



From Egocentric to Ecocentric consciousness

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From the perspective of human ecology humans are understood as ecosystems because we are self-organizing networks of living beings and interrelated dynamics, symbiotic multispecies assemblages fulfilling multidimensional functions and processes for thriving life and consciousness. At the same time, we are also an interdependent part of greater ecosystems, participating in a collective orchestration for the benefits of the systems of life on this beautiful planet, our primordial home, the Earth.

Likewise, we are biopsychosocial and spiritual ecosystems because our existence surpasses the biophysical realm unto other dimensions of being. We have the potential to become self-conscious beings, our psychological universe is vast and incredibly populated by all kinds of signs, symbols, images, archetypes, and multiple dynamics and energetics.

Nevertheless, in order to become full fledged human beings we depend for the formation and wholesome growth of our potentialities—and the unfolding of our authenticity—on a healthy and culturally meaningful socio natural environment that must provide us with the necessary elements to create a particular personality, a self-conscious individuality (Ego) interconnected in a network of sociocultural and ecological relationships.

Children grow from childhood into adolescence, and then towards maturity and elderhood, passing through a series of more or less clearly defined stages in which they become capable of thinking and feeling in new and different ways, evolving from simpler modes of awareness towards more complex ways of engaging with the world. This process of human “becoming” occurs as the unfolding of inherent potentials and capabilities and the task of parenting and education should be to assist this process of growth as best as possible:

1. It appears necessary for our own evolution that during childhood we learn from the adults around us how to behave and participate in the world, generating a self-conscious personality (ego) that can relate in original ways within a socio natural environment.
2. In adolescence we strive for social acceptance and affirmation of our own individuality (which includes gender, sex, self-care and experimentation for self-knowledge), this means, we have to become healthy egocentric, caring for ourselves and our authenticity while striving for recognition and acceptance in different groups and communities. But, once we have reached a good balance between social acceptance and authentic self-autonomy and expression, we appear to have to go through a psycho-spiritual initiation

