

# **Consumerism, Nature, and the Human Spirit**

By

Neal D. Emerald

A major paper submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Natural Resources

David L. Trauger, Chairman  
Gerald H. Cross  
Brett A. Wright  
Steve L. McMullin

Date of Defense: November 2, 2004  
Falls Church, Virginia

Keywords: Consumerism, Sustainability, Human Spirit, Spirituality, Self-  
Actualization

# **Consumerism, Nature, and the Human Spirit**

By

Neal D. Emerald

## **ABSTRACT**

Advertising and marketing have shaped the behavior and psychological profile of the American consumer. Consumerism is at the crux of a number of important issues affecting the nation and the world – creation and maintenance of the false self, spiritual emptiness, detachment from nature, and sustainability. Current levels of consumption are ecologically destructive and unsustainable. Understanding the psychological and spiritual effects of consumerism may be important to reverse the trend of increasing consumption. Opportunities for ecosophical development are key to promoting the behavioral changes necessary to reestablish our connection with nature and address the problems of consumerism and sustainability.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CONSUMERISM	4
Historical Background of Marketing and Advertising	4
Advertising: Creating Consumerism	6
Advertising and Consumerism in the Modern Era	14
Effects of Consumerism	19
Spirituality and Sustainability	24
SPIRITUAL VALUES	27
Recreation and Ecosophy	29
Caring For Spiritual Values	34
BEHAVIORAL CHANGE	36
DISCUSSION	37
CONCLUSION	47
REFERENCES	49
VITA	58

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I recognize the following individuals who provided inspiration, guidance, encouragement, and assistance in the development of my paper: David L. Trauger, Frederick Deneke, Gerald H. Cross, Brett A. Wright, Steve L. McMullin, Herbert Schroeder, Jay McDaniel, and James L. McMahan, Jr.

## INTRODUCTION

With the rise of consumerism, our global society has become increasingly focused on consuming goods and services, as a means to feel good about ourselves and to drive the economies of the world (McKibben, 1989; Suzuki, 1997;). Consumerism affects the individual in a number of ways. Consumerism affects the psychological health of the individual through erosion of the true self and replacing it with a false self, and the spiritual health of the individual by eroding our spiritual connections with nature and replacing it with consumption of goods and services.

The problem of consumerism raises a number of questions. How do the concepts of consumerism and narcissism affect humans? Specifically, how do these concepts contribute to a detachment from nature and loss of spiritual renewal? Ultimately – what are the ramifications for humans psychologically, ecologically, and spiritually? Consumerism is ecologically unsustainable and threatens to destroy the beneficial connection between nature and the human spirit (Berry, 1995; Suzuki, 1997; McDaniel, 2000).

The connections between nature and the human spirit are not well understood (Mannell, 1996; Driver & Azjen, 1996). Researchers are only just beginning to examine this void in our knowledge base. Sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists are starting to conduct much needed research in an attempt to determine how these concepts influence human behavior and the implications for the eco-spiritual health of society

(Mannell, 1996; Driver & Azjen, 1996). As the trend continues with more and more people moving to urban areas (Brown, 2001, p. 189), the potential for detachment from nature and subsequently, a growing lack of ecological awareness threatens our psychological well being (Orr, 1994, p. 131-151). David Suzuki (1997) comments on this: “Ecopsychologists argue that the damage we do to ourselves and our surroundings is caused by our separation from nature” (p. 179).

In order to more closely define the issue, it is important to clearly define consumerism and narcissism. Consumerism is defined as: “The theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is economically beneficial; Attachment to materialistic values or possessions” (Dictionary.com, 2000a). Narcissism is defined as: “A psychological condition characterized by self-preoccupation, lack of empathy, and unconscious deficits in self-esteem. Erotic pleasure derived from contemplation or admiration of one's own body or self, especially as a fixation on or a regression to an infantile stage of development” (Dictionary.com, 2000b).

Psychologist Philip Cushman (1990) described the linkages between narcissism and consumerism. He described recent historical factors such as urbanization, industrialization, and secularization as having developed an American self that bears the dual trademarks of narcissism: appearing “masterful and bounded” on the outside, yet “empty” underneath. Cushman defines this emptiness as the “self experiencing a significant lack of community, tradition, and shared meaning.” This societal change beginning

in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is a result of the transition from a religious to a scientific based culture, from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial-based economy, from a rural setting to an urban setting, and from a focus on community values to the individual (p. 600).

During the post-World War II era, many people moved to large cities to pursue work, many in factories and industries, which in a number of ways reduced their quality of life. Industrial reliance on skilled labor and craftsmen was ebbing with the popularity of assembly line style factories. Companies could pay their workers less as a result. With the trend towards migration to cities, people began to lose contact with their cultural roots: ethnic traditions, family ties, and spiritual foundations, as they adapted to the urban environment. These changes contributed to an emptiness in the self (Cushman, 1990, p. 600).

Cushman argues that the “Post-World War II self yearns to acquire and consume as an unconscious way of compensating for what has been lost: It is empty” (Cushman, 1990, p. 600). While this change in environs and consumer behavior began to accelerate and take hold in the post-World War II era, its origins go back several decades.

It is important to note that the point of this paper is not to label all consumerism as bad or evil. But rather to get people to think about consumerism, its effects on our global society, and to examine the reasons we choose to consume products and resources. Proponents of consumerism believe that the creation of new goods and services “lift people from

drudgery,” give people a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and has the potential to unite people all over the world in a common consumer culture (McDaniel, 2000, p. 145).

This paper will examine the historical foundation of consumerism and explore the psychological and spiritual implications of consumerism with regard to human well being. From there, a discussion of why spiritual values and connection to nature is important to the individual and society, as well as recommendations for change.

## **CONSUMERISM**

### **Historical Background of Marketing and Advertising**

The roots of modern consumerism lie in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, several factors held consumerism at bay, primarily, the dominant value system of organized religion. Several major religions, including Christianity and Buddhism, urged their followers to focus on spiritual goals rather than the acquisition of material goods which interfered with the goal of attaining salvation. Confucianism, the leading belief system of the upper class in China, also rejected consumerism (Stearns, 2001, p 3-5).

With the discovery of products such as sugar, a variety of spices, colorful dyes, and the availability of products such as high fashion clothing, there was a clear increase in demand for these non-essential products. While demand for these products increased, for the most part, it



was still only the wealthier class of individuals that could afford these products (Stearns, 2001, p. 15-23).

During the time period spanning 1800 – 1920, a number of important events in the development of consumerism occurred. In 1830, the first department store opened in Paris. By 1850, large department stores had spread to other major cities in Western Europe and the United States. Additionally, mail order catalogs began to appear and the first advertising agencies were born. A wide variety of imports and consumer goods became available (Stearns, 2001, p. 45-47). These developments, combined with a number of changes in the psychological profile of society, set the stage for the explosion of consumerism that would later begin in the 1920s.

Kanner and Gomes (1995) stated that: “It is far from clear that consumerism occurs naturally or spontaneously in humans” (p. 81).

Christopher Lasch, in *The Culture of Narcissism*, noted that industrial leaders in the United States during the 1920s understood that the desire for non-essential products was so anemic that it required continual promotion and reinforcement:

The American economy, having reached the point where its technology was capable of satisfying basic material needs, now relied on the creation of new consumer demands – on convincing people to buy goods for which they are unaware of any need until the need is forcibly brought to their attention by the mass media (Lasch, 1979, p. 72).

## **Advertising: Creating Consumerism**

It is unknown whether consumerism occurs naturally in humans or has been artificially induced. There is considerable documentation which shows that the media and advertising industry have worked hard over many decades to convince the public of many needs of which they were previously unaware, through a constant barrage of commercials to reinforce those needs.

