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Select Eastern Perspectives in Environmental Psychology (and beyond)

Tomoaki Imamichi

Abstract

This project explores select Eastern perspectives with their larger implications and the impact on the field of Environmental Psychology from a critical perspective.Environmental Psychology may be understood by the focus on environmental topics (Mainstream Environmental Psychology), but it can also be focus on an environmental perspective (associated with Critical Environmental Psychology and the origins of Environmental Psychology). Mainstream Environmental Psychology rarely examines fundamental assumptions that limit its approaches, including to one of the most pressing issues of our times, the environmental crisis. Different cultural and critical perspectives can profoundly enrich the field. They can challenge and have the potential to transform beliefs and systems that can be seen as some of the root causes of the crisis. This is what an environmental perspective and Critical Environmental Psychology seeks to address.

Eastern perspectives have received some considerable attention in various domains in Western societies. Eastern perspectives have arguably inspired existentialism, have been incorporated counter-culture movement, and been adapted into the New Age movement, as well as mainstream culture with some distortions. In these explorations, of particular interests are perspectives on the self and others, the environment, and human-environment relationships and compatibilities with an environmental perspective. In this particular paper, I would like to explore how select concepts, such as *wu-wei* (not-doing), can play an important role in health/well-being, environmental justice, and sustainability.

Keywords: Environmental Psychology, Critical Psychology, Eastern Philosophy, Holism, Taoism, Wu-wei

Author Bio

Tomoaki (Tomo) Imamichi is Associate Professor of Psychology at LaGuardia Community College and an affiliate faculty at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. He received his PhD in Environmental Psychology from the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. His interests include environmental competence (how to deal with challenging tasks and environments), phenomenological approaches, which include moving-through-the-environment from running-with-a-stroller (2014) to walking-with-an-elderly (2019), and modes of being-in-the-world (Ma as an essential part of being-in-the-world (2019)). His is also

interested in exploring how Environmental Psychology can be more environmental from a Critical Psychology and practical perspective. Additional information can be found at: https://lagcc-cuny.digication.com/tomo_imamichi/Welcome/

Email: timamichi@lagcc.cuny.edu

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Critical Psychology in the Context of Environmental Psychology

Critical Psychology

Critical Psychology can be seen as a critique of the field of psychology, in particular "mainstream psychology" which has been referred to as "traditional modern" psychology" (Maiers, 1991). Critical Psychology explores and challenges some of the taken-for-granted epistemological and methodological assumptions, theories and practices. In this regard, post-modern psychology (Kavle, 1992) is also a critical psychology with its criticism of "traditional modern" psychology. Criticisms include reductionist and individualistic approaches, and attempts to reinforce, rather than to challenge, the status quo. Critical Psychology provides the potential to transform the field and society at large. Critical Psychology exists in the different subfields within psychology and has played an important role in psychology. Even though people may not necessarily identify themselves as critical psychologists, reflecting on the field of psychology, how historical, and socio-cultural forces have shaped and limited the field, and ways in which psychology could be improved could be considered part of critical psychology. These descriptions fit with Environmental Psychology, which studies the relationships between people and their environments. The relationships to the physical environment, in particular, have been an aspect that has been neglected in psychology (Imamichi, 2014).

Environmental Psychology as part of Critical Psychology

Environmental Psychology has various roots. Some of its intellectual roots can be traced to Gestalt Psychology, which in a sense was a critical psychology towards the reductionism, which at first was directed against Wundtian elemental experimental psychology in Germany, and later against Behaviourism in the United States that increasingly began to dominate the field of Psychology (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

Considering the emphasis on context and transformation, Lewin's (1951) field theory and action research is a major influence on Environmental Psychology.

In the United States, the formal founding of Environmental Psychology as a field can be traced to the late1960s and early 1970s with the founding of official programs, such as the PhD Program in Environmental Psychology at the City University of New York (Gifford, 2007), as well as interdisciplinary collaborations between Geography and Psychology at Clark University form which many pioneers in Environment and Behaviour Studies emerged (Koelsch, 1987; Canter & Craik, 1987). This period also saw the birth of publications such as the journal Environment and Behaviour, the Journal of Environmental Psychology and textbooks Environmental Psychology.

