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# Fear on the Run: Towards an Integral Environmentalism



R. Michael Fisher

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**Technical Paper No. 91**

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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Towards an Integral Environmentalism

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First Edition 2019

Cover and layout by R. Michael Fisher  
ISO F Logo (original 1989) designed by RMF

Printed in Canada

The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

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## **Fear on the run: Towards an Integral Environmentalism**

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### My Brief Background in Environmentalism

Before I ever dedicated myself to the Fear Problem as the greatest form of pollution on this planet, I had to go through several initiations of experiencing fear. No doubt fear of environmental destruction was major in its impact on me from my teen years.

It was the late 1960s-to early 1970s that I woke up to pollution effects and environmental crises looming because of the way that humans treated Nature and ultimately toxified it, compromising Life cycles, with wastes from their industrial life-styles. My first two professions were chosen in ecology and environmental biology because I felt a great love for Nature no. 1 and I wanted to protect it no. 2. Inevitably, I had to learn and wanted to learn everything I could about ecology and the environment, as well as activism that was essential to change the way Nature is treated by human societies, especially highly agriculturalized and industrialized societies. I was a culturally-born environmentalist which grew out of a natural-born naturalist.

Painfully, I was living in the so-called “First World” (Canada) and I was at times ashamed of this privileged (characteristically gross) materialist life-style and still am at times. Fifty years later I see what this pollution has done and where it has put the planet’s ecological systems (e.g., out of control CO<sub>2</sub> levels and global warming). That’s a nasty story to have to tell and know that I was part of creating it, although I didn’t start that way of life and create that story of human abuse of the environment that our species and many others depends on. Therefore, I grew up with pollution always on my mind since my late teens and more or less I’ve tried to live as simple of a life-style as possible, often going against the modern capitalist *status quo* of a materialist industrialist society which tells me what I should be

like and how to consume and create waste as part of being “successful.” Typically, I experience being not at all successful in the way that society and my parents, and school teachers and businesses, and governments wanted me.

I *resisted* excess pollution but knew there was always some pollution created by just living as an organism. That was a natural consequence of living. Recycling principles were always appealing to me in my choice to live simply with the minimum of an “ecological footprint.” Somewhere, along the line of my maturation and development as a critic of just about everything in this kind of society, I became aware (before I found a label for it) of an “*egological footprint*” as well. This latter measure of negative impact on the planetary ecosystems and social systems was a way to keep track of “inner” pollution created via *fear* or what I preferred long ago to call ‘*fear*’ *patterns*. ‘Fear’ with (‘) marks was a way to distinguish a ‘fear’ production that was culturally modified, toxic and polluting, way beyond the qualities and scale of natural fear that comes with being an organism trying to survive on this planet. I eventually, spent more and more of my time and research since late 1989 on the ‘Fear’ Project(ion) problem, which I simplified eventually as the Fear Problem.

I’m not the only one to recognize the ego-fear dynamic and cultural and technological changes that have exacerbated the Fear Problem (i.e., fear pollution excesses).<sup>2</sup> I seem to have coined the ECO-EGO<sup>3</sup> analogy of how as environmentalists we ought to be studying and remediating not just the ecological footprint but the egological footprint as well—because they are intimately interrelated—each feeding on the other as we consume and create wastes. A colleague from India recently posted a blog on the Fearlessness Movement ning community site which, in part, reflects my own theorizing: “Mind Pollution Cause for Environmental Pollution.”<sup>4</sup>

Ecological footprint is typically measured in the amount of energy one burns and resultant damages one does to ecological systems that we inherently cannot avoid to some degree. A heavy dominating eco-print is a major concern of typical environmentalism; lots of activism (e.g., recycling) are intended to lower levels of energy use. Egological footprint is a measure of the amount of dominating ego-fear (and ‘fear’) patterning that is wrought upon organisms and the environment. Is one spreading a lot of fear (‘fear’) unnecessarily? “Fearmongering” is a term today that is catching on however and is a concern to many critics but not most. This measuring device is more a metaphor at this point in human history and is by far

much less recognized as important compared to the former eco-print. I simply call it the *fear-print*.

