ROUTLEDGE

Engaging with Climate Change

PSYCHOANALYTIC AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

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Chapter 7

Unconscious obstacles to caring for the planet

Facing up to human nature

John Keene

Introduction

This exploration of some difficulties in our psychological relationship to the planetary ecosystem grew out of two challenging conversations. The first was with my grandson, who worries about the possibility of a Third World War; the second was with a politician, who questioned whether we will be able to do anything in time about climate change. Children are acutely aware of their dependence on adults for their safety and survival, and so they can be sensitive barometers of the pressure of anxiety about keeping the world safe for human beings. Keeping the world safe for human beings looks increasingly difficult, as the actions needed to prevent global warming from exceeding 2°C have widely been opposed or not implemented. Given that so many of our inherited adaptive patterns were developed to manage problems on a family and local scale the challenges of cooperating on a planet wide project are daunting and require the acknowledgement of many difficult aspects of our individual and collective behaviour.

I suggest that when it comes to how we see ourselves, we live in a curious world of doublethink. In spite of Darwin's contribution linking mankind with its biological heritage and Freud's account of the disowned operations of the mind, our public discourse tends to follow the Enlightenment view that rational thought now predominates, and there is recurrent surprise on finding so frequently that this is not the case. One might say that the problems potentially posed by significant global warming tick all the wrong boxes as far as our evolved, individually learned and group responses to our environment and to danger are concerned. The plasticity of human behaviour and the power of language, which have been such an advantage in the development of the species, mean that human individuals have to develop their own models of the world and their relationship to it. These models, which operate to a considerable degree outside awareness, are profoundly affected by experiences in infancy. These partly unavailable and partly disowned assumptions, which powerfully affect our behaviour, are not just the domain of psychoanalysts but are well recognized in folklore, myth and in our literary and dramatic heritage. Sadly, rapid and magnificent technological advances have had little impact on these fundamental processes, which restrict our capacities to

comprehend and to deal with external reality and to restrain our capacities for self-destruction. For seemingly wish-fulfilling reasons the existence of anxious pessimistic scenarios in the past is taken by sceptics as reason to ignore the problem of climate change.[1] This is poor logic, as even hypochondriacs can get seriously ill. The argument that climate change is just another mistaken apocalyptic vision does not fit well with the readily available evidence of humankind's poor record in dealing with other large-scale problems such as the destruction of habitat, the widespread deterioration of water supplies, the elimination of wild food stocks, mass extinctions of species, the reduction of bio-diversity and the pressures of a growing world population.

My approach here is to emulate the struggles of the ego (covering the organizing and deciding functions in our minds) to wean itself away from reliance on magical and wishful thinking and painfully attempt to face what really is the case (Freud 1911). This chapter considers influences on our attitudes to the environment, problems in our relation to facts, evidence and change, and the unconscious forces operating in groups and organizations that amplify these difficulties. These factors interfere with our ability to protect ourselves and others from harm. They include cultural values, which undermine protective responses to our living space. Finally, I examine some proposals as to how these dangerous tendencies in our individual make-up and collective behaviour might be mitigated.

Evolutionary and developmental factors

Two major hindrances to effective management of planetary resources follow from survival responses that evolved long before the present-day challenges.[2] Early humans survived if they could make an immediate response to a sharply defined threat: Is it a predator, friend or foe? (See, for example, Bowlby's discussion of man's environment of evolutionary adaptedness in Bowlby 1969.) By comparison, a diffuse, slowly evolving but potentially serious threat remains easy to ignore. Our attention prioritizes what we can currently see, smell and hear. 'Out of sight' can easily turn to 'out of mind' if the subject is uncomfortable. Hence we are highly attuned to 'weather', but our grasp of 'climate' is far more emotionally elusive in the way that Jared Diamond (2005) uses the term 'landscape amnesia' to describe our problems in registering slow changes in our environment. The second evolutionary preference for immediate gratification over longer-term needs is linked to the first. When it comes to the basic survival of the individual, it is 'now' that counts. This tendency is moderated through experiences in childhood, but it is exacerbated by the culture of consumption and it informs the emotional logic of the contention that there are far more urgent challenges than climate change.

