in undergraduate school (Environmental Biology degree) left me at times feeling “raped” by the information in those classes. No one of the instructors had any interest in the psychological impact on us as students receiving this information. Some ecocritics, like David Sobel (see Technical Paper No. 66) would say ‘see there is the fear of ecological disaster’ that we have to try to prevent because it causes ecophobia.

The details of all my eco-related experiences could fill a book or two. I wish to move on to the more central and conscious things I did in graduate school (Adult Education, M.A., and then Curriculum & Instruction, Ph.D.). But first a few of the “environmental education” roles that were attractive. I had been an ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘natural’ educator in ecological and environmental things since my mid-teens when I took an eight year old out into nature on many field trips. I later was a Park Naturalist for two summer jobs in which I took “tourists” by the thousands/summer into “nature” and learned how they perceive, represent, and often show mixed feelings toward “nature”—often, they had defense mechanisms to prevent them from real connection, and preferred mediated experiences, through me talking/teaching, through nature films, and through the lens of their camera, all of which actually blocked them from having authentic experiences with nature that was right under their footsteps. I was turning into a strong ecocritic at that point and knew I had to stop doing that work or I’d just be angry and critical at these people and the urban world they came from. Sure, I tried to help the problem, but it was too big for me at that age. In my “teaching” degree I specialized in Science and mostly biology, and came out with a minor in Environmental Education. I was ready to change the world and ‘rescue’ children from the horrible non-sustainable worldview of dominant culture. That all pretty much failed.

Oh, and I wrote my first eco-critique of environmental educators and eco-philosophers⁷ and the hypocrisy I experienced going to conferences and watching nearly all of them fly in petro-guzzling airplanes, stay in four-star hotels, while others were driving in their individual cars, rather than riding bikes and taking public transit as I mostly did. I was angry at the middle and middle upper-class, their un-self-reflexivity, their righteousness and confidence (arrogance). They were the bulk who mostly attended these events. I came from a poor working class background and was a struggle artist, creator, critic and educator on the ‘edge.’

Some 10 years later, I went to grad school and came to face for the first time an ecofeminist instructor and her followers/students (all young bright women). I took this course from her because I wanted to see what feminism was about and how it applied to ecological issues. I was naïve somewhat. Quickly, I felt “terrorized” for having a different view at times than the instructor and her “conformist” young followers. This shook me to the bones. I didn’t have a voice for the first time. I was silenced. Was this because of a hidden ecohobia in the entire classroom? I think so, yet I had no word, no theory, for it. Back then, I was vulnerable and didn’t have a way to critique the eco-folks and their “green” “feminist” “eco” ideologies. I was old, white, heterosexual, male, etc. I was the stereotypical ‘enemy’ just because of my location and presumptions these women would make about me. They certainly weren’t curious as to who I really was. It seemed my voice was on the ‘outs’ in this new postmodern postcolonial environment in university cultures—at least, in some departments.

In that ecofeminist class I wrote a book review of the very popular eco-writer (ecocritic) David Abram (*The Spell of the Sensuous*). Unlike my colleagues in this class and the instructor, I tore the book apart for so many things he was constructing about the human-nature relationship seemed way too over-romanticized and unproblematic. Even though Abram himself was a harsh critic of the industrial modern world. I was nervous handing the book review assignment in, and I will say, the instructor was fair enough and gave it a good mark, while suggesting I ought to publish my critique in an environmental journal. I honestly, wasn’t sure if I could trust her sincerity and it occurred to me she might just be setting me up to publish it and get slaughtered by eco-critics. I didn’t do anything with it.

⁷ Fisher, R.M. (1983). Will the real philosophers please stand, and take heed! *Journal of Environmental Education*, 14(3): 41-42.

I began reading critiques by Ken Wilber on the boomeritis down-side (shadow) of ecofeminism and “deep ecology,” and that helped me gain some sense of what discourse ‘beast’ I was facing. I wanted to be on their side; yet, I wasn’t going to compromise my integrity—my truths. It wouldn’t work. I mean, these were nice women too, don’t get me wrong. I thought they were mostly well-intended. Some were actually doing really good things in the world environmentally, etc. However, my keen observation and antennae for fear-based means of control and domination were up. It was traumatizing and I had to go to therapy to deal with it, amongst all the other terrorizing things that happen in the higher education institution I was attending.