Creating false needs was not an easy task. Benjamin Hunnicutt described the situation in the following terms:

Consumption was not guaranteed, but it could be promoted. It would be the hard work of investors, marketing experts, advertisers, and business leaders, as well as the spending examples set by the rich that would promote consumption....the business community broke its long concentration on production, introduced the age of mass consumption, founded a new age of progress in an abundant society, and gave life to the advertising industry (Hunnicutt, 1988, p. 42-43).

However, members of the business community were not the only ones responsible for promoting consumption. In 1929, President Herbert Hoover's *Committee on Recent Economic Changes* published information which showed how the U.S. Government was involved in helping the business community perpetuate demand for non-essential products: "...economists have long declared that consumption, the satisfaction of

wants, would expand with little evidence of satiation if we could so adjust our economic processes to make dormant demands effective.” Specifically, the committee reported:

...we now demand a broad list of goods and services which come under the category of ‘optional purchases.’... economically we have a boundless field before us; that there are new wants which will make way endlessly for newer wants, as fast as they are satisfied. By advertising and other promotional devices, by scientific fact finding, by carefully predeveloped consumption, a measurable pull on production has been created which releases capital otherwise tied up in immobile goods.... Our situation is fortunate, our momentum is remarkable (Committee on Recent Economic Changes, 1921 p. 13-17).

Historian W.W. Rostow (1991) corroborates this when he noted: “...in the 1920s, the American economy started to depend for the first time more on increased consumption for growth than on the relatively simple matter of increasing production” (p. 44). Christopher Lasch (1979) noted a statement made by former President Calvin Coolidge who stated: “Advertising is the method by which the desire is created for better things”(p. 72).

“Better things” does not equate to products regarded as necessities. Instead, “Better things” are about societal status and fashion statements. Lasch (1979) described this when he declared:

The attempt to ‘civilize’ the masses has now given rise to a society dominated by appearances – the society of the spectacle. In the period of primitive accumulation, capitalism subordinated being to having, the use value of commodities to their exchange value. Now it subordinates possession itself to appearance and measures exchange value as a commodity’s capacity to confer prestige – the illusion of prosperity and prestige (p. 72).

In other words, the value of products and goods originally was measured by the use of the product to achieve some goal. During the period of *primitive accumulation*, [italics added] an individual’s worth was judged by society by other metrics, such as the individual’s religious faith and involvement with family and community. With the transition to consumer-based metrics of value, merely owning or possessing a product is all that is required to judge the individual’s value or place in society.

Lasch (1979) described the intent of the advertising industry:

In a simpler time, advertising merely called attention to the product and extolled its advantages. Now it manufactures a product of its own: the consumer, eternally unsatisfied, restless, and bored. Advertising serves not so much to advertise

products as to promote consumption as a way of life. It manipulates the masses into an insatiable appetite not only for goods but for new experiences and personal fulfillment, it promotes consumption as the answer to the age old problems of loneliness, illness, weariness, and lack of sexual satisfaction (p. 72).

Lasch (1979) completed this thought by equating this mode of rampant consumerism as “keeping up with the Joneses”:

...the propaganda of consumption turns alienation itself into a commodity. It addresses itself to the spiritual desolation of modern life and proposes consumption as the cure. Do you look dowdy next to your neighbors? Do you own a car inferior to theirs? Are your children as healthy? As popular? Doing as well in school? Advertising institutionalizes envy and attendant anxieties (p. 73).

Another effect of this transition was that consumers began to lose sight of where their products originated. In earlier times, the consumer could see where the product originated in its raw or base form and see and appreciate where it came from. With improvements in transportation, railroads, and shipping, raw materials could be brought to a factory, processed, and then delivered right to the retailer’s shop or the consumer’s doorstep. The distance increased between consumer and the sources of the products they bought. The person who purchased beefsteak from the local

grocer or a kitchen chair at the downtown department store had little connection to the cow or the tree from which the finished product had originated. Nature was being rapidly consumed, but as packaged consumer products nature's bounty has lost much of the reverence it has once enjoyed as the source of life (Kline, 2000, p. 39).

As American society changed gears and shifted from a culture where basic needs and services had been met, to a culture where needs and services can never be met, it is worth noting that it would have been almost impossible for anyone at the time to recognize the significance and scale of the problems this would create or to stop this process. Industry was literally sailing into waters never before explored. The American economy mindset was firmly rooted in concepts of the American Judeo-Christian tradition of dominion over the resources of the earth, manifest destiny, "Over the Next Ridge Syndrome," and the belief that the natural resources of the country were inexhaustible (Nash, 1982; Kline, 2000).

While the origins of mass consumerism were rooted in the early part of the century, it was not until the post-World War II era that consumerism began to find a firm foothold in our culture. The years leading up to World War II were difficult economic times for the country. The Great Depression put the development of consumerism on hold for a short period of time. However, the economic engines required to support the war effort were just what the business community needed in order to reignite the economy. Attempts to mask consumption in patriotic terms positioned consumerism

as a citizen's civic duty. Lizabeth Cohen observed: "Mass consumption in postwar America would not be a personal indulgence, but rather a civic responsibility designed to provide "full employment and improved living standards for the rest of the nation" (Cohen, 2003, p.113).

During and after World War II, workers moved to urban areas to pursue work. They experienced a loss of family, community, and traditions, resulting in an empty self. The response was a self that: "seeks the experience of being continually filled up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathic therapists in an attempt to combat the growing alienation and fragmentation of its era (Cushman, 1990, p. 600).

The plan to increase consumption and fuel the engines of the economy, executed by the business community in partnership with the government, was wildly successful when measured in strict economic terms. However, the negative effects of consumerism on the psychology and spiritual aspects of the self, as well as the ecological impacts of natural resources being consumed at a prodigious rate, tell a different story.

There were few voices to oppose this trend, and at the time, such philosophies were not widely known or accepted. Writers such as Emerson and Thoreau advocated the concepts of transcendentalism – seeking solace and refreshment through contact with nature and ultimately God; in *Nature*, Emerson commented extensively on how the visual elements of nature were

refreshing to the spirit of man. But ultimately, it was the deeper, unseen spiritual aspects of nature, and through nature as God's creation, that allowed one to connect with God and refreshed man's spirit. He noted: "Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us" (Emerson, 1994, p. 24).

In *Walden*, Thoreau rejected materialism and the shackles of civilization while extolling the spiritual virtues of experiencing nature. He had this to say about materialism:

The nation itself, with all of its so called internal improvements, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense... (Thoreau, 1991, p. 75).

Thoreau lived in the woods at Walden for just over two years, his exploration of nature and transcendentalism led to a number of observations about the spiritual aspect of nature:

I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of the human neighborhood insignificant....Every little pine needle expanded and swelled



with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary... (Thoreau, 1991, p. 107).

While Emerson and Thoreau viewed nature through the lens of transcendentalism, Leopold approached the issue from a different angle. Leopold was not a religious man and did not approach the issue strictly from a spiritual standpoint, but from an intellectual standpoint. His writing indicated a deep reverence for nature. When asked by his daughter Estella if he believed in God, he replied that “he believed there was a mystical supreme power that guided the Universe...It was more akin to the laws of nature” (Meine, 1988, p. 506). He commented on the importance of maintaining the biotic integrity of ecosystems (Leopold, 1953, p. 212-213), as well as the need for contact with nature as a means of giving definition and meaning to life (Leopold, 1949, p. 188).

Leopold made the point that an ecological conscience made it possible for the development of an ethical attitude toward nature. This redefines the role of man from having dominion over nature, to a role where man is part of the ecosystem and recognizes the importance of all of the other pieces of the ecosystem. He makes this clear when he states: “It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value” (Leopold, 1949, p. 223). While Leopold recognized the proper role of man

in his environment, he was less optimistic about the time it would take for such cultural and behavioral norms to be achieved. In the essay, *The Ecological Conscience*, he stated:

I have no illusions about the speed or accuracy with which an ecological conscience can become functional. It has required 19 centuries to define decent man-to-man conduct and the process is only half done; it may take as long to evolve a code of decency for man-to-land conduct (Leopold, 1991, p. 345).