Beyond these fundamentals, our attitudes to the external world grow out of our earliest experiences. The baby's earliest relationships with the world centre on the need for love and the meeting of bodily needs for food, comfort and the excretion of waste. The schemas, attitudes and expectations that grow from these basic

needs remain unconsciously active throughout life, although they are often obscured or rationalized by later, more sophisticated ways of thinking.

The feeding situation provides a model based on bodily experience for how we take in and form ideas about the physical world. Objects are tasted, and those that taste good are consumed and the others rejected. This earliest love is ruthless (Winnicott 1958) and orientated towards immediate survival needs. It is only later in favourable external and internal circumstances that the capacity for concern for the mother and others tempers the demandingness and early sense of entitlement. Like the mother, the Earth – or, so aptly, 'Mother Earth' – is experienced as utterly enormous in relation to our individual activities and therefore often believed to be quite immune to our puny demands on her.

In earliest infancy, maternal provision for urgent needs and a holding environment is taken for granted unless it lapses (Freud 1911; Winnicott 1965). I see this 'environment mother' as contributing to a sense of the world as sustaining and there for us to use without undue concern. She may be seen as the bountiful and limitless sleeping mother whom we can forever take for granted. These fantasies of the infinitely bountiful breast-mother may underlie repeated beliefs that particular fish are bountiful and need no protection, until they are rendered almost extinct.

Where infant care is generally sensitive and responsive, a sense is built up that wishing makes things happen. In these circumstances the infant can feel a sense of optimism, hope and confidence in relation to his surroundings and for the future. Where the opposite is true, the result may be a pervading experience of a frustrating, vengeful mother and a pessimistic and fearful attitude to the world. The ordinary infant has to deal with varying balances of good and bad experiences in a state of maximum psychological vulnerability. The earliest way of managing this is for the infant to regard the good and satisfying experiences as coming from a wholly good person who is quite separate from, and has to be kept well apart in the infant's mind from, the bad person who is the source of the infant's pain and frustration. This separation or 'splitting' of good and bad helps to avoid the anxieties that the good mother will be destroyed by the bad mother or by the infant's own needs or demands.

Unmanageable anxiety is in phantasy evacuated into someone or something else in the way that the infant evacuates its waste. The 'good-enough mother' (Winnicott 1965) takes away baby's 'poos' and 'wees', but, more importantly, by identifying with the infant's anxieties and soothing the baby, she is able to detoxify these too. As a result, the baby gains confidence that helps it to deal with both anxiety and its bodily waste. I believe that these repeated encounters contribute to the complementary belief that the planet is an unlimited 'toilet-mother', capable of absorbing our toxic products to infinity. This belief figures frequently in arguments against human impact on climate. Many people find it impossible to comprehend the aggregate impact of millions of similar actions on the planet, whether of consumption or waste discharge. For much of the last century it was believed that the oceans could absorb whatever toxic waste we put into them. The

millions of tons of rubbish circulating in the Pacific show its limitations as a detoxifying toilet, but few are there to see it. The perception of pollution is also mediated through familiar evolved cues of smell and appearance. If it is slimy brown, sticky and smelly like faeces, its presence in the back garden or beach is an outrage, and compensation will be demanded. If the pollution is dubious assets well presented by smart professionals, then this aspect is ignored. A recent comparison comes in the huge demands for BP to compensate the Gulf region of the United States for its leaked oil. There has been no similar demand made to the United States to compensate the rest of the world for the fraud perpetrated by its financial sector. Pollution is taken seriously mainly if it affects people and places to which we feel connected. Union Carbide's Bhopal disaster probably killed between 4,000 and 15,000 people and caused generations of birth defects; 20 years later, the compensation offered is tiny compared to the billions of dollars demanded from BP for pollution that caused few deaths. Carbon dioxide, the major climate-forcing agent, is colourless and odourless and naturally occurring – we breathe it every day. This makes it easy for sceptics to argue that it should not be regarded as a pollutant and its effects charged to the companies that generate it, regardless of its destabilizing effect on the global climate.

