

Climate Change and Cultural Transformation

Part 4 THE GOOD, THE TRUE AND THE SUBLIME

Chapter 13 **Practising the Good: the Global We**

That the world has no ethical significance but only a physical one is the greatest and most pernicious of errors. Schopenhauer, *On Ethics*.

If ethics is, in Aristotle's view, how we should live, and how we should live in the polis - "politics" - achieving "the Good" both personally and politically, then we seem to have lost our way ethically in this 21st century. This is the age of the Anthropocene when the Earth is warming alarmingly, the oceans are rising and species are becoming extinct at an unprecedented rate, constituting a climate and ecological emergency we are responsible for but seem to lack the will to turn around. Our own imminent extinction is all too imaginable. Anyone who doesn't start from here today has lost her/his ethical bearings.

The moral philosopher, Stephen Gardiner, in his book, *The Perfect Moral Storm*, subtitled *The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, was very clear:

In public discussion, we do not understand the striking fact (anthropogenic climate change) in the most relevant terms, and so conceive of the problem in the wrong way. The dominant discourses about the nature of the climate threat are scientific and economic. But the deepest challenge is ethical. What matters most is what we do to protect those vulnerable to our actions and unable to hold us accountable, especially the global poor, future generations and non-human nature. ¹

This is from "A Dubious Framing", one of eight propositions which form the preface of Gardiner's book. His propositions start with a warning about "Runaway Emissions": "We are currently accelerating hard into the most serious global environmental problem that humanity has ever faced". Moreover, rather than slowing our rate of emissions we are accelerating them - "the most striking fact of our time".

Proposition 3 sets out the nature of the “Profound Challenge”: that “our problem is profoundly global, intergenerational, and theoretical”. When all three factors come together they pose “a perfect moral storm” for ethical action. At the same time Gardiner casts doubt on the adequacy of our current institutions and our moral and political theories to meet the challenge. In proposition 4 - “A Problematic Paradigm” - he suggests that what is paradigmatically a global problem is addressed by politicians who think in terms of the interests of their nation states, and, therefore, their analysis of the problem is too narrow and too inadequate as a basis for meeting the global challenge.

His other propositions concern: “A Threatened Discourse” - “our weak and self-serving ways of thinking”, often supported by apathy or ideological fervour; the development of “Shadow Solutions” that have the appearance of ethical values but are in truth “A Defensive Strategy” with rationalising arguments; and “Early Guidance” as to how “the current public debate about climate should be reorientated”. It should address the issues of “scientific uncertainty, intergenerational ethics, and intergenerational justice”.

In other words, if we think in only scientific and economic, not in ethical, intergenerational or social justice terms, we condemn ourselves - including those in power now - as well as all life, to the catastrophic consequences of climate change, a global phenomenon from which no one can be insulated. Those who consider themselves unaffected are deluded. We really are all in this together.

James Garvey was of the same view. In *The Ethics of Climate Change*, published in 2008, he considered then that the debate about the existence of climate change is conclusive. The science is in no doubt. Global warming is a fact. It is now a moral problem and the question is what we should do about it. ² Our continued indifference - or denial - should provoke moral outrage, as it does today in the speeches of the 16 year-old Greta Thunberg, who, as the representative of the young generation, points out that the emperor - modern civilisation itself - has no moral clothes.

The climate emergency of today provides us with an opportunity of examining our material and cultural history from a new global perspective. Climate change may be an ethical tragedy for us since the mass extinction accompanying it also leads to our own

demise. From a geocentric, rather than anthropocentric, view, however, it is not so much a tragedy, more a form of justice - the karmic principle in the Christian assertion, "as ye sow, so shall ye reap". If we, in the Western world, do nothing to change our consumerist way of life, what else can we expect? We simply have our just rewards. There are lessons to be learnt from the climate crisis, ethical lessons.

Perplexity

The first thing we might learn is about the very finite nature of our human knowledge. The European Enlightenment tradition developed the simple belief that all knowledge might be accumulated in one hubristic encyclopaedic venture - a circle of knowledge - that contained all there was to know. Modern scientific man confines his curiosity to the illusion of an objective world that is eminently knowable. All he has to do is use, and develop, his physical senses and all will be revealed. And this remains unconsciously the instinctual belief of many scientists today, irrespective of the twentieth century revolutions of relativity and quantum mechanics. Established science still - consciously or unconsciously - believes that we just need a little more knowledge and we will have unlocked the secrets of the universe.