### **Advertising and Consumerism in the Modern Era**

Sigurd Olsen (1982), who served on a panel discussing the topic “Urban Growth and Natural Resources,” at a conference sponsored by *Resources For The Future*, made some poignant observations about consumerism:

Ask the average city dweller what he thinks is the ideal life, and what might contribute to his greater happiness, and he will no doubt think of possibly another car, a bigger TV screen, a longer vacation, and less traffic to contend with. Ask him if the American dream means the disappearance of little towns with shady streets, open countrysides, to be replaced by greater and greater industrialization with smoke stacks instead of trees, polluted air instead of the smells of fields and woods, gadgets and labor saving devices replacing simplicity, with the feeling of the out-of-doors in his daily life becoming more and more a

memory, and he will shrug his shoulders and wonder if you are slightly insane. Instead of the old music his forebears listened to, and the rhythms of nature and seasons which regulated their lives, he has listened so long to the drums of the Chambers of Commerce that the American dream has become synonymous with the goal of unlimited exploitation and economic growth (p. 95).

According to *Business Week*, The average U.S. adult is bombarded with 3,000 advertising messages a day (Landler, Konrad, Schiller, & Therrien, 1991). To cultivate consumer needs, advertisers need to create a false image of the ideal consumer. The end result creates not only an impulse to buy, but a “consumer false self” (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p. 82).

Kanner and Gomes (1995) offer the following observation:

Advertisements do not simply exaggerate or distort the truth, they lie. No one’s success in business, athletics, or love ever depended on their toothpaste. Modern marketing techniques rely on the strategy that Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany’s minister of propaganda, called “The Big Lie.” Repeat any falsehood frequently enough, and no matter how absurd it is, people will believe it. Project the image of the totally happy consumer in countless commercials, and the false consumer self

becomes fully internalized as an impossible goal to which Americans 'spontaneously aspire' (p. 83).

They then compare this to narcissism:

...the consumer self is false because it arises from a merciless distortion of authentic human needs and desires. From our understanding of narcissism we know that a false self is formed when a child attends to external demands and rewards in order to obtain parental approval and love. When these external pressures conflict with the child's own feelings, these feelings are ignored, until the child comes to believe that the parents' wishes are her or his own. In a similar fashion, American children come to internalize the messages they see in the media and in society at large. They learn to substitute what they are told to want – mounds of material possessions – for what they truly want (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p. 83).

Corporations have worked hard to create a fascination with acquisition of the latest and greatest commodities. In 1990, 12,055 new products were introduced to American drugstores and supermarkets alone, a rate of thirty-three per day, many of them indistinguishable from one another except for packaging. The ecological impacts of manufacturing, transporting, marketing, packaging, and storing so many items is incredibly high (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p. 84).

Modern advertising promotes an almost “religious belief” among Americans and those who subscribe to the New Age/Aquarian Conspiracy paradigm described in *Deep Ecology* (DeVall & Sessions, 1985, p. 5). Adherents to this paradigm believe that rapid advancements in technology will allow us to address any environmental issue. As a result, consumption is never a problem. Advertising claims that there is a product to solve each of life’s problems. By implication, material solutions can supplant social, psychological, and spiritual ones, and the cumulative output of multinational corporations represents the pinnacle of all human accomplishment (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p. 84).

In his book, *How Much is Enough*, Alan Durning (1992) describes television advertising :

The barrage of sales spiels is so intense in the consumer society that people actually remember few ads. Yet commercials have an effect nonetheless. Even if they fail to sell a particular product, they sell consumerism itself by ceaselessly reiterating the idea that there is a product to solve each of life’s problems, indeed that existence would be satisfying and complete if only we had bought the right things. Advertisers thus cultivate needs by hitching their wares to the infinite yearnings of the human soul (p. 119).

The proliferation of personal computers, communication devices, and all sorts of multimedia, further complicate the subject by adding many new

products and services to be desired and purchased. The pace of technological advancement requires a never ending cycle of “keeping up with the Joneses,” which further exacerbates the cycle of consumerism. The cost of attempting to maintain such a pace of acquisition is unhealthy, economically and psychologically. *The San Francisco Chronicle* published an article which described the growing number of Americans who earn over \$100,000 annually but cannot make ends meet. By making ends meet, they refer to maintaining a standard of living that the rest of the world defines as luxurious. Many in the six figure bracket spend all of their income each month. These Americans, whose earnings are in the top 4 percent of the country, illustrate how deeply entrenched is the consumer false self (Glink, 1993, p. 5). The advertising industry has created needs so compelling that the wealthiest individuals in the most affluent country in the world continually scramble to increase their ability to consume products and services.

In this rush-to-riches consumer mentality, people are not achieving a higher level of happiness – indeed, the opposite is happening. In the article, *Are We Happy Yet?*, Durning (1995) makes the point:

Psychological evidence shows that the relationship between happiness and personal consumption is weak. Worse – two primary sources of human fulfillment – social relations and leisure – appear to have withered or stagnated in the rush to riches. Thus many in the consumer society have a sense that

their world of plenty is somehow hollow – that, hoodwinked by a consumerist culture, they have been fruitlessly attempting to satisfy with material things what are essentially social, psychological, and spiritual needs (p. 69).

### **Effects of Consumerism**

It is well documented that the depletion of resources and environmental degradation is directly related to consumption of goods and services (Brown, 2001; Brower & Leon, 1999; Gardner & Stern, 2002). Indeed, the United States leads the world in amount of materials consumed per capita (Gardner, Assadourian, & Sarin, 2004, p. 6-9).

In *Ecopsychology*, Kanner and Gomes (1995) offer a startling view of human behavior. The authors assert that unbridled consumerism is the cause of our environmental woes. In the beginning of the chapter, the authors recount an event from the 1992 global environmental summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil:

Representatives from several third world countries approached President George Bush to ask him to consider reducing the consumption habits of the United States. They contend that a major cause of the current ecological crisis was the enormous demand for consumer goods emanating from the United States and other industrialized nations. Moreover, it seemed unfair to them that they should be asked to manage their natural resources in a more sustainable manner – often to the detriment

of the short-term interests of their economy – while relatively minor concessions were being asked of the richer industrialized nations. Bush’s reply was terse and to the point: “The American way of life is not up for negotiation” (p. 77-78).

This idea of the American way of life is one in which we consume far more natural resources per capita than any other nation in the world (Gardner, Assadourian, & Sarin, 2004, p. 6-9). This shows no sign of abating. Americans, caught up in the cycle of acquisition of material goods, want more and more, and there is no end in sight. Author Paul Wachtel (1989) makes the following assessment: “The idea of more, of ever increasing wealth, has become the center of our identity and our security, and we are caught by it as the addict is by his drugs”(p. 71).

First world consumer habits are one of the two most serious environmental issues in the world today. Alan Durning (1992) states:

Only population growth rivals consumption as a cause of ecological decline, and at least population growth is now viewed as a problem by many governments and citizens of the world. Consumption, in contrast, is almost universally seen as a good – indeed, increasingly it is the primary goal of national economic policy (p. 21).

This clearly illustrates, the degree to which consumerism is deeply ingrained into our culture. As the population continues to grow, under the current consumer mindset, consumption, and its deleterious effect on our



natural resources will continue to increase (Brown, 2001; Brower & Leon, 1999; Gardner & Stern, 2002). Population growth and consumption are directly linked. The larger the population, the more people there will be consuming products.

Ecologist David Orr and theologian Jay McDaniel refer to the writing of Ernest Becker, who characterized consumerism as: “Modern man is drinking and drugging himself out of awareness, or he spends his time shopping, which is the same thing” (Becker, 1973, p. 284).