Ecocriticism and Culture of Fear Parallels

I’ll return later to Ken Wilber’s critique that helped me through all that mess of going through higher education and the postmodern, feminist and poststructuralist domination that existed in Education and the academy at the time I attended. But first, I wish to share my most powerful moment of risking to ‘stand up’ and challenge a very popular liberal (Democratic) public and political figure promoting the global warming eco-narrative—that is, Al Gore, and his film/ project *An Inconvenient Truth* (2004). Estok (2016) mentioned the Gore film, along with other eco-media (eco-apocalyptic themes) of our day and noted “these are radical failures” to bring about significant change. Estok goes as far to say, and I agree, there are “fundamentally oppressive ethical world views”⁸ operating beneath them and their contextualized (capitalist) marketing ploys. In Estok (2013), he noted “Ecological disaster and the framework of [post-9/11] terror within which it is conceptualized urgently calls for [new critical] theorization.”⁹

But in 2007 I had no idea of this ecocriticism or theories that might support my challenges to Gore and his film and overall public education project. I just knew much of Gore’s eco-narrative and critique of mainstream society was more about fearmongering at some level than Gore or eco-folks would want to admit. I did a critical public talk in the university on my challenge and a full classroom of education students and their professor attended and I could tell they did not like anything I said. Then I found out later, that instructor, whom I knew and thought was a friend, posted a critique of my

⁸ Estok (2016), 131.

⁹ Estok (2013, p. 3). See Estok, S. C. (2013). Ecocriticism in an Age of Terror. *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 15(1), 1-9.

position, more his rant, and let his students join in on the course website to do likewise. They never talked to me or asked questions. And, this is supposed to be “higher education”? I obviously triggered a lot of fear in them and defensiveness, as they encircled in their little ‘club’ of safety to reify their own ‘green’ ideology and worship of Al Gore and the film he produced. I was impressed with Gore’s presentation for sure but the more I thought about it and studied the eco-narrative, the more disturbed I was by the way “fear” was used in conjunction with nature. The lecture title of my 2007 critique on Gore’s work was “‘An Inconvenient Truth’’: A Convenient Culture of Fear, Al Gore.”

My eco-critique built for years but I never tried publishing anything. My prior dissertation research was on the growing problem of the *culture of fear* (see below), and it seemed Gore was playing into its tactics to influence the populist opinion and whomever else he could. I didn’t know in the academy where I would be heard and/or allowed to say what I was saying. During the Gore eco-years of publicity, I collected visual images and ads coming from various environmental groups, like The Sierra Club, World Wildlife Foundation etc. as they were pumping money into creating ads that showed people what the world would look like if we didn’t stop CO₂ outputs and change our life-styles today. I found this all very disturbing in its approach and use of “traumatic” imagery to ‘steal’ attention and what looked as if it was sci-fi not good science. I analyzed this all as “public pedagogy”—meaning, as how people like Gore or eco-organizations were going about “educating” the public using mass eco-media platforms. I believed this all needed to be critique from the point of view of uses (and misuses) of fear in teaching and learning. But there was no “referential” location it seemed for Gore or eco-organizations to critique their own pedagogies and curricula. That’s a big problem, and so, it felt like more propaganda was going down than good elicitive education.

