

# Review of: "An Ontological Turn for Psychology in the age of the Machine and Global Warming"

Davide Ziveri

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I had the pleasure to read the pre-print article of Louise Sundararajan titled "An Ontological Turn for Psychology in the age of the Machine and Global Warming" through my own lens of social psychology. I have been attracted by the title (that is also the 'fil rouge' through the paper) that suggests a link between the advanced globalization under capitalism and the climate crisis. Later, the text demonstrates that both have in common one specific conception of reality. Her deep dive into the concept of ontology -not a mainstream approach to global warming "solutionism"[1] - highlights the relevance of transdisciplinary reflections and research when coming to navigating the challenges of the so-called Anthropocene (please note that the author does not use this term).

The starting point is the idea that the magnitude and complexity of such a new epoch require an epistemological transformation of current paradigms. This winks to the Planetary Health framework that moves in the same direction of fillings the imaginative gap of how current environmental, social, and health problems could be understood and addressed. Such a link may deserve a comment.

Accepting the possibility of a paradigm change (Planetary health or whatever we call it), the scientific community should move from a sort of cultural relativism where all systems of knowledge are entitled to the same degree of legitimacy. Moreover, reflexivity should be pushed to the extreme of the critical analysis of the link between science and truth.[2] I consider this paper an invitation to social sciences to do not forget these crucial tasks. I would have loved to know the author's insights on the barriers that delay or limit such transformation.

In the mainstreamed "ontology of objects", well described in the paper, there is no room for Morin's call[3] to rethink knowledge. If we would follow his invitation, we will join again Sundararajan when she criticizes the mechanist (and apolitical) psychology. Promoting the value of neutrality, this latter has a blind spot: the possibility of action. A self not limited by the Cartesian dualism and, therefore, being involved in a different type of relationships with what we can consider "otherness", open the potential for diverse ways of being in the world. This will include a different form of caring, that is at the core of psychology.

Sundararajan opens a window on the cognitive and emotional endeavour of adopting a radical frame for looking into our experience of the Anthropocene. The experience of ecological grief is a perfect example. Distress and mourning are here, but globalized societies avoid acknowledging such a dramatic loss, living in built environments that provide positivist storytelling.

Moreover, an alternative ontology will reshape the definition of humanity (who is entitled of being considered a subject and who is similar to “us”) and, therefore, the practice of respect and caring.[4] An approach that informed the decisions of New Zealand, India, and Colombia in 2017 to recognize legal rights and the status of legal persons to rivers' ecosystems. [5] An example that Sundararajan shares crucial considerations that may have very real consequences for climate action.

To do so, the author points out the extreme value of indigenous knowledge, and she offers a roadmap for decolonization, at least for the psychology field, evoking the risk of a sort of epistemological exploitation or neo-colonialism, where the major emitters of greenhouse gases ask for solutions to those who less contributed to the problem but suffer first and foremost its consequences.

Finally, a question rise from this time spent together. Sundararajan makes a step forward in the exploration of radical diversity where the very categories of time, space, and self are profoundly diverse. Even if such change is likely to be needed, are those two systems just polarized and antago[6]nistic or a synthesis and cross-fertilization is possible?

For sure, concluding this very interesting article, I kept the idea, once again, that transdisciplinary dialogue with diverse communities' voices (and their world visions and values) are a game-changer in the discourse about the struggle for climate and environment. Sundararajan reflections about what we consider reality (ontology) facing the changes of the biosphere, a topic recently explored also by Latour, are intertwined with the query for meaning (ethic): this reiterates the message that science, namely psychology, should be open, but not neutral.

[1] Bill Gates (2021) How To Avoid A Climate Disaster. Dublin: Allen Lane

[2] Michel Foucault (1969) L'archéologie du savoir. Paris: Gallimard

[3] Edgar Morin (1977) La Méthode. Paris: Seuil

[4] Ticktin, M. I. (2019). From the human to the planetary. *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, 6(3).  
<https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.6.3.666>

[5] Erin O'Donnell & Elizabeth Macpherson (2019) Voice, power and legitimacy: the role of the legal person in river management in New Zealand, Chile and Australia, *Australasian Journal of Water Resources*, 23:1, 35-44, DOI: [10.1080/13241583.2018.1552545](https://doi.org/10.1080/13241583.2018.1552545)

[6] Bruno Latour (2021) Où suis-je ? Paris: La Découverte