In a recent book, *A Case for Irony*,³ the moral philosopher and psychoanalyst, Jonathan Lear, who also wrote *Radical Hope*, his book about *Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, argued for the return of irony, not in the conventional sense of irony as clever or satirical thinking, but irony as real perplexity. He cited Socrates as a classic example. When Socrates is charged with misleading and mystifying the young men of Athens by questioning all their unexamined assumptions, it is assumed that he knows the answers himself to his persistent questions all along. But in truth he doesn't. Socrates is genuinely perplexed but believes this to be a more honest basis for an ethical, good, or excellent life - even if it means he has to pay with his life.

Socrates would seem to be making the point that true knowledge is only attained by first recognising our own ignorance and delusion. This is not a principle our positive modern scientific culture recognises. Knowledge and ignorance are not opposites, they belong together. The beginning of all knowledge starts with the recognition and understanding of our basic ignorance. From this perspective ignorance is the primary knowledge.

Modernity and the Frankfurt School

Up until a hundred years ago what has come to be known as “the Enlightenment Project” was looked upon, if not benignly, then as an unprecedented success. European industrialism and natural science represented a progress and dynamism which commended itself to the whole world. But since 1914 it has been seen to go disastrously wrong - two very violent world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, the development of annihilating nuclear weapons in the cold war and now the altering of our climate, which threatens to end much of life on Earth as we know it. This is to say nothing of the political, social, economic and ecological dislocations also during this time.

This was recognised by the ‘Frankfurt School’ of critical social theory which emerged in Germany in the 1930s, and which moved to the United States when Hitler came to power. With the establishment of the Third Reich and the development of other fascist regimes in the world, they were even more convinced of the need to understand this phenomenon. As they wrote in the introduction to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1944, they had underestimated the difficulty of the task:

It turned out, in fact, that we had set ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism’.⁴

Modernity, far from building on the hopes and promises of European civilisation, was presiding over its demise, in short, ‘the self-destruction of the Enlightenment.’

The twentieth century - and age of modernity - was one of increasing anarchy and dissociation. It was a major theme of the poets and writers of the time. In Britain in 1920 Yeats, in his poem “The Second coming”, had memorably written:

Things fall apart: the centre cannot hold,
mere anarchy is loosed Upon the world.

while T.S.Eliot had asked, and asserted, in ‘*The Waste Land*’ in 1922:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish?.....Only a heap of broken images.

and Stephen Daedalus declared in James Joyce's *Ulysses* in the same year:

History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.'

“The enlightenment project”

It is a theme that has reverberated throughout the twentieth century and on into this. The political philosopher, John Gray, published *Enlightenment's Wake* at the end of the century. Gray had previously written a number of books about the post-liberal reality and the illusions and contradictions of Enlightenment thought and culture, also referred to today. In the last chapter of *Enlightenment's Wake*, which has the book's title, he summed up his thesis:

Though the Enlightenment project of constructing a universal civilisation has manifestly failed, the Westernising impulse that it embodied has transmitted to nearly all cultures the radical modernist project of subjugating nature by deploying technology to exploit the earth for human purposes. This is, in fact, the real legacy of the Enlightenment project to humankind - the Baconian and Nietzschean, but also Christian and Marxian humanist project of turning nature into an object of human will. Emptied of its theistic and metaphysical content, and with the emancipatory promise of Enlightenment humanism manifestly illusory, Westernisation impacts on the world's non-Occidental cultures in the late modern period as a form of revolutionary nihilism. ⁵

Any cultural movement will have its shadow as well as its light. Gray acknowledges the light of the Enlightenment - his own acuity of mind must derive in part from it! But, for example, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* - both a monument and a challenge .to Enlightenment reason - is evidence of the limits, as well as the gift, of reason, both of which the modern world seems to have forgotten. When Gray writes of the “nihilism” of Western civilisation he is pointing to the attempt of “enlightened” Europe to impose its own ideals universally on the rest of the world.