Attitudes to the environment are further complicated by old attitudes to the mother's body, to rivalry and to loss. The infant's dependency needs are painful and may be hated, which can lead to wishes to punish, control, empty out or destroy the mother who is felt to be the wilful source of the infant's frustration. The child's passionate attempt to understand and master the world can similarly be aggravated by sadism. Pleasure in destruction provides quicker and more immediate satisfaction than the painstaking matter of the creation or repair of things. This is sadly a frequent gratification for politicians and managers where the glee in inflicting pain can be only too obvious. It is particularly worrying where the environment is the unconscious target.

Reality testing is difficult: ideologies and culprit hunting are preferred

The search for truth and the evaluation of evidence involve hard emotional work. They involve facing doubt and uncertainty, which rapidly expose the thinker and any group to profound anxieties. These appear to recapitulate the anxieties of the infant who is totally dependent on adults whose benevolence cannot be taken for granted. These anxieties arouse fear, suspicion and a sense of persecution, which group situations tend to amplify (Bion 1961, 1962a). Bion (1962b) sets out three ways by which the mind manages anxiety. When anxiety is completely intolerable, it is evacuated by projective identification – someone else ends up experiencing it. Where there is a large degree of tolerance of anxiety, thinking and therefore reality testing is possible. Sadly the option so frequently found in our social discourse is not a nil, but a minimal tolerance of anxiety, which is managed by taking a position of moral superiority in place of knowledge and is followed by

the search for who is to be blamed and punished. This seems to be the default position for much of the media and a proportion of the public at large. Witch-hunting and conflict are more exciting and satisfying than the painstaking evaluation of evidence, which requires a capacity to bear uncertainty and depression. Even in adulthood there is a recurrent pressure for a return to the defensive strategies of early infancy. The preferred response is to treat every new challenge as a repetition of something familiar and already mastered until that proves untenable. Keeping things the same is a major source of our sense of safety. In this context the early need to split the inner world into clearly good or bad people and things recurs, expressed through the construction of mutually exclusive classes, frequently pushed towards extreme values. This leads to the frequent polarization of positions with regard to disputes, people, theories, and ideologies and rapid moves to either catastrophization or complacency. Attention to complex interrelationships (and the necessary imperfection of proposed solutions) is despised as muddle, weakness, and a failure to make a proper choice. Joined-up thinking is largely aversive and difficult to achieve. It is emotionally much easier to live in a world of simple certainties and the voyeuristic pleasures of scandals and personal triumph or weakness.

This splitting into ideally good and bad persecutory figures is alluring because the illusory clarity it promises is much prized. It is, however, inherently unstable because only one bad element changes the ideally good into the unmitigated bad. The primitive nature of this transaction is readily observed in recent 'climate-gate' scandals in which a few incompletely explained modifications to data and email evidence of personal feelings in the scientists were seized on by some to invalidate the whole scientific endeavour. Ultimately the reviews of the behaviour of the scientists concerned found little to criticize in their science. However, many critics found them guilty of the grossest misconduct and deceit, whether for alleged personal gain or in pursuit of their fanaticism. The extremity of the splitting required academics to function in a totally idealized manner, quite unaffected by the complications of being human beings working in the real world.

Splitting promotes paranoia, and conspiracy theories like this can be very stable. This is because their believability is reinforced rather than reduced by the absence of evidence. If there is no evidence, then the alleged perpetrators are felt to have been extremely clever in concealing their true motives, while the conspiracy theorists are even cleverer to have detected the 'truth'. In addition, they probably gain emotional force from an unconscious phantasy of triumphantly reversing the childhood experience of exclusion from the parents' bedroom and working out (often incorrectly) what the grown-ups have been up to.

Stability and the minimizing of emotional work are readily achieved by modern variants of 'shooting the messenger'. The effects of these tropes in human nature are simply summed up in T. S. Eliot's telling observation, 'Humankind cannot bear too much reality' (Eliot 1944).

