

## NATURAL PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

ROBERT GIFFORD

*Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*

Most of us spend most of our time in buildings. An early name for this field, architectural psychology, appropriately reflected this propensity. But environmental psychology is about more than buildings. All of us spend time outdoors, and nature's effects extend indoors: environmental psychology must include both architecture and nature. Natural psychology is that branch of environmental psychology in which the scientific study of person–nature transactions is pursued. It may be the ultimate form and most important frontier of psychology.

Although some environmental psychologists have explored natural psychology for more than two decades, most of us have worked most of the time on architectural psychology. This special issue is one attempt to redress this imbalance. The greening of psychology is long overdue.

We live in a world of shrinking natural resources. The U.N. says that 70% of the world's fisheries are being fished at or beyond their capacity. The last virgin timber in the world is being cut at a furious pace. Almost no-one in the world, even in remote places, breathes entirely fresh air. We must look not merely for new attitudes, but for new worldviews.

The papers in this special issue speak to new worldviews, new ways of investigating person–nature relations, and better ways to manage natural resources. It opens with Stephan Kaplan's latest formulation of attention restoration theory, his view that nature is replete with the features we require for recovery from too much directed attention. Inherently fascinating, nature encourages involuntary attention, a rest-producing experience that eases stress.

The evidence that nature is undergoing widespread change or degradation is unassailable. Still at issue is why. Among the purported perpetrators are technology, capitalism, and Christianity. However, Lawrence Axelrod and Peter Suedfeld argue

that guilt by association is not guilt: that these forces did not cause the decline of nature. Nevertheless, environmental psychology has been overlooked by policy-makers and others as a significant contributor to environmental preservation.

A prime example of the ways in which environmental psychology can help follow. Recycling by now is widely familiar but it still is not as widely practised as it might be. Carol Werner and her colleagues undertook a study of recycling explicitly to show local authorities how to increase recycling. Commitment, they propose, is a psychological process which may reverse the usual assumptions about attitude–behavior links: sometimes behavior changes attitudes.

Yet the traditional view that behavior follows attitudes is alive and well: other environmental psychologists are concerned with improving and specifying the connections between attitudes and behavior. Alexander Grob uses path analysis to describe the possible causal flow from 'green' attitudes to 'green' behavior.

The availability of nature's resources is not always precisely known. In fact, virtually all natural resources have unknown quantities. Often harvesters are unsure about the actions and reactions of others. What is the effect of all this uncertainty? Anders Biel and Tommy Garling consider the consequences of uncertainty for harvesters with various personal characteristics. Their review should stimulate further research about the kinds of harvesters who will cooperate or not in the many commons dilemmas we face.

Finally, Joseph Reser considers ecopsychology, a recent approach to environmental psychology that stems from clinical psychologists who have realized that person–nature transactions may be seen in a manner similar to other significant, personal relationships. Concepts like earth wisdom and spirituality are brought into conjunction with traditional

psychological concepts such as self and sanity. This is the place where poetic environmentalists meet environmental psychologists on level ground, presumably on a leafy commons.

Each of these papers represents a mini-school of natural psychology. This special issue easily could

be double its current size. Indeed, future issues of the Journal will contain articles that deserve a place in this issue but could not be included due to space limitations. The other, green side of environmental psychology is coming to the fore.