McDaniel takes this further and redefines the process of consumerism:

As a religion, consumerism is even more powerful than scientism, and its influence holds sway in many circles that are antagonistic or indifferent to science. We might characterize the religion as follows. Its god is economic growth for its own sake; its priests are the public policy makers who provide access to growth; its evangelists are the advertisers who display the products of growth and try to convince us that we cannot be happy without them; and its church is the shopping mall. Its primary creeds are “bigger is better” and “more is better” and “faster is better” and “you can have it all.” Its doctrine of creation is that the earth is real estate to be bought and sold in the marketplace. Its doctrine of human existence is that we are skin-encapsulated egos, cut off from the world by

the boundaries of our skin. And its doctrine of salvation is that we are saved – or made whole – not by grace through faith as Christians claim or by wisdom through letting go as Buddhists claim, but by appearance, affluence, and marketable achievement (McDaniel, 2002, p. 1462-1463).

The effects of all of this are that individuals are caught in a cycle of acquisition, leading to the creation and maintenance of a false-self, and a continuance of economic policies that further depletion of our natural resources and the spread of pollution, and ultimately, an erosion of our spiritual connections with nature.

Whenever the issue of consumerism is discussed, invariably the discussion drifts to the idea that individuals and society will have to lower its standard of living – that we will have to make many sacrifices to “do without.” The problem here is that the people are judging their standard of living based on the precepts of consumerism. Paul Wachtel (1989) says it best:

The image of belt tightening is one that issues from within our present set of assumptions; it equates conservation, recycling, and fewer gadgets with having ‘less.’ A psychologically oriented notion of ‘standard of living’ has quite different implications. It suggests that altering our present way of life does not really mean settling for less. It encourages us to think

not of what we are giving up but of new opportunities along a different dimension, which may be more satisfying (p. 143).

If consumerism is contrasted with the precepts of Deep Ecology, viewed as two opposing paradigms residing at opposite ends of a spectrum, the challenge then is to get individuals to begin to take a few steps down the spectrum in the direction of Deep Ecology. Those that have altered their behavior, consumed less, and explored spiritually more fulfilling aspects of life and existence, report that their life is more satisfying and rewarding, than a life measured by how many material goods one owns (Gilman, 1990).

Globally, consumption is directly linked to population growth. As more and more people are born, the need for resources to support these individuals increases, and the market for those who manufacture, market, and sell products and services continues to increase. In the 2004 edition of the *State of the World*, published by The WorldWatch Institute, the authors note: “The United Nations Population Division projects that the world population will increase 41 percent by 2050, to 8.9 billion people” (Gardner, Assadourian, & Sarin, 2004, p. 5).

Because of increases in population, gains that we may have made in reducing consumption will be nullified due to increased demand for natural resources. It is even more important that we find ways to alter the way we conduct ourselves at a global level. The transition to an ecologically

sustainable model will be one of the most difficult challenges humanity has faced.

### **Spirituality and Sustainability**

Traditionally, the issue of spirituality and sustainability have been debated by politicians, psychologists, philosophers, and scientists (Gore, 1992; Kanner and Gomes, 1995; Naess, 1989; Orr, 2002). Because of the environmental linkages, environmental professionals have been drawn into the discussion. The wildlife management profession is beginning to examine the linkages between consumerism, environment, and spirituality. In a recent paper presented to The Wildlife Society, entitled: *The Relationship of Economic Growth to Wildlife Conservation*, the authors state: “A small but growing ‘voluntary simplicity’ movement, comprised of secular and religious groups who oppose American-style consumption patterns for environmental, social justice, quality of life, and spiritual reasons may be a first step toward reversing patterns of increasing consumption”(Trauger et al., 2003, p. 5). This is synonymous with concepts such as Deep Ecology, and other branches of growing ecological awareness which are defined by ecocentric ethics and values.

Spirituality, or lack thereof, is the key. As a concept, spirituality provides the foundation for decisions on how we conduct our lives. It affects the choices we make in all facets of life, including decisions we make on consuming products and resources. Current rates of consumption are ultimately unsustainable, both spiritually and ecologically (Berry,

1995; Suzuki, 1997; McDaniel, 2000). Spiritually, where does this leave us? Many people in urban areas are caught up in a continual cycle of consumerism. They are so engaged in making money and then spending it – that other considerations are secondary. They do not understand or appreciate the natural world or the issues facing it. Contact with nature fades. This detachment is dangerous both ecologically and spiritually. We are nearing a point in the history of the planet where we may exceed the resources of the planet and plunge into a period of ecological catastrophe, the extent of which we cannot even begin to fathom.

David Orr (2002) alludes to this possibility in his article, *The Four Challenges of Sustainability*, he maintains that we will eventually transition to a sustainable society, the question is whether we will do so gracefully and in a controlled manner, or due to an ecological event resulting from unsustainable consumption. Orr refers to *spiritual emptiness* to describe one of the reasons we may fail to gracefully make this transition. He describes this spiritual emptiness as a condition brought on by a barrage of events that threaten to overwhelm us, and the numbing effect that cumulatively all of this has on the human psyche. Orr describes a total of four challenges related to sustainability, the fourth one is the one he calls the “most difficult challenge of all.” He describes the need to understand and address divergent problems, which he equates to a higher level of spiritual awareness. Orr argues that the heart of this higher level of awareness is one that honors mystery, science, life, and death (p. 1459).

Orr is saying that traditional scientific and economic methods are insufficient to meet the challenges of addressing the issues of sustainability. What is needed is an approach that uses a combination of science and traditional metrics, but is greatly expanded to include a number of qualitative components, with an emphasis on spiritual awareness.

Lynn White (1967) had similar ideas when he stated:

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one (p. 1206).

While Orr and White approached the issue from one of religion and spirituality, conservation biologist Brian Czech advocated a steady state economy in which we transform the unsustainable nature of our economic system to an ecologically sustainable model. Czech argues that meaningful steady state policies will require broad public support and suggests that a “social, psychological program” will help to transform public opinion (Czech, 2000, p.179). Trauger et al. (2003) expanded on this further from the standpoint of establishment of a “more stable, sustainable economy.” Specifically, they stated:

Because the public values wildlife, this is an achievable goal if the public fully understands the fundamental conflict between economic growth and wildlife conservation. Realistically, the

public values human welfare more than wildlife conservation. Relating the steady state economy to increased human welfare is the key to societal acceptance and wildlife conservation (p. 18).

This will be difficult to achieve given the current norms by which society and our economic model are based, and by which consumers measure their lives. But we must attempt to do so - if we are to get to this steady state economy, the change will be due to changes in individual assumptions that are derived from changes in behavior – that flow from the development of a more spiritual approach to life. Ultimately, this means we must all consume less and be cognizant of what we consume, why we consume, and the resultant impacts on the global ecosystem.

If we are to avoid this ecological catastrophe, we must work to move the global society as a whole in a direction which allows for the exploration of spiritual values, and all of the resultant spiritual and ecological benefits derived therein.

### **SPIRITUAL VALUES**

The process of restoring the individual has received many labels: restoring the self, refreshing the soul, renewing the human spirit. It is important to understand these labels are different names for the same concept; they are different ways of saying the same thing.

Humans have a need to feel nurtured and fulfilled through an understanding of their contribution to society and/or a sense of community

and belonging (Cushman, 1990, p. 600). Healthy long-term processes for nurturing these values are essential. Thoreau (1991) sensed mankind's need when he said:

We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features.... the wilderness with its living and decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander (p. 255).

Elsner, Lewis, Snell, & Spitzer (1996) define the importance of renewal of the human spirit:

...renewal of the human spirit is important for the individual to enjoy a full life and to be a productive member of society, for the members of a family to regain their vigor, motivation and interests in the family unit, and for members of the community and the nation to maintain a long-term productive role as economic agents and as socially responsible citizens (p. 11).

Humans can find the rich, rewarding, and enduring fulfillment of the self through exploration of nature. This process includes an awareness and understanding of the concepts of consumerism and how this affects us as individuals. Relief can be found in the pursuit of connectivity with nature as the solution to the problems of the false self.



