

# FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS

Climate Psychology Alliance



**Explorations in  
Climate Psychology  
Journal**

Issue 1: October 2021

# Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal

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Cover picture by Steve Marshall.

## Editorial Team

We are happy to introduce CPA's *Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal* Editorial Team, in alphabetical order:

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# Introducing *Explorations*

By the Editorial Team

Climate change confronts humanity's current unsustainable existence in this world. It makes us turn towards ourselves and recognise our interdependency on others, including nature.

"Facing difficult truths about climate change and the ecological crisis" is a vision of the Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA), which was constituted more than a decade ago. CPA was created as a space where psychology could be centred and the psychological depth of climate change be explored, and where community-created and different collective actions could be shared. CPA has developed from a UK-based group to a membership-based alliance representing many different voices around the world. Recently, CPA created a website for an international presence.<sup>1</sup> CPA mainly comprises psychological professionals, but it is also a platform for activists, policy-makers, journalists, researchers and other people who share an unyielding concern for our planet. CPA's aim is to play a meaningful role in the development of climate psychology and to contribute more broadly to the discourses that could shape the world for the better.

In these footsteps, we are excited to introduce to you the first issue of CPA's *Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal*, or *Explorations*. Organising and realising this first issue has been a creative process for over a year. The journal seeks to be alert and open to what is emerging in CPA as a collective of different people's conversations, relationships and actions, which are constantly shifting as the climate crisis manifests itself in so many different ways.

*Explorations* is a natural progression of the inquiry and explorations section of the CPA website that for years has shared testimonies, reflective articles, research and book reviews written by members. Humbly, this Editorial Team sought to respond to CPA's desire to consolidate these works and provide a medium to reflect on what is emerging for members in relation to the climate crisis. The first issue is the Editorial Team's voluntary work over months. We have not only deliberated about the medium – we've settled on a bi-annual journal – but have also thought about how to situate the journal within climate psychology, to capture what is taking place.

*Explorations* will not replace all the contributions and exchanges happening through the Google groups, working groups and website. We hope the journal will be a valuable add-on to CPA by sensitively tracking and reflecting the pace, rhythms, voices, movements and other emerging expressions of climate psychology. We thought of explorations in several ways in this respect, some of which will be reflected in the first issue. As you will see in this issue, *Explorations* is not an academic journal (even though we welcome analytical articles, reviews and features that promote peer-reviewed research). One of our goals is to promote different forms of expression – such as interviews, reflections, testimonies, poetry, art and lightly edited conversations. As an Editorial Team, we believe that only through this approach are we able to create a platform that is inclusive of the different ways people are experiencing and engaging with one another on climate



change. However, to be clear, all views are not equal and we would like to promote those who help to navigate the inner and external work (relational and socio-political) that this moment calls on us to do.

This issue comes shortly after the latest IPCC report (10 August 2021)<sup>2</sup> was published and weeks before the next COP (United Nations climate change conference) will take place in November 2021. As the IPCC once again communicates how devastating and urgent the climate crisis is, globally, people notice climate-change-induced events happening more frequently and they also notice that no area or region is exempt from harm and suffering. This might have an impact on the visibility of climate injustice and highlight the further need for action at all levels of our society. However, the major economies benefiting from and manifesting economic growth seem still, most of the time, to be less affected by the consequences of the crisis.

While climate psychology as a field further evolves into looking into the dynamic of the crisis and its psychological manifestations, we

1. <https://climatepsychologyinternational.org>

2. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

feel the crisis is also pushing members to the edge of understanding what climate psychology is, and to what and how it is supposed to contribute to society. One example of this is the research that Caroline Hickman and others recently published. The research shows that, in 10 countries, the majority of young people have experienced extraordinarily high levels of climate-related distress (for example, anger, sadness, anxiety and fear). Not only have they experienced this profound distress because of the state of the planet, but also because the vast majority feel betrayed by their governments' inaction. On 21 September, UN Secretary-General António Guterres drew attention to the findings, stating in an address to the General Assembly: "We must show children and young people that, despite the gravity of the situation, the world has a plan and governments are committed to implementing it." We cannot oversee its longer term effect, but this work is an example of CPA having a direct impact in the cultural and political arena.

Topics are clearly expanding into neighbouring areas of cultural debates and cultural understanding. (How to distinguish between them is an ongoing question, in any case.) Clearly, our relation to the natural world, to other-than-human others, is also key, while CPA is increasingly looking into everyday politics and its operation. Maybe this reflects competing stories as they are told in the world about climate, testifying as we dare to say that the old story (capitalism) doesn't work any longer. Climate psychology is confronting these political realities on multiple fronts that challenge us to radical thinking and acting. As we write this introduction, some CPA members have openly asked their representative bodies to take a stance and be clear that they will look after their members who have protested in the public space, non-violently, in an act of civil disobedience. We also have members who are actively involved in climate litigation and others who are mobilising to end the continued investment in fossil fuels. We see it fit then that we begin this issue with questioning the ideology of modernity that has colonised our lifeworlds.

**"A pathology so deeply ingrained as to be unrecognisable: how the climate crisis hides itself in plain sight"** is an interview with David Kidner, during which he introduces the ideas that knit together his two main books on ecological psychology. He wrote *Nature and psyche: radical environmentalism and the*

*politics of subjectivity* in 2001, while *Nature and experience in the culture of delusion: how industrial society lost touch with reality* followed in 2012. David reveals the industrial nature of the modern world, and the disturbing extent to which an industrial society colonises and exploits not only the natural world, but also our sense of identity.

Steve Marshall then holds a space among these discourses for radical hope. Noting governance and shareholder shifts, the successes of climate litigation and possibilities for repartitions, his article, **Three days in May**, describes some of the paradigm shifts that are taking place. Importantly, he also emphasises that climate justice is inseparable from social and racial justice.

Steve's is the first of two 'personal reflections' in this issue. We are including these alongside reviews and more formal papers. They can be testimonies, actions, musings, sensings, relational happenings and so much more. We try to be minimal with editing in this section and these articles are written in a descriptive rather than an academic style — which we enjoy.

The poet, author and politician Aimé Césaire once said: "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge". We see poetry, art and dialogue as being inseparable from the broader social goal of this journal. For this reason, we have woven together these ways of knowing the world throughout the journal. In this issue, we have been blessed with the poetic works of Paul Zeal (**'Raven'**), Elspeth Crawford (**'Passing by'**) and John Wood (**'The death of life on Earth'**).

In **Reflecting together on climate psychology**, a rich real-life event stimulated a dialogue between members of CPA. Dialogue and the recognition of similarities and differences are essential to us feeling through these times. In July of this year, Shelot Masithi, Paul Maiteny, Rachael Webster, Laurie Michaelis, Sally Gillespie and Steffi Bednarek sat together virtually to share their personal experiences of what brought them to climate psychology, how they are navigating the moment, the significance of culture and context in ecological relations, reflections on how we could transform our values and beliefs that drive the ecological crises, and more. Look out for a call later this year to join the second dialogue.



In this issue, we have also included two book reviews by CPA members. **Ivana Sharp reviews** Thomas Hübl's latest book, *Healing collective trauma*, which gives a detailed description of trauma. Ivana illuminates the collective trauma integration process that Thomas Hübl offers as a solution – but not without a good dose of critique. The review reminds us to be sceptical about quick solutions.

**Els van Ooijen reviews** *Pilgrimages to emptiness: rethinking reality through quantum physics*, by Shantena Augusto Sabbadini (2017). Els first draws our attention to the “amazing mystery of life” throughout Sabbadini’s work, which draws us deeper into the permeability and edges between order and chaos. In doing so, Els offers reflections about the difficulty of facing the climate crisis while being enchanted by the beauty and complexity of this world.

Our second personal reflection is Ruth Jones’s article **1,000 days in the land of 1,000 hills**, which offers a shining example of a bond of friendship being forged across differences of geography, ethnicity and life experience, resulting in transformative experiences in rural Rwanda. We recognise that a caring and effective response to the climate crisis requires that we think and work together with others across the world, holding their situations and needs in mind alongside our own.

In **Climate psychology and liberation: beyond climate grief and sorrow**, Tony Cartwright argues that Buddhism and other ancient teachings illuminate the major civilisational transition currently underway (‘the Anthropocene’) and, in particular, how it is changing us in the West. Whilst living and dreaming were given much attention by the therapies of the last century, the focus on meditation and dying as transformational – and potentially liberating – is a more adequate response to the climate emergency. Buddhism reveals how we have lost touch with some simple but fundamental truths; ways of seeing that are only now being ‘rediscovered’ by advances in systems science and theoretical physics.

When it comes to the future of this journal, we hope to serve the CPA membership and collaborate with those who appreciate the journal as a platform for spotlighting climate psychology in its many forms. In **How to contribute to Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal**, we describe in detail how to share what you’re working on, your thoughts, views or accounts of events or experiences. In the next issue, we would like to focus on centring the more-than-human world in climate psychology and have detailed this in the call. The submission deadline is 31 January 2022.

Our imagination plays a pivotal role in helping us to engage with catastrophe and imagine a new world. Climate and ecological fiction (usually abbreviated to ‘cli-fi’) serves the same function. To help readers find their way amid the growing number of cli-fi and solarpunk works, we have designated a space within the journal – **Cli-fi corner** – for reflective reviews of works of fiction that readers have found thought-provoking and, in some way, illuminating. It will be a space for readers to review and share their reflections on a work of climate fiction, solarpunk or eco-fiction, whether in the form of a novel, a short story, a film, a television series or a play. We also would like to give space to authors to reflect on their works.

Lastly, we’d like to ground each journal in some form of embodied practice. In **12 ways to praise a particular Oak tree that stands on the corner of a field on Turner’s Hill, East Sussex**, Toby Chown shares his experience with Martin Shaw’s provocation: to find something beautiful and give it 12 secret names.

We hope you will enjoy this first offering and that it serves its purpose. We encourage everybody within CPA to invite others from outside CPA to have a look.

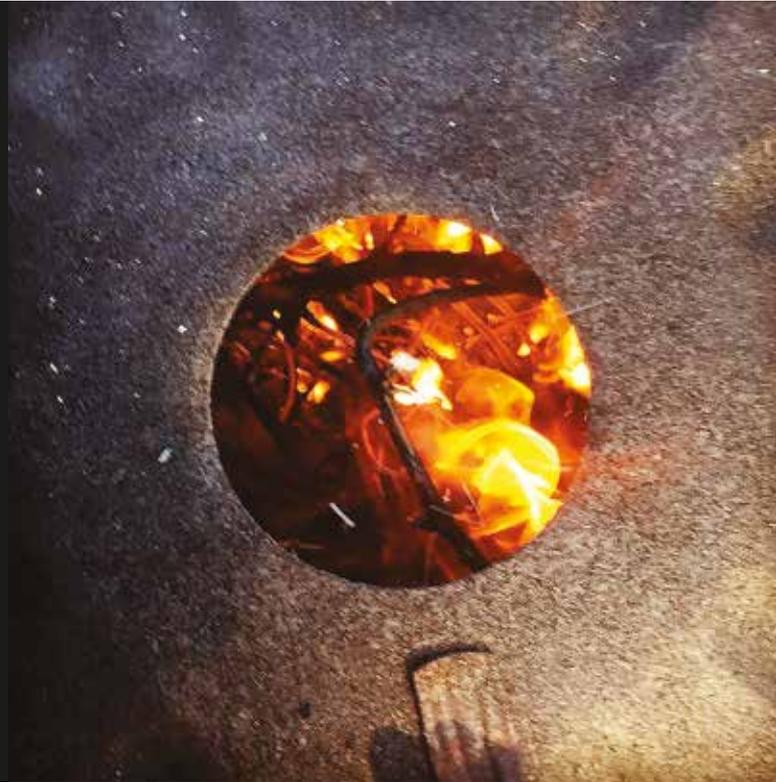
# “A pathology so deeply ingrained as to be unrecognisable”: How the climate crisis hides itself in plain sight – a dialogue with David Kidner

By Toby Chown

**David Kidner** is a psychologist and former university lecturer of 40 years' experience. He is the author of two books with a distinctive and important set of messages for psychologists approaching the climate and ecological crisis. *Nature and psyche: radical environmentalism and the politics of subjectivity* investigates psychology's betrayal of the natural world, and the colonisation of the idea of the individual by the same industrial patterning that colonises the natural world.

His second book, *Nature and experience in the culture of delusion: how industrial society lost touch with reality*, develops this argument further, looking at the ways that reality has become shaped by an interplay between social construction and materialistic positivism. Both of these approaches, he argues, whilst appearing opposed, collude in denying a fundamental reality and vitality to nature, and strip us of an essential dimension of human experience that is deeply woven into an ecological reality.

In this interview, David introduces the ideas that knit together these two key books, and his vision of ecological psychology – revealing the industrial nature of the modern world, and the disturbing extent to which an industrial society colonises and exploits not only the natural world, but also our sense of identity.



**Toby Chown:** Your first book, *Nature and psyche*, looks at subjectivity and how it has been warped by what you call ‘industrialism’, in exactly the same ways that what we call ‘nature’ has been warped and destroyed. I wonder if you could first tell us how you came to write *Nature and psyche*. How you would introduce it to people approaching climate psychology for the first time?

**David Kidner:** Like all my writing, *Nature and psyche* demanded to be written rather than being consciously planned. I knew that there was something important that needed to be recognised and expressed, but it was only as I tried to write that it began to take shape. The same thing applied to what I was reading, too. I would immediately recognise when something was relevant, but then I'd have to think it through before I could begin to consciously realise why it was relevant. Over the years, I've become comfortable with that way of writing, at first sensing only the outline of what needs saying, and letting it take shape in its own way and at its own speed. That's a journey I'm still on today, although hopefully I have a much fuller picture of what it is I'm trying to express...