Group functioning is constantly under threat from regressive pulls and the demands of 'sentience'

While thinking is hard enough for an individual in quiet contemplation, thinking clearly and acting in a group setting generates anxiety rapidly as the size of the group increases above 6 or 7 (Bion 1961; Kreeger 1975; Menzies Lyth 1988,1989). Here the individual may be exposed to the risks of shame and criticism, isolation, fears of loss of identity (Turquet 1975) or, at worst, losing his or her mind. Freud (1921) emphasized how groups deliver security by creating a 'horde' of equals with the leader carrying the burden of the group's ideals.

Without capable and sophisticated leadership, groups and organizations unconsciously collaborate to produce some stable configurations – which Bion (1961) called *Basic Assumption* activity – whose basic unconscious premise is that the group should be emotionally absorbing, but nothing really novel should take place. One basic assumption is organized around the issue of dependence, and it can be seductive for both leader and followers. Here all moral and practical responsibility is invested in the leader who feels admired and powerful but subject to unattainable expectations, while the followers feel like dependent children. They will be taken care of and are relieved of responsibility but will end up feeling psychically diminished. Our political parties seem to find it very hard to break out of these assumptions in addressing the electorate, and the media's need for dramatization and scapegoats reinforces it. When disappointment sets in, the standard responses are either to find someone to blame and fight with (Basic Assumption: Fight-Flight), or else attention is devoted to some symbolic idea or couple (in psychoanalytic terms representing the parental intercourse) whose activity promises to solve everything in *due course*. (This is Basic Assumption: Pairing.)

Governments and organizations face innumerable conflicts of interest and priority. It is helpful to separate the declared task of the organization (the normative primary task) from two others: the existential primary task and the phenomenal primary task. The existential task covers the conscious and unconscious strategies focused on the psychic and functional survival of the individual, the sub-group or the organization as a whole. Our early dependence on our caregivers initiates attachment patterns that can be extremely durable. Maintenance of these affectional bonds to people, groups and ideas frequently unconsciously take priority over task performance and rational considerations. Each individual may thus have his own view of what he should be doing, but this may be dominated by acting in a way that ensures his economic or psychic survival regardless of the impact on the organization. This may be quite explicit – for example, 'to keep our jobs this department needs a crisis to show it is needed' – but it may also include fears such as upsetting authority figures and the need to sustain a favoured picture of the self, which may put others or the enterprise in jeopardy.

This survival or existential task also explains why 'sentience' (the loyalty that a group or 'tribe' expects and receives from its members) is a more dominant factor in group and organizational performance than more distant or more abstract

elements of the normative task or even evidence and facts. As a poignant example, David Clark, Robin Cook's special adviser, describes[3] how Cook's diaries contain insights about the mind-set of cabinet colleagues and the way they responded to events in the run-up to the Iraq War. They show a government for whom the real nature of the threat posed by Iraq was subsidiary to other considerations: for the Prime Minister the imperative was sticking close to Washington, while for most of his colleagues it was about loyalty to the Prime Minister. Some cabinet members admitted to swallowing private reservations in order to stand by him. However, there should be no illusions that those with an understanding of group and organizational dynamics are immune to these pressures. To quote Gordon Lawrence, a highly experienced group consultant: 'I find myself continually perplexed by the capacity of . . . (organizational training conference) . . . staffs to create lies that they come to believe in order to preserve the staff group and its relationships' (Lawrence 2000: 150).

The policymaking of governments and other large organizations is therefore frequently dominated by the existential primary tasks of individuals (for example, their ambition, envy and rivalry), in tribal configurations such as subgroups, departments, professions, ministries, and so on. If climate-friendly policies add costs to a department's budget and make life easier for another department, how could they possibly be adopted? Many of the problems derive from inherent and legitimate conflicts of interest: will a government that imposes extra costs on individuals and business get re-elected? Governments wish to retain electoral support as well as do what they believe is right. The media may wish to focus on drama and catastrophe to ensure sales rather than present a balanced and reasoned account of uncertainties that attracts less interest.

More perversely, groups can be set up in such a way as to ensure failure, to pursue a divide-and-rule policy and subvert other tasks, to delay, to exact revenge, and as a result of other unconscious impulses. Demanding consensus, for example, gives everyone a veto on action. Other familiar devices to postpone action or responsibility are to set up working parties, enquiries, royal commissions and so on. This is the domain of the *phenomenal primary task*, which is the task the group appears to be undertaking although unaware of it. James Hansen (2009: Ch. 9) has suggested that the whole structure of carbon 'cap and trade' has this kind of basis, since it functions like the mediaeval selling of indulgences. Those who can afford it have little incentive to stop sinning, and anyway there is money to be made from the creation of a market.