Before moving on to what is “integral environmentalism” and its relationship to my fearwork, it is important to acknowledge that taking a more psychological, sociological, political, historical, anthropological and spiritual and philosophical approach to environmental activism, as you may have noticed, is not very respected. I mean, especially not in the overt (and extravert) expressions of environmental activism that we are used to seeing in media (e.g., Green Peace, or Greta Thunberg’s climate activism with Extinction Rebellion, etc.). Environmentalists typically rely on “science” for facts and have a very rationalist orientation to solving the problem and ‘taking action.’ It is the latter goal of activist rebellions to revolutionize the way things are, and to bring down the System. Action, action, action. And, it thus has to be very exterior to get good press coverage and try to then change peoples values and minds, even their world view so they will come onto the activists’ side of the fence. Of course, this activist media-grabbing attention seeking is not the only form of activism, or environmentalism, but it is by far the most dominant.

I raise this issue because I am more an introvert unlike most extraverts that love to protest on the streets. In recently reading some of Charles Eisenstein’s (2018) book *Climate: A New Story*, he critiques the typical strategies of the active extraverts who rebel and cause a big fuss and think that raising peoples’ fears (even panic), disrupting their lives, and terrifying them about extinction and end of the world—etc. I’ll get to his finer-tuned wise critiques later in this technical paper. He is right “we need to do some things that will bring quick results” to the environmental crises we face. I agree. What he does point to is that shaming and making people feel guilty and afraid they aren’t doing enough, or not doing the right things—is “not working.” He repeats that refrain throughout his book. When are environmentalists going to slow down and sit back and see what is not working in their current and past methods? He knows, as do I, most will keep doing what they think will work—by hook or by crook—they will confirm their biases and ways and still keep on doing the same old ways of activism.

Like Eisenstein, an environmentalist himself, he nor I are trying to tell people don’t do what you are doing. We know that people will react and many will do the simplest and most overt external things to try to make good changes to a dire situation. They are in *fight-flight* mode and often pissed off as hell. They can’t sit still and grieve loss. Impulsively driven (often by anxiety), they have to take action and they want all of us to as

well just like them. There is danger of narcissism in this reactivity of course. In their rage at injustices, at the pain and suffering in themselves and others, they even know how to shame us for not taking action like they do or not seeing the immanent “emergency” like they do or like the “science” proves is the case. All that is very problematic behavior and the perceptual lens and motivations are highly questionable. I am implicitly challenging that here and always have in my own environmentalism since my youth. I am now age 67 and still learning just how important it is to mature our brands of environmentalism—and find better ways for its expressions.

Eisenstein is overtly challenging all that type of fear-driven activism in his new book, thank goodness! For the moment, let me cite from his last page of the book, where he does sit back, and says that all things we need to do to love the planet and save the planet are not all “quick” and external and overt. He asks for more balance re: his integrative view of environmentalism at its best.

There are things that we can do to bring “quick results” and “slow results” he says, and neither should be necessarily seen as better in all cases. Unfortunately, typical activists see the “quick results” as the only way to go. Eisenstein gives us options, and so do I, when it comes to being a good environmentalist:

Which are yours to do? Are you excited to campaign for a plastic bag ban where you live? For a marine sanctuary? To stop a pipeline or fracking well? Or is your calling something that will take generations to have tangible ecological benefits? Is it maybe to work with trauma survivors? To aid refugees? To practice holistic midwifery? To be a mentor to at-risk youth? To raise children who carry a little less pain into adulthood than you did? These are the kind of things that enrich the cultural soil in which new paradigms and policies can grow.... They are a declaration of the kind of world we [you] want to live in... bringing us into alignment with a living world.... It requires that we trust our knowing... [and our particular calling to help].  
(Eisenstein, 2018, p. 278)

What is Integral Environmentalism and Role of Fear?