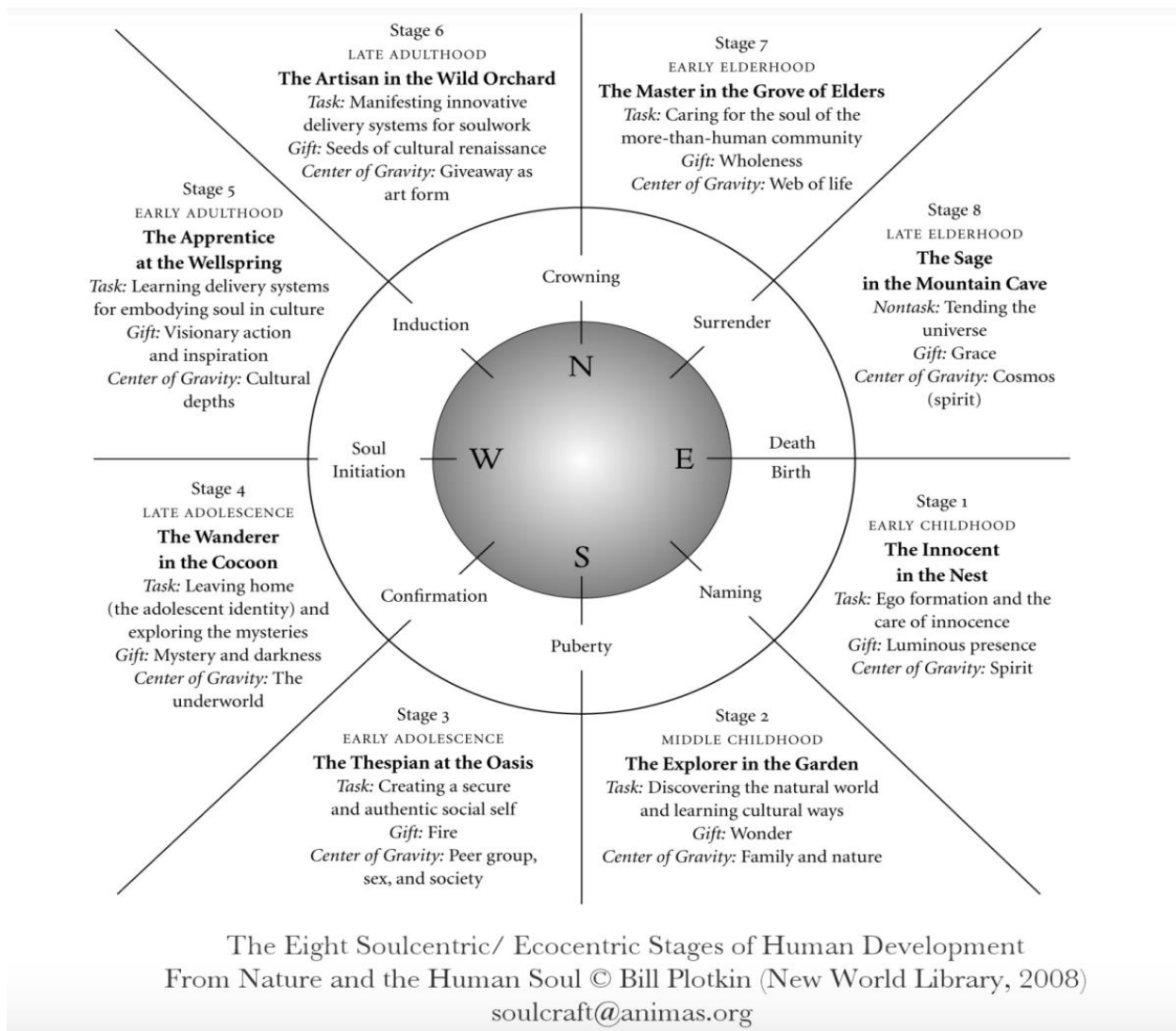




in order to shift our consciousness from *egocentric to ecocentric*. This type of initiation has been called the journey of *soul initiation* or *descent to soul* (Plotkin, 2021)¹.

3. This shift means that our personality (our ego) is no longer the center of our worldview but rather we have become aware of our membership and ready to enact our responsibilities towards the more-than-human community; when Earth, our true home (*Eco-Soul*) becomes the original center of gravity. That's to mature, to become a true adult².

A very useful and innovative map of such a process, the map of eco and soul centric human development was created by Bill Plotkin in the Animas Valley institute in Colorado, US:



¹ Bill Plotkin, 2021. *The Journey of Soul Initiation: a Field Guide for Visionaries, Evolutionaries and Revolutionaries*. California: New World Library.

² Bill Plotkin, 2008. *Nature and the Human Soul: Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*. California: New World Library.





This map presents eight different stages of human development, four main stages divided in two parts: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood. These stages are described in mythopoetic language because their meanings are more-than-rational in order to activate our connection with the collective unconscious of humanity, the imaginal world of symbolic and mythical language. At the same time this model is aligned with nature's directions and cycles. But the most important aspect of this model is the realization that in order to go through any stage in a healthy (wholesome) manner it is important to fulfill the developmental tasks corresponding to each stage, which are (according to the map):

1. The task of early childhood consists in Ego formation and caring for innocence.
2. The task of middle childhood consists in discovering the natural world and learning cultural ways.
3. The task of early adolescence consists in creating a secure and authentic social self.
4. The task of late adolescence consists in leaving home (the adolescent identity) and exploring the mysteries of soul and nature. In this stage is where the Soul initiation shall happen. After initiation a person becomes a true adult, a self-responsible member of the greater framework of life.
5. The task of early adulthood consists in learning delivery systems for embodying soul in culture.
6. The task of late adulthood consists in manifesting innovative delivery systems for soulwork.
7. The task of early elderhood consists in caring for the soul of the more-than-human world, the Earth community.
8. And the task of late elderhood which is a non-task consists in tending the universe.

According to this framework and considering the potential of Youth Work to support this process of growing from egocentrism to ecocentrism, the role of youth workers consists in supporting and empowering young people for the fulfillment of the tasks of childhood and adolescence³. This means that youth workers have to significantly support young people in their process of exploring the natural world and learning cultural ways while discovering and creatively expressing a secure and authentic social self. This is not easy, especially in our consumerist and egocentric societies. Notice that these tasks are open enough as to include the whole variety of possible expressions from different cultures and societies, with unique variations regarding place and socio natural environments. All human beings are born with the potential to realize these developmental tasks which are foundational for wellbeing to be sustainable on a regenerative and resilient level.

Furthermore, it could be possible for youth workers and educational practitioners to even support the preparation for the exploration of the mysteries of the world and psyche, as well as

³ Psychological youth is comprehended by these two periods of human life: childhood and adolescence.





the gradual metamorphosis of the egocentric life towards ecocentric lifestyles, which is the task of late adolescence and early adulthood.

Indeed, it is known today that for thousands of years in traditional communities all over the world the responsibility to lead this process of transformation was reserved to elders and initiated adults, as well as to celebrate the corresponding rites of passage that consecrate the crossing of stages. Evidently, it would also be important for youth workers to find ways to creatively celebrate some necessary rites of passage to acknowledge and confirm the fulfillment of developmental tasks and the transition towards further stages. The rites of passage's effect allows the individual ego to integrate the whole experience while informing the community about their new place within their social ecology.

“When human maturation goes well it is primarily due to success with the developmental tasks of our life stages. This is what moves us forward. What takes place between the major life passages — during the stages themselves — is actually much more significant than the passages and the ways we mark them with rites. But both are essential and interdependent: Without day-to-day success with the developmental tasks of the stages, we either fail to reach the next passage or do so only in a partial or distorted manner. And without effective rites of passage, we might enter the next stage in only a partial or compromised way”.⁴

⁴ Bill Plotkin, 2008. *Nature and the Human Soul: Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*. California: New World Library.