As to the second part of your question, I'd want to get across the idea – one that even today is not generally recognised – that climate change is only a single symptom of a pathology that's so deeply ingrained within industrial society as to be almost unrecognisable; a symptom of a deep malignancy that will take all

our strength and commitment to excise. So long as we see climate change simply as a technical issue, albeit one that will have dire consequences, then we have no chance of avoiding catastrophe – although the particular form that catastrophe will take is still partly undefined. For decades, or even centuries, Euro-American society has been clearing a space within which industrial society can flourish – a social space rather than one that recognises the foundational character of nature; and climate change can, I think, be understood as a return of the nature we have pushed aside.

**Toby:** It's good to hear about your creative process. That blend of intuition and reflection seems to offer one way out of some of the intellectual traps that face us when we try to grapple with the immensity and elusiveness of the present crisis.

Your books offer readers a way of starting to uncover how industrial systems of thought curtail the question of how deeply ecology goes into psyche and nature. They blend your own distinctive voice with writing from a wide range of sources from psychology, anthropology, ecology, scientific papers, poetry, philosophy. Your use of this wide range of sources and interdisciplinary approach challenge readers to travel across disciplines to avoid intellectual *cul de sacs* and to broaden an understanding of what causes climate change and the ecological crisis.

In your forthcoming essay, you argue that, despite dazzling technical accomplishments, there has been “a gradual narrowing of human awareness and reason over the last several centuries” – something that perhaps we as ‘moderns’ often reflexively assume is not the case.

Much of *Nature and psyche* and *Culture of delusion* are given to identifying this subtly hidden pathology and the narrowing of experience that it brings. It seems an important part of your project that we understand that the pathology that threatens all life on this planet is at once both hard to detect and yet hiding in plain sight – deeply ingrained in our society.

Your writing suggests that this pathology amounts to a systematic denial of ‘nature’ as the source both of scientific practice and of the self. If we take the pathology metaphor further, it’s as if the infection has taken hold of both the ‘exterior’ world and its industrial and scientific practices, and the ‘inner’ world and its psychology. It’s as if the pathology continually works to justify industrial practices and yet conceal its own destructiveness.

It seems to leave us with the idea of ‘matter’ as dead stuff to be ‘developed’ or ‘improved’ by ingenious humans, and a certainty that the human beings doing this improving are a bundle of thoughts and feelings socially constructed by a language that’s also been created by ingenious humans.

In some ways, your books seem to be elegant answers to the perpetual question: “Are humans a part of nature?”

One could give a quick cosmic answer, “Yes, because everything is”, or a misanthropic, “No, because they destroy nature and make unnatural things”, but your writing seems to offer a much more compelling answer, if I have read you correctly, that the human psyche has deep, often-forgotten roots in the ecological world, yet is conditioned by a human society that acts as if there were no aliveness to nature.

How do you understand this question of “Are human beings a part of nature”? How important is this question to “excising the malignancy” of that part of ourselves that is working against the living world?

**David:** Your question covers a lot of ground – necessarily, because it’s the higher-order, more inclusive picture that’s most important here. This is the picture that we don’t usually see,



because conventional knowledge is split into disciplines, topics and informational tidbits in much the same way that the reality of the world is divided into elements, ‘natural resources’, ‘ecosystem services’, and so on. In other words, the physical reduction of the world to ‘natural resources’ is complemented and reinforced by a reductionist understanding that sees the world as a collection of ‘things’, generating a false illusion that this sort of understanding adequately represents reality.

This deliberately encouraged fragmentation denies one of the essential qualities of life – its systemic organisation, which allows something to be separate on one level while functionally entangled with other entities at a higher-order level. For example, a cell can be studied as an individual entity, but also as part of a bodily organ, just as the organ can be studied both individually and as part of the system we call the individual. Likewise, the natural world is organised eco-systemically – that is, in terms of nested levels of organisation – allowing ‘bottom up’ as well as ‘top down’ feedback between the ‘layers’ of organisation. So, a powerful creature such as a lion may seem to dominate other forms of life; but the lion can be undone by a lack of prey or by viral diseases such as canine distemper.

In contrast, industrialism allows only limited – and decreasing – ‘bottom up’ feedback, and more and more tends towards a top-down hierarchy. Forests and elephants have no say in their treatment; and in the human realm, the power of voters to change or influence governments is fading because public understanding is generally hostage to an elite cartel comprising the mainstream media, the state and the corporate realm. Industrialism is therefore opposed to the organisation of life, both in terms of its content and its fundamental structure. Industrialism has become so all-pervasive that much of the world’s population now tacitly shares most of its fundamental assumptions, including the intoxication with technology and consumerism, the belief that the entire natural world is ours to use as we see fit, and the unconcern with the future of life on earth or even of our own children and grandchildren. Because it is almost universal, this seems ‘normal’, even ‘natural’, to us; and thinking beyond it requires a far-reaching epiphany.

Where does this leave the individual? Well, it’s clear that humanity evolved as part of life, and for the most part we still possess those characteristics that could align us with the natural world if we dusted them off a bit. But more than any other species, the large ‘association’ areas of our brains make us fatefully prone to being colonised – or ‘programmed’, for those who prefer digital analogies – by invasive ideologies.

So, the ways we think and act are heavily dependent on whether we are brought up as part of an Amazonian tribe or a fascist sect, or whatever. While a dwindling number of societies are still attuned to the natural order, most are not; and the imprint our ideological environments leave on us can take a lifetime – or often, more than a lifetime – to transcend. Specifically, the extent to which we are capable of rapport with other forms of life, or even with our own bodily self, depends on the extent to which we’ve been derailed by the industrialist view of life to which we have been relentlessly exposed. So, humanity is a focal part of the terrain on which the war of industrialism on the natural order is focused; and to a varying extent, we have become the agents of the industrialist system.

Acknowledging our essentially divided character allows us to recognise the falsity of various inadequate models of personhood:

## INTERVIEW

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the view that we are entirely 'constructed' by the social (read 'industrial') realm; the view that our 'greed', 'anthropocentrism', 'individualism' (etc) are the root causes of industrialism's destruction of nature rather than symptoms of it; the view that industrialism is merely an extension of our interactions with other natural entities, so that everything we do is necessarily 'natural'; or the denial of our natural roots that is implicit in the argument that what we need is a 'balance' between the needs of humanity and those of the rest of the natural world.

Each of these views subtly or overtly assumes an industrialist starting point, making them blind to the issues that must be addressed. So, it goes without saying that 'excising the malignancy' of our assimilation into industrialism is not a simple matter of 'green technology', or learning to 'love nature', or whatever. In some respects, human evolution itself has been assimilated, as Iain McGilchrist shows in his fine book, *The master and his emissary*.<sup>1</sup> But a positive aspect of our situation is that we still possess in our embodiment some of the basic tendencies and characteristics that could enable us to relocate ourselves within the natural order: the ability to respond emotionally to a beautiful landscape, to music, to injustice, to a child's smile. These things cannot be negated by industrialism – although they may have been sidelined – because they are essentially untranslatable into the language of industrialism, and so cannot easily be absorbed or perverted.

**Toby:** It sounds like you are saying that we are caught between our intrinsic relationship to the natural order and the ecocidal realities of modern life. That because of human beings' ability to learn from 'external' ideologies and culture, rather than instinct or nature itself, we are highly vulnerable to our view of the world becoming anti-nature. So, both a 'nature awareness' workshop and a 'green tech start-up' business end up being what mythologist Martin Shaw calls "toxic mimics" – things that appear numinous but are actually destructive.

I want to linger a little around the concept of 'industrialism'. Industrialism becomes the principal agent of destruction in your writing. Its identification evokes history as well as psychology; one of a turn towards work, money and systems of exploitation. *Nature and psyche* and *Culture of delusion* make industrialism visible – it seems that one defining feature of industrialism is precisely how hard it is to see, even present in notions of 'balance' or of anthropocentrism.

Your writing in *Nature and psyche* and *Culture of delusion* offers continual shifts between a sense of whether the problem is 'out there' in social structures, or 'in here' in our psyche or nature, to the extent that I wonder if this question of what is 'inner' or 'outer' is actually a major problem for human beings. I don't think you are simply saying that we simply need to reform corporations, have more accountable media and vote in different governments; there is something deeply embedded in our social structures and our sense of self that we must recognise as part of the same thing.

The problem of industrialism, and the need to locate it either within or outside of human nature seems like modern secular re-statement of a theological question about original sin. Do we as human beings feel ourselves to be fundamentally flawed from within and

'fallen', or basically good but oppressed or deluded by malign industrial constructs?

I'm curious about how we understand more of this 'alien ideology' of industrialism; where it came from, how it could flourish and arise from nature. What metaphor brings us closer to recognising industrialism? Is it a complex, in the Jungian sense, or a distorted part of a necessary function of the human being? Or is it embodied in the actions of the state, media and corporations?

**David:** Many writers identify *capitalism* as their chosen target; but I view capitalism simply as the economic core of the much more pervasive industrialist ideology that, because it's so all-encompassing, permeates much of our being as well as most education, bureaucracy, law, etc. This is why it's so difficult to recognise – because it's an all-engulfing tidal flow rather than a local current, one that affects us *and* our environment in complementary ways, so that everything appears to be static. This problem is worsened because we have been taught to think *only* in a way that's focused and specific, rather than *also* contextually aware.

This relates to the issue of our separateness (or not); and a systemic perspective is essential to grasping this point. At the relatively low level of organisation that we are encouraged to inhabit, we may be 'individuals', having our own roles, making our own choices and perhaps forging our own paths. But if we look upwards at the next higher level of organisation, we are components of an ideology that nudges us towards particular choices, behaviours and viewpoints. We may think of ourselves as choosing what we buy or which careers we select; but these choices exist within an assumed context that we have little power over. And this also applies to *environmental* choices. Chopping the heads off the weeds isn't going to produce any real solutions... In effect, we – along with most of 'external' nature – have been assimilated into industrialism and until we dig deep to uncover the *roots* of industrialism, the world has no chance of a healthy future.

The terms 'inner' and 'outer' may also reflect unsuspected ideological assumptions. The term 'inner' is often used to imply a sort of uber-individuality – a withdrawal into the 'pure', individual self that is a consequence of a residual part of ourselves shrinking away from an industrialist realm experienced as alien. But this alienation from what is outside us is itself part of industrialism. While shrinking away from an alien industrial environment is understandable and often healthy, the same doesn't apply to the *natural world*; and I suggest that we are most ourselves when we are able to reach out (a term that has been rendered almost unusable by its corporate use) into the natural world as well as to *also* reflect on our innerness. As Roger Brooke puts it, when we look within to find our own spirituality, what we discover is a *world that is spiritual*. 'Innerness' doesn't have to be about being unsullied by continuity with anything 'outside ourselves', which is a denial of our systemic character as beings who are at one level 'individuals' and at other levels continuous with natural systems. We are truest to ourselves not – or not only – as isolated atoms of experience, but when our experience can encompass *all* these levels.

Industrialism, by defining us *just* as 'individuals', not only cuts us off from our higher-order experience as parts of natural systems, but also prevents us from recognising the higher orders of *industrialist* organisation, so that we are fixed in place as its unknowing agents. Because of this, we experience lost levels of

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McGilchrist, I. (2009). *The master and his emissary: the divided brain and the making of the western world*. Yale University Press.

experience only as an absence or a yearning for something undefined; and a danger is that we individualistically express this constriction of experience in ways that are consistent with our industrialist conditioning – in consumerism, or through a purely sexual neediness, or a need for constant stimulation, and so on... Industrialism has not only made us strangers to much of our experience, but has also made it difficult even to recognise what has been lost...

Because we have lost those connective, higher-order relations that make us part of the world, it is not just a human loss, but also an impoverishment of the whole natural realm. As nature collapses into its component pieces and understanding becomes mere taxonomy, nature begins to approximate its industrialist representation as a heap of separate substances and entities.

And where does industrialism come from? A tasteless but accurate analogy, I think, is malignancy, which can originate in a single mutation that finds its opportunity in an unsuspected niche. For example, one can clearly identify the roots of 'the market' in 14th century commerce, religion and 'natural philosophy', along with complementary and fateful changes in subjectivity. But it's misleading, I think, to search for 'the beginning' of industrialism, as if there's a simple cause-effect relation, although one can point to its precursors...

**Toby:** Thanks David, that's a lot of food for thought. There is this sense of being within a kind of hideous mirror – within ecosystems, organisms have niches, which invisibly restrict their impact. Lions cannot take over the world, as there must be many more gazelles to feed them. Even bacteria seem restricted by viruses. We seem to have created a world that presents an illusion of choice and mastery, and only a slim chance of discovering something that would reflect what it is for a human to truly find an ecological niche in a living world – a mature niche that arrives from that world rather than is imposed on it.

I love what you say about yearning and the collapse of the 'outer world' into a spirit world – it brings to mind James Hillman's idea of the *anima mundi* – the soul of the world, as "the world turned inside out". Somehow, contemporary manifestations of spirituality seem to have this hallmark of the 'inner world' as a kind of refuge or escape, rather than this decisive shift in perspective you call 'reaching out'. What you say about being lost also resonates – that we have become eco-psychologically lost in a world where it is getting harder and harder to be physically lost.

To view industrialism as a highly persistent entity or collective psychological complex that doesn't have or need an origin story seems helpful – that we can retain an ecological way of looking at industrialism, and apply that through looking, seeking better contextual understandings, which might also be as simple as treating people better, or seeing nature more clearly, as well as taking action that understands the assimilative effects of industrialism.

We have reached the limit of what we can discuss here, but I'd like to give the last word to you. What would you like to say to CPA readers as last words for this piece?

**David:** I'd like to emphasise something you point to above – that "it's as if the infection has taken hold of both the 'exterior' world and scientific practices and the 'inner' world and its psychology".



That's a very important point, I think – that industrialism transforms both the world and our understanding and experience of the world. Our experience shrinks in lockstep with the stilling of life itself, as we seem to become more narrowly 'rational', more disengaged, more 'in denial', more 'apathetic'. But we have learned to be all these things as we have been socialised into thinking in a way that's consistent with industrialism – as human judgement and reason has moved towards a machine-like 'rationality'; as knowledge has been replaced by information; as we increasingly inhabit an environment that 'nudges' us towards particular decisions without the need for thought; as we learn to think in industrialist language – 'resources', 'progress', 'invest', and so on; as intellectual fashion replaces critical thinking; and as the pretence of democracy replaces the reality. In this way and many more, human agency has retreated as the industrialist grip on our lives has become more all-embracing...