The above quote appealed to me immediately upon reading it and it validated my own primary emphasis in types of environmentalism that have suited me best. My calling is more on the inward path of the problems we face today and in the past. I tend to work on the inner toxicity, which I call

the Fear Problem (see later below). I tend to the nature and role of fear in human and environmental and ecological dynamics and development. I tend to what Eisenstein above calls enriching, healing, and repairing the “cultural soil” *via* new paradigms and world views (e.g., see my Fearlessness Paradigm, Fearlessness Psychology, etc.). Yes, it is much subtler than street activism, direct action; it is rather indirect action and deeper than what is easily visible. It requires immense patience and perspicacity of discernment and vision of what is really important in the crises of the day. Hell yes, I work daily to find ways to improve the conditions of children and youth, and their systems (nests) of care and socialization, so that all will have less suffering, less pain and less fear, and thus less toxic leftovers from past generations as they attempt to connect to and care for the world they are emerging within. Fear itself (not just fears) is connected to all things suffering and by managing and transforming it well then we’ll have the potential for true empathy for ‘others.’ If we don’t get this straight, and truly shift our scale of empathy, and further more to compassion, the future is going to be extremely violent without end.

Integral environmentalism pays equal attention, gives equal value across a broad spectrum of aspects of reality and complexities of analysis and interventions. Simply, it is an ecological and environmental sensibility that is holistic-integral. That’s not a simple notion once you go beyond the surfaces of typical definitions and meanings people give to “holistic” approaches or “integrative” approaches to analysis and solutions to human problems.<sup>5</sup> “Integral” is something else, and quite different but included the former (see the integral philosophy of Ken Wilber for more background). My great interest is in the distinction of the two kinds of “footprints” and their pragmatic consequences re: daily life. Unfortunately, even the best of environmental activism rarely gives the ego-footprint any extra thought or ink in publications and education programs. There is always some talk about “values” that have to change to be more environmentally sustainable, and that we have to learn to love Nature more and be more mindful of our effects on things.

However, it is scant and insufficient teaching to fully gather what is required, and thus I promote “integral environmentalism” with fear studies at its core—that is, another expression of attention on the ego-footprint. At times, I see only the fear (ego) footprint is really the root of all humanity’s problems. I also know, that would be un-integral to think and operate that way, but at times I really feel this urgency to focus on the real core of our problems. Fear (i.e., ‘fear’ patterning). I have written on this since the mid-1980s off and on, and especially have dedicated my life mission to this

since late 1989. I won't review my findings here as my work on fear and fearlessness is easily available on the Internet and in libraries around the world.

In a recent book by the unique young environmentalist Charles Eisenstein, I was curious to see his way of thinking about the integration and balance of critique and interventions in environmentalism today. He is wise to critique in his book *Climate: A New Story* (2018) the obsession of technical rationalist calculative thinking as the way best to go (via “science”) to solve the global warming and ecological problems. One reviewer of the book mentions that Eisenstein's book is a refreshing and unusual “radical shift from a utilitarian worldview [and its concomitant utilitarian “green” technological mindset] to an *integral world view*”<sup>6</sup>—the latter more based in love, empathy and a sacred recognition of the intrinsic value of Nature itself not just what humans make valuable of Nature. “Integral world view” is what Ken Wilber has taught for over 40 years and which I have learned from and adopted in my own unique ways—including my critical integral approach to Fear Studies overall. Fear has to be seen as *integral*, complex and involved in every aspect of the “footprint” (inner and outer; mind and environmental) of human beings, individually and collectively. Note: although Eisenstein wisely pursues “integrity” in living as humans so as to maintain “integrity” in living systems, and he balances the importance of inner and outer realities of the environmental crises today, he does not use Wilber's philosophy nor “integral” theory per se and rather only uses the term “integrity” and holistic. I think that's a vast limitation to his work and yet it is not my intention to demean Eisenstein's great contribution.