The 1960s can also be associated with rude awakenings, such as the Vietnam War that challenged, not only US military competence, against a small far-away country that most Americans could not find on the map (Gallup, 2019), but also of the moral standing based on atrocities witnessed via uncensored independent journalism. The 1960s were also marked by the counter-culture, which was in part inspired by Hinduism and Buddhism, or, in other words, Eastern perspectives. The word “counter” as in “counter-culture” suggests that it is critical of mainstream culture.

Environmental Psychology emerged out of the context of the human rights movement, the ecological movement, and the state of architecture (Sommer, 1987). It was shaped by the disillusionment of the status quo. Notable critical publications of that era included Rachel Carson’s (1962) *Silent spring*, and Jane Jacob’s (1961) *The life and death of great American cities*. While Carson focuses on the industrial chemicals and the eco-system, and Jacobs on modern city planning and neighborhoods, the divergent topics converge on their compelling observations and the theme of challenging modern and industrial reductionist thinking- the one-size-fits-all approach neglectful of wider and long-term consequences and diverse populations. The disillusionment of the status quo and the desire to literally make the world a better place pertained to the field of psychology as well. Several psychologists felt that psychology in its current state were insufficiently addressing human rights issues, the ecological crisis, and the crisis in architecture and urban-design. Moreover, there was a crisis in psychology, the sentiment that psychology lacked relevance and was not equipped, epistemologically and methodologically, to address these issues, even if it wanted to.

In the 1960s, much of psychology was dominated by behaviourism, turning psychology into a “mindless” pursuit, with its exclusive focus on behaviour and trying to dispose of the mind. Furthermore, behaviour was reduced to that of rat, and not only that, but a rat in a lab reduced to pressing levers or running through mazes to avoid electrical shocks and hunt for pellets. This, to some degree, may have reflected the life of modern human, but there was certainly much left to desire.

The rat and controlled environment of the lab made observations, experimentation, hypothesis testing, spoke to the cornerstones of empirical science, but the reductionism inherent in these approaches stripped itself of relevance. Psychology was not merely a “mindless” pursuit; it was a “worldless” pursuit.

The critique of the “worldless” pursuit could further be applied to other perspective within psychology: The cognitive perspective put the mind back into psychology. But

the mind that the cognitive perspective introduced was akin to a computer to be programmed, and the conceptualization merely evolved from a behaviourist automaton to a cognitivist automaton and the focus “on what is in the mind”- rather than “what the mind is in”, still did not sufficiently address the environment.

To this day much of psychological “problem solving” ranges from bio-chemical approach with medication to reduce undesirable symptom, the behaviourist approach with reinforcement and punishment to change people’s behaviour, or via the cognitivist approach to change people’s thoughts. It was to enforce the status quo rather than to change it.

The humanistic perspective with its consideration of the whole human being and meaning to some extent put the “soul” back into psychology. But the focus on self-actualization did not fully consider the whole human being as a relational and contextual being in the physical world. The relational and contextual to some extent was addressed by Social Psychology. However, there was still a lack of consideration of cultural diversity, which was to be taken up by Cultural Psychology and the lack of consideration of the physical environment, which was to be taken up by Environmental Psychology. This focus on the physical environment and contextual factors is a defining aspect of Environmental Psychology. The neglect of the physical environment and contextual factors, may in part explain why psychology had so seemingly little contribute to some of the real world issues, epitomized in bad architecture and design, social and environmental injustice, and the environmental crisis.

But there was not much that psychology had to offer. Thus a defining feature of Environmental Psychology became its multidisciplinary characteristics - and an engagement with various epistemologies and methodologies from other disciplines and professions, particularly in those in relationship to the physical environment. These included the geography, sociology, anthropology, architecture, and urban planning. There was a move towards qualitative methodologies, phenomenology, ethnography, and participatory action research.