The crucial point is that industrialism's degradation of nature is not just an 'environmental' problem – something 'out there' in the rainforests and the Arctic. It's also a parallel and related degradation of human beings, affecting our experience and thinking. Recognising this is an essential first step in recovering a healthy nature...

Photos by Toby Chown.

# Three days in May: Is there light at the end of the tunnel?

By Steve Marshall

I ignored the issue of climate change in the '80s and '90s, assuming that governments around the world would sort things out before it got too bad. During the '00s I watched governments make commitments and then fail to deliver.

In the last decade, it has looked more and more likely that everything would go wrong. It seemed that the forces of neoliberalism and individualism would succeed in extracting every last penny from the poor to the pockets of the rich. It appeared that the energy and attitude that the nations of Western Europe used to enslave hundreds of thousands, murder millions and strip resources from so many nations at the point of a gun would continue unabated, albeit with a diplomatic smile. And, unbelievably, it looked as if the powerful would smile in their luxury, as the only climate that any of us have known was damaged beyond the point of human recovery.

The fear, anxiety and depression associated with climate change is real, and the fear that our entire human society is unable to face this problem and address it might be true.

And then something happened at the end of May. Or rather, six things happened. Six things which may prove to be of great significance.

Climate change is real and is happening, and it may make this planet unliveable for human beings. And despite the arguments about deforestation, agriculture, travel and personal responsibility, the largest and primary cause is the fact that in the last 150 years we have burned millions of tons of fossil fuels – coal, gas and oil. And much of that extraction has been from countries we took from their indigenous populations and from nations that we do everything we can to control.

And, on the 27 May 2021, two countries owned up to some of their responsibilities. Not their responsibilities in the burning of fossil fuels, but still, some of their responsibilities.

Germany acknowledged the murder of tens of thousands of Herero and Nama people at the beginning of the 20th century and agreed to pay €1.1bn to the people of Namibia in recognition of what it admits was genocide.

Following a report by French archivists and historians who had been given unprecedented access to government archives, President Macron of France spoke in Rwanda and asked for forgiveness for France for standing by a genocidal regime for far too long.

Neither were abject apologies for the actions of colonial Europe and the payment to Namibia cannot be considered full reparation. And whilst both governments have motives that are looking to their future relationships with the nations of Africa, these are steps in acknowledging that the relationship is no longer master and slave but as joint members of a greater community. Both recognised that justice, even in small steps, must bind us together – racial justice and social justice are forever entwined.

Politicians' promises do not always carry much weight, but these are public statements and I do not think either France or Germany will retract.

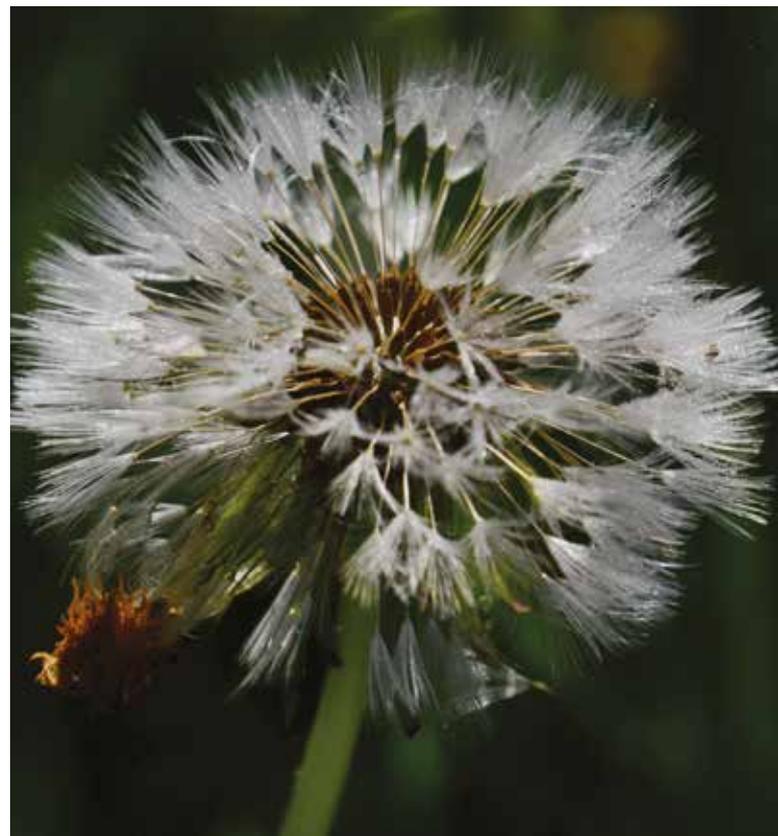
One day earlier, on the 26 May, three of the largest fossil fuel companies in the world had unexpected experiences.

Chevron was surprised when the Dutch campaign group Follow This convinced 61% of its shareholders to vote against the Board in favour of a proposal to force the group to cut its carbon emissions. This is an oil company whose shareholder value is largely based on the future reserves it can mine. Now it has to work out how to cut its carbon emissions.

On the same day, Engine No. 1, an environmentally minded hedge fund formed just six months ago, astonished the Board of ExxonMobil when they persuaded other shareholders to vote three of their four candidates onto the Board – serious candidates with long experience in oil and gas and in renewables.

And backing Engine No. 1 and their candidates were two of the biggest investment houses in the world – Blackrock and Vanguard – both becoming worried about oil companies whose shares have performed woefully in recent years, despite the rise in demand for oil and gas.

And possibly the greatest surprise was felt by the Board of Royal Dutch Shell when a court in The Hague, in a case brought by Friends of the Earth and others, ordered the oil giant to cut its carbon emissions by 45% from its 2019 level by 2030, in line with the Paris climate accord.





Shell had specifically argued that the Paris climate accord was a matter for governments to address. And the court disagreed, ruling that Shell was breaching Dutch law and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Three oil companies and one underlying message. Chevron's shareholders want carbon reduction to protect themselves and that will benefit us all. ExxonMobil's Board may not be green but it now includes climate-aware members who will push it to renewables and that will benefit us all. Shell must comply with the Paris climate accord because it is not just for governments, it is for us all. The communities in which these fossil fuel companies operate – shareholders, investors and courts – have changed the environment in which they must try to survive.

And here we have three recognitions that we, as a global community, must and can solve this crisis. Social justice is only possible with climate justice.

And the 25 May was the anniversary of the murder of George Floyd and the trigger that turned Black Lives Matter from a small campaign group in the US into a world-wide phenomenon.

A year has passed and the world has not collapsed.

The statue of Edward Colston no longer stands to proclaim him as a benefactor of Bristol, but lies in a museum with the certain knowledge that his patronage was funded by the enslavement and murder of thousands of his fellow human beings.

Other statues are down and many more are being questioned. Footballers take the knee and even prime ministers do not like to be reminded of watermelon smiles.

And one on-duty United States' police officer has been convicted of a black man's murder.

As can be seen from the Dutch court's verdict, human rights are only rights if they apply to all humans. Murder of any human being is still murder. Justice only works for me if it works for you. Social justice only works if it means racial justice.

And social justice and racial justice only exist if we can achieve climate justice. Because if I can survive some climate change

because I am rich and privileged, and you cannot, we do not have social justice or racial justice or any real justice.

I see these events as indicative of a paradigm shift that is happening in the world. There will be resistance and there will be set backs.

And there is hope. This is not the light at the end of the tunnel. And we are no longer facing a dark unending hole. These are six small lights in the complex tunnel we must traverse.

And there are others, as rich countries recognise that containing Covid means they must vaccinate the world. Like climate change, plague is an all-the-community or none-of-the-community thing.

And these lights will help illuminate our way and our approach so that we can see each other fully and honestly, and help us connect one to one, so that together we can increase the light and build the human community we need to survive. There may not be a light at the end of the tunnel but there are some glimmers.

**Steve Marshall:** I write poetry and prose and plays. With my wife, I run a small-holding growing some of our own vegetables and meat. My working life included teaching English and drama, and was mainly in IT and business management. I have acted and directed for over 50 years, including running an amateur theatre. I have been the Trustee of a charity training counsellors and psychotherapists. I am passionate about climate change and the devastating physical and psychological effects that I will largely escape but that will impact my children, my grandchildren and people across the globe.



Photos by Steve Marshall.

# Raven

By Paul Zeal

*Noah sent the Raven out across the waters, and it did not return;  
and he sent out the Dove – it returned with an olive leaf.*

Raven fly high, Raven fly high  
Hint of steel in your Raven's wing  
'Keep on flying, you', laughs the Raven,  
'With your feet of clay and starry crowns.  
'I am Raven who flew beyond the dove –  
It's no place for me, that olive tree –  
Keep on flying, you too', mocks the Raven,  
'While waters rise and ice mountains fall.  
'Ravenous, I coast on appetite –  
Whilst I soar above the mountains  
On wings of cold delight  
You play dice with our Paradise.  
'I drop you a wing...  
Feather – enough for you to hold  
But not enough for you to fly  
Up to here where the skies are cold'.

I bow to you oh Raven,  
For the gifts that you hold dear,  
I know you share the truth  
That all of us must fear.  
For there's trickster laugh in your Raven's call,  
And twirling fall in your Raven's flight  
'Hint of steel in my Raven's wing –  
While waters rise, ice mountains fall'.



**Paul Zeal**, MA, psychoanalytic psychotherapist (retired, after 50 years), is still a family and cultural systems constellator, and nature constellator, co-facilitating workshops in various settings. He is also a Taoist practitioner. A founder member of CPA, and organiser of the Radical Hope conference. He has published several chapters and papers, and articles in *Resurgence-Ecologist*. Paul now lives on Dartmoor, managing a small area of wild woodland and gardening organically, with nature in mind.

# What is climate psychology?

## A group dialogue among CPA members

Edited by Steffi Bednarek and Sally Gillespie

For this edition of *Explorations*, we (Steffi Bednarek and Sally Gillespie) sent out an invitation to CPA members to respond to the question, “What is climate psychology?”, in terms of our personal and professional experiences and responses, feelings and struggles with a world on the brink of collapse.

This is a question that no one person can answer, therefore we decided to host a reflective conversation to come up with a collaborative response. Paul Maiteny, Shelot Masithi, Laurie Michaelis and Rachael Webster accepted our invitation, leading to a rich two-hour dialogue one morning in June. In this edited version of our conversation, we begin with the question: “How did you get involved with climate psychology?”

**Rachael:** I've been environmentally aware since I was little, but, three years ago, I read that even if we met the goals in the Paris Agreement, we were still screwed. The IPCC report followed and Bendell's paper. I kind of crashed and then went headlong into ridiculous activism, trying to get arrested. I burnt out completely. I realised that I needed to be there for my children. I wanted to talk to them about it, but I didn't know how it was safe to do so without crushing them. So, I thought I would try and write a book for my daughter, clarify my thoughts and present everything in a way that was the least damaging and the most informative. And I stumbled across CPA, which is a lovely tribe to be in, with people who were talking about these issues.

**Shelot:** I was a farm girl. I learned a lot about how to protect the environment traditionally, from my grandmother and my great-grandmother. As African people, we know that we need to nurture the soil because our food comes from it. When I came to university, I was studying psychology. I used to talk a lot about the environment with my professors. My classmates didn't get it. They think I'm crazy. So, I also started believing that I was crazy. But one of my professors mentored me and helped me to connect with others. Last year, someone pointed me towards CPA.

I don't feel like I fit in because people are not experiencing what I'm going through, what my people are going through. In rural Africa, if you ask people, “Do you know what climate change is?”, they will tell you about the floods, the droughts, etc. When it's explained academically, we don't understand. If you want to teach people of African descent something like climate change, you need to learn their language. Ask them what's going on in the environment. They will tell you. Everybody, from every culture or continent, defines climate change in a very different way, because we all experience it differently.

**Paul:** I really relate to what you're saying, Shelot. As a child, I asked three big questions. “Why are we so cruel to each other as humans? And how come as a species we don't seem to mind making other species extinct?” All my life has been about wanting to understand these questions. When Apollo 11 went to the moon,

I was more focused on the photo of the Earth than on the moon. I was aware of this invisible web that seems to work fine until humans disrupt it. But we're a species too, so my third question was, “What part does my species play in all this? And what am I here to do?” All my life, I've been emphasising not so much the issues as the need to understand the ecosystemic dynamics they disrupt and the psychological causes that lead to ecosystemic holocaust. I feel a strong impulse, obligation even, to use this language to describe the scale of extinction and its psychological causes. My father was an Auschwitz 'survivor' who would have understood this.

Working as an ecologist, an ecological educator and an anthropologist, my experience suggested that there was massive resistance to worldview change, yet there also seemed to be a resistance to looking at why. I started to write about the unconscious, instinctive (id) causes of our consumptive behaviour, and of blocks and catalysts to changing it. I was interested in what it takes to change a culture; what it takes to even change an individual worldview.

I eventually got so fed up with the resistance to my inquiring into such questions from my university department that I left academia to train as a psychotherapist, and approach my questions from a practical direction. I thought I would find psychotherapists applying their knowledge of unconscious processes to resistance to changing worldviews and behaviour.

I've been quite disappointed that the emphasis of climate psychology is on issues rather than getting to know dynamics within us that are causing the breakdown. I sense a strange resistance to really getting at the psychological causes of ecological breakdown.

**Laurie:** For me, it's not so much an emotional journey. It's a kind of inquiry, a problem-solving journey. I was 10 when I knew I wanted to work on energy and the environment. I did a PhD on wood as an energy source in Kenya, but I saw how problems there had their roots in the Global North and decided it was more useful to work in my own culture.