A globalised Enlightenment, in Gray's view, can be toxic, given that non-Occidental cultures, some of them with much subtler ethics and wisdom than Europe's, will have their own distinctive civilised ways. He emphasises the importance of a pluralistic outlook, arguing that the institutions of Western civil society aren't necessarily the *sine qua non* of a successful modern economy. In the preface to the 2007 edition of *Enlightenment's Wake* he writes: "Accordingly I move forward from the position set out in *Post-liberalism* to defend a pluralist perspective in which no privileges are accorded to liberal practice and the animating project is that of framing terms of harmonious coexistence among different cultures and traditions".

Adam Smith and the ethical invisible hand

There is perhaps a distinction to be made between the actual Enlightenment and what has been dubbed "the Enlightenment Project" and the uses to which Enlightenment values have been put in the modern world. There was an ethical side to the actual Enlightenment. Take Adam Smith for example. The justification for the current view of the workings of the market economy and the wealth of nations is taken to be the concept of the "invisible hand", as described in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. The invisible hand is assumed to be the essence of the free market economy and, later, the mechanism of industrial capitalism. Interestingly - and something which today is overlooked - Smith was first a professor of logic in Glasgow before taking up Hutcheson's chair of moral philosophy in 1752 and publishing his first great book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759. It wasn't until 1776 that he published *The Wealth of Nations* but it grew out of the earlier book which first established the ethical philosophy that formed the background to the later work. It might be asked whether "the invisible hand" refers not so much to a mechanism of the market as to the faculty of sympathy within the human mind and heart.

Chapter 1 of *Moral Sentiments* is "Of Sympathy" and sets out the principle of 'the propriety of action'. As Adam Smith writes:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him... Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion we feel for the misery of others... for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they may feel

it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it. ⁶

Despite the influence of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in the eighteenth century - by 1790 it had reached its fifth edition - *The Wealth of Nations* has, as Amartya Sen points out in his introduction to the modern Penguin edition of *Moral Sentiments*, been interpreted without reference to the framework of thought of the earlier book, “to the detriment of economics as a subject”. The neglect applies, among other issues to “the appreciation of the demands of rationality, the need for recognising the plurality of human motivations, the connections between ethics and economics, and the co-dependent - rather than free-standing - role of institutions in general and free markets in particular in the functioning of the economy”. ⁷

For Smith the economy could not be thought about independently of political issues. In other words political economy necessarily involved ethics. Or, as Aristotle believed, politics - how the polis is run - is ethics. The economy needs the help of government, just as the market needs the ethical governance of other institutions. And this is as important - and lacking - today in the age of globalisation and the geo-political economy.

Ethics at the horizon

At the end of the last century and the beginning of this there are signs of a new coherence amidst all the sense of disintegration. But if there is a new knowledge on the horizon, then ethics will be at the heart of it, its starting point. “Practical reason” - ethics - as the great teachers insist, comes before “pure reason” or metaphysics. Gautama Buddha, for instance, remained silent in his ethical teachings about questions of meaning and interpretation and taught the fourth noble truth, the eightfold path of right living and thinking, which leads to a release from suffering. Only then could you aspire to enlightenment. Ethics is the necessary initial path to wisdom. And Christ, of course, emphasised love as the essential principle above all others.

The moral philosopher and psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear’s earlier book, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* was about the experience of seeming cultural annihilation of the native Indian Crow Nation when the buffalo - so central to their way of life - were wiped out after European colonisation and they could no longer fight with their

traditional enemy, the Sioux.⁸ An enigmatic dream of renewal inspired their chief, Plenty Coups, to lead them to a new way of life, even though he had no idea at first what form this would take. This was what Lear described as “ethics at the horizon”.

It was a time of no hope, yet Plenty Coups was able to hold on to a hope beyond conventional hope, a hope that also went beyond despair – Lear writes of “courage and hope” in contrast to “mere optimism”. In *Radical Hope* he describes how, with the loss of their culture, the Crow found themselves “reasoning at the abyss”. In Plenty Coups’s words:

When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened.

As Lear described it, they faced a “radical discontinuity” with their past. It was like “a rip in the fabric of one’s self”, “a disruption in the sense of being”. In Lear’s words:

Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have this hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it.⁹

This is the essence of ethics.