Protective mechanisms and culture

Any attempt to deal with worldwide problems, therefore, has to manage these universal human modes of functioning on a grand scale. Positive actions have to be initiated and sustained in the face of additional difficulties to do with national attitudes to cooperation with others. Our moral functions (superego functions in psychoanalytic terms), which push us to act in accordance with our ideals and

guard us from self-harm, operate largely out of awareness but become conscious as the voice of conscience or a sense of anxiety or alarm. However, from infancy onwards such restraint to the individual's desires for satisfaction is resented, and this may live on powerfully in the conscious and unconscious mind as a resistance to authority, duty or responsibility. The cultural expectations that surround us are the medium in which our individual superegos swim and develop.

Howard, Orlinsky, and Lueger (1995), putting forward a general model of how psychotherapies function, called the first stage of any therapy *re-moralization*. By this they meant the process at the beginning of therapy that restores to patients some hope that they may be able to recover from their problems and heal themselves. This focus on moral values resonates with two impressive texts, one on the success or failure of societies and the other on an analysis of good and bad power. Diamond (2005) noted that past societies that survived their environmental crises had been able to re-examine their core values. Mulgan (2006) argued that in spite of the pressure of immediate challenges, any state that only tries to maximize the well-being of today's citizens would betray its deeper responsibility to the interests of the community and the ecological systems on which human life depends: 'The ideals of trusteeship require us to become servants to the future and leave the world better than we find it' (2006: 306).

Since the world economy and its dominant business models drive the present surge towards growth with increasing pressure on the Earth's resources, this would seem a necessary place to start looking to generate hope for the recovery or protection of the world patient. However, reviewing developments over the last thirty years, one can only recall the Irishmen's advice to the traveller asking for directions: 'If I were you, I wouldn't start from here.' My sense is that rather than experiencing a sense of increased morality and responsibility we have wittingly or unwittingly been through a period of amoralization in Western culture. In Britain, from the war-time period, when the welfare state was envisaged to provide care for the population after the ravages of war and when austerity was the order of the day, we have been through a period when individual and social superego functions have been treated very oddly, dominated by splitting and moves between extremes. Demonization or idealization has regularly shifted between capital and labour (currently represented by those on welfare) and the state versus the private sector. Debate can often appear reduced to the question, 'Who is holding the country to ransom?' First it was the trades unions and, for a brief period, the bankers and their minders. However, this latter reality is being cleverly side-stepped and massaged out of the public discourse. Why the super-wealthy and their tax havens have escaped this role so far may be a source of some bewilderment, until we factor in some of Mulgan's observations, described below. The old music-hall song shows how familiar this is: 'It's the rich what gets the gravy, and the poor what gets the blame.'

During the post-war period of austerity and re-building, the state was seen as the good object with the provision of welfare and security its duty while the markets had barely recovered their credibility from the crash and depression of

the 1930s. From the early 1980s, this was reversed, and the social message came that greed was good, competition better than collaboration and that there was no such thing as society. Governments, too, were divesting themselves of responsibilities for managing their economies in a way that would properly benefit their citizens by projecting responsibility into the supposedly infallible markets, on the basis that as long as inflation or the money supply were controlled, only good would follow if business could proceed unfettered. Other entities to whom responsibility was delegated included news media proprietors, editors, focus groups and the stock and bond markets. (The seriously flawed idea of markets as fundamentally and automatically guided by rational processes is discussed in detail by Tuckett 2011). The role of primitive splitting involved in this exercise can be detected in the fact that the total trust given to market forces was accompanied by the evacuation of untrustworthiness and venality into anyone who was *not* a trader. Teachers, doctors, lawyers, civil servants, everyone in the public sector were supposedly all on the make, exploiting their jobs for personal gain and sucking the state dry. To deal with the projected corruption and incompetence of everyone else, governments came to see themselves as the only people who could be trusted to know right from wrong and to dictate change from the centre. The personal authority of individuals derived from knowledge, experience, responsibility and integrity was replaced by a culture of management by checklists.

