

Ecological Contact and Psychological Well-Being: A Process-Based Account of Experiential Coordination

Andres Miranda

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Abstract

This article develops a process-based explanation of psychological well-being, grounded in ecological theories of cognition and eco-psychology. It begins with the observation that contact with nature has long been associated with psychological restoration, although contemporary explanations often frame it in terms of stress reduction or attentional recovery. The argument presented here proposes a broader interpretation in which psychological fragmentation occurs when experience becomes excessively self-referential and insufficiently coordinated with the environmental processes in which life is already embedded. At the same time, it asserts that nature is neither a collection of stable objects nor something that simply surrounds human beings. Nature signifies a continuous network of dynamic relationships in which the organism and the environment co-constitute each other.

From this perspective, psychological well-being depends on the re-establishment of experiential coordination between the person and the world. When this coordination weakens, cognition becomes increasingly introspective, attention diminishes, and continuity with the larger realm of life is reduced. Ecological contact interrupts this contraction by reintroducing sensory openness, novelty, and forms of interaction that are not organised around prediction, productivity, or self-maintenance. The article situates cognition within a processual understanding of life and suggests that brief ecological practices can cultivate attentional flexibility and attunement to the environment. Rather than treating nature as a therapeutic resource external to the individual, it proposes that human experience is already integrated into ongoing ecological processes. Psychological health is thus understood as the capacity of experience to remain in dynamic coordination with these processes, rather than separating from them.

Introduction: An Idea We Keep Returning To

This article begins with an ancient idea: ecological contact improves psychological well-being. This concept runs

through Eastern philosophical and contemplative traditions, especially within Buddhist and Daoist thought, where contact with nature is linked to interior balance, attentional clarity and psychological renewal (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Kohn, 2009; Tucker, 2003). The Romantic tradition also offers a parallel development. Although it is not contemplative in the Eastern sense, thinkers such as Goethe and Schelling (Beiser, 2002; Richards, 2002; Schelling, 1988, 2004), writing in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, resist the reduction of nature to a merely mechanistic order, instead understanding it as a living, self-organising process. Nature, in this view, is not something placed outside human beings as a detached object of observation, rather it is a reality in which human life is already implicated and from which it cannot finally be separated without distortion. This fits with the present account as it challenges a sharp division between subject and world, and instead emphasises a continuity between human experience and the natural order. However, this idea of continuity should not be seen as completely positive or peaceful. Romantic and Gothic writing often portrays nature as having a double character. At times, nature is beautiful, calming, and restorative, but at other times it is overwhelming, strange, and unsettling, challenging idealised picturesque and sublime views of nature (Braid, 2016). Nature is not always experienced consistently. It is often shaped by psychological and situational conditions. It may be a source of comfort, but it can also be a setting that intensifies both connection and alienation. This tension is well articulated by José Ortega y Gasset's idea that human life is always bound up with its circumstances (Ortega y Gasset, 1914/2000). His claim that "I am myself and my circumstances" means that life is always lived within conditions that we do not fully choose and cannot fully control or fully understand. Circumstances are not just a neutral background. They are the real conditions—both enabling and limiting—within which life takes place. From this point of view, we never experience nature on its own. We always experience it as part of a lived situation (Ortega & Gasset, 1914/2000). Together, these ideas support a clearer ecological view. Being part of an environment is not simply about harmony with nature, or separation from it through fear or alienation. It is a more basic condition of life: we always exist within structured environments that both support us and limit us at the same time. Ecological contact, then, is not only something that improves well-being. It shows that human life and environment are always connected and formed together through ongoing interaction (Ortega & Gasset, 1914/2000).