## GROUP DIALOGUE

I was the convening lead author for the IPCC 2nd Assessment chapter on transport policy. Three of the authors were pushing strongly for solutions they believed in. One was a technological fix, another an economic fix, and the third was about urban planning. I realised that these guys had beliefs about human psychology and behaviour, and they didn't have evidence for it. Later, I was working on climate scenarios and especially how technological and behavioural change could bring about the tenfold reduction we knew was needed in CO2 emissions. I was realising there's no separation between technological change and behavioural change. If you change technology, people are changing at the same time.

So, I moved on to research sustainable living as an academic. One of the big insights is how much people's behaviour is relational, set in the context of their peer group, of their family. And so I got interested in how do we change together? I started a project supporting Quaker groups to develop their own approaches to sustainable living. Part of what I've learned is how slow and difficult it is and that people have different journeys – but that we can change. Some people need to do the emotional loss journey, but some people actually need to just get out there and do something.

**Steffi:** I'm still grappling with the concept of climate psychology. The word 'climate' seems to narrow something down. My whole life has been about making connections that are not explicit, so shaping a new field only makes sense to me if it's not defined too rigidly, because it's all about interconnection.

As a child, I related strongly to plants. I tried to describe this to adults and realised that they didn't get it. I felt it was an incompetence in me that I couldn't communicate this.

I grew up in East Germany and my life was very entangled with the politics of the Cold War. My mom was a political prisoner, and so the collective trauma of oppression shaped my early life. Later, as a student, I was briefly involved in eco-activism, but it was all about doing and changing. There was a lack of psychological consciousness.

I studied psychology and, later, psychotherapy, but there it wasn't about culture and politics anymore. It was all about an individualised perspective and I became really good at limiting my perspective of who I am and who others are in that little box. But the longing to understand the interconnections with the wider world never went away. I was on a course at Schumacher College and some of the redwood trees behind the college were felled. I felt this deep grief. I had completely forgotten about my relationship with plants as a child. And that's when I considered that this was not a deficit of mine. Maybe I needed to keep trying to give words to my experience of connection, learning to become bigger and bear the kind of loneliness I felt in some of the things that were so important to me.

In 2017, I had a thyroid operation and had to sign that I'm aware that I may be at risk of losing my voice. That was pivotal for me because I felt that I hadn't even begun to use my voice. That was the first time I wrote an article that looked at how the failures of capitalism show up in psychotherapy, and how we may be part of the problem. That article got me invited to join CPA.

**Sally:** I have a memory of being a teenager in Aotearoa New Zealand, phoning up talkback radio and haranguing the poor DJ about pollution, how wrong it was, how we had to do something. And hanging up and thinking it doesn't really achieve anything to lecture people.



I became a Jungian psychotherapist because I have been a tremendous dreamer all my life. It brought me to ecopsychology. Over time, I became very interested in the psychology of climate denial. In 2008, I had a huge dream. I woke from it knowing I'll be working on climate issues for the rest of my life. It was really clear that's where the world was, that there was no escaping that, and that I needed to be a part of it. What grabbed me then was the question, "What's going to happen to me as I get more immersed in climate issues? Am I going to become incredibly despairing? Or is there perhaps a journey or trajectory here?" I formed a research group for my PhD. It was a huge relief to be able to talk about the intensity of feelings with others, but also to find out that there was a developmental trajectory that could be activated by being in a supportive atmosphere with others. In 2011, Psychology for Safe Climate started in Australia. And that's where I saw the transition from climate psychology being about what's driving denial to becoming very hands-on in terms of supporting campaigners. I realised how hard people work in this area, and often never have a conversation about how they're feeling about the stresses, or how that is for their relationships or spiritual life.

I live on the land of the Gadigal and Wangal people. We're being taught a very different worldview by Indigenous leaders here. It just makes it so clear that when people talk about 'us', as humans whose actions have led to the climate collapse, it's the European worldview and the capitalist system which has done this. What we're hearing from Indigenous elders here is about a worldview of living kinship, which embeds custodianship and relationships, on the need to bring out the best in land.

***Our introductions throw up a number of themes that are taken up by the group, beginning with the significance of cultural worldviews and contexts in ecological relations.***

**Paul:** For me it's about the ecology of psychology; how psychology connects with the emergence of capitalism as a symptom of something deep in us. How is that different in Aboriginal society? How has that psychology manifested differently? I feel such a need to understand how we work in these different contexts. What aren't we understanding?

**Steffi:** The anthropologist Juergen Kremer talks about the Indigenous roots of Europeans. We can't sidestep them into somebody else's culture. The way forward also needs to look back, so there is no route to our own indigeneity that doesn't lead through trauma that we suffered and inflicted. That is so huge. We haven't got a cultural container – methodologies that are large enough to do this. We've done away with that. We've only got the individual lens, but we need a communal container to look at communal suffering.

**Shelot:** Paul, you ask the question, “What’s the psychology that connects humanity and everything else?” My answer is *Ubuntu*, a South African philosophy, which elevates wholeness, respect, kindness, love, peace, interconnectedness. It’s all about the intersections of humanity in everything that’s under the sun. The ecosystem is everything. People of African descent do not speak about Ubuntu, we live Ubuntu. It’s who we are, it’s embedded in us. We understand the intersectionalities of life. It’s our ancestral inheritance. We don’t exploit things, especially natural resources, we respect them, we have kindness for the environment. That’s how we need to do things in order to solve these problems. Like you said, Steffi, it’s not about solving climate change. It’s about solving human consciousness. It’s about integrating human beings together. We don’t have to like each other. We just have to get together, unite for the sake of life, for biodiversity.

In order to deal with all these global problems, we need to understand what it means to be human first. Climate change is not about carbon dioxide. What about water? What about food shortage?

I recently started an organisation, She for Earth. It’s about teaching children and young people an approach to Ubuntu – a coming together of people in order to solve all these problems. It doesn’t matter where you are, it affects us all. And it does so differently. Understanding that is power.

**This leads us to reflect on ‘theories of change’, the beliefs that drive them and the root causes of contemporary ecological crises.**

**Laurie:** There’s something about theories of change. The idea that if people would only do this, then everything would be all right. I think where I am, I don’t actually believe in that. Maybe there is something we can do that will fix it and maybe Ubuntu or universal connection is it. But can we actually do that? There’s a bit of that in what CPA tries to do – a set of practices that CPA converges around. There’s a piece in CPA’s governing document that basically says climate psychology is about enabling people to face difficult feelings. And there’s a hidden theory of change – that if people face difficult feelings, somehow they will then act and things will be alright. I think actually the hardest thing is not knowing. Navigating a landscape where different people need to make different journeys and are going to come across different problems. Where maybe the best we can do is just learn how to look out for those different features in the landscape and how to interact, how to be sensitive to each other and maybe how we can support each other to find a shared journey in that.

**Paul:** I’m absolutely with you on Ubuntu and Western indigenous equivalents – like the saying, “We are one another”. Working with people, academics, activists who say, “All we need to do is change our worldview, have more compassion”, all sorts of prescriptions which in psychological terms are kind of super egoic. There’s a sleight of hand that goes on. If all people are connected, what is the psychology that leads us to so easily slip into the opposite – “It’s all about me”? I feel a real need to understand the psychology behind that slip. From the idea, the espoused values, to what we’re actually doing.

**Steffi:** I’d love to hear your own answer.

**Paul:** There’s this resistance to looking at the psychology of the instincts that we share with all species. As a naturalist, I look at the trees and I see the jigsaw that they make with their leaves. What is

that? That’s a drive to get as much sunlight energy as they can, in order to create as much sugar as they can, in order to grow as much as they can. There are all sorts of adaptive mechanisms that have evolved over billions of years. The virus is an incredibly powerful mirror to us. All it does is to grow and perpetuate and reproduce. It’s really basic instincts. It’s got this dimension to the connectedness too, because of another species that evolved billions of years later. Supposedly, we are more complex, but we use that to say, “We’re better and we’re special”. We’re not, we’re just different. The conditions for the perpetuation of the virus have been caused by our ever-so-clever way of articulating and expressing that very same instinct, “I want to grow. I want to perpetuate, in all sorts of clever ways”. And that’s part of the psychology of this, the growth or viral instinct that is not being considered, because it entails a really deep reorientation of ego, from self to, “Wow, I am part of this. How amazing it is”. But it’s not about getting rid of the ego. It’s a reorientation of meaning, from what I call a consuming orientation, to finding meaning by saying, “Wow, what’s my part in all this?” And that, immediately, in my experience, reduces the drive to consume.

**Rachael:** I wonder if the difference there is with domination, because the trees and the branches that were spreading out are doing it to grow and will be part of the cycles, whereas we seem to have flipped a switch, maybe through trauma or maybe through disconnection from the land, to have gone from wanting to grow, to wanting to stop other things from growing.

**Paul:** I think that can be explained by the same basic dynamic. There are plants that have evolved particular mechanisms to stop other plants growing.

**Laurie:** You should see the ground elder in my garden!

**Paul:** Right! I’m using ecology as a language for speaking about what’s been there for a long, long time, in the old traditions in other languages. The domination bit is a clever, complex, cognitive way of doing the same thing. “You know, it’s still all about me.”

**Steffi:** But we’re also part of nature and so our consciousness has evolved in a way that we have done what we’re doing. And something in that has gone wrong, but maybe it’s not all bad. Is there something good in that too?

**Paul:** I think it’s become grotesquely distorted. We’re not recognising some of the other capacities. We have to reorientate ourselves in ways that have always been there in every tradition. Where there have always been leaders and elders who’ve understood it and, it seems, played a part in religious systems that emerged to constrain behaviours.



## GROUP DIALOGUE

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**Laurie:** I think it's really interesting the urge to label different bits of us, or of the system, as good and bad, and that actually they may function helpfully in different circumstances.

**Sally:** There's something here about cultural disintegration and loss of story. You talk, Shelot, about Ubuntu and its meaning, cohesion and moral guidance. You need a process of bringing children into maturity to hold that consciousness. And what you're talking about, Steffi – the trauma of losing touch with one's indigeneity, and the stories, the eldership, the rites of passage that give meaning, which are essentially about how to live well in community, in relationship to all this living world and to cosmos. Once we have fallen into the myth of human exceptionalism, we get all sorts of dominations and people carrying trauma. There's so much that Western cultures have to look at. How can we find healing vessels and healing therapies from within such a flawed, wounded and traumatised culture? We talk about healing from the wound, the wound requires that we do listen to those who are not carrying that trauma, who are still carrying the stories of wholeness, of connection.

***Our attention turns towards death, sparking an exploration of the identity shifts and life meanings that a conscious acceptance of mortality can engender, along with numbness and grief.***

**Steffi:** I want to bring in the importance of accepting death and decay. There's already such a separation in defending our life and wanting to prolong it. Looking at constantly prolonging life makes my life special and I have to do something exceptional with that life. I don't see a continuation. For me, maturity is all about accepting that, at some point. I will be no more and really come to terms with that. That means I'm part of a chain; my life is relative. I don't have to build a monument to myself or write an amazing book that will be mentioned 500 years later. Instead it's this culture of "I matter because I'm a chain in this and I can rest in peace, knowing that I have functioned as an element of the whole. That's enough – I'm a link".

**Sally:** So often people say, "What can I do?" or, "It's all over". And yet, knowing that we are a link, knowing that what efforts we make – whether it's planting trees or farming regeneratively or whatever – is that continuity, and a form of active hope and the humility we need for it. The grandiosity where we have to matter as an individual, as opposed to finding that journey as a link that continues life forward.

**Paul:** That's a metaphor that can be deepened more. If we think of a jigsaw, we can see the whole picture. But can we have the maturity to make our lives about crafting, "What's my place, my little piece of the picture in the jigsaw?" An ecosystemic outlook can give life deep meaning. It's an ancient one too. But this instinct is so powerful; it comes in and becomes all about me again.

**Rachael:** That resonates with me, because since processing a lot of grief, I've realised that we might not get what we want from so-called 'fixing things'. It's really about meaning and connection. And, therefore, I've found that I don't even need hope anymore, because I've got meaning. I'm not feeling so controlling and so anxious about the outcome, because that's not the point. The point is the meaning and finding your true place in it. I really liked Bill Plotkin's recent book. He talks about your unique ecological niche. I thought of that, Steffi, when you said you don't have to write a big book that lasts; you just have to play your little piece in the puzzle. And you need to keep being that piece against the onslaught of

neoliberal capitalist ways of messaging. Being in touch with that meaning helps with the confidence of doing that. On a personal note, waking up to the severity of everything happened for me at the same time as losing a friend to a brain tumour. It ran in parallel; the numbing, the denial, the unreality of the situation. But coming through both, we've made massive changes to our lives. We took the children out of school and did unschooling. It's terrifying, because every day you're being told they should be doing GCSEs to get a job, otherwise they'll end up homeless, blah, blah, blah. But we've had to hold on to, "This feels right. It's where I'm meant to be". You have to step up to that every day, and keep connected. That's one thing the crisis has brought up for me, which is really positive.

**Steffi:** For me, it's about finding meaning as participation in life, rather than having to do something spectacular with it; attending to the beauty of it all, to allow myself to be touched, to turn up for the relationships and the suffering, to fully experience it. It is nearly impossible to do. I feel I have to numb so much in order to get by. It feels really hard to focus on living, when everything is focused on 'making a living', and you're so exhausted from it. I'm also reflecting on my own complicity in the whole system and how difficult it is to extract myself. It's really hard to live according to those words, and not to participate in a system that I intellectually can see is toxic and causes a lot of horrors. I perpetrate those horrors and find it unbearable; so a large part is numbing. One of the things that has happened to me as a member of CPA is that when I joined, I felt very emotional. And then, the onslaught of sharing disastrous information led to a numbness too. And so I feel that I have lost some of the essence of being fully present. So, even within CPA, there's been a numbing process for myself.

**Rachael:** I think that's necessary, isn't it? I think you need to function. You need to be able to, at least at times, numb yourself because it's too much. It's too overwhelming. We don't live in a society that can hold that all the time. I don't see that as a bad thing. I think maybe we need to have regular spaces where we can let all that out and get in touch with it. But we have to function and that feels awful as well. I've struggled with that, too.