## **Recreation and Ecosophy**

Spiritually and environmentally, society would benefit tremendously from development and integration of an *Ecosophy* into our belief system. *Ecosophy*, is a term which denotes a much broader understanding of ecological concepts, including ethics, norms, rules, and practices, toward nature, into one's collective conscience. Many outdoor recreation activities are appropriate mechanisms for facilitating ecosophical exploration.

The term *ecosophy* was introduced by Arne Naess in 1973 at an ecophilosophy talk given at a conference in Eastern Europe on the future of research. He coined the word from two ancient Greek roots, *ecos* - meaning home place, and *sophia* - meaning wisdom. Naess used the term to refer to any articulated philosophy of life in harmony with ecocentric values (Naess, 1995, p. 155). Pursuing an ecosophy is searching for ecologically wise and harmonious living. There are multitudes of diverse ecosophies (Drengson, 1997). The term *Deep Ecology* was also coined by Naess in an article entitled: *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements* (Naess, 1995, p. 151-155). In this article, Naess articulated the deep, spiritual approach to nature contained in the writings of conservationists such as Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. Ecosophy is at times used interchangeably with the term Deep Ecology. Naess calls his own personal philosophy - *Ecosophy T*. It is based on the norm, "Self-realization for all beings" (Drengson, 2001). What Naess is advocating through self-realization is, careful introspection into the nature of one's

self, and more specifically, what he refers to as the *ecological self*. This provides the opportunity to explore and develop one's own ecosophy.

Sharon Montes (1996), makes an observation that directly links spirituality to health and incorporates the idea of an ecosophy as a central theme:

...relatively little scientific research relates spirituality to health, leaving room for speculation about those relationships. First, it makes sense to me that a person who has a set of core values that go beyond ego gratification and whose life is directed largely by those values will also by definition have a mentally and physically healthy lifestyle as connoted by words that are key to these systems of belief such as inner peace, balance, respect for all forms of life, and living in harmony (p. 114).

Outdoor recreation is an important mechanism for developing an understanding and respect of healthy ecosystems. Most outdoor recreation relies on unpolluted, functioning ecosystems. To pursue these activities allows one to begin the journey of self-discovery and ecological awareness. In *Deep Ecology*, Bill Devall and William Sessions (1985) underscore the importance of outdoor recreation in developing a sense of place:

Some of the activities which are especially useful, include in our estimation, if done with the *proper attitude* [italics added], include fishing, hunting, surfing, sun bathing, kayaking,

canoeing, sailing, mountain climbing, hang gliding, skiing, running, bicycling, and bird watching. There is a very large body of literature coming from people who have participated in some of these activities, especially, mountain climbing and fishing, which attest to the possibilities for developing a sense of place and intuitive understanding of the connections between humans and nonhumans together with a respect for the principle of biocentric equality (p. 188).

Goodale and Godbey (1996) further this idea in their promotion of leisure as the mechanism “for nature-based experiences and values that lend deep and enduring psychological essence to human life”:

...includes moral and ethical aspects of resources, higher aspects of mind, ascendancy of higher emotions, refinement of thought and feeling, sense of place, cognitive and emotional responses, appreciation of life forms, recognition of intrinsic values, introspection, devotion, reverence, respect, wonder, awe, mystery, and inspiration. All of this language appears in discussions of leisure since leisure is an ideal, existential, transcendent, and rooted in philosophy and religion (p. 97).

It is important to emphasize that merely participating in these activities does not equal development of an ecosophy. Efforts need to be made to stress the importance of each individual’s unique spiritual exploration coupled with these activities. Environmental literature from a

variety of notable writers including Emerson, Thoreau, Marsh, Muir, Leopold, and others is an excellent place to start the intellectual exploration of the spiritual aspects of ecosophical development. The deep, spiritual ideas articulated by these and other authors should create opportunities for questioning and introspection, assisting the individual in ecosophical development.

Exploration of nature-based art, poetry, and music also provide opportunities for the individual to explore in this journey of self-realization. Art, poetry, and music have ways of connecting one to nature in intangible ways that provoke intense emotion and joy. Emerson (1994) penned a number of poems exploring the connections between nature and God (p. 1) and discussed at length the importance of poets and poetry in praise of the natural world (p. 161-177). Early American artists from the Hudson River School such as Thomas Cole and Frederic Edwin Church embraced the transcendental ideals articulated by Emerson, Thoreau, and others and their paintings were inspired by those ideals. Artists such as Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt created such moving and inspiring paintings of the landscapes of Yellowstone and Yosemite that people were moved to protect them (Nash, 1982, p. 78-83). More recent artists, such as nature photographer Ansel Adams, embrace the transcendentalist philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau and attempt to communicate this through their art (Dayton Art Institute, 1999). Experiencing and feeling

such art can be a pleasurable and valuable experience in the journey of ecosophical development.

It is interesting to note that back in the 1920s, the concept of recreation, more commonly referred to as 'leisure,' at the time, was also looked upon as a means for furthering consumerism. President Hoover's *Committee on Recent Economic Changes* presented the following summary:

It was during the period covered by the survey (the 1920s) that the conception of leisure as 'consumable' began to be realized upon in business in a practical way and on a broad scale. It began to be recognized, not only that leisure is consumable but that people cannot consume leisure without consuming goods and services... (Committee on Recent Economic Changes, 1921, p. xvi).

This is still true today. There is a plethora of products for the consumer pursuing outdoor recreation activities. Indeed, recreation activities such as backpacking, rock climbing, fishing, and hunting present the consumer with an endless array of gadgets and gear choices. It is then important to insure we closely examine our recreational activities and attendant gear needs in order to insure we are not part of the problem. Every time a new piece of gear is introduced or improved, do we really need to purchase this? The issue is the quantity of each item. Does the hunter really need or use the 35 rifles and shotguns in his gun cabinet? Does the angler really need or use the 20 rods in his collection? What are

the ecological impacts of manufacturing and consuming more recreational equipment than we need? These are questions the recreationist should consider. Aldo Leopold recognized the dangers of consumerism when he declared:

I have the impression that the American Sportsman is puzzled; he doesn't understand what is happening to him. Bigger and better gadgets are good for industry, so why not for outdoor recreation? It has not dawned on him that outdoor recreations are essentially primitive, atavistic; that their value is a contrast-value; that excessive mechanization destroys contrasts by moving the factory to the woods or the marsh (Leopold, 1949, p. 181).

### **Caring For Spiritual Values**

For many years, public land managers have understood that people visit parks and forests in order to get close to nature and to renew themselves. The question then becomes, what does this mean with regard to management of land and recreation opportunities so that these spiritual needs can be realized?

Some might assume that managing resources in order to facilitate the renewal of the human spirit applies only to wilderness and other pristine environments. However, because of the tremendous growth of urban/suburban areas, many people receive their spiritual renewal from nature-based areas such as trails, parks, interpretive/environmental

education areas, and recreation facilities (Elsner et al., 1996, p. 11). In *The Significance of Urban Trees and Forests: Toward A Deeper Understanding of Values*, the authors note: “Our research suggests this area [Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois] is capable of providing many of the experiences people often associate with wilderness (Dwyer, Schroeder, & Gobster, 1991, p. 18).

In *Spirit of the Forest: Integrating Spiritual Values into Natural Resource Management and Research*, Schroeder (1996) defines spiritual values as: “...refers to the experience of being related to an ‘other’ that is larger or greater than oneself and that gives meaning to one’s life at a deeper than intellectual level”(p. 295). It is worth noting that Schroeder’s definition does not attempt to include a methodology for measuring spiritual values. The intangibility and infinite variation of what constitutes spiritual values is beyond our current scope or capability to quantify or qualify.

Most religions identify this *other* as a supernatural deity or God. However, for many, *other* is a natural entity such as a tree, the earth, wilderness, or the universe. Some psychologists now believe that human beings have a basic need for this kind of experience. Spirituality, in one form or another, appears to be a natural function of the human mind and plays an important role in psychological health and well being (Schroeder, 1996, p. 295).