Ecological contact, within this understanding, is not merely a therapeutic intervention. It points to the embeddedness of human life within the wider natural world. The aim here is

Corresponding Author: Andres Miranda

Email: alethias2000@yahoo.com.au

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not to introduce something new, but to make explicit a feature of experience that is often overlooked in everyday life due to distraction and cognitive overload. is an intuitive quality to the idea that being in nature helps. This is why a walk outdoors can quickly reorganise experience—attention becomes less constrained, thoughts settle, and a quiet sense of relief is often felt. Of course, it would be a mistake to generalise this. The reverse may occur in cases where natural settings and stimuli produce an aversive response, such as bio-phobia (Soga et al., 2023). Human beings, as living organisms, are not uniform in the ways they respond in this respect. This phenomenon was already recognised in nineteenth-century psychology, which suggested that experiences of nature are not shaped only by the external environment but are also influenced by internal psychological states. In psychoanalytic terms, experiences of nature are shaped by unconscious feelings and emotions. As a result, the same natural place may feel calming at one time and strange or unsettling at another, depending on the person's psychological state (Freud, 1919).

More generally, one might say that human beings are biological creatures, and as such cannot be meaningfully separated from nature. Nature is not something external to human existence; rather, it is the very circumstance within which life is lived—the environmental condition that makes existence possible at all. To become too distant from this is, in a sense, to lose contact with the ground that already sustains us. If nature is the space where human life takes place, then it makes sense why psychological research has repeatedly found that contact with natural environments with natural environments is associated with improvements in mood, attention, and overall psychological well-being (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Berman et al., 2008; Bratman et al., 2015; Garza-Terán et al., 2022; Rhee et al., 2023). It is important to note that, as people move away from natural living environments, they increasingly live in more urbanised forms of existence. Human intelligence has created new “landscapes of activity”, both virtual (for example, video games and social media) and technical, which expand the range of possible experiences. This creative dimension is clearly changing human psychology, as it requires adaptation to environments that can limit or reduce access to natural reality, which still remains, in many cases, at the heart of urbanised life, despite technological development. This work, however, focuses on the restorative effects of the natural environment on health, and with it stress reduction.

Now, a different approach can be taken. This paper argues that polarity – the unhealthy psychological fragmentation between self and environment in which the experience of “I” takes shape in a more self-enclosed form – arises when experience is not harmoniously situated in an organised correlation, or coordinated relation, between the individual and environmental processes. While all other living beings tend to coincide with their environment, the human being often does not fit seamlessly within this medium, as they become preoccupied with meeting the demands imposed by society. From this follows the strenuous effort to reconnect with the natural environment, as well as the difficulty of stepping outside a conceptual repertoire that draws the individual inward into themselves. This forms part of the tendency towards the construction of an artificial “second nature” that is layered over natural nature—a kind of “over-nature.” By “over-nature”, I mean the conceptual and social layer we place over lived, ecological reality, which can partially replace or distort direct engagement with the natural environment. Ecological contact can help counteract this tendency toward an “over-nature,” restoring a more immediate and grounded relation with the natural environment beneath our conceptual constructions. This can also be understood as a form of attunement: a dynamic balance with what nature is already doing. Rather than organising everything internally, the individual becomes more responsive to what is *currently occurring*. This line of thought is consistent

with Edward O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, according to which the human organism exhibits an evolved affinity for life and natural environments, shaped through its long evolutionary immersion in ecological conditions (Wilson, 1984). However, while biophilia frames this affinity primarily in terms of preference or evolutionary adaptation, the present argument extends the claim further. It is not only that human beings are drawn to nature because they evolved within it, but that psychological coherence depends upon the ongoing coordination between experiential life and environmental processes from which it cannot be cleanly separated. In order to clarify what is at stake, it is necessary to specify what is meant here by nature.

What Do We Mean by Nature?