**Steffi:** I'm not sure I fully agree. I think there's a capacity where you need to act and function, but I wouldn't call it 'numbing' that is



necessarily needed. That goes into denial or not wanting to be conscious about something. So, the numbing part is not necessarily a helpful thing for me.

**Laurie:** How much is this actually to do with how you function with other people? Because when I started on this journey, I really struggled with not identifying at all with the meaning in society around me. And, in a way, just focusing on climate, ecological, relational crisis is where I get my meaning. So, I don't particularly want something else. But for most people I work with, the thing that keeps them behaving normally in society is that they feel they have to do that to function with other people.

**Shelot:** It's also about getting in touch with reality, letting go of the illusion that everything is all about ourselves, that we need to achieve certain things in our lives. But it's getting out of this illusion that we can solve every problem on time and live happily ever after. This is a crisis about maturity, of accepting that I'll die anytime – it might be sooner or later – but I just need to make sure that I play a meaningful part in all this, asking, "What is my part in this. What role am I playing in exacerbating the problem or solving the problem?". Individually, we cannot do so much. Collectively, we can achieve really good things.

**Sally:** Thinking about numbness – is it a good numbness or is it a bad numbness? What about all the grief? I realise I've gone to a different place in the last bit of time. There is a really deep sadness in me, but I think I feel more in a place of acceptance. We have to accept our own personal death, to accept that there is a whole lot of dying going on at the moment. And our job is to find out what our work is to do here. What we can do. I've been inspired by reading a lot about indigenous responses and the message that keeps coming across is that we can't just sit down and become drowned in grief – that's not what it is about for us. We have work to do here. We are custodians. This is our mother that's being torn apart. And we've got to hold the life thread of what is of most value, and safeguard and live by this as much as we can. I think we need to not suppress our feelings and our grief; to find ways of honouring them which don't involve losing sight of where we can meaningfully and lovingly contribute to the thread of living in a time of dying.

**Steffi:** I think you need both, because, in order to know what meaningful action you can contribute, you need to allow a really wide range of emotions, including grief. Without that, the action is going to be fuelled unconsciously and that may not always go in the direction that we intend.

**We finish up reflecting on the process of the conversation and its effects on each of us.**

**Paul:** I'm sitting here with a mixture of emotions and a huge relief that, finally, people – particularly CPA, are seeing that it's not just an issue, it's about our embodied and embedded lives, that we are members of the ecosystem. It's about our human journey. It's about our psycho-spiritual evolution – and that does not, in any way, mean 'better than', 'top of the tree' or any other value-judgement like that. Evolution brings about more diversity and complexity through time. How can one species be 'better' than another when all is necessary for Earth's life system?! This is the work. Without moving on from the 'better than', 'it's all about me and us' and 'it's all there for us' orientation, including in subtle ways I see in some environmentalism, there isn't going to be a long-term solution. So it's not about achieving an outcome, it's about 'who am I, what am I

here to do, but as a participant member of the ecosystem and, therefore, the cosmos?'

**Shelot:** I often told my little sister that mirrors don't break, they multiply. So, these are psychological mirrors of the psyche, multiplying. And they present themselves in different aspects, in different concepts, in different problems: it's climate change, it's poverty, it's war in Palestine, it's police brutality, it's racism, it's inequality. These are all psychological mirrors, multiplying. We often look on the outside, but the problem and the solutions are all within ourselves, because our psyches are broken, and that's the part that needs to be fixed.

**Rachael:** It's been really profound and fascinating to hear so many different stories. Shelot, I'm just astounded by your story and how much you have to offer.

**Steffi:** What I'm taking from our conversation is this notion that there's a polarity between lending my life in order to be of service to life and trying to do what I can to mend the bits that I'm in contact with. But at the same time, living with the notion that things may not be able to be fixed. Sometimes people who die are only able to make peace and beauty and meaning in relationships in their last days of life. At some point, we may go extinct. That may not be a terrible thing for life on Earth. There may be this shift in consciousness, maybe at the last minute something enormously beautiful can happen.

**Sally:** When you started to bring up the metaphor of the mirror, Shelot, I was thinking about the mirrors here and how little we know individually. And yet, when we gather together, what we can reflect and reveal to each other through the use of our own reflecting and consciousness, and how we can speak through being with others in the presence of that process.

**Laurie:** I actually feel quite grumpy. And that's partly because it's lunch time and partly, I think, I have a real resistance to a bit of convergence going on. I feel really uncomfortable with convergence around this stuff, and with having answers. Whenever we get to answers, I want to step back. I'm conscious of the urge to try and be an expert, knowing that's completely counterproductive. So, I am grateful. And I'm also grumpy.

**Steffi Bednarek** is a trauma therapist, Gestalt psychotherapist, writer and facilitator from the UK.

**Sally Gillespie** is a writer and workshop facilitator with Psychology for a Safe Climate, Australia.

**Paul Maiteny** has worked in conservation ecology, ecological education and anthropology, and as an ecosystemic/transpersonal psychotherapist. Most of his research through Oxford and the Open Universities, UCL, the Grubb Institute and independently conducted, can be found at <https://independent.academia.edu/paulmaiteny>

**Shelot Masithi** is a student, author and founder of She 4 Earth – a climate/environmental focused school in South Africa.

**Laurie Michaelis** is an analyst and practitioner in human dimensions of sustainable living and social change.

**Rachael Webster** is a wife, Mum, activist and communications and engagement person for the Climate Psychology Alliance.

In this section, we showcase reviews by CPA members that offer thoughtful reflection on climate psychology books, as well as publications on the peripheries that may help us make sense of the moment we find ourselves in. Thomas Hübl's book *Healing collective trauma: a process for integrating our intergenerational and cultural wounds*<sup>1</sup> is reviewed by Ivana Sharp, while Dr Els van Ooijen reviews Shantena Augusto Sabbadini's *Pilgrimages to emptiness. Rethinking reality through quantum physics*.<sup>2</sup>

# Healing collective trauma, by Thomas Hübl

Reviewed by Ivana Sharp

“Climate change is a symptom of collective trauma and our delay in forming an intelligent and coherent response to it is the same.”

The concept of intergenerational or historic trauma is not new, but it is not widely known or accepted as relevant. This book makes a heartfelt case for taking this phenomenon seriously and acting on it. From the trauma perspective, the dire state of our world is caused by accumulated unacknowledged and unprocessed emotion/experience, and the way forward is through bringing this material back into collective consciousness. Our efforts to create a better world will never fully work unless we acknowledge this shadow force – a dark chi – which wants to be known and reintegrated. Without attending to this aspect of ourselves, we are condemned forever to, unknowingly, repeat the past. Hübl claims that what we call future is just a new version of our past and that we can't really know our true future until we create space for it by clearing away the past. Another reason to pay attention to our shadow is that the energy bound in it is the energy we need to move towards a better future.

Trauma, in the author's view, creates separation. One of its consequences is that our reality is split into the material and the spiritual realms. With a background in both medicine and mysticism, Hübl attempts to bridge this gap by using both lenses – medical and esoteric/energetic – in his explanations. However, the focus of the book is on the mystical principle. Hübl goes into detail describing life as energy which seeks its transformation through substance. He uses diagrams and metaphors to illustrate these subtle processes, which seem to be known to him from direct experience. He describes a healthy state as energy flowing freely in its natural cycles, slowly turning into structure and creating form. In this way, energy is both a content and a container, spirit and matter. He goes on to explain that when energy cannot complete its cycle, it fragments from the whole and lands in the unconscious. These energy blocks, diversions and suppressions are caused by an inability to stay present with the intensity of life. When they happen over and over, they solidify into structures and create symptoms. Hübl sees most predicaments of our world as symptoms of trauma – anxiety and depression, conflict, violence, polarisation and tribalism, and also apathy and numbness. His answer is people coming together to do the work of healing and reconnecting.



Apart from the detailed explanation of the origins and effects of trauma, Hübl offers a practical solution in his 'collective trauma integration process'. It is a form of group work that he has developed and is practising internationally. In the book, he sets out its principles, process and demanding competencies for group facilitators. The stages of the process are vividly described, starting from creating coherence in the group to the 'waves' of emotion. These are collectively felt first as a wave of resistance to what is arising, in the form of denial, irritation or dissociation; then as the eruption of suppressed emotion, the discerning of the collective voice; and finally as integration.

It has been suggested that the global problems we are facing stem from Western perceptions of separation and disconnection between ourselves and the world. I see the main contribution of this book as promoting and developing this notion through illustrating how this separation happens and how to remedy it. The main practices suggested for reconnecting are attunement, presencing and embodiment, as well as meditation and prayer. Hübl claims that when we clear ourselves from the baggage of our past, we become a "grounding rod for the higher light". I think he becomes a little idealistic here in his expectation that the facilitators of CTIP will be able to completely clear their emotional baggage – especially as he also states that individual and collective traumas cannot be separated. I would like to see more realism and humility in admitting that we might never reach that goal, yet still be effective in bringing more light into our denied and disowned parts.

For climate psychology, this book brings an uncommon angle to familiar concepts. The nervous system is presented as a "vast

1. Hübl, T. (2020). *Healing collective trauma: a process for integrating our intergenerational and cultural wounds*. Sounds True.

2. Sabbadini, S.A. (2017). *Pilgrimages to emptiness. Rethinking reality through quantum physics*. Pari, Grosseto: Pari Publishing.

energy library hosting the sum total of every developmental stage that we've taken, as well as every step and stage our ancestors walked to bring us here". The will is "not simply the instinct to survive but the longing to become something new and more whole". Concepts such as co-regulation, attunement, perception or presence are described in detail from an energy perspective. Whether one agrees or not with Hübl's 'mystical principles of healing', reading about it might just resonate with some intuitive knowing. This book could be seen as a step towards developing deeper, more holistic understandings of human nature, supporting CPA members in their moving away from linear, dualistic thinking towards more systematic understanding of climate issues.

Hübl's writing might feel somewhat ungrounded and unscientific. At times, there is a sense of it being out of balance, leaning too far on the side of intuition. Although he mentions the danger of spiritual bypassing, there is a gap between his high visions of human potential and the reality of what can be achieved. His claims can invite scepticism, running the risk of being dismissed

altogether. This, for me, highlights the importance of not settling down on a particular view, but balancing between perspectives, checking in with others, and being both open and grounded.

In these times of urgency, we might be tempted to fall for quick solutions. Hübl's latest book is a useful reminder of the complexity and subtlety of our world; and also of its deeper beauty and intelligence.

**Ivana Sharp** works as an integrative psychotherapist in London. Her background is in working with children with special needs and in alternative therapies. She is fascinated by the process of healing – both individual and collective – which she sees in terms of reconnecting. Ivana has dedicated much of her time to exploring this subject through the medium of therapy, parenthood, mindful movement, family constellations, art and other mainly experiential ways. She is a member of the Climate Psychology Alliance.

## **Pilgrimages to emptiness, by Shantena Augusto Sabbadini**

**Reviewed by Dr Els van Ooijen**

The title hooked me in immediately. As a Zen student, it reminded me of the Heart Sutra, a Buddhist chant, that contains the lines, "form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form, that which is form is emptiness, that which emptiness form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness... and so on". The chant evokes a deep truth about everyday reality that is not accessible by the rational mind and that I would be hard put to explain. The same is true of meditation (or psychotherapy for that matter); without sustained practice, no amount of reading about it gets near to what it feels like. The idea of quantum physics as part of a more mystical approach to reality, therefore, sounded most intriguing.

The author's background does indeed span the divide between science and Eastern philosophy. As a theoretical physicist at the universities of Milan and California, he researched the foundations of quantum physics and contributed to the first identification of a

black hole. Later, in the 1990s, Sabbadini worked at the Eranos Foundation, an East-West research centre founded under the auspices of C.G. Jung. He has translated various ancient Daoist texts (presumably from ancient Chinese) and is currently Director of the Pari Centre, a non-profit educational centre located in the medieval village of Pari in Tuscany. The centre runs interdisciplinary courses and conferences focusing on ecological considerations within the context of our current consumerist society. Sabbadini also lectures at Schumacher College in Devon (UK) on the philosophical implications of quantum physics.

Sabbadini aims to re-awaken in the reader a sense of the amazing mystery of life and all existence. He first provides an overview of the main developments since our hunter-gathering days; ranging from the development of farming, to the scientific and philosophical revolutions of the 17th century, to the present day. At one time, he says, we felt part of an alive, sentient and ensouled world, often referred to as a 'participation mystique'. However, each new development took us further away from our natural environment so that now we regard ourselves as separate from a soulless world, governed by mechanical laws. Although the author does not make this point, our increasing estrangement from nature facilitates our thoughtless plundering of the earth and its natural resources, with potentially disastrous consequences.

I was particularly interested in the author's discussion of thermodynamics, a 19th century development that came out of the technology of the steam engine. According to the second law of thermodynamics, there will be increasing entropy (breakdown) over time in any system. This was the first indication of a gulf between what we understand and what we can control. We now see this with the continuous, ever-accelerating, breakdown in the



## BOOK REVIEWS

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earth's climate system. Although we understand what is happening, we do not seem to control it.

I was equally interested in his focus on chaos theory – a discipline that was developed relatively recently, as it is dependent on computers being powerful enough to simulate the consequences of physical models of reality. Simulations showed that, depending on the nature of the system, very small changes in starting conditions could have a very large effect on future behaviour, making it unpredictable. Weather is an example: as it is impossible to know the current situation with complete precision, small errors can cause wildly different predictions. It seems obvious that as the earth as a whole is a system, it tries to maintain itself in a stable state overall. However, it remains only stable over a certain range of variation, which, with potentially disastrous consequences, has now been exceeded. Hence, all the unpredictable weather events that have been occurring in recent years.

Interestingly, the boundary between order and chaos is more permeable than we used to think, as it is possible for order to arise out of chaos, with “the most interesting things happening just on the edge between order and chaos”. ‘Important things happening on the edge’ is something many therapists may be familiar with. Many of us may have experienced clients mentioning something really important outside the boundaries of the actual session; typically just as they are walking out of the door!

