

**UKCP article: integrative project of Climate Psychology Alliance.** December 2022.

Given the state of the planet, the crumbling nature of global society and the prospect of our “civilisation”’s complete collapse, the future of life on Earth is at stake. But a crisis is always an opportunity, as the cliché has it. And the opportunity is to believe in ourselves and our creative ingenuity to rescue life nonetheless, even from the apocalypse we are facing in this 21st century. It’s currently an energy and cost of living crisis in the Western world but an absolute life-and-death emergency for the rest of humanity.

Energy isn’t just about fossil fuels and renewables. It’s also about mental energy, and we have plenty of that, if only we knew how to use it profitably. One of the ways is to pool our mental energy efficiently, and that is about working together integratively and collaboratively, in an alliance which stretches across all our individual and social endeavours, physically, emotionally and mentally.

It seems to me the term, Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA), embraces all these issues, so where better to start - for us - on the project of a universal human alliance than an integrative approach to the psychologies and psychotherapies of the modern Western world and the implications for social, economic and political life both locally and globally.

In 2016 *The Psychotherapist* magazine of the United Kingdom Counsel for Psychotherapy published an edition, entitled “Climate Change and Radical Hope” which, drawing on contributions from members of different schools of psychology and psychotherapy in the Climate Psychology Alliance, brought attention to the blanket of denial about climate change in our own professional ranks and across the whole Western world, the need to understand this, and the crucial importance of acting to adapt to, and mitigate, the emergency. They also addressed the issue of Radical Hope which formed a middle way between naive optimism and nihilistic despair. <sup>1</sup>

My own contribution to this group edition was to describe how the different schools of psychotherapy might begin to work integratively within the organisation of the UKCP and how this might act as a psychological model for a collaborative approach in the world outside the sphere of the psychotherapy professions. Here is the original text of my own article, one of nine from CPA members:

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<sup>1</sup> *The Psychotherapist*, issue 63, summer 2016, edited by Judith Anderson and Chris Robertson

## **Everything and nothing: radical hope in a time of climate change**

*Tony Cartwright encourages psychotherapists to see the bigger picture, not just the view from their own specialisms, when faced with the potential crisis of climate change. A contemplative mind is an essential complement to analytic thought.*

In a longer article with this title,<sup>2</sup> I suggest provocatively that there may be a case for “doing nothing” in the face of climate change, given that our past track record indicates we are unlikely to stop the powers that be from extracting and burning fossil fuel reserves well over the 2 degrees centigrade average temperature rise limit, and that climate scientists now think we are heading for 4 degrees centigrade plus sometime this century. This is despite all the warnings of the Greens and ecologists in the past 50 years. The scientists are now more loudly insisting we should cut our carbon emissions urgently and completely if we are to avoid global catastrophe this century. Doing nothing would therefore seem not to be an option but, of course, I do not mean literally doing nothing. We should all be climate warriors now.

### **A different kind of doing nothing**

But there is a different kind of doing nothing which is actually very hard to do, though it is core, I think, to “radical hope”. As psychotherapists, we know that holding back on our wish to act, just being there when faced with very distressed clients, can sometimes be the most therapeutic intervention because it gives people the space to look at their difficulties and draw on their own inner resources. So it can be with everyone. As the storms and floods get worse, as the predictions of global warming seem more certain and scientists write with more conviction than ever about the “sixth mass extinction”, our fears and anxieties grow and intensify and the pressure to do something increases.

The Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA) was formed to think about why so many people still deny, ignore, or disavow climate change.<sup>3</sup> It may not be indifference or

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<sup>2</sup> See this as the first essay on this website.

<sup>3</sup> Sally Weintrobe, editor, *Engaging with Climate Change: psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*, 2013. Also Joseph Dodds, *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos: complexity theory: Deleuze/Guattari and psychoanalysis for a climate in crisis*, 2011. Another interesting collection is Mary-Jayne Rust and Nick Totten, co-editors, *Vital Signs: psychological responses to ecological crisis*, 2012.

complacency, but the result of half-conscious feelings such as helplessness, sadness or a sense of being wholly inadequate to the crisis. Doing nothing can mean facing and contemplating the reality, whatever feelings it evokes. One is reminded of the amusing Zen injunction: “Don’t just do something, sit there”. But can we act out of something other than fear and anxiety?