Famed conservation biologist Edward O. Wilson believes that we have an innate connection with nature that he calls *Biophilia*. He defines Biophilia as the tendency to want to focus on life and life-like processes. Wilson draws a direction connection between nature and the human spirit:

I will make the case that to explore and affiliate with life is a deep and complicated process in mental development. To an extent still undervalued in philosophy and religion, our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises from it currents (Wilson, 1984, p. 1).

### **BEHAVIORAL CHANGE**

Behavioral change is a slow process, particularly at the societal level. A better understanding of human behavior can aid in our struggle to address these issues. However, while it is important to define and understand these problems in a scientific context, we must not limit our ability to solve these problems through a rigid, science-is-the-only-answer approach. As David Orr (2002) describes, “human problems such as those posed by the transition to sustainability are not solved by rational means alone.... divergent problems can be resolved only by higher methods of wisdom, love, compassion, understanding, and empathy” (p. 1459).

Much earlier, Leopold (1949) articulated similar arguments – in his discussion of *The Land Pyramid*, he states:

An ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a



biotic mechanism. We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in (p. 214).

Gardner and Assadourian (2004) outline what they believe is required to reverse consumption and ecological decline, as well as the problems Kline described earlier regarding the loss of connectedness to where products originate:

People in a well being society would also develop close relationships with the natural environment. They would recognize the trees in their parks and the flowers in their yards as easily as they identify corporate logos. They would understand the environmental foundations of their economic activity: where their water comes from, where their garbage goes, and whether coal, nuclear, or renewable energy runs the power plant that generates their electricity. They would likely enjoy developing projects at home that help them to live more intimately with nature – a rain catching cistern, for example or a compost bin or vegetable garden. In short, they would learn to love nature and to become advocates for it (p. 178).

## **DISCUSSION**

We must attempt to change our global society. Behavioral change can take long periods of time to manifest. If we do not achieve the changes necessary to address the challenges of spirituality and sustainability and

move the human race forward – gracefully - it may very well be decided for us, in what will be in all likelihood, an extremely unpleasant period of human culture and evolution. It is no longer acceptable to conduct business as usual (Brown, 2003, p. 19). Long standing precepts need to be carefully scrutinized and set aside if they are barriers to societal change.

There is no single remedy for the spiritual ills brought on by consumerism and the resulting detachment from nature. A broad range of solutions should be implemented to ensure maximum benefit to the global society's collective spiritual state and the ecological health of the planet.

The challenges before us are formidable. Given the current structure of our economic and political institutions, overcoming the inertia of these establishments is critical if we are to move forward. It all begins with the beliefs of the individual. We must find ways to enable individuals to explore their spirituality and develop an ecosophy through a wide variety of mechanisms.

In order to begin the healing process, ideally, behavioral and lifestyle changes must be central to the healing process. Proponents of the Deep Ecology paradigm have many things to say in regard to this process in terms of how one can live an ecologically harmonious life.

With this ecocentric approach in mind, the goal of behavioral and lifestyle change should have at its core, two essential objectives:

(1) To be cognizant of the purchases we make, the process we used to determine why and how we need or desire a product, what are the ecological costs to the planet for manufacturing the product, and how the product ultimately affects our lives. The goal here is not to label all consumption as bad or evil, but rather to illuminate the process we use to determine how and why we acquire goods, and the effect of that product on our lives. Individuals should spend some time considering whether they really need a product and why the purchase is needed.

(1) Development of an ecosophy or *ecosophical* approach to one's life, which incorporates the necessary elements for spiritual fulfillment. This may include pursuit of traditional western-based Judeo-Christian religious belief systems, through a variety of eastern-based or progressive philosophies, or the many shades of the Deep Ecology movement. The objective here is to build a framework that incorporates ecocentric values for long-term psychological and spiritual health and fulfillment.

These two objectives have a number of linkages. While the cognitive aspect of the first objective tends toward examination of our thought process with regard to consumerism, the natural evolution of this process leads the individual to ask other questions about the nature of consumerism and subsequently, its environmental effects. If pursuit of the first objective does not proceed beyond the issue of the effects of consumerism, pursuit of the second objective will ultimately allow one to discover the relationship between the two.

Kanner and Gomes (1995) offer some suggestions for the psychology profession to use in implementing treatments for people who need help in escaping “narcissistic-consumerism” tendencies. This consists of a three step process that (1) challenges the lies of the false self; (2) assists with containing the pain that emerges upon the dissolution of the false self; and (3) identify and nurture dormant qualities of the self that flourish when connected with the natural world. Many forms of pleasure that have been numbed by urban living, from bodily to perceptual to aesthetic to spiritual, come back to life in natural settings. (p. 88-91).

People have traditionally equated natural settings with forests, parks, and wilderness. While sojourns in these settings would be an ideal place for such spiritual exploration and refreshment, people should not have to leave the city to find opportunities to refresh themselves in nature. Research has shown that many opportunities for psychological refreshment are available in urban settings (Dwyer, Schroeder, & Gobster, 1991, p. 18-22).

These recommendations for spiritual exploration and renewal have common ground with earlier psychology research. In the late 1960s, psychologist Abraham Maslow used the term “self-actualization” to refer to the process of growth, specifically, that self-actualizing people develop a capacity for “peak experiences” in which the individual sense of self is transcended or extended to include a feeling of identity with a larger reality (Schroeder, 1996, p. 82).

Most human cultures can trace back to a time when their culture, their societies, placed tremendous spiritual and/or religious value on trees and other special places (Dwyer, Schroeder, & Gobster, 1991, p. 22). It appears as if this feeling, has somehow ingrained itself into the human psyche and is therefore part of us. The outdoors, the natural world, is therefore an excellent place to pursue this healing through experiential activities. This is an opportunity to employ the ecopsychology profession, natural resource and recreation managers, and environmental groups to educate consumers and provide avenues for spiritual exploration.

The phenomenon of consumerism, sustainability, and spirituality are inextricably linked, requiring a multi-faceted approach on many levels to address the many environmental problems we now face. The individual should ask critical, introspective questions about the need for products and material goods in one's life. The individual should think critically about the intent of commercials and the information and reports distributed by for-profit interests with the goal of reducing unnecessary consumption. The individual should spend time thinking about the long-term effects of consumption on our ecosystem and consider what we are passing on to future generations. The individual should open and maintain an ongoing dialogue about these issues with their community. The individual should practice other habits that reduce our impact on the environment - practice the 3 R's – reduce, recycle, and reuse. The individual should get involved in community efforts to protect and maintain the ecological health of the

local ecosystem. These efforts, collectively, will help the individual develop the kind of ecosophical foundation that is needed going forward for a healthier future.

The transition to a sustainable society will require a major improvement in the level of, and quality of participation of the citizenry of the world in their respective societal organizations and government institutions to address issues of consumerism, environmental quality, and ecological sustainability. Governments closely scrutinized by a thoughtful, ethical, organized, involved citizenry will be empowered to implement the kind of changes necessary to improve the quality of life for all.

Governments, need to find ways to address divergent problems by changing the way in which they approach problems. Rational thought and logic will be insufficient alone to allow governments and society to move beyond the problems of consumerism, ecological sustainability, and our resultant detachment from nature. Incorporating higher methods of wisdom, love, compassion, understanding, and empathy, in other words, a higher level of spiritual awareness, will allow us to find solutions to address these difficult issues.

The scientific community needs to overcome its trepidation about spirituality and find ways to embrace this concept. Orr states:

Scientists in a secular culture are often uneasy about matters of spirit, but science on its own can give no reason for sustaining humankind. It can, with equal rigor create the knowledge that

will cause our demise....the spiritual acumen necessary to solve divergent problems posed by the transition to sustainability cannot be achieved with a return to some simplistic religious faith of an earlier time. It must be founded on a higher order of awareness that honors mystery, science, life, and death (Orr, 2002, p. 1459).