It was surprising to read that quantum theory is already a century old, as it is probably the most fundamental discovery regarding the nature of physical reality. Here the reader is introduced to some very strange phenomena, such as the movement of particles depending on whether or not there is an observer. From a quantum perspective, our assumption of an objective world, independent of whether or not anyone is looking at it, is unwarranted!

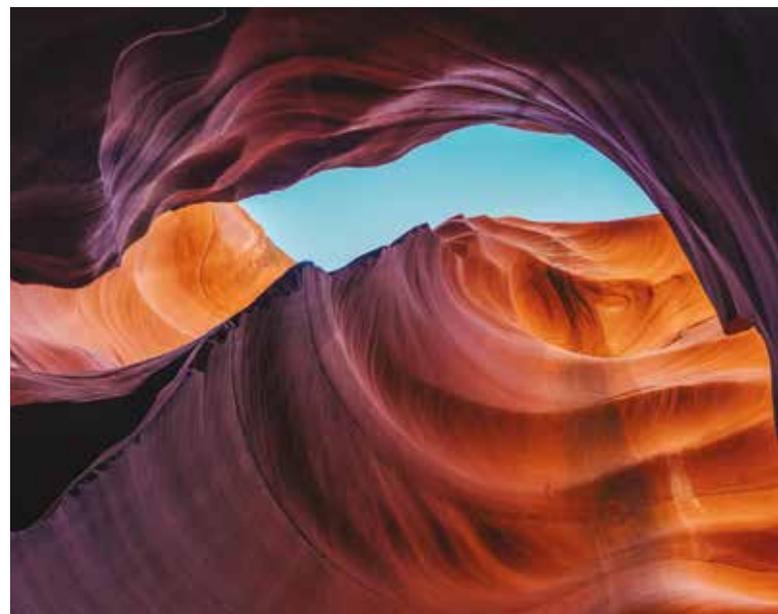
In the last two chapters, Sabbadini draws links between Eastern philosophies such as Daoism, Hinduism and Zen Buddhism, and the current scientific understanding of the nature of everything. In the Epilogue, he refers to the Mahayana Buddhist notion of Indra's net, according to which all of existence is a “kind of cosmic spider web in each knot of which sits a shining jewel (and) each one of these jewels reflects all the other ones in a recursive play that generates the universe” (p.257).

Overall, I enjoyed the book, it is clearly written, although containing various typos. It is reminiscent of *The Tao of physics*, by Fritjof Capra (1975),<sup>3</sup> but doesn't reference it, which is surprising as Capra's work was such a bestseller at the time. My old copy of this had disappeared, so I was delighted to be able to get the updated 35th anniversary edition, published in 2010. I find Capra's work a bit more accessible, as it offers a more coherent integration of modern science and ancient mysticism. Unfortunately, neither author engages particularly with climate change or climate psychology, although, towards the end of his book, Capra mentions “a new form of ecologically oriented politics, known as Green politics” (p.341).

Regarding climate psychology, it is problematic that, as Sabbadini

says, the general public has not yet caught up with the scientific developments of the last century and a half. Many people still appear to assume that we live in a clockwork universe where everything is predictable. Although the author does not say so, this also partly explains why, despite so much evidence, the world as a whole is not taking in the seriousness of the current climate emergency.

**Dr Els van Ooijen** is a psychotherapist and supervisor in private practice (UKCP reg., MBACP Accred). Author of *Clinical supervision made easy. A relational and creative approach for the helping professions*. Co-author, with Ariana Faris, of *Integrative psychotherapy and counselling. A relational approach*.



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3. Capra, F. (1975) (35th edition, 2010). *The Tao of physics. An exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism*. Boulder, Colorado: Shambala Publications.

# The death of life on Earth

By John Wood

I

The death of life on Earth, is this the end?  
No longer can we hide from what we fear,  
We cannot think extinction is our friend.

With intimations of our own dead end,  
We watch each species disappear,  
Blindly hoping death is not the end.

The whale lies dying in the river bend,  
The insect poisoned ceases flight midair,  
And falling, causes ripples without end.

Other life is nevermore our friend,  
If she's there, can Gaia hear our prayer?  
It seems that death will never end.

A good volcano blast would not offend,  
Nor a well-aimed asteroid cause despair,  
Can we dare hope extinction is our friend?

Who knows what's next, we'll not transcend  
Our self. What, Sapiens, that dirty affair?  
The death of life not being the end  
Let extinction come and be our friend.

II

The tragic hero is no longer Hamlet,  
Macbeth, Othello, or King Lear;  
It's Us, for having so destroyed  
The world we could have loved.

Ambition, despair, and ignorance  
Blind the stumbling Fool,  
Searching, he thinks, for beauty and truth,  
But becomes the Lord of Misrule.

The Exceptional stance, to stand above the law,  
Any law that would curb desire,  
We have no doubt for we are certain,  
We are the culmination of creation.  
And until the Earth is Martian deserts,  
We'll not be satisfied with our efforts.



III

I could lose myself in Dickinson –  
Luxuriate in Wordsworth,  
Punch it out with Ted Hughes,  
Or soar with Elizabeth Bishop.

But that was way back then,  
When we had trust,  
That Nature was there for us,  
And death would happen just once.

Ithaca still calls,  
A naked rock,  
Awaiting a spark,  
To begin again Life.

**John Woods** worked in the NHS for nearly 40 years as a member of the British Association of Psychotherapists and the Institute of Group Analysis – the last 20 of which were at the Portman Clinic in London. Initially a school teacher in his 20s, John was always writing, and has published on various topics such as working with young people affected by sexual abuse, group therapy with adult offenders, boundary violations in psychotherapy, and his own near-death experiences through illness. He says, “For 40 years, I have been married to Marie Zaphiriou, to whom I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for everything, not least for our two wonderful grown-up children. In my (semi-) retirement I rediscovered a love of poetry, and joined the Brondesbury Poetry Group. Sustained and supported by them, as I am also by the Climate Psychology Alliance, I am finding ways to formulate, work through, and use the difficult feelings engendered by the planetary crisis faced by us all”.

# 1,000 days in the land of 1,000 hills

By Ruth Jones

Five years ago, after working as a therapist in different guises for over 20 years, I found myself itching to stretch my legs and looked for a different kind of CPD in the spirit of learning from experience outside the therapy room. I started casting around and, even though Africa had not really been on my radar before, Rwanda started to draw my attention. I was intrigued to see the community level tier of healthcare provision, where volunteers in each village were trained to identify and manage malaria, HIV/Aids and early years mother and baby health and nutrition. Realising that sitting at home researching would only ever give me an imaginal exposure, I decided to experience something of the country at first hand.

On an exploratory visit, I saw a centre for former street kids, with a peer leadership community model which left me excited to know more about how they were achieving such impressive (therapeutic?) outcomes. After spending three weeks there during the summer of

2017, I took the decision to move my therapy and supervision practice online and to go to Rwanda open-endedly. Initially, I had ideas about groups and interventions to offer to the kids and staff team at the centre, but quickly realised I was there to listen and learn more than impart any import. There are very many strands to this ongoing learning and unlearning. Of all the intentional and unintentional impacts of my first 1,000 days in Rwanda, I would like to share the outcome of my simple friendship with Mr Adolphe. And it is perhaps relevant to share that I grew up in a Marches market town fed by my grandfather's productive kitchen garden and that my first 'proper' job was at the Centre for Our Common Future, which, in that pre-internet era, was established to network global NGOs in the wake of the World Commission on Environment and Development, and in preparation for the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. While there, I was privileged to meet the likes of Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement, who was then living in exile.

Adolphe and I met while we were briefly staying at an Airbnb in Kigali; both of us foreigners in Rwanda. Adolphe is the most unassuming man, with a gentle smile and modest manner, which issues from a firmly rooted strength of character and deep faith. He respects the five times daily prayers and his way of being Muslim gives him the serene presence I have otherwise only encountered in renunciant Buddhists. In the beginning, we acknowledged each other politely, but one morning struck up a conversation in French about composting (no less!) over breakfast. Adolphe was in Rwanda to research organic and traditional farming methods, and was looking into toxin-free, sustainable fertilisers at the same time that I was trying to install a composting system at the centre. I shared with him the information I had gathered about different approaches to composting around the world, as well as in Rwanda, and from then on we didn't stop exchanging ideas and information. We visited Gardens for Health, a project which teaches impoverished mothers of malnourished babies how to grow and prepare nutritious and satisfying food for themselves and their children. Adolphe travelled around the country, looking at different ways of drying food and keeping harvests fresh for longer without electricity. We visited a woodworking factory manufacturing eucalyptus products, and we talked and talked for the following couple of months. He visited us to see how we had implemented a prototype compost loo and he was interested in our experiments with growing in sacks and using calendula and marigolds to deter insects, especially mosquitos. He wanted to hear from the young people who were living at my house about the traditional gardening methods they had seen in the Rwandan countryside as children.

Those enthusiastic, authentic exchanges and our shared



**At Green Acre Circle.** Top left to right: Irrigation and ducks; makuna (green fertiliser); street kids. Centre left to right: Mr Adolphe; composting toilet. Bottom left to right: Simeon harvesting papaya; sack gardening. Photos by Ruth Jones.

perspectives as foreigners living in Rwanda, were a great loss to me when Adolphe went back home to Chad.

Adolphe had explained that although he had a successful career as a hydraulic engineer in the N'Djamena, he felt increasingly disenchanted with the values of his middle-class peers. He felt called to rejuvenate the family land in Mandoul region, where 80 families were struggling and increasingly failing to eke out a living. Although fertile, the sub-Saharan area only has a six-month growing season, and the villages have been depleted of their workforce by the migration of younger people to the cities, since the exploitation of oil started in that part of Chad some 20 years ago. The lure of the city, especially once the harvest was in, rapidly faded into a life of drudgery, where city wages barely covered a person's survival needs, leaving nothing to save for the future or to send back to the villages. Adolphe's vision was to develop an ecological village with water management systems, so that crops could be cultivated all year round to supply the local feeder market which sends food supplies into the cities. Beyond this, he dreamed of strengthening the village way of life culturally and educationally, to incentivise young people to stay in the rural areas, and to help develop the rural community economically and socially.

What I didn't know, until after he had returned to Chad and started giving form to what is now called Green Acre Circle is that, at the time we met, Adolphe was feeling defeated and had given up all hope of realising this dream. He says it is only thanks to the moral support of our friendship and the encouragement of our shared enthusiasm that he rekindled his belief in what he wanted to do. He was facing family opposition and the incredulity of friends that he would 'waste' all his privileged education and his promising career. He needed a kindred spirit to be able to hold true to his belief that he was making absolutely the best use of his skills and knowledge at this time and in that place.

While my own tree planting and pre-school projects in Rwanda ground to a halt under lockdown, Adolphe has been able to spend long periods of time at the village in Chad, putting in place the structures to underpin his vision. Local enthusiasm and support for his project are growing rapidly, as are the trees, crops and animals.

When I made the plan to spend time in Rwanda, my family and friends were very enthusiastic. But, interestingly, there was considerable 'sucking of teeth' from therapy colleagues, whose first question was usually, "But what about your patients?" (as if I wouldn't have fully considered them!). Indeed, it was fascinating to see how all the patients I did 'take with me' responded to this relocation, and how productive it was in different ways for each of them.

I wanted to share this simple story here, to show how we don't cease to be therapists when we 'trust the process' of engaging with the world outside the consulting room. It took me decades to realise I could afford to relocate because, even though not-at-all wealthy by UK standards, my first world privilege does mean I could make the move to working online and renting out rooms in my home (in this case, to highly qualified Indian surgeons studying advanced stem cell techniques from an Indian professor working locally – the question of our extractive-colonialist brain-draining of trained health workers from around the world to service the British NHS is a whole other story). My point is that it is often not the

grand gestures, weighty tomes or clever formulations of the therapy world, nor the industrial-scale ecological colonialism of internationally funded tree planting programmes which really bear sustainable new fruit for people and the planet. Simple, straightforward connections come about naturally and synchronistically when we make ourselves open and available for them. Raw, first-hand experience, person-to-person guileless connection, the courage to forego socially embedded, pre-conceived assumptions and pre-occupations about personal safety and security help till the soil so that sustainable new shoots can truly take root.

**Ruth Jones**, La Président d'Honneur, 2020-21, Green Acre Circle (Centre REJ pour l'Agroforesterie, la Biodiversité Animale et Végétale (CRABAV), Région de Mandoul au Tchad), is qualified in art therapy, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, organisational consultancy and energy psychotherapy. She has worked for more than 25 years in NHS Child and Adult Mental Health Services (mainstream and special educational) and in community-based projects, and for the past decade in private practice in North Kent, offering psychotherapies, clinical supervision and consultancy. Her publications include *Foreshoring the unconscious, living psychoanalytic practice* (see [www.ruthejones.co.uk](http://www.ruthejones.co.uk)). At the end of 2017, she moved her practice online to spend more than eight months a year in Rwanda, where she has created several thriving community-based projects.

# Passing by

By Elspeth Crawford



Someone is dying and someone is about to be born  
 someones are living, passing the day under blue sky  
 someones are nearly dead from despairs  
 under stresses and strains of cruelty  
 someone died and someone is born.  
 the sun shines on those parts of the world  
 that have turned to it, the dark will get its turn  
 someone is dying and someone is about to be born  
 there is a bee on the bramble, leg sacs heavy with pollen  
 he buzzes on busy with his honey making.  
 The bees are dying while pollen drifts  
 the world turns on corporate money making  
 someone is lying and someone's heart is torn  
 someone is kind and the heart lifts  
 for hope in the spirit not quite gone.  
 The leaves have turned green again, blossom is drifting  
 children are playing out where it's green.  
 Cars have returned to the roads that were quiet  
 Birds again sing unheard and unseen  
 Grieve for the dying wherever they've been.  
 Someone is dead and someone is born  
 someone is happy another forlorn  
 A butterfly stirs within the cocoon  
 A fish swims away from the river to ocean  
 Child cartwheels, bee buzzes, heart beats.  
 Someone is dying, and someone is not yet born.