A truly integral environmentalism will give balanced analysis and attention to the problems of the eco- and ego- footprint. Rare is this done anywhere. In particular, from my fearological perspective, integral environmentalism has to give a central role to fear and its impacts, and especially to ‘fear’ patterning. Arguably, and Eisenstein makes the case, that environmentalism and ecology themselves will be continually failing if they do not recognized the deeper psychosocial and cultural political aspects of solving environmental problems. He suggests, rightfully so, that if fear is actually at the basis of environmentalist practices and activism, that will not lead to solutions beyond the mere surfaces and will rather create worse problems in the end—and, he basically says such a fearmongering or fear appeal advertising within environmentalist practices (especially, with climate change activists) has proven to “not work” anyways. Using fear to change people just is bad methodology, he argues.<sup>7</sup>



What is the role of “fear” in Eisenstein’s picture of reality and the environmentalism he proposes?

### Fear on the Run

I awoke from dreaming and was thinking immediately as I lay in bed of how “fear” is like a “fuel.” It ignites and creates power(s). It produces action(s)—not always good. Just like the (carbon-based) fuels of our Industrialized societies—it has value and its has disaster.

Fear on the run—at the base of running. This was a metaphor that grew and unfortunately now in daylight I remember on bits. This section of this technical paper is very relevant to Eisenstein’s efforts and my own to create a revisionist environmentalism and ecology for our times—that is, a truly integral one.<sup>8</sup> And that is a “fearlessness” one as well.

I was thinking of the new automobiles being manufactured today. The one’s that automatically shut down the engine when one breaks for more than a few seconds (as if one is at a red light, or in a car line-up). It is impressive new technology. I hear automobiles when I am on my bicycle. It is a saving ‘green’ smart idea. However, nothing in that technological invention has stopped the trucks and cars getting bigger and bigger—at least that is what I see on the streets of North American cities, especially in Calgary, where I live. There is no incentive apparently to drive smaller vehicles like in the 70s-80s—and, then, that all got forgotten, and people are driving faster and highways have high speed limits, not lowering limits to cut down on fossil fuel consumption. We’ve slipped back a long way since the 1970s as I see it. Even if cars shut down and ‘rest’ more often on the streets.

What if we could do the same technology (analogously) with fear that is fueling our lives today? Like what if we could shut-down way more often and not run on fear so much. Stop. Rest. Even just be (mindful), or whatever, it is we do but just not run on fear as motivator. That would be a great intervention in healing and slowing everything down. But it isn’t doing that with the automobiles as I said. Turning down fear, turning off fear—that’s another game to solve. I won’t try to answer that here in this technical paper though you can see that is what I think has to happen and the sooner the better if we want to helpful and evolving integral environmentalism.

Listen to Charles Eisenstein's basic critique of where activist environmentalism has gone, where it has taken a 'wrong' turn, and made a 'bargain with the Devil' he believes:

I am afraid that, in adopting climate as their keystone narrative, environmentalists have made a bargain with the Devil. At first, climate change seemed a boon to environmentalism, a potent new argument for things we have always wanted, a new reason to shut down the strip mines, to conserve the forests, and ultimately to end the expansion of a consumerist society. Finally we had a do-or-die [emergency] reason to implement agricultural practices that regenerate the soil [etc.... Accordingly, environmentalists welcomed the climate narrative as a useful ally, a legitimizer of things they wished people would embrace on their own merits.

We the environmentalists thought, 'What we've wanted to do, now they'll *have* to do.' The premises of the conversation [of environmentalism] shifted away from love of nature and toward fear of our survival. We moved from the heart to the mind, asking that we be motivated by distant consequences.... [e.g., heating up, weather extremes, water levels rising]. (p. 131)