Nature is often understood within ecological science as a complex system of interdependent organisms and environments (Gibson, 1979; Pickett et al., 1992). According to this view, the natural world is generally seen as relatively stable and continuous in its overall structure, even though it is always changing in particular ways. Counselling and ecopsychological approaches, although different in orientation, also tend to assume some degree of environmental stability. What differs is not so much the idea that nature endures, but the meaning given to this endurance. Rather than treating nature mainly as an external object to be analysed, these approaches understand it as a lived environment in which human experience is already situated and shaped through participation (Roszak et al., 1995; Jordan & Hinds, 2016). The difference, then, is not so much between stability and change, but between different ways of understanding the relation between human life and the natural world: one emphasising structure and organisation, the other lived involvement within a relatively stable environment. Yet this assumption of relative stability becomes more difficult to maintain under closer examination. What are ordinarily taken to be stable things are always in flux. A forest continually changes through cycles of growth, decay, and regeneration. An organism constantly regulates and adapts through metabolic exchange. These examples show an ecosystem persists only through ongoing interaction and transformation. What appears stable is, in fact, sustained through movement and change. It is therefore more accurate to understand nature not simply as a system of fixed things, but as a process. Here, “process” does not simply mean that things change over time. Rather, it suggests that what we call stable entities are sustained, moment by moment, through continuing patterns of activity, exchange, and transformation, rather than existing as wholly self-contained and unchanging substances (Dupré & Nicholson, 2018; Rescher, 1996). While stable forms do exist, these are temporary patterns that persist within a constantly changing environment. This matters because it transforms the meaning of “contact with nature”. Connectedness is not simply about being exposed to an environment, but about interacting with a living process. It is participation in a process that is already active at every moment of the human experience.

Experience as a Single Field

Human experience is part of this process. Within a single stream of experience, two distinct modes can be identified: the physical (body, biology, environment) and the psychological (thought, feeling, meaning). These are not separate realities, but different descriptions of the same life in constant evolution. The difficulty does not start here. It occurs when these aspects are no longer felt in relation to each other. When the connection between them weakens, experience begins to feel fragmented (Laing, 1960; Zahavi, 2005). But fragmentation is not the consequence of different aspects of experience; rather, it becomes an issue

when they are uncoordinated. At that point: for the subject of experience, thought becomes more self-contained, the body feels less integrated, the world feels more distant. Life is re-imaged from something that sustains organic populations to something that must be controlled. Gregory Bateson described this as a breakdown in the “patterns that connect” (Bateson, 1979, p. 11).

When relationships between parts are no longer maintained within a living organisation, coherence declines—not because anything disappears, but because the relations themselves are no longer sustained. This is intensified when nature is treated as something external—a container one can enter or leave. In such a relation, the continuity between experience and environment fades, and fragmentation becomes more likely. If fragmentation is understood as a loss of coordination, then effective cognition can be described as the capacity for different aspects of experience to remain in relation. The physical and the psychological do not require reduction to a single explanation; they need to evolve together. When this happens—that is, when the physical and psychological are developing in relation to one another—experience can become more continuous, less demanding, and less marked by conceptual and cognitive division (Laing, 1960; Zahavi, 2005).

In ecopsychological terms, this same sense of fragmentation can also be taken to point to a wider sense of separation between human experience and the ecological systems it belongs to.

The Fragmented Self in Experience

Cognition, as typically approached in psychology and neuroscience, is something that goes on within the organism, with explanatory weight placed upon internal mechanisms and operations. By contrast, ecological and enactive approaches question whether such an inward location is sufficient, suggesting instead that cognition cannot be cleanly contained within the organism at all. Rather, it emerges in the ongoing coupling between organism and environment, where each is continually defined in relation to the other (Gibson, 1979; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). When this organism—environment is disrupted, experience can become increasingly self-referential. The self is then experienced as a separate organising centre, around which active life is structured. Attention turns inward, thought loops reinforce themselves, and the larger field fades. Life closes in on itself, turning away from the particularity of the world. Ecopsychologists describe this as a contraction of the self away from its broader ecological relations (Roszak et al., 1995). However, it is not selfhood that is in question, but the way it can become isolated from the rest of experience—what I call the environmental disconnection.

When the “self” is no longer situated amid the ongoing flow of life in the environment, fragmentation becomes more noticeable, and continuity begins to fade.