**Dr Crawford writes:** "In Li-Young Lee's poem 'My Father's House' the lines 'someone has died and someone is not yet born' appear as a repeated motif. This was the inspiration for my own writing, which otherwise is mine, though it appears 'borrowed'."

**Dr Elspeth Crawford** is a psychosocial practitioner, long-since retired from the School of Education at University of Edinburgh. Over the years, Elspeth drew on Bion's ideas and psycho-social practice to bring social justice and emotional education to students. Her doctorate is on the history of science discovery, not-knowing and learning negative capability, which, in practice has affected everything, however hard it is to find.

# How Buddhist theory and practice take us beyond climate grief and sorrow

By Tony Cartwright

The climate emergency requires a deeper understanding of ourselves.

*He meditates on Extinction but does not embrace Extinction.... He meditates on Nonaction but continues always his acts of service and education. (Thich Nhat Hahn, quoting from the Vimalakirtinirdesa sutra, 'Not dwelling on the Nonconditioned'.)*

'Climate change' is an umbrella term which covers the whole gamut of the ecological crisis, such as ocean warming, deforestation, and the mass extinction we are causing. But it also includes an existential crisis for us; 'the human phenomenon'. Science has all the technical knowledge it needs to fix climate change. What has stopped it, though, is its blind and limited view of human nature and the living quality of the universe we are born into.

Denial of climate change – and the real opportunity of a spiritual renewal – is also a challenge for our modern human sciences. This, however, is changing as it dawns on us what may be emerging now from current consciousness. Traditional scientific evolutionary theory focuses solely on biological or material phenomena. But those who are aware of a human awakening suggest there is also a new step in consciousness as momentous as the emergence of life from matter and consciousness from life. It is an awareness of mind and consciousness itself that goes beyond the conceptual thought of modern man. Our ability to face the challenge of climate change depends on freeing ourselves from the limited thinking of the past.

## The 'interesting' story of climate change

On the opening page of Mike Hulme's book, *Why we disagree about climate change: understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity*,<sup>1</sup> he states:

*Climate change is not a 'problem' waiting for a 'solution'. It is an environmental, cultural and political phenomenon which is reshaping the way we think about ourselves, our societies and humanity's place on Earth.*

Mike Hulme was Professor of Climate Change in the School of Environmental Services at the University of East Anglia in the UK, as well as founding director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. In the preface to his book, he presents climate



Christopher J. Fynn, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

change as an 'idea' as much as a physical phenomenon that can be observed and measured. It is now 'a social phenomenon' and our cultural, social, political and ethical practices are reinterpreting what it means. Within the book, he examines this 'mutating idea', seeing how from the different perspectives – "depending who one is and where one stands" – the unfolding idea of climate change means different things to different people and implies different courses of action.

The story of climate change is not one that begins in ignorance and ends in certainty. It is "much more interesting than that". It is a story about "the meeting of Nature and Culture and about how humans are central actors in both of these realms and about how we are continually creating and re-creating both Nature and Culture".<sup>2</sup> In *Why we disagree about climate change*, Hulme reframes the question. We should ask ourselves not just what we can do about the climate emergency, but how it changes us.

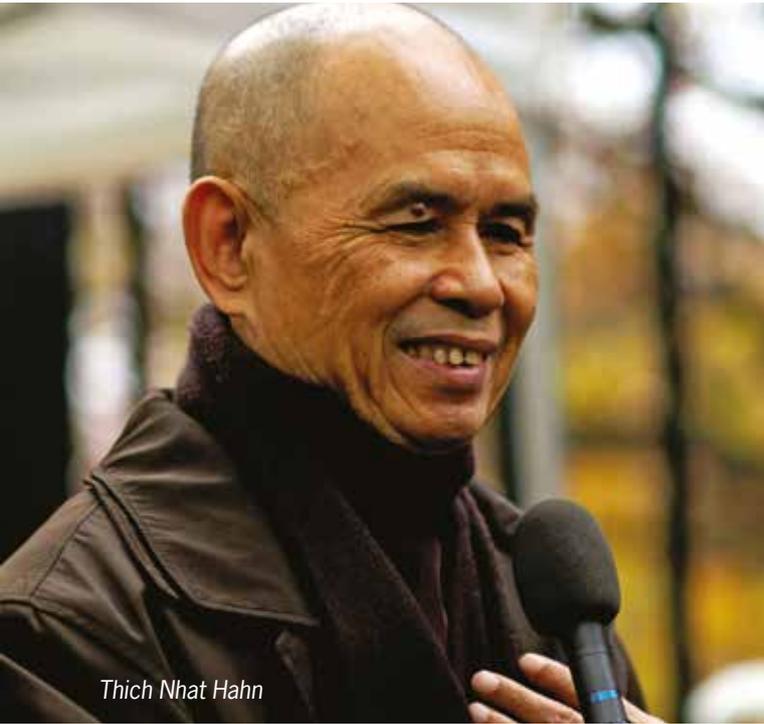
## Bardo

There is a legend in Tibet about the Indian sage, Padmasambhava, who helped bring Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century CE at the request of the Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen. Apart from his actual teaching and the founding of Buddhist monasteries, Padmasambhava, as B. Alan Wallace describes, "concealed many of his teachings in the manner of 'spiritual time-capsules' known as 'treasures'... to be gradually revealed over the centuries when human civilisation was ready to receive them".<sup>3</sup> One of these, for instance, was the book we know as *The Tibetan book of the dead*, which was translated and published in English in 1927, but which was as much a book about psychological and spiritual liberation.

1. Hulme, M. (2008). *Why we disagree about climate change: understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

2. *Ibid.*, p.xxviii.

3. This quote is from the introduction (p.x) to a book by Wallace, B.A. (1998): *Natural liberation: Padmasambhava's teachings on the six bardos*, which is a translation of another of Padmasambhava's 'treasures'.



Thich Nhat Hahn

Jung wrote a psychological commentary on it and regarded it as his 'constant companion' throughout his life.

Padmasambhava's 'treasures' focused on the Tibetan notion of *bardo*, which means 'transition phase' or 'in between state'. He intended the meaning of *bardo* to apply also to transition stages in life itself; namely living, dreaming and meditating, as well as dying, death and rebirth. What I am suggesting is that the 'discovery' of these writings in our apocalyptic time suggests we are beginning to understand ourselves in a new way. We are living in a major civilisational transition phase and, though living and dreaming were given much attention in the last century, the focus on meditation and dying as transformational – and potentially liberating – is a more adequate response to the climate emergency.

## Breathing and mindfulness

Meditation is a contemplative discipline that begins with breath awareness, which is also the foundation of mindfulness – two practices that the contemporary Vietnamese Zen master, Thich Nhat Hahn, has also taught and written about extensively. One of the best things to come out of the Vietnam war was the publication in 1975 of his classic, *Miracle of mindfulness*. He has written many books, but in 1988 he published *Breathe! You are alive*, which was a commentary on Shakyamani Buddha's original *Sutra on the full awareness of breathing*,<sup>4</sup> and then, in 1993, he followed this up with *Transformation and healing*, which, in turn, is a commentary on *The sutra on the four establishments of mindfulness*.<sup>5</sup>

In *Breathe! You are alive*, he wrote:

*Breathing is a means of awakening and maintaining full attention in order to look carefully, long, and deeply, see the nature of all things, and arrive at liberation.*<sup>6</sup>

The 'transformational breath' movement today, which takes its inspiration partly from Thich Nhat Hahn, points out that many of us have learnt to breathe poorly, or 'incorrectly', as a result of traumas in our upbringing.<sup>7</sup> Babies and young children breathe fully with

their bodies but, as we grow up we 'learn', often through trauma, to reduce breathing to parts, rather than the whole of our bodies. As a result, we lose the power and agency that deep breathing brings. But, as the literature on breathing insists today, full-body breathing can be recovered, past traumas can be re-experienced and understood, and a life of effectiveness and well-being achieved. Some even claim that learning to breathe properly in a few sessions is worth two years of psychotherapy! They clearly complement each other. Conscious breathing helps us to 're-embodiment' ourselves, while psychotherapy also brings awareness of how we are 'embedded' in the many levels of our culture. Breathing, as the foundation of all contemplation, also opens us to direct contact with the life of spirit, which, as the perennial thinkers attest, is the primordial ground of body and mind.

## Breath and spirit

As Donna Parhi, the yoga teacher, also says in her impressive *The breathing book*, "the essential breath" is a potent elixir, which we have lost connection with.<sup>8</sup> Learning how to breathe fully again opens the door to a natural way of being and is our own natural energy resource. We have reduced breathing "to a mere respiratory exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen" but, in Greek, *psyche pneuma* meant breath, soul, air and spirit, and in Latin *anima spiritus* was breath and soul, while in Sanskrit, *prana* refers to the life force which death (when physical breathing stops) makes us more aware of. In short, to the ancients:

*The breath was seen as a force that ran through mind, body, and spirit like a river running through a dry valley giving sustenance to everything in its course.*<sup>9</sup>

Parhi also suggests most people today are unaware they breathe poorly. Many common illnesses, physical and mental, are the result. Correlations between breathing and the state of our body and mind have been understood for thousands of years in other cultures; for instance in ancient Taoism, in yogic scriptures and in the medical practices of Indian Ayurveda and Chinese and Tibetan medicine. 'Breath therapy' is very effective for our physical and mental health, but calm and regular breathing also supports us in whatever we do. Parhi again: "Integrated breathing can be the cornerstone for all other human movement patterns and processes, allowing us to be confidently engaged in the world."<sup>10</sup> No climate activist, one thinks, should be without it!

4. Hahn, T.N. (1988, 1990). *Breathe! You are alive: sutra on the full awareness of breathing*. London: Rider.

5. Hahn, T.N. (1993). *Transformation and healing: the sutra on the establishment of mindfulness*. London: Rider.

6. Hahn, T.N. (1990). p.22.

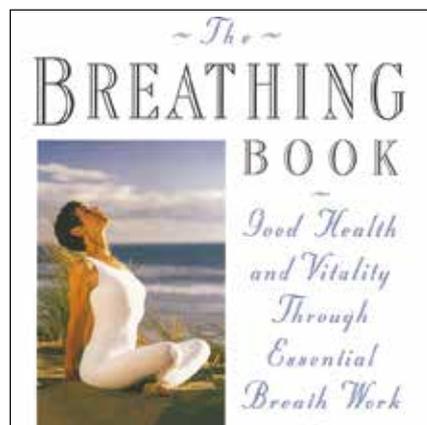
7. See, in the States: Kravitz, J. (2002). *Breathe deep, laugh loudly: the joy of transformational breathing*. Sandwich, New Hampshire: Free Breath Press. And, in the UK: Dennis, R. (2017). *And breathe: the complete guide to conscious breathing for health and happiness*. New York: Da Capo Press.

8. Farhi, D. (1996). *The breathing book: good health and vitality through essential breath work*. New York: St Martin's Essentials.

9. *Ibid.*, p.5.

10. *Ibid.*, p.8.

Breathing properly – full body breathing – is also the gateway to liberation. Breathing is not just something we do, but a part of the nature of everything; a universal process of oscillation, as it were, to which animal, and human, breathing can attune itself. I have often thought that what science calls ‘the big bang’ was actually the first ‘breath’; the universe taking its first step in becoming manifest – a cosmic process of breathing that has continued for millennia, on both a macro and micro scale, and which finds its expression in us today.



## Modern illusions

Breathing is therefore a symbolic and mental, as well as physiological, action. The mind breathes. It is constantly ‘inhaling’ and ‘exhaling’, and thereby renewing and liberating itself. Truth may be approached by detailed scientific analysis and rational thought, but it also has a simplicity which we have lost touch with. For instance, there are some illusions we are beginning to see through. Four of the principal ones are:

1. The assumption of the separate individual self.
  2. The fact of an objective universe, separate from ourselves.
  3. The fundamental reality of opposites.
  4. Consciousness as a phenomenon of human beings alone.
1. Freud believed ‘narcissism’ to be the disorder of modern man, yet still founded his psychoanalysis on the notion of the separate individual person. This was perhaps unavoidable for someone who believed “anatomy is destiny” and the body to be a fundamental reality of our identity. Yet, clearly, we are born into a family and a culture, and our identity is essentially interdependent from the beginning. Body and mind can no longer be conceived only as individual attributes of our being.
  2. The universe is assumed by science to be an objective given, into which we are thrown at birth. But this assumption was questioned by the revolution of quantum mechanics in the early 20th century. The more we examine the world, the more we realise it is stranger than we could imagine, and the more we appreciate that the world we see is not the world as it really is. The world as it appears is a product of our imaginations. You don’t have to have read Immanuel Kant to begin to understand that the universe we examine is also a phenomenon of our own minds.
  3. We assume the world to be split in two; a material entity on the one hand and an object of the mind on the other. The modern axis of thought is a dualistic one. Opposites are, in William Blake’s words, “contraries” and “without them there is no progress”. But the modern mind fails to see that the universe is also a unity and

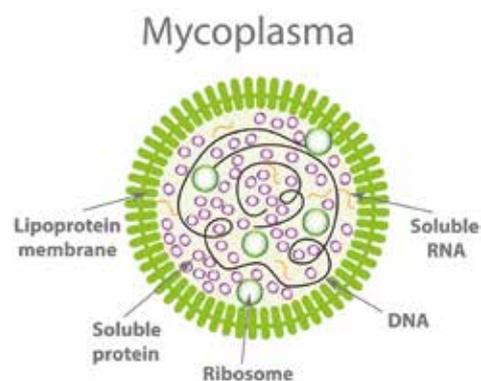
has ‘one taste’, as the Buddhists say. Opposites are not just contrary but also a continuum. They are ‘nondual’. They are complementary or, as Blake goes on to say, heaven and hell are also ‘a marriage’. The new axis is, as the neoplatonist Plotinus described it in the second century CE, “the One and the Many”. We also know it in the relationship between the universal and the particular, unity and diversity, or in difference as connection.