Two psychoanalytically inspired investigations of the social psyche in the post-war period (Lawrence 2000; Miller 1993) discussed how this change in the social contract led to an experience of failed dependency, with a resulting withdrawal from reality into the virtual worlds of film, literature and, later, the Internet. They also noted a withdrawal from collective action into smaller groups of twos and threes in the workplace. At its extreme, responsibility for others disappeared, and the only reality to be attended to was that of the individual and his survival. This is a culture of selfishness in which individuals appear only to be conscious of their own boundaries. These they have to protect against incursions from attack from those who are feared to contain all their own repudiated envy, greed and violence.

A world order that follows these trends is reminiscent of the internal world of narcissistic and borderline patients. Here, weakness of the ego is unable to integrate activity or prevent the eruption of primitive impulses that are likely to be greedy, sadistic or self-destructive. These primitive impulses are also frequently combined, as Fairbairn (1952) and Rosenfeld (1971) have described, to form organizations within the self, within a society or between nations, which mock and attack the loving, caring, protecting parts of the self. These parts sustain belief in love, goodness and relationships. In their place the organization argues that it is better to trust triumph, narcissism and sadism. Such dynamics are powerfully visible on the international scene. Power and money (which, as well as their inherent desirability, are also aphrodisiacs) exist in powerful networks, while the regulating authorities, which are the carriers of the protective superego functions of restraining and policing, are usually underfunded or compromised in their roles. This situation powerfully affects two major worldwide challenges. The first

is how to restrict the frankly bad behaviour of those who will defy the law for personal gain. The second is that it remains rational to grab whatever you can as fast as you can if you cannot guarantee that your restraint will not be taken advantage of by others. (This is the group of strategy problems known widely as 'the prisoner's dilemma' – Flood and Dresher 1948.)

For most of the world's population, the threats of financial collapse, terrorism or climate change are now more pressing than the threat of invasion (Mulgan 2006: 296–297). However, our inherent dislike of controls makes it hard to get enforcement taken seriously. It is on these grounds that Mulgan (2006) and Hansen (2009) are pessimistic about global attempts to control the emission of greenhouse gases. Having let the genie out of the bottle that it is all right do what you want even if it is not morally right – as long as you can get away with it – it is very hard to get it back in again. The global capital markets remain voracious in a way that is insatiable even in a crisis. International collaboration on bank reform or planetary protection remains difficult because historically nations have seen themselves as closed sovereign islands that in moral terms are sufficient unto themselves. Concern for what is good for the nation – or, more precisely, even in democracies, the ruling elites that hold power and wealth – trumps what is good for the world as a whole. Neither China nor the United States likes to be constrained. By the third decade of the century, CO_2 levels in the atmosphere may be reaching levels that will be impossible to reverse, and both China and the United States will be contributing some quarter of the world's total.

Precisely because the actions needed to arrest climate change will have an uneven distribution of costs and benefits, it remains unlikely that consensus can be readily achieved. Any attempt to curtail the developing world will be viewed by it as just another 'con' to deprive it of chances that others have had. On the other hand, even dominant nations will need people to trade with them, which offers the rest some leverage if nations can cooperate to use it. Those who hoped that the recent financial crash would usher in a re-evaluation of core values and inspire international cooperation on climate have been disappointed. Two psychological issues seem important here. First is the fact that the crisis threatened to affect all the major economies at once. It was therefore a common and sharply defined threat, while the effects of global warming will be patchy and uneven until far advanced. Second, the responses to the financial crisis have been similar to that following a serious car crash. For those close to people who are killed or maimed there is major anguish, and the world is changed. For those who escape unscathed, there may be a few miles of careful driving, but surviving when others do not contributes to a sense of omnipotence and immortality and there is a rapid return to 'business as usual'. Some will be able to benefit as competitors will have disappeared. Howard Davies, then Director of the London School of Economics, observed (2010) that once the fear of total collapse of the world economy was past, the need for concerted action receded; governments returned to the priorities of what suited them best. On both sides of the Atlantic there is a

reluctance to empower international regulatory bodies combined with the tendency of special interests to try to get all regulation watered down.