Of course, their agendas were well-intended just like with Gore, but I had some three years earlier completed a study of the interdisciplinary literature on the “culture of fear” (e.g., Barry Glassner, Frank Furedi, etc.¹⁰) and what I saw within the ecomedia was just more of the same “culture of fear” dynamics. In 2003-04 I was hired to do a baseline study of the “culture of fear” by an independent business leadership development firm at the time. I summarized the literature by coming up with a definition for the *culture of*

¹⁰ There are so many critics of the culture of fear these days, it is best not to try to represent them here but encourage you to learn about them by starting with Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_fear

*fear –the attempt to manage fear by using fear-based means, which creates more fear rather than less.*¹¹ It seemed Gore, and his thousands if not millions of followers were missing the “fear” (*aka* Estok’s ecophobics) problematic in the educational equation. From what I could tell they were not at all interested in whether they were participating in the culture of fear which arguably keeps global warming (and other forms of violence to Life) perpetuating itself. Another glance at my definition of culture of fear, back 13 years ago, sounds a whole lot like the pattern of the definition of the problem with ecomedia in Estok’s ecocriticism, or Einstein’s or Jung’s critique as I quoted earlier in this paper: (simply) “it reproduces what it critiques,” as Estok wrote.

If Estok is right, and I sense he is, that ecocriticism today has to be understood and practiced within tragedy and an “Age of Terror,” then likewise I would add that equally ecocriticism be contextualized within the “culture of fear” context, and its scholarship going back at least to the mid-1980s (but the dynamic had begun much earlier). Ecomedia and eco-narratives of all kinds, any discourse about nature, environmental issues and ecological problems all have to be contextualized appropriately and ethically – if we want to get a good analysis in order to make good prescriptions to climb out of this mess we’ve created. The ethical implications of our contextualizing are serious matters and it has been my stand in this series of Technical Papers to focus on the context of the Eco-Fear Problem as underneath all the other major problems, including environmental crises, ecophobia, racism, sexism, etc. Later, in Technical Paper No. 68, I will argue for the conceptualization of *fearism* and an (eco-)philosophy of fearism as complementary to Estok’s initiatives in ecocriticism overall. I especially think his “ecophobia” expanded conceptualization will be very useful to helping our world better come to understand and manage our ecological crises unfolding so rapidly today.

The yet uncovered analogy, but something I intuit, is how Estok’s ecocriticism is a criticism of eco-criticism. I too have had criticism of the critics of the culture of fear. I have attempted to classify the critics and make sense of the patterns of their own complicity with the very culture of fear they critique. One of the main ways they fall into that problematic is because they have such a limited (under-theorized) conceptualization of fear itself. But that is another story for another time. Like Estok, I am working

¹¹ Fisher, R.M. (2004). *Capitalizing on fear: A baseline study on the culture of fear for leaders*. Minneapolis, MN: Intellectual Architects, Ltd.

on a critique of the critics of whom I really appreciate the work they are doing and their good intentions to improve things, yet, they seem to reproduce in subtle ways the very thing they critique. How to show them this, or even get them talking about it as a potential problem in their critical discourses is nearly impossible. That's my experience over the years. I have also attempted to get "educators" of all stripes to equally look at this issue,¹² but to virtually no avail of interest on their part.

Reframing ECO Camp Narratives: Integral Theory

No autobiographical synopsis of my life and studies would be complete without, at least, brief mention of the nature and role of integral theory—a new branch of critical theory. I would encourage any critical thinker and theorist to at least engage Ken Wilber's work, although there are other integral theories and thinkers.¹³ My venturing into the grand synthesis type of philosophy of Wilber began when I was 30 years old. For 35 years I have followed his work, used it with my own, and attempted to find a holistic-integral approach to analysis—including the study of "fear." I will not cite all of Wilber's books and articles and talks on-line. I will not defend him and his work here either. Lots of critics exist, and I too have joined their ranks. That said, I highly respect the foundations of his new form of critical theory, which deserves to be called post-postmodern (i.e., integral) theory. His basic goal is to attempt unifying broad and deep difference across disciplines to create a powerful critical analysis and set of solutions to world problems. I won't try to describe all of that in this short technical paper.