This is a bit like what happens in biological systems when a cell behaves as if it were independent of the organism and seen experimentally in cell culture preparations. Instead of functioning in a coordinated way, its activity becomes locally self-amplifying and less regulated by the organising dynamics of the surrounding tissue system, and it starts to prioritise its own activity without regard for the whole for it has lost contact with its native environment. This illustration is not intended as a literal equivalence between psychological and biological processes, but as a structural analogy through different levels of organisation. A similar pattern can be observed *in situ* when a cell’s regulatory coupling within a tissue system is disrupted. Rather than participating in coordinated biochemical signalling, its activity becomes locally self-amplifying and less constrained by the organising dynamics of the surrounding tissue. As Levin argues in his bioelectrical account of cancer, such cases can be

understood in terms of alterations in the scaling of the cellular self, rather than as failures of an inherently purposeful system (Levin, 2021).

From this perspective, self-fragmentation seems to ease when experience is no longer organised around itself, and when we begin to reconnect with the earth that sustains us, through direct and simple forms of contact such as breathing fresh air, or sitting quietly in natural surroundings. Psychological well-being, therefore, is not limited to increased vigilance against mind wandering or the development of clearer thinking but, from the author’s perspective, must also include the organisation of experience and thus engagement with the natural world. This includes the capacity to remain receptive and open, the ability to move between different aspects of experience without losing connection, and the capacity to stay engaged with what is happening, rather than retreating into internal loops. This notion has been and continues to be explored specifically in the work of Steven C. Hayes who emphasised psychological flexibility, openness, and values-based action over experiential avoidance and excessive control (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012).

Everyday Pressure and the Turn Toward Nature

When the pressures of daily life accumulate, experience begins to narrow. Thoughts become focused on managing tasks; we frantically anticipate what’s coming next, worrying about how to keep up with constant demands. Even moments of rest can become filled with mental rehearsals. At a certain point, this narrowing is felt directly. We feel tired, detached, mentally exhausted. In this situation, self-reflective people recognise the need for space, the need to step back, to escape. This is clearly a sign that the current field of experience is overloaded. However, this should not be taken as a rejection of technology or technological development. Human beings transform their environments in order to survive, adapt, and reduce vulnerability to environmental conditions. The construction of shelter, the controlled use of fire, and the development of tools all came from this adaptive relation with nature.

However, contemporary technologies increasingly mediate forms of engagement that were once more directly embodied and environmentally situated. Using a remote-controlled heater is not equivalent to gathering around a fire, just as travelling by car is not equivalent to walking through an environment. These technologies are often indispensable and beneficial, yet they may also suspend aspects of the organism’s inherited repertoire of sensory and ecological relations with the surrounding world. Heidegger voiced this concern in the last century as well, pointing out that modern technological life increasingly positions the world as something to be ordered, managed, and rendered available for use, thereby altering the manner in which human beings relate to their environment (Heidegger, 1977). There is little doubt that many contemporary environments—digital, institutional, and commercial—place sustained demands on attention, potentially intensifying experiences of fragmentation and perceptual disconnection.

By contrast, the natural environment offers something different. It is a space not disturbed by persistent thought, without competing egos, a place not organised around human expectation. Natural things unfold without being structured around tasks, deadlines, evaluations, or simple utility. In this alternative experiential context people forget themselves; attention is no longer constantly pulled in by demands; it returns to a simple awareness of the present. What opens up is not an abstract escape, but a real change in the organisation of experience, involving a reduction in reflective self-focus and a more immediate mode of awareness (James, 1904; Gale, 2004).

There is, after all is said and done, harmony and rest.