David Suzuki (1997) further expands on the gap between spirituality and science:

...by attempting to observe fragments of nature objectively and without emotion, scientists extirpate the passion and love that piqued their curiosity in the first place, often to discover that they have so objectified the focus of their attention that they no longer care. Severed from historical and local context, scientific endeavor becomes an activity carried out in a void – a story that has lost its meaning, its purpose and its ability to touch and inform (p. 18-19).

Ecologist Paul Ehrlich sums it up:

I am convinced that a quasi-religious movement, one concerned with the need to change the values that now govern much of human activity, is essential to the persistence of our civilization. But agreeing that science, even the science of ecology, cannot answer all questions – that there are other “ways of knowing” – does not diminish the absolutely critical

role that good science must play if our over-extended civilization is to save itself (Ehrlich, 1986, p. 17-18).

Local, regional, state, and national land and recreation managers should continue to focus on offering recreational, experiential, nature-based learning opportunities to expose children to positive outdoor experiences and to lay the foundation for a lifelong affinity for nature. However, a major change should be made to these programs to add significant emphasis on the spiritual aspects of this exploration and discussion of what it means to develop an ecosophy.

These are values that recreation and land managers can identify in planning and management design processes. Philosopher Holmes Rolston (1996) states: "...a forest wilderness elicits cosmic questions. One of the obligations of landscape managers is to preserve nature as a sanctuary for these spiritual experiences" (p. 22). These experiences need to come as early in life as possible. Exposing children to nature at an early age builds a fascination, love, and respect for the natural world, while building their understanding of the complexities of ecosystems.

Pushp Deep Pandey reinforces this idea:

Children have an inherent desire to run after butterflies, love beautiful birds and wild places, and want to make friends with elephants and tigers. Parents know all too well how easily a child can persuade them to spend money on an aquarium teeming with a variety of fish. Dogs, cats, and parrots are all-



time favorites. Children enjoy dragonfly pond restoration programs, are fascinated by large animals in zoos and prefer to play in yards full of flowers and butterflies. Children also learn by being in the company of nature (Pandey, 2003).

K.R Young in *Conservation Biology* advises involving children in nature early on: “the sustainable use of natural resources....requires an intimate knowledge of biological and physical realities” (Young, 2002, p. 855-856).

Psychologist Theodore Roszak recommends using this child-like sense of wonder as a vehicle for healing:

For ecopsychology as for other therapies, the crucial stage of development is the life of the child. The ecological unconscious is regenerated, as if it were a gift, in the newborn's enchanted sense of the world. Ecopsychology seeks to recover the child's innately animistic quality of experience in functionally ‘sane’ adults. To do this, it turns to many sources, among them traditional healing techniques of primary people, nature mysticism as expressed in religion and art, the experience of wilderness, the insights of Deep Ecology. Thus, for example, Wordsworth’s hymns to the child’s love of nature are basic texts for developmental ecopsychology, a first step toward creating the ecological ego (Roszak, 1998).

Education is an important vehicle for positioning individuals so that they have the opportunity to experience nature in all its forms and as a foundation for a lifetime of intellectual and spiritual exploration and ecosophical development.

School systems, both public and private, should develop cross-curriculum programs across all grade levels, integrating math, science, and literature - into an exploration of ecology through field trips, homework assignments, and exploration of the environmental classics, with the goal of providing opportunities for self actualization, spiritual exploration, and what it means to develop an ecosophy.

At all levels, recreation and land managers should incorporate frameworks into management plans which encourage the individual to explore self-actualization. Because of the opportunities offered in nature for self-actualization and the large amount of land owned by local and state governments and the federal government, it flows naturally that an integral component of land management plans should be mechanisms for individuals and collectively - our society - to develop an ecosophy. Many opportunities exist for federal agencies such as the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service to further incorporate self actualization goals into recreation and land management planning.

This is a difficult concept as it goes beyond the boundaries of traditional natural resources management and planning. Traditional methods required that values be measured or quantified. Due to the

intangible nature of spiritual values, measuring or quantifying spiritual values is not possible. Spiritual values differ from person to person, and vary greatly from culture to culture, due to a wide range of external influences spanning cultural, historical, religious, sociological domains. On a larger scale, we as a society, as a world society, need to evolve a much stronger sense of stewardship. Our global ecosystem cannot withstand the continuing assault indefinitely (Brown, 2001, p. 7-14).

### **CONCLUSION**

Consumerism has affected global society in many ways. It has been designed and manipulated as a means to feel good about ourselves with a cyclical mechanism requiring constant attention and reinforcement through regular consumption. Along the way, consumerism has a profound impact on the psychology of the individual, contributing to the development of an unsatisfying false self and eroding our spiritual connection with nature. Ultimately, consumerism has evolved into a mechanism which threatens to overwhelm the global ecosystem with its ecologically unsustainable nature.

The challenges before human kind are formidable. Addressing the issue of education will be an important area for changing behaviors that feed consumerism and force us to face the ultimate challenge of sustainability. Historically, the upper class of society, individuals who have satisfied their needs on the first four levels of Maslow's Hierarchy, have been the ones afforded the luxury of contemplating and exploring philosophical and spiritual issues and questions. In order to empower the

largest number of people to explore these possibilities, we need to find ways to help satisfy the more basic human needs and position individuals at the portal of self actualization/self realization.

If we are to move forward as a species, we need to find ways to protect and conserve our resources. A global approach then is needed with more and more individuals developing an ecosophy. Anthropocentric approaches are no longer acceptable. We must begin to transition to an ecocentric view of the planet. These issues reach deep into the roots of our current economic and political infrastructure and will not be changed quickly. Our current measures for economic growth and output are short-sighted and ever increasing levels of consumption ultimately will lead to some sort of major undesirable ecological event.

However, the need remains for nurturing and development of the true self through a voyage of self-discovery that leads to the process of self-actualization, the journey of spiritual exploration and renewal of the human spirit for which we humans constantly strive, the development of an ecosophy, and the healing it brings from the hollow ravages of consumerism.

## References

- Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York, NY: Free Press Paperbacks.
- Berry, T. (1995). The Viable Human. In G. Sessions (Ed.) *Deep ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Brower, M. & Leon, W. (1999). *The consumer's guide to effective environmental choices: Practical advice from the Union of Concerned Scientists*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- Brown, L.R. (2001). *Eco-Economy: building an economy for the earth*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Brown, L.R. (2003). *Plan B: Rescuing a planet under stress and a civilization in trouble*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Cohen, L. (2003). *A consumer's republic: The politics of mass consumption in postwar America*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Committee on Recent Economic Changes. (1921). *Recent Economic Changes in the United States*. Retrieved June 20, 2004 from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cool:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(lg38T000\)\)::bibLink=r?ammem/coolbib%3A@field\(NUMBER+@band\(amrlg+lg38\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cool:@field(DOCID+@lit(lg38T000))::bibLink=r?ammem/coolbib%3A@field(NUMBER+@band(amrlg+lg38)))

Cushman, P. (1990). Why the self is empty: toward a historically situated psychology. *American Psychologist*, 45, 599-611.

Czech, B. (2000). *Shoveling fuel for a runaway train: Errant economists, shameful spenders, and a plan to stop them all*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Dayton Art Institute/Traditional Fine Arts Organization. (1999). *In praise of nature: Ansel Adam and photographers of the American west*, Retrieved August 20, 2004 from <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/1aa/1aa3.htm>

Devall, B. & Sessions, G. (1985). *Deep ecology: Living as if nature mattered*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Books.