4. Consciousness is not just a product of the brain or merely a phenomenon of the human mind. The universe evolved us, so it must also be the source or root of consciousness. As a supreme intelligence, it is an infinite mystery to the cognitive mind. We cannot ‘know’ the universe but, as products of nature ourselves, we can share in its awareness. We can ‘be’ it. We ‘are’ it, or as Thich Nhat Hahn, who introduced us to the notion of ‘interbeing’, would say, ‘we inter-are it’. We may have bodies and minds, but we also have a spirit which sees beyond the opposites, particularly of the conscious and the unconscious. We cannot know the supreme, cognitively speaking, but we can realise our ‘being’ of it. In doing this, it is as if we are beginning to wake up to who, and what, we essentially are.

## The big picture

Liberation, then, is not ‘of’ the personal but ‘from’ the purely personal to something free and absolute in us all. If we are really serious about tackling the climate emergency – in the existential and psychological as well as technical sense – we must see that our view, and experience, of ourselves is changing. If we think in terms of the 21st century as a bardo – the transition phase of our time – then the major change is from modern and analytic thinking to a post-modern and integral view, or from a purely scientific culture to an eco-systemic one.

This implies a transition from a specialist consciousness, where detail is relentlessly pursued for its own sake, to a mandalic consciousness which also has a big picture focus; a unifying view in which we can see the wood as well as the trees. James Lovelock’s ‘Gaia hypothesis’ and theory is an example of such systemic thinking, as is his colleague Lynn Margulis’s microbial research from the microscopic view. There is a wonderful illustration in the frontispiece of her book, *What is life?*, written with her son, Dorian Sagan, which captures the systemic continuum from a picture of earth in space to a microscopic image of a ‘mycoplasma’ (magnified 10,000 times), with the caption: “Between these two realms lies all life as we know it.”<sup>11</sup>



11. Margulis, L. and Sagan, D., 1995, *What is life?* Foreword by Eldredge, N. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

## FEATURE

One might ask where this new systemic view comes from. It is there potentially in us all, of course. But, perhaps, we in the modern Western world need some help from outside to see it; politically, psychologically and spiritually. Hence the interest today in non-occidental and global cultures. The modern Chinese, for instance, could be said to have done the world a favour by invading Tibet and unwittingly encouraging a global Tibetan teaching diaspora, which challenges us to a dialogue with the essential thought and practice of two and a half millennia of Buddhist tradition.

### Beyond suffering

Buddhism accepts the truth of suffering as the universal experience of us all. It is the first 'noble truth' in Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching and refers to 'the three poisons' – hatred, wrong desire and delusion; seeds we are all born with and that are conditioned in us by life, but which psychotherapy can help transform into self-understanding and well-being. Yet, what is sometimes forgotten is that Buddha also taught the end of suffering and, at the same time, the realisation of joy, peace, freedom and essential insight.

Buddhism points a way to realise what it calls 'the four immeasurables' or divine qualities within us. In Hindu Vedanta, these were known as the Brahma-vihara, or 'divine states of dwelling', four positive states of mind that could be realised in meditation and radiated out in all directions, for the benefit of the meditator and all those who are the object of the meditation. In Buddhism, these four immeasurables are known as: infinite kindness and love (*maitri*) towards all beings; compassion (*karuna*) toward those who are suffering; sympathetic joy (*mudita*), particularly over the release of others from suffering; and equanimity (*upeksha*) toward friend and foe alike.

*Maitri* is sometimes translated as 'loving kindness'; a phrase that can seem rather meek in English, but 'love' is based on the understanding of the unity of all things and 'kindness' on our essential identity with each other. It is not just physical or

emotional desire but goes much deeper. *Karuna* (compassion) is something we understand well, though it is complemented by the other three qualities and is best practised with true wisdom. *Mudita* (sympathetic joy) is often too little understood or appreciated in modern traditions of thought but is immensely liberating. *Upeksha* (equanimity – particularly, letting go of resentment) may be difficult to realise in a strongly competitive culture where hostility towards the 'enemy' is conditioned in us, but it is an essential quality we all potentially have. These qualities are to be found universally in cultures around the world, now and throughout history, despite the wars and violence that currently seem so prominent.

Our ability to face climate change, understand the part we have played in it and engage in action to avert its worst consequences, depends on a true understanding of ourselves. Human nature is not separate from the universe which created it. Along with our serious flaws and fallibilities, we can discover immeasurable qualities of resource and resilience inside if we look. As Buddhism teaches, the awareness that mindfulness and meditation bring is a powerful means of realising liberation and enlightenment in whatever we do.

The issues of climate change challenge us in so many ways. But many think that we have one last decade to save ourselves and all life from catastrophic and terminal collapse, and that COP26 in Glasgow this autumn is a crucial opportunity. The Dalai Lama thought our response to the climate emergency could result in the realisation of our true human potential.<sup>12</sup> It may seem paradoxical that it can liberate us. But the message of the perennial wisdom – in all its forms – is that we should actually live and act without thought for tomorrow. If the only true time is NOW – 'the living (breathing) present' – and the future is an anticipation from the present, then 'the future' will look after itself if only we live with real integrity now. This is the way of natural liberation.

**Tony Cartwright** is now retired, having worked in mental health first as a social worker, then a family group and systemic psychotherapist in an NHS adult psychotherapy service. He has always had an interest in non-European wisdom traditions, as well as Green politics, since the '80s.



12. See The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Gyatso., T. Mind, heart and nature. Universal responsibility and the climate emergency. In Stanley, J., Loy, D.R., and Dorje, G. (Eds.) (2009). *A Buddhist response to the climate emergency*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

# How to contribute to *Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal*

By the Editorial Team

To this point, we hope that you have enjoyed a taste of what is to come. We thank all the authors for putting their hearts, bodies and minds into these pieces. We look forward to continuing to listen and to providing a platform on what is emerging within CPA, and the broader discourses and happenings about climate change and climate psychology in our societies.

In the next issue, we would like to focus on centring the more-than-human world in climate psychology and we invite contributions that are, for example:

- journal-like analytical pieces focusing on our relationship with the more-than-human world (for example, psychology and rights of nature, ecocide, re-enchanting our relationship with the more-than-human world, bringing in the more-than-human world's voice into our practices – therapy, climate action and environmental justice);
- personal reflections on what you are doing or your practice, whether it be in therapy, in group work, or on the frontlines of activism defending the more-than-human world;

- embodied practices (for example, ecopsychological, terrapsychological, art) that others can try at home;
- book reviews on the theme; or
- items for the Cli-fi corner (see special announcement below).

In addition, we will also put a call out for members who would like to participate in another dialogue, later this year.

The special issue will not be limited to its specific theme, as we want to be mindful of, and reactive to, what is taking place in the moment. We will always be open to reviewing papers that do not fit the theme and will make space for those that fit the issue. These forms of contribution should be sent by 31 January 2022.

Additionally, if there are important developments, such as upcoming campaigns, the release of international reports, or litigation taking place that coincide with the April 2022 publication, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Please expect a few rounds of feedback from the Editorial Team once you have submitted. We cannot guarantee publication.

## Climate fiction corner

By the Editorial Team

For most of us, it is impossible to imagine ourselves living the full-blown consequences of the climate crisis, whether directly by way of drought, fires or flood, or indirectly by way of food shortages, mass migrations or the collapse of law and order. Facts and figures, while necessary and informative, are of no help when it comes to the “what it’s likeness”<sup>1</sup> of these, as yet, un-lived experiences.

Climate fiction or cli-fi, as it is sometimes called, has evolved in the context of growing evidence of unsustainable climate change and associated ecological destruction. At its best, it offers the opportunity to engage emotionally and thoughtfully with future scenarios (which are increasingly, in some parts of the world present scenarios), through identification with invented characters as they either find their way or founder in a world turned upside down. We are invited to enter vicariously into that world. We struggle and grieve as they struggle and grieve. We find a way through as they find a way through. We are caused to consider how we would behave in their place, what compromises we would make, whether we would live up to our own expectations.

Cli-fi comes in many shapes and forms. It may involve technologies that do not yet exist, as in science fiction. Or it may reference only such scenarios as have already arisen somewhere in the world at some point in time – as Margaret Atwood says is true of her novels, which she describes as ‘speculative’, rather than ‘science’ fiction. Some cli-fi novels (perhaps I am not alone among psychologists in finding these the ones I value most) engage explicitly with the

question of meaning. When the familiar world around you collapses, what remains important? What remains meaningful? What do you/I think and feel about the choices the characters make? What would you/I do in their place?

Cli-fi genres, like solarpunk, are also subversive, challenging how power is structured by imagining resistance. For instance, Nick Wood’s *Water must fall* confronts issues of inequality and social (in)justice, and centres narratives that are often neglected in mainstream cli-fi books, such as race, gender, class and disability. However, it is not only what these imaginaries about climate injustices bring into focus and in many ways oppose, but also about what they are for. Cli-fi helps use imagined alternative futures than only collapse, and ‘business as usual’ and it helps as a narrative device to imagine ourselves moving toward these places in our daily life.

Cli-fi corner is a space for readers to review and share their reflections on a work of climate fiction, solarpunk or eco-fiction, whether in the form of a novel, a short story, a film, a television series or a play. We look forward to your submissions – all of which will be published either in the *Explorations* journal or on the CPA website. We recommend a word count of between 500 to 1,000 words. Please send your submission to [maggieturp@googlemail.com](mailto:maggieturp@googlemail.com)

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1. Puttnam, H. (1981). *Reason, truth, and history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# 12 ways to praise a particular Oak tree that stands on the corner of a field on Turner's Hill, East Sussex

By Toby Chown

## 12 secret names, with thanks to Martin Shaw:

The climate crisis throws us into the turmoil of seemingly unresolvable problems. How do we cap carbon emissions, address consumer capitalism, overpopulation, gross inequality and the destruction of nature, stop the rising tides, calm the raging seas, put out the wildfires, keep the oil in the ground, prevent corruption and fake news, and so on?

I'm not saying that any of these problems don't need to be taken seriously or addressed. The climate crisis is real and at our doors. What I want to say is that a psychology of climate crisis must include the person in it and understand that the moment of reflection on the crisis takes place within a thinking, dreaming person. A person who breathes in oxygen and breathes out carbon dioxide, whose gut, spine and brain is a reflection of the strange contours of evolution. A person who is part of a living breathing world.

Our imaginations are such a powerful part of ourselves that we often fail to recognise when our imagination takes hold of us. In the piece below I quote James Hillman, the Jungian psychologist who placed the imagination squarely at the heart of all human understanding and knowledge. He said that it is not through duty that we will save the world, but beauty. Often our attitudes can harden into a thick moral purpose. Yet beneath this must lie some sense of being touched by the particular nature of the world, by this tree, this bench, this patch of wild grass. It's never a thing; more a background to the unfolding stories of our lives. This is the job of poetry; where poetry is understood as an experience that might be told rather than a stiff duty.

The storyteller Martin Shaw says it even more bluntly. We have betrayed the wild and we need to fall in love with it again. It was Martin who gave a group of us at the Into the Wild festival a bardic task – to find something beautiful and give it 12 secret names. These names are not quite so secret now, as I share them with you. I'll have to go back to think of 12 more. But perhaps you might want to do this too. Go to someplace sacred to you and praise that place in 12 secret ways that you don't have to tell anyone. If you do, you might find that place changes shape around you, starts to become at once more solid and dreamlike, to begin to feel like a place you belong, are a part of, a relationship, a home.

*For love to return to the world, beauty must first return, else we love the world only as a moral duty: Clean it up, preserve its nature, exploit it less. If love depends on beauty, then beauty comes first... (James Hillman)<sup>1</sup>*



### 1.

I praise you Oak tree for your humility, branches open to the skies like a cupped palm receiving a gift.

### 2.

Oak tree, you cover your trunk with a mossy green coat. I tip my hat to you Oak tree, for your capacity to clothe yourself with living cloth.

### 3.

I praise you Oak tree, for your tenacity and patience, In the corner of this tree you have borne witness to the seasons of hundred years  
To the sudden death of rabbits, the talons of hawks, innumerable moons have set into your branches, innumerable sunsets painted your gnarled trunk gold.  
You stand steady as the seas rise and the moon wobbles.

1. Hillman, J. (1998). The practice of beauty. In Beckley, B., with Schapiro, D. (Eds.). *Uncontrollable beauty*. Allworth Press/School of Visual Arts.

## 4.

I praise you Oak, for your leaves, shaped like green clubs from a pack of cards,  
No other tree rounds its leaves with such panache.

## 5.

My spine leans against your trunk, oh Oak, you bring shelter and support.

## 6.

Who but the Oak allows lichen to wallpaper its flesh with rasps of grey green flock in quite such a way?

## 7.

A house provides shelter, yet an Oak tree takes a person far deeper into their home.

## 8.

A king with his sceptre and orb gathers his estate in full dignity,  
yet cannot surpass the calm majesty of your presence, oh Oak.

## 9.

Silent as an owl at hunt, taller than a haystack, you seek not scurrying flesh, but upwards to hunt the Sun, and downward to feed with dark networks of fungal filaments

## 10.

Your companionship with mycelial threads and neurological shapes tangle you into an earth dark earth pulse that I only touch on in dream or if I lie near you, oh Oak.

## 11.

You bear all sorrows with patience and diligence; if Odin were to hang from you for four nights and offer his eye for your poetic gifts, you would bear the request with good humour

## 12.

You showed that one-eyed god  
the way up to Asgard and down to Helheim;  
You stretch up towards dimly remembered gods,  
And down towards the faded ghosts of our forgotten,

Yet in our in-between world, our Midgard  
You fork your branch to allow the little hawthorn its space, graceful  
as a ballerina's pivot.  
Wiser than Solomon you stand here, allow your body to become  
both crossroads and shelter.

**Toby Chown** is an author, dramatherapist, imaginal ecologist and a member of the CPA *Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal* Editorial Team.

# FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS

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