Environmental Psychology as NOT part of Critical Psychology

Environmental Psychology understood by the focus on environmental topics and less understood by the focus on an “Environmental Psychological Perspective”.

The environmental crisis has become one of the most pressing issues of our times, and claims to address environmental issues have become fashionable and marketable, seen as public relations and profit making opportunities for corporations and organizations, and imperatives to rebrand oneself as green as sustainable (Rogers, 2010). This has been reflected in grant opportunities and academia. Mainstream psychology addresses the environmental crisis is within the confines of their self-erected disciplinary boundaries with an excessive focus on the individual, or rather individual behaviours, reduced to variables for testable hypothesis. The unfortunate results of statistically significant, conference presentable, academic

journal publishable findings are that they are rather trivial. Some of these discontents were expressed in Canter and Craik (1987). Many of the more recent developments do not seem to significantly address the larger issues. The larger issues, ranging from the mental health, the obesity to the environmental crisis, cannot be addressed by reducing them to individual behaviours that do not consider the larger contexts in which they occur.

The focus of psychology and modern society in general appears to be on pharmacological and technological fixes (c.f. Kvale, 1992, Slife, Rebter, & Richardson, 2005), rather than conditions reflected in the physical environment, architecture and urban planning, influenced by government policies. However, the consideration of the larger context poses multiple challenges. It would require reaching beyond the epistemological and methodological confines, and it may lead to a challenge of the status quo, questioning a way of life that is "non-negotiable," and biting the hand that feeds one. The most that one can ask people to do is to reduce the energy use in their ever expanding McMansions or oversized homes by installing smart meters, buying more energy efficient appliances, buying more fuel efficient (or electrical) SUVs or oversized cars, and perhaps recycle more, rather than downsizing and consuming less in the first place. Capitalism and consumerism is getting a green makeover.

Select Eastern Perspectives?

Critical Environmental Psychology seems to be compatible with, if not embracing select Eastern perspectives.

The term "Eastern" is quite complex. In the Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology Sundararajan (2014) points out that rather than Eastern Psychology the term Asian Psychology is more common. The East is often juxtaposed with the term "Western" and is used as an umbrella term that the West is not. There may also be association with "Western values" tracing its roots to Greek philosophy. The East often signifies Asia. But even if we were to specify the East in terms of the Far East or East Asia (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean), there are different traditional practices informed by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Hwang & Chang, 2009).

Hence the choice of select Eastern perspective in the title is a way to acknowledge that there is no one Eastern perspective, and to limit the scope of this writing as it would not be feasible to address all Eastern perspectives. The select Eastern perspectives will be explored in the context of Environmental Psychology and in the larger context of the West, the United States of America in particular. The East, in form of lumped of together different cultures, has been demonized and romanticized, deemed worthy of study, subject to distortion and appropriation. Much has been lost in translation, which has been made up and filled in with interpretations to make it intelligible and turning it into something different (c.f. Said, 1978). These can range from watered down to modified more palatable versions to fit the tastes of the

consumers looking for exotic experiences, who ironically claim to crave for authenticity, which may no longer exist, or would be hardly digestible.

The food analogy is quite fitting as it reflects the phenomenon of lumping together and turning it into something different- an “Asian restaurant” that serve a fusion of not quite Japanese-Korean-Chinese foods that get high praise by suburban White people and strongly recommend it to their Asian friends, to whom it may be a rather exotic experience in a different sense.

The consumption of another culture is not merely for an occasional exotic experience. It is often associated with a belief in some sort of magical power and can lead to a permanent, but more often temporary, adaption of a new life-style. In the consumption of various substances via an adherence to peculiar diets that may not be particularly enjoyable, one can still hope for some medicinal and health benefits, or at least some weight loss.