With climate change the whole world now faces what seems to be an absolute, rather than relative abyss. This is a different ethical horizon today, one that presents us with ultimate issues - how do we conceive of a “good life” or a benign universe when our actual existence is threatened on a global level. Perhaps the answer to this cannot be found in ethics alone but also needs to be looked for in scientific - natural and human - and aesthetic understandings. Ethics needs the help of truth and art. As the core value spheres, these three are a unity - classically the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

Lear writes about the “irony” of the Crow, not knowing who they were, after their culture collapsed. With the breakdown of their entire way of life they must have felt they had lost any sense of identity. Lear framed it in the form of an enigmatic question: “Among all the Crow, is there a Crow?” In other words, the value or ethic they traditionally lived by, the standard that could be judged as a good, or excellent Crow life, no longer had any meaning or made any sense. They had to find a new ethic to live by.

From our modern perspective we might say this was moving from a tribal ethic to our own more expansive sense of community - quite a leap to make and one that didn't automatically commend itself, given the dubious ethics by which the colonisers treated the Indians! But more than this it wasn't a matter of simply assuming a modern culture and its values, but retaining what was best of their own while adapting to a new way life, of realising some sense of continuity within the discontinuity. This would be a new Crow, not like the old one, but recognisably Crow.

Plenty Coups did not give in to despair but accepted the demise of his culture with courage and a faith that something would emerge out of the abyss. Accordingly at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier he laid down his "coup stick" – the emblem of his warrior culture – acknowledging that the traditional ways of the Crow had to be laid to rest before a new life could begin to be imagined. What made his hope "radical" was that it was accompanied by a faith in a future goodness.

Though Lear doesn't draw the comparison explicitly, with the crisis the whole world now faces it is clear to the reader. The Crow survived as a tribe by adapting to the life of their colonisers, but today we are in the midst of a global mass extinction which poses an absolute threat. We might now ask the ironic question: "Among all the humans is there a human?" This raises further questions. What is it to be human now that we are aware of the possibility of our imminent extinction? Or, if we begin to think the unthinkable, how does it change how we experience ourselves? What is the ethical view from this new horizon? How do we reason at our own abyss? Might we begin to ask ourselves who, or what, we really are, while we are still here and still have time to ask? Climate change may for many presage a disaster too monstrous to contemplate but it may also bring a new knowledge.

A new coherence

Ethics may provide the means - or vision - by which we might face the fragmentation and dissociation - the "Waste Land" - of the modern world. We may not subscribe to the classical teleology of the Great Chain of Being today but there is a new sense of the unity of all things and the integration of our obstinate dualisms. This is perhaps indicated by the modern revival of interest in the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza. In his *Ethics* he provided

an alternative view to the opposition of mind and matter of his contemporary, Descartes, the philosopher of the emerging modern world, and, with Francis Bacon, the inspiration for the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Spinoza, in his *Ethics*, made sense of our existence by writing of a single, unified “Substance”, which he defined as “God”, and of which “mind” and “matter”, are manifestations. ¹⁰

Spinoza was accused of materialism and of equating God and nature, seeming to confine God to an identity with the physical, “extended” world, emphasising only His immanence rather than also His transcendence. Karl Jaspers, the twentieth century philosopher, suggested, however, that Spinoza did not think of God and nature as one and the same thing but, rather, that nature was also a manifestation of God’s transcendence, and that the two attributes known to us as thought and extension are qualities of His immanence. ¹¹

Thus, God, for Spinoza, is both immanent and transcendent. In the post-Enlightenment and modern world we have lost the sense of a transcendent principle within nature. Ethics is about the integrity of both immanence and transcendence. It is what makes everything coherent, a true unity - the absolute - in diversity. Science is also now beginning to rediscover this, something which I explore in the next two chapters.

Spinoza’s understanding of the unity of all things perhaps anticipates nineteenth century evolutionary theory and Darwin’s evocation of the interconnectedness of all natural life, except that Spinoza also includes the dimension of mind as well as biology. This includes us as a thinking species as well as a physiological one. If the mystery and magic of biological evolution is how life unfolds from simple forms to more complex ones - atoms to molecules to cells to organisms and so on - then the wonder of human life is the unfolding in history of mind and the ever more complex social forms it gives birth to.