It should be noted that what is said here about harmony and rest does not presuppose a perfected or fully equilibrated state, nor forms of natural engagement associated with sporting or intensive physical activity. More precisely, these terms indicate a reduction of internal pressure, in which experience is no longer repeatedly dominated by anticipatory control and task-oriented focus, that is, a way of life that does not excessively prioritise productivity, speed, and being busy in institutional contexts. It is not at all surprising then, that under these ecological conditions, a reconnection with the wonders unfolding around us begins to develop. The cycle between thought and self-attention relaxes. Attention begins to move freely with the sensory information available in the moment. Research in this area indicates that contact with natural environments supports attentional recovery and reduces cognitive fatigue (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Berman et al., 2008), and is also associated with improvements in emotional regulation and subjective well-being (Zeng et al., 2025). From a clinical perspective, these effects are especially pertinent in conditions characterised by attentional rigidity, rumination, and heightened self-referential processing, where the capacity for release from repetitive cognitive organisation is often compromised.

Environmental psychology, taking a less dogmatic approach, describes a range of positive effects associated with contact with natural environments, although these effects are neither uniform nor guaranteed. More modestly, it may be said that some natural environments, and particular kinds of experience within them, can at times support a more balanced way of relating to experience. In such moments, nature may reintroduce a field of experience that is not primarily organised around the self. Experience can then become less governed by internal narratives and more responsive to what is present. (Bowler et al., 2010; Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018). A form of environmental attunement may begin to be felt in experience, although this is typically contingent upon a degree of comfort within natural settings, as well as a readiness to engage them with openness, attentiveness, and something like existential friendliness or awe (Wilson, 1984). Self-awareness does not disappear in these moments, just as it does not disappear when one is absorbed in a film, a book, or a physical activity; rather, it recedes from its usual dominance. In natural environments, the boundary between psychological life and environment may become more coordinated, and experience responds with a certain fluidity to what is happening (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This does not imply a state of complete equilibrium with the environment, nor is such a state necessary or desirable. If experience were perfectly balanced, experience would lose its vitality. Life depends on a degree of tension, contrasts, and continuous adjustment. From a regulatory perspective, this involves maintaining individual organism–environment dynamics within limits that preserve integrative capacity, avoiding states in which variability exceeds the ability to coordinate experience. Life is then a process, and it is present where there is a difference in levels of activation and organisation. This is what can be understood as attunement—a continuous process of adjustment. The organism and the environment remain distinct, yet coordinated, allowing psychological processes to remain stable without becoming rigid, and open without losing coherence.

Implications for Therapeutic Practice and Everyday Experience

Taking into account what has been discussed in this article, psychological well-being encompasses not only the work of changing the relationship with self-defeating thoughts, improving emotion regulation, and increasing awareness of interoceptive

content, but also reducing rigid self-referential closure, and moving from fragmentation towards meaningful coordination with the environment. That being the case, ecological contact may therefore be seen as a natural context in which experiential processes continue to be reorganised. This approach is not intended to be limited to specific diagnostic categories or clinical criteria. Rather, it may be understood as broadly relevant to individuals who experience sustained cognitive and emotional strain associated with contemporary technological, institutional, and commercial environments. In this sense, it is offered as a general orientation for those who find value in reducing attentional overload and re-engaging, in simple and accessible ways, with periods of time spent in natural settings. Therefore, the following exercises are not presented as techniques in a strictly clinical sense, but as simple ways to support a renewed attentional openness to ecological contexts in which such reorganisation of experience may, under appropriate conditions, become possible.

Exercise 1: When Experience is Not Immediately Labelled

When we resist the impulse to immediately label what we perceive, attention remains closer to movement itself. This quality is often obscured once objects are stabilised in thought as fixed things. At times, this openness arises spontaneously—for instance, when an engaging topic at the dinner table draws everyone into a shared unfolding of thought. Yet such moments are contingent and cannot be relied upon. To cultivate this kind of flow more consistently in relation to nature, intentionality must be introduced into the stream of consciousness. The question then becomes: how can this be done? One approach is to allow perception to remain as undifferentiated as possible for as long as is practicable. Instead of defaulting to familiar classifications such as “tree,” “wind,” or “bird,” attention can linger with more immediate qualities: vertical patterns of growth and shifting light across bark, air currents felt on the skin, or bird song unfolding in space. Language is not excluded, but its organising function is temporarily delayed. In this interval, experience remains closer to ongoing processes before it settles into stabilised conceptual form.