A lifestyle goes beyond diet of course. It can come with various practices that range from yoga to the martial arts (sometimes a fusion of Karate and Kung-Fu) that, too, are often associated with a belief in some sort of magical power, that also range from medicinal and health benefits, or at least some weight loss.

Finally there is a “spiritual” aspect, which ties into some of the physical practices, ranging from breathing techniques to adopting particular postures, engaging in particular movements. Tied in with these practices are particular attitudes and beliefs, or mental practices such as meditation that enhance one’s well-being, take one to a higher level of consciousness or some form of enlightenment. Rather than salvation, waiting for life after death in heaven, and being at the mercy of God mediated through church, one could achieve enlightenment, in one’s lifetime on earth by oneself, or perhaps with the help of a guru, sensei, or coach. This can be appealing particularly in an individualistic context.

But even with less spiritual ambitions, in the context of a culture that struggles with obesity, and depression, along with the intertwined social and environmental issues, these Eastern alternatives can appear quite promising. Particularly with the dramatic economy rise of some of these Eastern countries with increased global prominence, such as Japan in the 1980s, South Korea and China in more recent decades, they have received more attention: An urgency to understand a potential threat or partner, and possibly something to be learned from Eastern perspectives?

Eastern perspectives, sometimes associated with Eastern philosophy, religion and spirituality has played a significant role in various domains throughout Western society, most notably in the 19th Century, where modernity, industrialization, and colonialism on the one hand brought new problems and on the other hand lead to an increased exposure to other cultures (Clarke, 2000). To some extent, the Romantic and Lebensreform movement, and Existentialism and Transcendentalism can be seen as influenced of Eastern perspectives (Burns, 2006). Thoreau’s Walden, the quintessential environmentalist writing of his years in the woods may come to mind. It has been argued that Thoreau may have been first American yogi, based on letters

that make direct references to yoga (Syman, 2010). The yoga of Thoreau is not to be confused with some forms modern Americanized versions of (consumerist, capitalistic, individualistic, decontextualized) yoga that occur in fancy yoga studios, with overpriced yoga gear and bottled water in overheated rooms in cold East Coast winters to simulate hot climate zones of India. A yoga that is reduced to poses, and some superficial individualistic health benefits, but social and environmental costs.

Thoreau's yoga (to unite) was an engagement with the world; it was not an attempt to shelter oneself (in a studio or from other people). Even his years in the woods did not completely isolate him, but involved much social and political engagement.

In many respects the Eastern perspectives can be seen has a criticism of Western society and modernity. In oversimplified terms an antidote to some the "Western issues" could be found in some Eastern inspiration. Eastern inspiration can mean different things, as there are differences within Eastern perspectives, as there are within Western perspectives. Some of the key features within Eastern religion and spirituality include the reverence of nature, the celebration of the body, and the idea of self-transcendence, that stood in opposition with the Christian beliefs.

The introductory chapter of the textbook *An introduction to Environmental Psychology* (Ittleson et al 1974) argues that it was precisely these deep seated assumption within the Western perspectives that explain the general disregard for the environment, not merely in the field of psychology, or academia, but as a culture in general. In simplified terms nature and the body as been associated with evil, something to be overcome or at least to be controlled and subservient to the human and the soul. Eastern perspectives draw less of a boundary between nature and human, body and soul, and emphasise the relational, harmony and unity, rather than autonomy and separateness. The textbook makes a direct reference to Taoism.

In a truly multidisciplinary fashion, the textbook illustrates its points by looking at European and Chinese paintings that consistently show the contrast: In the European paintings the person is in the foreground and nature and the environment is relegated to the background, whereas the Chinese paintings show the person embedded in the environment. A more recent study (Huang & Park, 2014) has replicated such findings in the differences in Facebook photographs, where Americans tended to prioritize their face over the background, whereas East Asians included more contexts in their profile pictures.

Doubting Descartes

Arguably a defining aspect of dominant Western and modern thought is epitomised by Descartes' dualism of mind and body, the spiritual and the material. The title "doubting Descartes" is twofold. One is that Descartes departure point was doubt-subjecting everything to doubt arriving at the one thing that cannot be doubted- that one is thinking therefore one is existing. The other is that Descartes' dualism and approach can be subjected to doubt.