Evolving ethics

It is in our social and cultural formations as they evolve that we can look for the essence of our ethical being. Lawrence Kohlberg, the American psychologist, following Piaget’s theory of cognitive and moral development in the child, extended this into his own theory of the moral or ethical stages of development, based on the idea that ethical development involves an ever emerging and enlarging sense of social awareness. ¹²

Kohlberg hypothesised six stages of moral development or planes of moral adequacy to explain the evolution of moral reasoning. The six stages are grouped into three levels: “pre-conventional”, conventional and “post-conventional” morality. These discrete stages and levels form a continuum - potentially they go beyond the post-conventional, though Kohlberg did not research these. The psychological stages correlate with the evolution of social or cultural forms. The pre-conventional describe the early stages of development when conforming behaviour relates to the avoidance of punishment (stage 1) or issues of self-interest (stage 2). The conventional is conformity to social norms (stage 3) or to authority and law and order morality (stage 4).

The post-conventional takes us into the realm of individuality and principled conscience. This is: either social contract driven (stage 5) where laws are socially agreed rather than rigidly conformed to and, through majority decision, democratic government is made possible; or a morality, based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles (stage 6), laws being valid only insofar as they are grounded in justice. The implication here is that a commitment to justice obliges a person to disobey unjust laws and therefore requires a level of independent thought not available to people at pre-conventional or conventional levels.

These stages of ethical development may be thought to be a little schematic. Human beings and their social institutions never develop in a predictable linear fashion, yet Kohlberg remains influential for introducing a research-based and theoretical analysis of moral or ethical development. His student, Carol Gilligan, extended his work by adding a feminine dimension, emphasising the place of empathy or care, as well as the more masculine sense of justice.¹³ Ken Wilber thought in terms of a “Basic Moral Intuition” that is born in everyone. It is the sense of “we” - conscious or unconscious - as well as “I” that we all have, whatever our developmental stage.¹⁴

Structures of consciousness

The evolution of a sociocentric awareness in tandem with cognitive psychological development is at the heart of ethics. That we have entered a major period of transition from a rational, modernist culture to an integral one is the view of a growing number of thinkers, including in the middle of the last century the German poet and cultural

philosopher, Jean Gebser, who was mentioned in the introductory chapter. He is less known today but familiar to Europe's cultural community when he was alive. He left Hitler's Germany in the thirties for Spain and France before finally settling in Switzerland, where he worked with Jung. In his book, *Ursprung und Gegenwart* - literally "origin and present time" - published in two parts in 1949 and 1953 and translated into English in 1985 as *The Ever Present Origin*, Gebser hypothesised the development of human history in terms of five structures of consciousness - archaic, magic, mythic, mental and integral - which he intriguingly devised, and illustrated, from a knowledge of all the world's major arts, philosophies, and human and natural sciences.¹⁵

Ursprung und Gegenwart is a 400,000 word *magnum opus*, akin to Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang Des Abendlandes* - translated as *The Decline of the West* - except that whereas Spengler's book was published after the First World War and sounded a pessimistic note, Gebser's was written after the Second and was about the rebirth of the West into a more integrated worldwide age. Gebser's main thesis was the emergence of a new integral consciousness which includes, but goes beyond the rational, analytic consciousness of the European Enlightenment.

Central to this integral thinking is a new relationship to space and time. In the "mental" culture of the West since the Renaissance, space is experienced as perspectival, while time is linear. For instance, "history" is constructed as chronological and progressive - as opposed to the timeless sense of magical societies or the polar and circular experience of mythic cultures. The new sense of space, free of a limiting perspective - which Gebser calls "aperspectival" - and the new relationship with time, which he conceives of as "time-freedom", comprise an emerging "integral consciousness", viewing the "mental" sense of space and time from a new experience of the present.

Space is no longer so opaque and purely material but has become "diaphanous", or transparent, while the "past" and "future" - and the concept of the three times - are experienced today as forms of consciousness, less as realities having an objective, independent existence of their own. Modern historians have acknowledged for some time that history is written from the present, not from some essential point in the "past", as E. H. Carr pointed out in the 1960s.¹⁶ And now it is being acknowledged that the "future" is equally influential in our experience of the present, not a determined evolution from the

past but an unpredictable unfolding from the present. The future is an anticipation from now.