This practice is also found in contemplative writers of the Christian and Buddhist traditions, where disciplined forms of attention are developed to reduce immediate conceptual interpretation and allow experience to be encountered in a more direct and sustained way. In Buddhist thought, early teachings such as the *Satipatthāna Sutta* emphasise sustained mindfulness of bodily sensations, feelings, and perceptions without immediate conceptual elaboration (Bodhi, 1995). Zen and Vipassanā meditative traditions often describe this practice as a form of non-discursive awareness in which experience is observed prior to naming and interpretation (Analayo, 2003). In the Hindu yogic tradition, the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali understand meditative practice as the cessation of mental fluctuations (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*), allowing consciousness to rest in a more stable and less distorted form. In this context, the aim is to reduce the dominance of conceptual proliferation and representational thought, interrupting habitual cognitive processes in order to allow experience to appear in a more immediate and less mediated way (Guenther, 2005). In the Christian contemplative tradition, authors such as the Desert Fathers and later figures like Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross similarly describe forms of concentration and prayer in which sensory distraction and discursive thought are gradually quietened, facilitating a more direct awareness of divine presence. While these traditions differ significantly in their metaphysical frameworks—ranging from non-theistic attentional disciplines to explicitly theistic accounts of divine encounter—they converge in their emphasis on practices that loosen habitual conceptual structuring to open experience to

what is immediately given.

Exercise 2: When Movement is Not Entirely Task-Directed

Another exercise for appreciating flow in nature involves walking without a specific goal or structure. One can slow down, stop, or change direction without reference to a predefined plan. Movement begins to follow environmental conditions and bodily cues rather than an externally imposed structure. Experience takes on a different quality: less organised by anticipation and more open to the present. This reduces the dominance of top-down predictive control and increases sensitivity to environmental flow. The aim is to experience the ease and subtle joy of movement itself. Here one can point to exercises of embodied attention in practices such as Kendo (Japanese martial art) and Tai Chi (Chinese internal martial art), where movement is cultivated as continuous, responsive, and non-rigid, rather than directed by fixed pre-planned action.

Exercise 3: When Thought is Present without Dominating Experience

Even in natural environments, thought does not disappear completely. The human mind provides a continuous background in which mental imagery and self-referential processes unfold over time and retain the capacity to shape ongoing experience. Thoughts are not intruders; they are part of consciousness. They are transient formations among others alongside sensory experience such as the sight of trees, the movement of wind, and bodily posture. However, thoughts can become persistent and begin to dominate the field of experience, creating an imbalance in its ongoing dynamics. This need not be the case. Thoughts do not need to be treated as enemies that must be expelled. Instead, they can be observed without elaboration or resistance, while attention remains partially engaged with the surrounding environment. In this way, cognition becomes one process among others, rather than the primary structure through which experience is organised. So when sitting in nature, there is no need to empty the mind. Instead, thoughts may arise and pass without being followed or resisted. They can be regarded as part of a wider field of changing conditions—like weather systems moving through a landscape. Some thoughts appear briefly and dissolve like passing clouds; others form more stable patterns, like steady winds moving through the countryside. This exercise is really about redirecting attention from objects of thought towards the perceptual environment in which one is located. It allows thoughts to emerge as part of the flux of experience, while perception of the natural environment actively shapes the present moment. This is not a form of suppression, but a rebalancing of experiential emphasis within a continuous and dynamic field of awareness. While there are superficial similarities with Buddhist and Zen practices, such traditions typically aim at reducing attachment to conceptual elaboration, rather than eliminating perception or achieving a fully pre-conceptual state.