### **What lies ahead?**

The theme of “everything and nothing” seemed to me to fit with the absolute enormity of what lies ahead for us, a sense captured in the title of Naomi Klein’s recent book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*.<sup>4</sup> Klein states:

*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.*

In my original article I explored the relationship between everything and nothing philosophically and psychologically. After all, everything comes from nothing. Isn’t this what the bible says in Genesis - order out of chaos? And science too? Scientists are now starting to explore the nothing that produced the Big Bang. Could this chaotic nothing be a subtler, more mysterious form of order? Everything and nothing may seem opposites but they have an affinity we would do well to think about.

### **Knowledge of the true self**

And, as for “everything”, didn’t Ken Wilber, who was profiled in this magazine some years ago, write a book in 1996 with the intriguing title *A Brief History of Everything?*<sup>5</sup> This is not everything in a quantitative, material sense but as a psychological and spiritual reality. Wilber is a very lucid exponent of the perennial philosophy and would be familiar with that puzzling question in the Indian *Upanishads*, those metaphysical dialogues written down some two and a half millennia ago: “What is that by knowing which all things are

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<sup>4</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: capitalism vs the climate*, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, 2000/1995.

known?”<sup>6</sup> The answer in the *Upanishads* is knowledge of the true or original self. Real, absolute knowledge is not about the world so much as the self through which a person experiences the world.

UKCP readers might wonder how our professions might begin to address the problem of climate change. It may initially be about understanding the unconscious reasons for our denial. The question then follows: how do we cope with the climate crisis and what it means for us? How do we think about its implications, not just for psychology but also for science, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, existential and spiritual issues, and everything else? Our modern scientific culture is very fragmented and our specialisms have become extremely disconnected and out of touch with each other. Is it too late to think how we can begin reintegrating them? One answer is to start by looking at ourselves.

### **Objective and subjective experience**

Our natural sciences have explored and revealed the outer world, micro- and macroscopically, in ways we could not have dreamt of, such is their empirical and imaginative progress. But equally astounding has been their lack of self awareness in doing so, a fateful example of the observing self being unaware of itself as observer. So absolute is the gap between objective and subjective experience, and their relative values, in our modern culture that it is difficult not to see this as connected to the fatal consequences of the industrial revolution in the last century, leading to the horrors of mechanised world war in the first half of the century, the development of annihilating nuclear weapons in the Cold War and now the actual alteration of the Earth's climate and all it portends.

Ken Wilber has emphasised the crucial importance of reintegrating the core values of ethics, science, and aesthetics, known as the Good, the True and the Beautiful in the classical world. In his first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*,<sup>7</sup> may give us the key to restoring the science of mind in our modern, and postmodern, world. The great

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<sup>6</sup> Eknath Easwaran, “Mundaka Upanishad” in *The Upanishads*, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, 1993/1977.

nineteenth century scholar, Jamgon Kongtrul, captured the essential insight of Buddhism: “Just realising the meaning of mind encompasses all understanding”.<sup>8</sup>

This, as Ken Wilber knows, is not just the human mind but the universe itself, and everything in it, as mind, the universe as a “spectrum of consciousness”. There is nothing that is not mind. It’s may be difficult for us to understand, given that we have been educated to believe in a purely material or dualistic world.

### **An infinitely layered spectrum**

The spectrum metaphor is taken from the scientific idea of an electromagnetic spectrum, which is a potentially infinite continuum comprising different wave bands of energy. Could not consciousness also be an infinitely layered spectrum with different levels of awareness finding expression on different wave bands of the continuum, a rainbow of consciousness? Wilber applied that to the whole of human culture but perhaps we could think of it with respect to psychotherapy and the structure of the UKCP. The different models of psychotherapy could be seen as forming a continuum, with each of its colleges occupying different strands on the spectrum. Once this principle is understood, the spectrum can be seen to extend beyond the psychotherapeutic arena to the larger world outside.