If time is a form of consciousness, then this also changes how we experience ourselves, less as the finite egos of mental consciousness, and more as “ego-free” beings belonging to an open universe. As the philosopher, Alexander Koyre, suggests in his book, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, published in 1957, we will experience “things never seen before and thoughts never thought”.¹⁷

Wilber had identified Gebser as an important thinker in his early book, *Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution*, published before the English translation of *Ursprung und Gegenwart*. Quoting from a 1972 journal article in English by Gebser, Wilber explained:

For Gebser the German Word, Ursprung conveys “our primordial Origin”, the timeless and spaceless whole, “the wholeness which existed at the very beginning, prior to time”. Gegenwart is “our living Present, which, as it actualises reality, encompasses all phases of time - yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and even the prehistorical and the timeless”.¹⁸

Wilber adds “these are all very familiar concepts to the perennial philosophy”.

The book which promised to put Gebser back on the map was Georg Feuerstein’s *Structures of Consciousness*, published in 1987, two years after the English translation came out.¹⁹ Feuerstein was German and had read *Ursprung und Gegenwart* in the sixties, making detailed notes at the time with the idea of writing a book about the author and his ideas. With that in mind he had also come to know Gebser personally, though he didn’t write his own book until later, some ten years after Gebser had died. Feuerstein is an authority, and writes lucidly, on the yoga traditions and thinking of Hindu culture.

Feuerstein showed how in Gebser’s thesis the archaic, magical, mythic, mental and rational are not just historical stages as we might see them from our own time, but qualitatively different forms of consciousness that have made us what we are and remain potentially accessible to us now. Our modern mental and rational culture, however, sees itself as radically distinct from what has gone “before” and lost touch with the original spirit

within the other structures. Given the extreme fragmentation of consciousness of our rational scientific culture - and the global impasse we have reached as a result - it is time to integrate the unitive spirit of magical thinking and the imaginative feeling of the mythic with our own analytic mind.

If there is a new knowledge on the horizon, then ethics, as I have already said, will be at the heart of it, its starting point. Practical reason, as the great teachers insist, comes before pure reason or metaphysics. Gautama Buddha remained silent about questions of meaning and interpretation and taught the fourth noble truth, the eightfold path of ethical, or right, living and thinking as a means to be released from suffering. Only then could you aspire to enlightenment. And Christ of course emphasised loving your neighbour as yourself as the essential principle above all others.

In conclusion

If Ethics is about how we live and it is clear our carbon dependence and consumerist way of life is leading to catastrophe, then we must learn to live much more simply. The Earth cannot afford the material life the modern world desires. To be sure everyone should have a roof over their head, enough food to eat, and some sort of work but living simply doesn't preclude a better life. In fact it is more likely to lead to greater happiness and creativity. The American inspirational writer, Duane Elgin, affirmed this in his books, the original *Voluntary Simplicity* and his later *Promise Ahead*.^{20 21}

That wisdom and ethics go together formed the central teaching of the great second century Buddhist sage, Arya Nagarjuna. An understanding of emptiness - *shunyata* (*emptiness*), its psychological as well as philosophical dimensions - changes how a person lives. Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* offered advice to leaders on this essential principle. As a contemporary commentary, *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness*, illustrated, the two values strengthen each other.²² Ethics is empowered by true wisdom, but wisdom without ethics is ineffective, even possibly harmful.

The Tibetan practice of ethical habits are summed up in their centuries-long tradition of *Lojong*, a distillation from the ancient wisdom of India and China. It consists of 59 pithy sayings which constitute the Seven Point Mind Training, brought to them in the twelfth century by the Indian master Atisha. This teaching, they believe, is the core of the entire

practice of Tibetan Buddhism and consists of practical instructions which make use of all the circumstances of everyday life to lead a person on the compassionate path to Buddhahood. It combines profound teachings with a common-sense ethics which other traditions would also recognise. ²³

The third of the seven mind-training points recommends “The Transformation of Adversity into the Path of Awakening”. “Awakening” brings transformation. Climate change faces us with our oblivion but it is also an opportunity for real enlightenment, which, in turn, can only help us to mitigate and adapt to climate change. As I discuss in the next three chapters, ethics, science and aesthetics - the Good, the True and the Sublime - are a unity. They complement and strengthen each other, but ethics comes first. Ethics is how we ground any new understandings in the practice of daily life.