The one focus I will describe is in Wilber (1995), *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*,¹⁴ where he makes a metaphysical distinction, with good holistic-integral thinking and vast evidence he synthesizes from many sources, about the "ECO Camp" and "EGO Camp" narratives (discourses)—universally, worldwide. Being an American philosopher he mostly talks about the American tendencies to love and/or hate (i.e., fear) each others value systems based on whether they are ECO or EGO. So, without going into this too much, I'll try to give his basic argument in this regard—but keep in mind we are theorizing here on the macro-kosmic scale of con-

¹² Fisher, R. M. (2016). Educators, we have a *culture of fear* problem! A CSIE Yellow Paper, DIFS-14. Carbondale, IL: Center for Spiritual Inquiry and Integral Education.

¹³ For e.g., see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory

¹⁴ See Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology and spirituality: The spirit in evolution (Vol. 1)*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

consciousness itself and how it takes various forms and creates various conflicts (battles for what is “reality” itself). This work has potent implications for ontology and epistemology and ethics, to say the least. It is always best to consult Wilber’s original writing on this to fully understand it.

I am a curriculum designer by profession, so I love attempting to understand the design of Nature or Kosmos (as Wilber calls it). How can I design anything, analyze anything, by working with the Real(ity) of the largest Design going on? Because Wilber starts his integral philosophy from a nondualist perspective, he sees everything as connected, non-dualistic in relation. He posits that everything is unfolding with dynamic interconnected complexity ongoing, not unlike Hegel (yet, with differences too). He is not one to be overly universalist but also he is critical of postmodern particularists or relativists. He wants both tendencies to be respected and integrated as much as possible to understand Reality as best we can.

That said, from an earthling’s perspective, his most basic understanding of the universe dynamics of consciousness evolving (and he is not totally unique in this view), is that there is a “rising up” tendency of Life forces (i.e., “Love”) towards “Oneness,” which he calls *Eros*; some myths have called the “Solar” (or “other-worldly” reality). And at the same time a “downward” tendency towards the “Many” he calls *Agape*, some myths have called “Lunar” or “Earthly” (or “worldly” reality). Indigenous cosmologies often have this “Twin” meta-theme.¹⁵ Wilber’s vocabulary is complex, beyond what I will go into. The Kosmos (ideally) if all was working well and there were no forces of “dissociation” (i.e., mistakes in systems communications, psychic splitting-off, denial, culturally-constructed oppression, etc.) the EGO development part of the spiral dynamic (i.e., *Eros* or Solar meta-motivation of going “up”) of the whole cycle would rise and then return as needed for integration purposes and the betterment of the whole system—that is, to be healthy and sustainable—that is, it would “join” or braid easily with the ECO development part of the spiral dynamic (i.e., *Agape* or Earthly meta-motivation of going downward). Growth would thus all proceed without “cancerous” errors. But history and evolution show that ‘shit happens’ so to speak and ‘cancerous’ growth patterns of Domination of one tendency or the other happen and can cause great mutations and sometimes horrible destructions in living

¹⁵ Jacobs (1998, pp. 22-23) identified this, based on Howard Teich’s work as a Jungian psychologist studying Joseph Campbell’s work on mythologies and Indigenous myths as “Twin Hero” stories. See Jacobs, D. T. (1998). *Primal awareness: A true story of survival, transformation, and awakening with the Raramuri shamans of Mexico*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.

systems. For example, Wilber would argue that the underpinning (conscious or unconscious) of the Mind-Body problem in philosophy for ever, is problem that is interpretable as an EGO-ECO problem.

ECO-Camp is a notion Wilber labels for the school of thought and values where the ECO dynamic of the spiral is privileged and worshipped over and above the EGO dynamic—or, he also points out the opposite can be equally true. The common factor is Domination of one perspective (or Camp) and the mess that creates in the whole system, because each Camp grows in its “dissociation” a sense of the fear of the Other—each, grows within that fear-based maneuver its own ontology, epistemology and ethical value systems, etc. They Battle it out for Domination, each righteous that they can explain the problems on Earth from their perspective and their corrective. The ECO camp (which he also calls the Descenders) have historically begun to dominate the postmodern narratives, and no doubt have done this because of what they (eco-folks) have critiqued about the Ascenders (EGO camp) and their pathologies, like ignoring the body, the Earth, the ecological world, the feminine etc. I won’t go on and on. You likely get the picture, but the point I picked-up on in Wilber’s kosmic analysis is his talk about the nature and role of ‘Fear’ and what I label the ‘Fear’ Project(ion) that is going on in this Battle.¹⁶