Descartes dualism is worthy to consider and the context in which it emerged. It follows an intellectual tradition that can be associated with Platonism. Plato's allegory of the cave describes the human condition as looking at a cave well that are mere shadows of the truth, mistaking the shadows as the truth. On the hand it applies to current contexts, it seems to have foreshadowed the age of screens, where humans spend much time in front of their screens, which is in a sense, like being in caves, looking at flickering reflection on a cave wall. Received via the screens are mediated realities subject to distortions. On the other hand it also reflects where Descartes has received his ideas, not merely by having read Plato, but by spending much time in an oven. It is no wonder, that the ideas baked in an oven, would reflect such context. Ideas that emerge while sitting in an oven are not likely to reflect an embodied embedded sentiment, as opposed to numerous other conceivable ways, such as walking through the woods or through town. It may come of little surprise that Nietzsche walked to think and write, while Kant did so to escape (Gros, 2015). Entertaining the idea of an evil demon that implants false perceptions, and that the only truth one can be certain of is that "cogito ergo sum", may not seem that far fetched when deprived of other stimulation. The idea of the evil demon, takes Plato's allegory of the cave to another level. Our perceptions are not just mere shadows of the truth and subject to distortions, but our perceptions could be completely false. With Plato, there appeared to be a glimmer of hope, that there may be something that we can make out of these reflections, and that by engaging reason (rather than mere observations) we may be able to get some sense of the truth. Descartes further dismisses perception as they can be subjected to an evil demon, and the only certainty is one's existence, arrived by the fact that one is thinking. This seems to solidify the status of disembodied and disembedded thinking. It relegates the body and the environment to a distraction not worth of attention. Could this in part explain the health and environmental crisis plaguing modern society?

Alternatively, the certainty of one's existence could be conceived be the fact that one is feeling or experiencing one's body and the environment. This then would make the body and the environment at the heart of existence. Thus it can be argued that the antithesis of Cartesian dualism and to separate is "yoga"- to unite. The emphasis of unity is also inherent in Taoism. The iconic *yin-yang* symbolizes the harmony of opposites, dualities that are part of whole- and that each contains the other. Many of the Taoism inspired martial arts (e.g. Judo, Karatedo) and arts (e.g. Sado (tea), Kado (flower)) embody this concept of unity. As much as the engagement in these arts involves physical skill, it is the training of the mind achieved via the body and engagement with the world, with the aim of self-cultivation (Carter, 2007).Moreover, much of the training involves achieving a state of mindlessness (as opposed to mindfulness), and letting go of the self (as opposed to focusing on one's self). Rather than imposing one's will on the world, it involves a degree of surrender to the world. Taoism, described as the "art of being in the world" (Okakura, 1906) emphasizes the importance of "the world" and in that sense is to be the antithesis of Cartesianism. The phrase being-in-the-world has been popularised and commonly misattributed to Heidegger (Imamichi, 1968), and the groundbreaking existential idea in the context

of 20th Century Western philosophy have been linked to hidden sources of East Asian influence (May, 1989).

Dualism and its discontents

Inherent in dualism is also an either-or thinking, and right-wrong/good-bad dichotomies, splitting the world in two. An inherent problem with dichotomies may be the failure to consider that both can be true or false, as well as a failure to see what may lie beyond the dichotomies. This to a great extent has been played out in the history of psychology as well. The dichotomies are not only a splitting, but also an implicit hierarchy that puts one over the other: the mind over the body, the mental over the physical, and the objective over the subjective.