Addendum: Socialism today.

1. Eco-Socialism

Socialists have always tried to hold industrial capitalism to account in the cause of social justice. Now they are adding ecological arguments to their case. As, for instance, the political writer of the left, Naomi Klein - a more recent convert to an ecological perspective - in a powerful warning, declared unequivocally in her 2015 book, *This Changes Everything*:

We know that if we continue on our current path of allowing emissions year after year, climate change will change everything about our world. And we don't have to do anything to bring about this future, all we have to do is nothing. ²⁴

Klein thinks in terms of the defeat of deregulated capitalism, with its exploitation of the poor through allowing free rein to the greed of the rich and powerful, and impressively links the struggle against this to all historical liberation movements – anti-slavery, anti-apartheid, race relations, global social justice, human and gender rights and so on. But climate change is, of course, more momentous than them all, for “this changes everything”.

Marx's critique of capitalism, of course, was based on an ethical sympathy with the suffering of the world's poor and downtrodden but also with an understanding of ecological principles. John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology* explores this neglected side of Marx.²⁵ Marx was very interested in, and read Darwin closely. The second volume of *Capital* was published in 1961, two years after *The Origin of the Species*.

Eco-socialists today point out how human nature is part of the ecological "web of life". Jason Moore, for instance, argues in *Capitalism in the Web of Life* that the cause of the storm can be found in the way capitalism organises nature - including human nature - and he suggests a new way of looking at capitalism as a "world ecology" of wealth, power and nature.²⁶ Capitalism makes the fundamental mistake of assuming material nature to be an infinite means of income rather than a finite source of capital, which we are on the point of exhausting. Moreover, the thinking behind capitalism assumes human beings are somehow independent and outside the web of nature rather than an integral part of it.

On the contrary, we are now aware of the importance of urgently weaning ourselves and our economy off our dependence on finite fossil fuels, which has contributed to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and are responsible for potentially catastrophic global warming. We have recently reached the symbolic figure of 400 ppm (particles per million) of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

Eco-Socialists, of course, question whether Capitalism can ever be ecological. What could "Eco-Capitalism" possibly look like? Jonathan Porritt explored this, implying a reference to Ernst Schumacher's *Small is beautiful*, in his *Capitalism as if people Mattered*. Capitalism and Socialism are not opposites, of course, but have always been part of a mixed economy. It is ideological conflict that has set them apart.

Andreas Malm, another eco-socialist, teaches Human Ecology at Lund University in Sweden, and suggested in *Fossil Capital* that the roots of global warming are to be found in the rise of steam power in the eighteenth century.²⁷ Malm asks why manufacturers turned from traditional sources of power, such as water mills, to an engine fired by coal. His answer is that steam power, which, in fact, offered neither cheaper nor more abundant energy, was more conducive to superior control of subordinate labour. Capital, driven by fossil fuels, could concentrate production on the most profitable sites and during the most convenient hours, which it continues to do today. Any transition from a fossil fuel to a renewables economy must involve a challenge to a carbon-dependent capitalism.

While the historical - or “dialectical materialism” - of Marxist thinking is important to take into account, it is only half the story. We - *homo sapiens* - are not just material bodies but also minds. Culture - both psychological and social - is an integral part of the human economy. The roots of industrial capitalism and current neo-liberal economics are also to be found in the philosophical, political and psychological superstructure of our history.

2. The Polanyis

It was Karl Polanyi who, in *The Great Transformation*, described the change from an organic society to a market one. At the same time his study of the Industrial Revolution, and the economic theory and practice that emerged with it, offered some understanding of the social, political and economic processes that led to the ills of the modern world.²⁸ He pointed to the development of a market economy independent of political and social realities, a disembedded economy which led to the myths of the market, particularly the myth of laissez faire neo-liberalism. As Polanyi insisted there never was a truly free self-regulating market which worked. And as Joseph Stiglitz wrote in the Foreword to the 2001 edition of *The Great Transformation*: “The myth of the self-regulating economy is, today, virtually dead”.²⁹

Interestingly, Polanyi’s brother, Michael, wrote an even profounder philosophical and psychological study - *Personal Knowledge*³⁰ - to complement *The Great Transformation* and to show how the impersonal knowledge in our culture has split fact from value and science from humanity. Any transformation must have a personal as well as social dimension. This view was clearly spelt out in Robert Thurman’s 1998 landmark *Inner Revolution*, drawing on the profound philosophical and psychological insights of a Tibetan Buddhism now available to the whole world, after the brutal invasion of Tibet by communist China in the last century.