Indeed, this is most perceptive of Eisenstein, and others before him long ago in the environmental movement (albeit, only the rarest souls)—that fear appeal advertising and motivation tactics of environmentalism is very limited in effectiveness and at worst it is actually violent and destructive to the whole environmentalist project of getting people to care about their environment. I won't go on here. I close with this quote by Eisenstein for us all to ponder, not matter if you are a prophet of denial or a prophet of saving the planet (environmentalism). Remember, we have "shifted away from to... toward fear" he claims. Indeed, we have, on many dimensions and aspects of current life. It is unsustainable and is killing us. Fear. The Fear Problem. 'Fear' patterning. This then raises a question, bigger than Eisenstein seems to have worked through, and that is "Why does fear overcome love" (of Nature, etc.) in the history of humanity—and the history of one's life? Of course, there is evidence that this doesn't have to be the way to go. That's the "new story" awaiting, that Eisenstein, myself and some others wish to keep telling and inviting others to join with us. I particularly, just want Love vs. Fear (the old story) at the core of the new integral environmentalism and narratives—that is, the environmental education really made for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let's talk.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fisher is an Adjunct Faculty member of the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, AB, Canada. He is fearologist and co-founder of In Search of Fearlessness Project (1989- ) and Research Institute (1991- ) and lead initiator of the Fearlessness Movement ning (2015- ). The Fearology Institute was created by him recently to teach international students about fearology as a legitimate field of studies and profession. He is also founder of the Center for Spiritual Inquiry & Integral Education and is Department Head at CSIIE of Integral & 'Fear' Studies. Fisher is an independent scholar, public intellectual and pedagogue, lecturer, author, consultant, researcher, coach, artist and Principal of his own company (<http://loveandfearsolutions.com>). He has four leading-edge books: *The World's Fearlessness Teachings: A critical integral approach to fear management/education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (University Press of America/Rowman & Littlefield), *Philosophy of fearism: A first East-West dialogue* (Xlibris) and *Fearless engagement of Four Arrows: The true story of an Indigenous-based social transformer* (Peter Lang), *Fear, law and criminology: Critical issues in applying the philosophy of fearism* (Xlibris); *India, a Nation of Fear and Prejudice* (Xlibris) Currently, he is developing The Fearology Institute to teach courses. He can be reached at: [r.michaelfisher52@gmail.com](mailto:r.michaelfisher52@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> A most recent book on this I'm just beginning to read: Lockwood, P. (2018). *The fear problem: How technology and culture have hijacked our minds and lives*. Herndon, VA: Mascot Books.

<sup>3</sup> In many places over the years of publishing on these things, I give a deeper sourcing of the ECO-EGO dynamic and problems of evolution itself based on the integral philosophy of Ken Wilber. I will not cover this in this technical paper.

<sup>4</sup> Arguably, this interrelation of eco- and ego (environment and mind, respectfully) is ancient in various wisdom and esoteric teachings around the world—see Ravishangar (2019) at <https://fearlessnessmovement.ning.com/forum/mind-pollution-cause-for-environmental-pollution>

<sup>5</sup> For e.g., “integrative politics” is the term that Marianne Williamson is flaunting across the American political landscape of late during her bid for the primaries to win the 2020 presidency. I appreciate this holistic-integrative effort greatly, she is rare in this within the political sphere but it is still wanting on many dimensions when put into an “integral” (Wilberian) lens of which she is aware of but chooses does not forefront in her campaign. I am currently writing on book on her campaign and American's varied reactions to this.

<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising to me this comment of endorsement comes from the reviewer Satish Kumar, re: Eisenstein's new book. Kumar is founder of Schumacher College and editor emeritus of *Resurgence & Ecologist*. E. F. Schumacher was one of the pioneer 20<sup>th</sup> century integralists with his notions of “appropriate technology” and “buddhist economics” theorizing. Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful* that I discovered in the early 1970s was one of the most important life-changers in my understanding of what was going on so ‘wrong’ with W. economic theory and application via capitalism—all of which were destroying the planet and harming human health and well-being with it.

<sup>7</sup> See my recent blog on Eisenstein's critique <https://fearlessnessmovement.ning.com/blog/charles-eisenstein-questioning-fear-appeal-environmentalism>

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the literature and approach of “integral ecology” (somewhat related to this discussion of an integral environmentalism) I highly recommend Esbjörn-Hargens, S., & Zimmerman, M. (2009). *Integral ecology: Uniting multiple perspectives on the natural world*. Boston, MA: Integral Books/Shambhala.