Reflections in the physical environment

The basic assumptions of dualism and hierarchies, are reflected in the physical environment, and can be seen as one of the great failures of modern architecture and urban planning, also known as the international style, which has known no borders: It has crossed political ideological boundaries where capitalist and communist architecture produced similar structures based on similar design principles. It also went global, reaching all parts of the world as the process of modernization. The “winning” formula ranged from the prioritizing of the automobile over pedestrians, industry and productivity over community and quality of life. It held assumptions that viewed humans as machines and homes as warehouses. This was quite consistent with several psychological perspectives’ view of humans ranging from behaviourism to cognitive psychology that more or less saw humans as machines, whether it was behaving machines or information processing machines. Additionally, one of the main problems explaining the failures of modern architecture and urban planning were the assumption that great buildings and cities can be conceived in an oven (a la Descartes) or a studio, or in the words of Tom Wolfe (1981) entirely in one’s head. The phenomenon architects that dreamt up critically acclaimed award-winning designs that looked good on paper, perhaps even in pictures and worked well in theory, but are a nightmare to users, whose perspectives and needs were not being considered, and did not work in practice. This epitomized the split between builders and dwellers, the creative minds and the living bodies. The split between ideas of timeless ways of building and universal designs (international style), and the realities of designs that did not live up to its promises not quite fitting in any context as context such as history, culture, and geographies were ignored- the very aspects that made traditionally grown towns work, in contrast to the modern planned ones. Ingold (2000) speaks of the building and the dwelling perspective and critiques the dominance of the building perspective and the disconnect from the dwelling perspective- the lived experience that should inform what and how to build.

This analogy of misfit can be applied to a psychology that was also looking for to be a pure science, devoid of confounding variables such as history, culture.

Measures for “success” are not limited to approval of colleagues from the same design-school of thought or ideologies, or economic factors. In fact these measures conflict with health and well-being, social and environmental justice, and sustainability.

Holism and *wu-wei*

A holistic view gives consideration to community and quality of life, a view that does not merely view humans as behaving or information processing machines, but meaning making complex beings whose existence is intertwined with history, culture and geographies. To a large extent the failures of modern architecture that are reflected in the physical environment are similar to a greater socio-cultural ethos that is reflected in other areas, including the sciences that also may have fallen short on community and quality of life. Particularly within psychology, many social and environmental issues are reduced to “individual problems” to be solved individually. But this is not merely the approach within psychology, it is a convenient way for governments and corporations to shift the responsibility away from themselves, (while at the same time individuals are hoping for governments and corporations intervene). Quality of life is also reduced to subject well-being measures on a scale from 0 to 10, (World Happiness Report, 2020), and while the World Happiness Report suggests that it matters where one live, well-being tends to be managed on an individual level ranging from seeking professional help ranging from medication and to cognitive-behavioural therapy, and some self-help books. Even within this individualized approach, some Eastern influences may be evident. Yoga and meditational practices that work on controlling body and mind are similar to cognitive-behavioural approaches- the cognitive part attempts to control the mind, the behavioural part the body. Self-help books are often eclectic infusion of “Eastern” wisdom. But the ultimate aim is usually not some form of self-transcendence or enlightenment, but get one’s anxiety or depression under control, and sometimes going further in promising to become happier or increase one’s subjective well-being.

The focus is on the self, and even in that respect in a limited way: How to become more productive, but productive for what, and at what costs? Is it to build happier and healthier communities, and make life better, not just for oneself, but everyone?

The focus on oneself and the neglect of relationships and context are the markers of individualism and the independent self that are often associated with “Western” perspectives and contrasted with the collectivism and the interdependent self associated with “Eastern” perspectives. The interdependent self is often associated with relationships to other people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such East-West differences have been observed in various psychological studies of cognitive tasks that show heightened sensitivity to relationships and context in the collectivism (Nisbet & Masuda, 2003). Such differences further appear in attitudes toward the environment associated with egocentrism- more prevalent in individualistic countries, and ecocentrism- more prevalent in collectivistic countries (Schulz, 2002). The other people may include consideration to those who have come before, and those who