In this way of thinking, different therapy models and modalities within the psychotherapy world could be considered integrally, from body work to transpersonal approaches. It would lessen the sectarian impulse which leads one school, or approach, to claim to have the whole, or right, answer. Rather than being a potential Tower of Babel, with competing voices and languages, every form of therapy would have its place somewhere on the spectrum, providing the opportunity to contribute and learn from each other. For instance, body therapists could remind us we are material flesh and blood; cognitive approaches, that energy follows thought; psychoanalysis, that mind is also unconscious; transpersonal psychotherapy, that there is a supra-unconscious as well as a sub-conscious; humanistic therapies could emphasise the importance of philosophy and human existential issues; and systemic psychotherapy, that the mind is wide as well as deep, and that a person is as much an interdependency as an individual. Conflict and difference are inevitable but they don’t have to be only divisive. They can often connect and enrich.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Kalu Rinpoche, *Luminous Mind: the way of the Buddha*, 1997/1993

## **The possibility of transformation**

George Marshall, the founder and chair of Outreach, recently wrote an interesting book, *Don't Even Think About It*, in which he suggested that our brains are wired to ignore climate change.<sup>9</sup> Hard wiring is a metaphor taken from material science but I wonder whether our wiring is changing or whether anything is hard wired. From a buddhist perspective, which I find helpful when thinking about our own modern culture, western scientific truths, like hard wiring, are always relative, as are boundaries of any sort. Absolute truth, by contrast, is what Buddhism calls *shunyata*, which is often translated as 'emptiness'. In 'emptiness' there are no boundaries and therefore relative 'truths' can change. In such openness there is always the possibility of transformation.

What the modern world needs is a true science of mind. Climate change may bring much destruction and suffering in this century, even our extinction, but could it be, at the same time, that we have the opportunity of an awakening that transforms us? Science has demonstrated the plasticity of the brain but what could have more potential plasticity than the human mind? Jung and Richard Wilhelm made famous the classic Chinese book of wisdom, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, first translated into German by Wilhelm in 1929.<sup>10</sup> The "Golden Flower" is the original mind and heart, which we all have access to.

## **The bigger picture**

In 1991 Thomas Cleary made a further translation from the Chinese and annotated it with notes and commentary informed by his knowledge and wide reading of Taoist and Chan/Zen principles and practices.<sup>11</sup> In his version he identified the essence of the "secret" as the capacity to "turn the light around". This is the heart of true contemplative practice - open to everyone, whatever their cultural and environmental conditions. The light inside every person is the same light as lives in the entire universe. Turn the light around in yourself and the universe is transformed. In the Indian *Vedanta* tradition this is known as *You Are That*.

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<sup>9</sup> George Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It: why our brains are wired to ignore climate change*, 2014

<sup>10</sup> Richard Wilhelm and C.G. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: a Chinese book of life*, 2014/1932

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Cleary, translator, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: the classic Chinese book of life*, 1991

“Turning the light around” is also the art of stepping outside our familiar perspective and looking from somewhere else. No one discipline on its own can meet the challenge of climate change and ecological degradation. The systemic principle that the whole is more than the parts suggests that it is important to see the bigger picture, not just the view from our own specialisms. It is also important to see the whole in the part. This is the essence of an integral approach in psychology as well as in the larger world. “Turning” to a contemplative quality of mind can enable an intuitive grasp of essentials that elude rational or instrumental thinking. There is a perennial truth: “Just as the drop is in the ocean, so the ocean is in the drop” - the whole mysteriously in the part, as well as the part in the whole. “Doing nothing” is my code for the contemplative mind, or spirit of wonder, not an alternative but a complement to cognitive or analytic thought. We can use it in all our activities, personal and professional. What could be more healing to both therapists and clients than a practice that addresses the therapeutic relationship to the wider needs of the whole Earth and the life of all species on it?

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