Dictionary.com. (2000a). Definition of consumerism. Retrieved March 30, 2004 from <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=consumerism>

Dictionary.com. (2000b). Definition of narcissism. Retrieved March 30, 2004 from <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?r=2&q=narcissism>

Drengson, A.R. (1997). An ecophilosophy approach, the deep ecology movement and diverse ecosophies. *The Trumpeter*, 14 (3), Retrieved March 30, 2004 from <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v14.3/drengson.html>

- Drengson, A.R. (2001). Education for local and global ecological responsibility: Arne Naess's cross-cultural, ecophilosophy approach. *The Trumpeter*, Retrieved March 30, 2004 from <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v17.1/drengson.html>
- Driver, B.L. & Azjen, I. (1996), Research needed on hard-to-define nature-based human experiences. In B.L. Driver, D. Dustin, T. Baltic, G. Elsner, & G. Peterson (Eds.), *Nature and the human spirit: Toward an expanded land management ethic*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Durning, A. (1995). Are we happy yet? In T. Roszak, M.E. Gomes, & A.D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth – healing the mind*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.
- Durning, A. (1992). *How much is enough? The consumer society and the future of the earth*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Dwyer, J.F., Schroeder, H.W., & Gobster, P.H. (1991). The significance of urban trees and forests: Toward a deeper understanding of values. *Journal of Arboriculture*, 17 (10), 17-25.
- Ehrlich, P. (1986). *The machinery of nature*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Elsner, G., Lewis, D., Snell, F., & Spitzer, W. (1996). The role of public lands in maintaining and rejuvenating the human spirit. In B.L.

- Driver, D. Dustin, T. Baltic, G. Elsner, & G. Peterson (Eds.), *Nature and the human spirit: Toward an expanded land management ethic*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Emerson, R.W. (1994). *Nature and other writings*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Gardner, G., Assadourian, E., & Sarin, R. (2004). The state of consumption today. In L. Starke (Ed.) *State of the world 2004*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Gardner, G. & Assadourian, E. (2004). Rethinking the good life. In L. Starke (Ed.) *State of the world 2004*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Gardner, G. & Stern, P. (2002). *Environmental problems and human behavior – 2nd edition*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Gilman, R. (1990). Economics, ecology, and us. *In Context*. Retrieved August 27, 2004 from <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC26/Gilman.htm>
- Glink, I. (1993). Farewell to easy street. *The San Francisco Chronicle*, p. 5.
- Goodale, T., & Godbey, G. (1996). Hard-to-define values as dimensions of leisure. In B.L. Driver, D. Dustin, T. Baltic, G. Elsner, & G.



- Peterson (Eds.), *Nature and the human spirit: Toward an expanded land management ethic*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Gore, A. (1992). *Earth in the balance: Ecology and the human spirit*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hunnicut, B.K. (1988). *Work without end: Abandoning shorter hours for the right to work*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Kanner, A.D. & Gomes, M.E. (1995). The all-consuming self. In T. Roszak, M.E. Gomes, & A.D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth – healing the mind*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.
- Kline, B. (2000). *A brief history of the U.S. environmental movement*. Lanham, MD: Acadia Books.
- Landler, M., Konrad, W., Schiller, Z., & Therrien, L. (1991). What happened to advertising? *Business Week*. September 23.
- Lasch, C. (1979). *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Leopold, A. (1949). *A Sand County almanac and sketches here and there*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Leopold, A. (1953). Conservation. In L. Leopold (Ed.) *Round river: From the journals of Aldo Leopold*. Minocqua, WI: NorthWord Press, Inc.
- Leopold, A. (1991). The ecological conscience. In S.L. Flader & J.B. Callicott (Eds.) *The river of the mother of god*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Mannell, R. (1996). Approaches in the social and behavioral sciences to the systematic study of hard-to-define human values and experiences. In B.L. Driver, D. Dustin, T. Baltic, G. Elsner, & G. Peterson (Eds.), *Nature and the human spirit: Toward an expanded land management ethic*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- McDaniel, J. (2000). *Living from the center: Spirituality in an age of consumerism*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- McDaniel, J. (2002). Spirituality and sustainability. *Conservation Biology*, 16 (6), 1461-1464.
- McKibben, B. (1989). *The end of nature*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Meine, C. (1988). *Aldo Leopold: His life and work*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Montes, S. (1996). Uses of natural settings to promote, maintain, and restore human health. In B.L. Driver, D. Dustin, T. Baltic, G. Elsner, & G. Peterson (Eds.), *Nature and the human spirit: Toward an*

- expanded land management ethic*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Naess, A. (1989). *Ecology, community, and lifestyle*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Naess, A. (1995). The shallow and the deep, long range ecology movements: A summary. In G. Sessions (Ed.) *Deep ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Nash, R. (1982). *Wilderness and the American mind - 3rd Edition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Olsen, S. (1982). *The meaning of wilderness*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Orr, D.W. (1994). *Earth in mind: On education, environment, and the human prospect*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Orr, D.W. (2002). The four challenges of sustainability. *Conservation Biology*, 16 (6), 1457-1460.
- Pandey, P.D. (2003). Child participation for conservation of species and ecosystems. *Conservation Ecology*, 7 (1) r2. Retrieved March 30, 2004 from <http://www.consecol.org/vol7/iss1/resp2>
- Rolston, H. (1996). Nature, science, and spirit. In B.L. Driver, D. Dustin, T. Baltic, G. Elsner, & G. Peterson (Eds.), *Nature and the human*

*spirit: Toward an expanded land management ethic.* State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.

Rostow, W.W. (1991). *The stages of economic growth : A non-communist manifesto.* London, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Roszak, T. (1998). Ecopsychology: eight principles. *EcoPsychology On-Line*, Retrieved March 30, 2004 from <http://ecopsychology.athabascau.ca/Final/intro.htm>

Schroeder, H.W. (1996). Spirit of the forest: Integrating spiritual values into natural resource management and research. In J. Swan & R. Swan (Eds.), *Dialogues With The Living Earth.* Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.

Stearns, P.N. (2001). *Consumerism in world history: The global transformation of desire.* London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Suzuki, D. (1997). *The sacred balance: Rediscovering our role in nature.* Vancouver, British Columbia: Greystone Books.

Thoreau, H.D. (1991). *Walden.* New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Trauger, D.L., Czech, B., Erickson, J.D., Garrettson, P.R., Kernohan, B.J., & Miller, C.A. (2003). *The relationship of economic growth to wildlife conservation.* The Wildlife Society. Technical Review 03-1-2003.

Wachtel, P.L. (1989). *The poverty of affluence*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

White, L. (1967). The historical roots of our ecologic crisis. *Science*. 155. 1203-1207.

Wilson, E.O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Young, K.R. (2002). Minding the children: knowledge transfer and the future of sustainable agriculture. *Conservation Biology*. 16. 855-856.

## **Vita**

### **Neal David Emerald**

Neal David Emerald did undergraduate studies at Northern Virginia Community College and received an Associate in Applied Science degree in Recreation and Parks Management in 1997. He then went on to George Mason University where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Recreation Resources Management from the Department of Health, Fitness, and Recreation Resources, Graduate School of Education; and a certificate in Environmental Management from the Department of Biology, College of Arts and Sciences in 1998. He received a Graduate Certificate in Natural Resources from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 2001. Over the years, he has been deeply involved in a wide array of environmental issues as a volunteer leader for conservation organizations such as Trout Unlimited, the Virginia Wildlife Federation, and the Conservation Council of Virginia. He spent five years working on the staff of Trout Unlimited, the nation's leading coldwater fisheries conservation organization, and as a research assistant in the Center For Recreation Resources Policy at George Mason University, performing social science-based research on outdoor recreation and natural resource issues. He currently works for Apple Computer and teaches a course at George Mason University entitled "People With Nature."

Neal grew up as the son of an Air Force captain and lived on remote Air Force bases where he spent a great deal of his time in the woods and

jungle. In more recent years, he has spent time as a volunteer leader for conservation organizations such as Trout Unlimited, working on Virginia stream improvement projects such as Four Mile Run and Mossy Creek and environmental policy issues. He attributes the early years of time spent in the woods as the foundation for his affinity with nature. As a teenager, the discovery of angling led to an understanding of the need for clean water and healthy aquatic habitat. From this grew an understanding and awareness of broader ecosystem issues.