are yet to come- past and future generations. But the relationships of the interdependent self may extend beyond people and extends to the wider world, one's relationships with environments. Objects and environments are passed down from past generations and are to be passed down to future ones. Such objects and environments have a life of their own. Just as people would take care of such objects environments, the objects and environments take care of people. It places people objects and environments in mutually beneficial harmonious relationship, and may limit the degree to which a person is to impose one's will on the environment. At the same time a person needs to bend to the will of the environment. It is an antidote to the obsession with personal autonomy and control. This principle touches on *wu-wei* (無為),loosely translated as "not doing." It can be interpreted as the art of acting without acting, not in the sense of "laziness" but as a form of self-restraint. "Not doing," also letting nature take its course, in other words, not resisting forces of nature, but learning how to be with them, and harnessing the forces of nature that allow things to emerge naturally.

In the context of energy, renewable energy sources illustrate this point. There are a variety of renewable energy sources, and the effectiveness of such energy sources need to be considered in their contexts. Rather than hailing one particular source of energy as the solution, solar energy is sensible in areas that receive much sunlight, wind energy is sensible in areas that receive much wind, hydro energy where there is water, geothermal energy in areas where there is geothermal activity.

Some of the forceful interventions could do more harm than good, in form of unforeseen negative side effects or long-term consequences (for the sake of some immediate gains or short-term benefits on narrow criteria).

This is not to say that such perspectives are adapted in Asian countries, quite on the contrary. In order to keep up with the global economy and in part by adapting to modern ways of life come at the expense of people and environments.

In the context of Environmental Psychology *wu-wei* has relevance on several fronts.

Many environmental interventions call for actions- recycle, buy environmental, rather than considering perhaps one of the most effective interventions- not doing. Not doing is note meant to not engage in "pro-environmental" behaviours, but rather than obsessing about actions such as recycling and buying environmental there are more important non-actions, including a form of self-restraint: Not consumption in the first place and considering all the things and activities one can do without (such as taking non-essential trips in oversized cars and engaging in non-essential consumption).

There is also an obsession with new technologies to provide panaceas, rather than looking at already available and appropriate technologies and practices. A new generation of environmentalists, identified as neo-environmentalists promote optimism in techno-salvation and capitalism as solutions to the environmental crisis (Kingsnorth, 2012). The promotion of electrical cars is misplaced, when the fuel sources to generate the electricity are primarily fossil and nuclear, and batteries require mineral mining and turn into unrecyclable toxic waste. Subsidies are given

private car companies rather than investing in a public infrastructure ranging from transportation alternatives to affordable housing in cities that would make excessive commuting and car dependency obsolete. De-growth and downscaling is rarely part of the discussion as already articulated by Schumacher (1973) that bigger is not better, small is beautiful which also has been associated with Buddhist Economy. Some of the technologies and practices marketed and sold as sustainable are not necessarily so. Rather in buying-in into such technologies and practices, one could consider “not-doing” in form of de-growth and downscaling.

Writing in the context of COVID-19, “not doing” seemed to be a particular challenge for action-motivated Americans, when being a hero and doing one’s part meant staying at home. COVID-19, which put the world on pause, had some immediate perceptible environmental benefits, which could be credited to a “not-doing” phase that halted industrial production that allowed countries meet their emission targets to address climate change, and improved air quality: The irony of COVID-19- a respiratory virus that indirectly helped people breathe. In this regard “doing-nothing” can go a long way, but at the same time “doing-nothing” may need to be seen as a deliberate act, coupled with mindfulness and self-control.

Conclusion

Environmental Psychology, which subscribes to a so-called environmental perspective, can be considered a critical psychology. In part this environmental perspective, which emphasizes the importance of the physical environment, contextual factors, and a holistic perspective, which are compatible, if not inspired by select Eastern perspectives. In this regard it also offers potential solutions to many of the social and environmental issues, which may stem from an overall epistemological and methodological weaknesses that have failed to adequately consider the importance of the physical environment, contextual factors, and a holistic perspective, which go well beyond the field of psychology itself, but characterize some of the limitations of Western and “modern” perspectives.

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