So, in a sense Estok’s “Ecophobia Hypothesis” (as I only am beginning to understand) is a large calling for critical analysis and re-framing of the entire field of ecocriticism—which I think is a great call to attend to the nature and role of fear (‘Fear’) in the entire ECO Camp discourse (call it a worldview if you like)—especially, in the Age of Terror, tragedy, and post-9/11 world. Wilber’s potential contribution is that one can critique the ECO Camp as having good love at its base foundational motivation—meaning, good *Agape* forces, yet, it has over-done its ‘corrective’ and dismissed or Othered the EGO (*Eros* forces)—and, what that dissociation (rather than healthy differentiation) turns on via a *fear-based* architecture simultaneously breeding within and beyond that *Eros-Agape* growth/movement. The result, as Wilber argues very well, I think, is *Eros* (more or less) turns into *Phobos* (‘fear’ as arrogance) and concomitantly *Agape* turns to *Thanatos* (‘fear’ as ignore-ance). Not that Wilber is depicting here any simplistic linear causality in how the ‘natural’ Love-metamotivational forces get toxified by ‘Fear’ Project(ion)s. The point is, we can understand a grand patho-

¹⁶ See Fisher, R. M. (1997). *Thanatos and Phobos: 'Fear' and its role in Ken Wilber's transpersonal theory*. Technical Paper No. 4. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

logical condition, and we can understand how humanity has (and continues) to contribute to it by dissociating narratives and biases and planting them against each other—this is what consciousness can do. Humans play a powerful role in this consciousness development—for good or bad—for Love or Fear. I explain this “Uni-bicentric Theorem” in detail elsewhere, as I present a path of Fearlessness as a macro- “*cura*” and “*therapia*”¹⁷ and as an alternative radical critical pedagogy.¹⁸

I believe good ecocriticism, and the Ecophobia Hypothesis can both inform the Wilberian narrative and be informed, if not transformed—and, also the other way around. Simply, the Eco Camp trajectory (i.e., eco-narrative and the ecocriticism narratives) can be pathologically fear-based themselves. What meta-theoretical (“fearless”) framework do they have to even discover or uncover their own potential hidden curriculum of fear (‘fear’)? They don’t. Yet, Estok’s “Ecophobia Hypothesis” may be a great way to find a healthier ethical referent and critical praxis for that field.

Critical integral theory is the most holistic approach I know of—it is the least fear-based as well. Yet, of course, this is all to be validated in the years ahead as it is all “tested” in practice. I’ll turn now to my latest ventures in the development of ‘Fear’ Studies, based on the Wilberian philosophy but hardly to forefront it nor to over-privilege it either. I wish to have more people, especially curricularists and pedagogues to take-up a focused attention on the nature and role of fear (and ‘fear’). Basically, that project has been published in two papers, 12 years apart, and I can say that very little “action” has happened from my project in this regard, but that doesn’t mean it won’t be influential in the future.

Ecocriticism and ‘Fear’ Studies

The last major aspect of my evolving theorizing, especially in curriculum is what I have called ‘Fear’ Studies. Ever since 9/11 it seemed obvious to me that the world (especially higher education) required a new stream of studies, like Cultural Studies, or African Studies, Indigenous Studies, etc. So I

¹⁷ Fisher, R. M. (2017). Love-Fear: Uni-Bicentric Theorem as basis for the Fearlessness Movement. Technical Paper No. 65. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

¹⁸ Fisher, R. M. (2017). Radical love—is it radical enough? *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 8(1), 261-81.

wrote my first major curriculum article in 2006 and a follow-up in 2018.¹⁹ Of the many elements in the curriculum I was proposing under this new label, there is one thing that continued as a thread, and that is my argument that we need to name the Fear Problem (with capital letters).