Exercise 4: When We Notice What Interrupts

The third exercise involved focusing attention on moments when nature interrupts expectation—for example, sudden changes in wind, uneven terrain, unexpected sounds, or subtle shifts in light within the environment. This fourth exercise is not a direct continuation of the previous one; rather, it introduces a complementary dimension of attentional openness. Both exercises clarify two pathways through which experience can become more open. The first involves an internal de-centring of thought, where cognition loses its organising dominance

and thoughts no longer develop into extended elaborations. Attention is no longer captured by conceptual activity, and perception regains a more immediate and embodied character. The second involves an external interruption of anticipation, where environmental events introduce novelty into experience and disrupt habitual predictive structures. We are dealing here with change, variation, and the emergence of the unexpected—conditions that give rise to surprise. The capacity for wonder is fundamental to life, as it opens experience beyond the narrow structuring of everyday anticipatory patterns, particularly within technologically saturated environments (Monroy & Keltner, 2023). In this sense, nature continually presents itself as unfamiliar and revealing to an attentive and receptive gaze. Taken together, these processes describe different pathways by which psychological life becomes more open: either through the relaxation of internal cognitive control or through the disruption of external expectation. In both cases, experience is no longer totally controlled by prediction or conceptual closure. Instead, it becomes receptive to what emerges anew, allowing novelty, variation, and surprise to participate in the ongoing shaping of experience.

It should also be made clear that the aim of these exercises is not to replace existing contemplative or cognitive approaches. We simply want to articulate a different therapeutic mode in which environmental dynamics are understood as co-constitutive of attentional organisation. In clinical application, these exercises may be integrated as a movement between two poles of experience: on the one hand, the internal de-centring of thought, in which conceptual elaboration loosens its organising grip; and on the other, an openness to environmental variability, in which perception becomes responsive to the subtle interruptions and modulations of natural processes. In mutual relation, these movements allow experience to be re-situated within a wider field of activity, where natural variation does not merely accompany cognition but participates in its ongoing reorganisation. Undifferentiated perception, flow in movement, and a relative suspension of habitual mental content can, in moments of attentional openness, give rise to a sense of wonder that extends a person's relation to the natural world. In such experiences, the field of attention is less dominated by conceptual categorisation and becomes more responsive to environmental variation. This can simultaneously expand the horizon of personal activity, fostering a more creative and less habitual way of engaging with what is ordinarily familiar yet overlooked. Rather than involving a loss of cognitive agency, this mode of experience depends upon a refined form of attentional openness, in which agency and receptivity are held in dynamic balance. In their mutual relation, these exercises support a greater coordination between cognitive activity, bodily awareness, and environmental responsiveness, allowing experience to become more closely attuned to the surrounding world.

Conclusion

As physical beings, humans are not separate from the planet. Psychological well-being has often across contexts, cultures and time been associated with contact with the environment. This article takes these insights seriously, proposing instead a more fundamental claim: that fragmentation or disharmony in one's experience of self and world arises when experience is not situated within a coordinated flow of life. Nature can support recovery from this fragmentation, not by imposing further demands, but by reintroducing a field of restorative processes within which experience may be re-situated.

Understood in this way, well-being is not exclusively an internal psychological construction, but is grounded in the continuous relationship between an organism and the processes in which life is already immersed. The organism cannot be fully

understood in isolation, but only as something that unfolds through its relations with the environment. Life and being therefore belong together. In this respect, the idea put forward here shares some common ground with Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein as "being-in-the-world," where human life is understood as always existing within a world of relationships and situations rather than separate from them. Rather than a fixed state, the optimal condition is an ongoing process of coordination in which experience remains dynamically integrated, without internal contradiction or fragmentation. This may be understood as a form of ecological cognition.

From this perspective, it becomes possible to consider how contemporary conditions reshape this organism–environment relation in novel ways. We thus observe that the tensions present in society today are paradoxically born from the abundance of our own efficiency, an abundance that has progressively distanced us from natural life. Alongside this, it may be suggested that many of the needs currently recognised as absolutely necessary are in fact subjective, and perhaps largely conditioned. Human beings have long lived by imposing changes upon nature; perhaps now it is time to consider how nature, in turn, may begin to impose positive changes upon human life.

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