And Karl Polanyi’s daughter, Kari Polanyi Levitt, has built on her father’s socialist vision with a critical analysis of the market economy, updating it to include *The Great Financialization* - the financial disaster of 2008 - and the rise of the global south to challenge the economic values of the “developed” world.³¹

Notes

- ¹ Stephen M, Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p xii.
- ² James Garvey, *The Ethics of Climate Change: Right and Wrong in a Warming World*, London: Continuum, 2008.
- ³ Jonathan Lear, *A Case for Irony*, Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- ⁴ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London: Verso, 2016 (1947) p xi
- ⁵ John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, with an introduction by the author, London: Routledge Classics, 2007 (1995) pp 266-67
- ⁶ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, with an Introduction by Amartya Sen, edited with Notes by Ryan Patrick Hanley, New York: Penguin Books, 2009 (1759) p 13.
- ⁷ Ibid. p viii
- ⁸ Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- ⁹ Ibid. p 103
- ¹⁰ Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley with an introduction by Stuart Hampshire, London: Penguin, 1996.
- ¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *Spinoza*, from *The Great Philosophers, Volume II*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Ralph Mannheim, New York: Harvest/HBJ, 1966 (1957)
- ¹² Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Vol 1*, San Francisco: Harper, 1981
- ¹³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- ¹⁴ Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: the Spirit of Evolution*, Boston: Shambhala, 2000 (1995) pp 640-643 and see references in Index to BMI (Basic Moral Intuition).
- ¹⁵ Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin, Part One: Foundations of the Aperspectival World - A Contribution to the History of the Awakening of Consciousness, Part Two: Manifestations of the Aperspectival World - An Attempt at the Concretion of the Spiritual*, Authorised Translation by Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985. *Ursprung und Gegenwart*, 1949 and 1953.
- ¹⁶ E.H. Carr, *What is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures, delivered in the University of Cambridge, January-March, 1961*, London: Penguin, 1961.
- ¹⁷ Alexandre Koyre, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Forgotten Books, 2008, 1957
- ¹⁸ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden: a Transpersonal View off Human Evolution*, Wheaton, Ill., USA: Quest books, 1996 (1981), p 27. See also Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, 2000 pp 192-197
- ¹⁹ Georg Feuerstein, *Structures of Consciousness: the Genius of Jean Gebser. An Introduction and Critique. Lower lake, California: Integral Publishing, 1987.*
- ²⁰ Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity*

²¹ Duane Elgin, *Promise Ahead*

²² Khensur Jampa Tegchok, *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness: A Commentary on Nagarjuna's Precious Garland*, translated by Bhikkhu Steve Carlier and edited by Bhikkhu Thubten Chodron.

²³ See Chogyam Trungpa, *Training the Mind*, Boston: Shambhala, 1993; Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are: How to Accept Yourself and Others*, London: Thorsons, 1994; B. Alan Wallace, *The Seven-Point Mind Training: A Tibetan Method for Cultivating Mind and Heart*, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2012 (1992); and the classic commentary by Jamgon Kongtrul – *The Great Path of Awakening: the Classic Guide to Lojong*, translated by Ken McLeod (1987, 2018).

²⁴ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, London: Penguin, 2014, p 4

²⁵ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.

²⁶ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, London: Verso, 2015, pp 3-4.

²⁷ Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, London: Verso, 2016

²⁸ Karl Polyani, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, foreword by Joseph Stiglitz and new introduction by Fred Block, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 (1944)

²⁹ Ibid p x

³⁰ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 2002 (1958)

³¹ Kari Polyani Levitt, *From the Great Transformation to the Great Financialisation: On Karl Polyani and Other Essays*, Halifax, Canada: Fernwood, 2013.