The Fear Problem is inter- and transdisciplinary in nature, and cannot be reduced to simple notions of “fear” as a problem in the psychological and psychiatric sense. This is similar as a maneuver to Estok’s wanting to not have the notion of “ecophobia” reduced either to a psychological or psychiatric problem (see Technical Paper No. 66). It intrigues me to see that Estok also wanted to use capital letters to highlight the “Ecophobia Hypothesis” as he thinks is so foundational and essential as a framing for eco-criticism as a field of inquiry. And, like myself, Estok believes this is an ethical problem that we are addressing—which, in my words, more or less revolves around our human and institutional relationship with fear (‘fear’) and, as I wrote above, with the ‘Fear’ Project(ion)—the Fear Problem.

In the ‘Fear’ Studies curriculum (and its assumptions, propositions)—there is basically a claim that human beings are always doing “fear management” in some way, especially as they feel distress, are traumatized, and are living in a context of a culture of fear, a post-traumatic culture, or as Estok wrote, an “Age of Terror.” This meta-contextualizing by myself and Estok centralizes “fear” not merely as a factor, but as a pivotal core or gravity in a sense, whereby humans cannot ignore it or make it lesser than it is actually functioning overall across all domains of experience and knowing. Knowledge (and epistemology) itself is to be constructed and deconstructed within and around this contextualizing. That’s Estok’s eco-criticism approach with his offering a corrective to those who have ignored or diminished the nature and role of fear today. That is, who have ignored the Fear Problem, as ‘Fear’ Studies would call it, and who have ignored now, what I prefer to call the Eco-Fear Problem. This latter move, as I have mentioned earlier in this series, is due to my contact with the literature on the Anthropocene era and the cascading of environmental and ecological crises that cannot be ignored today as core and central to human survival and the quality of Life for all systems on Earth. This context shifting, and the coming up against the reality of the Eco-Fear Problem is nicely addressed, from the little I know at present, in Estok’s “Ecophobia Hypothe-

¹⁹ See Fisher, R. M. (2006). Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(4), 39-71. See also, Fisher, R. M. (2012). Foundations for ‘Fear’ Studies: 9 propositions. Technical Paper No. 43. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute. See also, Fisher, R. M. (in press). ‘Fear’ Studies, 12 years later: Progress and barriers. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*.

sis”—I look forward to reading his new book yet to come out but will soon in 2018.

On that note, I'll end this Technical Paper No. 67 with a few of my favorite quotes on fear, that confirm that fear is not merely a factor in society, but something much much greater.

All that is certain is that fear itself will continue becoming—the way of life. The grounding and surrounding fear that the system helps develop tends toward an autonomy that makes it an ontogenetic force to be reckoned with. That reckoning must include the irrational, self-propelling mode of fear-based collective individuation we call facism. – Massumi²⁰

Fear is a critical emotion in everyday life as it permeates many of our minor and major decisions. Explicitly or implicitly, fear is one of the emotions that most strongly shape[s] human life. - Starkstein²¹

According to a 2008 study entitled *Fear in the Mega-Cities* conducted by the Rome-based World Social Summit, fear, “is the most useful key to understanding today’s society”Fear is seen to be one of the defining political emotions of late modernity. Sociologists, artists, philosophers, activists, and pundits see fear everywhere. If fear has become a way of life, the contemporary [global] city is seen to be one of its most prominent and productive social laboratories. - Jeffries²²

Wherever life exists....the main road is fear. It is the greatest road. All other paths of life [and their philosophies] come to join the greatest road. - Subba²³

²⁰ Massumi, B. (2005). Fear (the spectrum said). *Positions*, 13(1), 13-48. (p. 47)

²¹ Starkstein, S. (2016). Fear: A conceptual analysis and philosophical therapy. Unpublished dissertation. Perth, Australia: Murdoch University. (p. i)

²² Jeffries, F. (2013). Fear disarmed. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 12, 332-39. (p. 333)

²³ Subba, D. (2014). *Philosophy of fearism: Life is conducted, directed and controlled by the fear*. Australia, Xlibris, p. 245.