Restraint evokes unconscious phantasies aroused by weaning, which is the prototype for managing loss and is complicated by feelings of unfairness, feelings that may be revived by inequality in adult life. It seems to me that avoidance of guilt and pain at what we may have done at a global level to other people and to the planet through our exploitation adds its force to an argument propounded at the Seattle Convention in 1999. This is that in the absence of better alternatives, the present economic system of providing global enrichment through continued growth had to be sustained, while chillingly describing as 'zones of sacrifice' those whose environments or communities are destroyed in the process – I would add here, as long as they can remain out of sight and so out of mind.

Servants of the future

It seems probable that the evidence of mankind's amazing achievements and mastery of nature feeds the fantasy that more and greater benefits can be used to avoid guilt and depression, not just about present and past damage (the zones of sacrifice), but also the pain of facing unfairness in a growth-driven world. Therapeutically, hope that is not manic or hallucinatory comes from a realistic assessment of the damage we have caused and the adoption of realistic plans for reparation. How individual, organizational and national responsibility for past and present damage to the environment is assessed is complex and is likely to be resisted because it will cause pain and guilt, and no one wants to have to give up anything.

This connects with the view expressed by Lawrence (2000) that in the West a healthy future cannot be brought into being until we experience and consciously call to mind the meaning and significance of tragedy, both as private trouble and as a public issue at our point in history. Tragedy refers to all the factors that are beyond our control, from unhappiness and misfortune to death. As a result of our successful mastery of so much of nature we have come to believe that life should be trouble-free, and we have poor means of integrating tragedy into our lives. We split tragedy off into characters in films and television dramas and into people 'not like us'. These include the weak, the underclasses, strangers and foreigners. Tragedy readily comes to be felt by people as an intrusion into their lives, as an impertinence of fate. For those who are relatively privileged, there is always a tendency to bring that good fortune into the realm of personal omnipotence as something earned or deserved. Humankind is powerfully programmed to attribute personal outcomes to moral virtue, or its lack, and not to structural societal factors.

Until reconnection is made with the depth of our species' dependence on the natural world and the inevitable precariousness of individual lives, there can be no proper engagement with these tragic elements as a public issue. Instead, when tragedy happens, politicians often offer foolish promises that 'we must act so that this can never happen again'. This challenge returns the focus to the

interdependence of leaders and followers. Apart from natural tragedies that no one can prevent, much tragedy in the world is brought about through our 'mindless' acting regardless of consequences. Societies are particularly vulnerable to the acts of immature narcissistic leaders who promise to relieve all anxiety but, being out of touch with elements of their internal world, only attempt to satisfy their 'I want' wishes and desires. Such narcissistic people beget tragedy, for they enter into a course of action unable to consider the consequences except on their own terms. In contrast to the drama of tragedy, there is no recognition of hubris or ultimate self-knowledge. Sadly, the 'me-ness' stance, coupled with withdrawal from reality and the increased insecurity that has arisen in the past decade or so, has led to an increasingly fearful mode of social functioning.

In trying to enliven our capacity to think and dream of a better future and to reverse the withdrawal from engagement with the unconscious life of groups, there remains the problem for citizens of affecting the policies of nations and organizations. Like the loving part of patients held hostage by a mafia in their minds, the healthy impulses of our populations are frequently outflanked by the operations, even in democracies, of ruling elites or particular concentrations of power and self-interest within them. I believe it is the problem of how to influence policy, more than apathy or individual greed, that can make individual impulses to care for the planet seem hopeless or futile. In the United Kingdom hundreds of thousands of protestors against the Iraq war, probably representing many more, had no impact on the decision. Al Gore (2009) cites the vision that sustained over centuries the construction of the cathedrals of Europe as a demonstration of our species' capacity to embrace goals far beyond the lives of individuals. I do not think such aspirations are absent among the current population of the world, but the sustaining philosophy that led to the cathedrals was very different from the doctrines of maximizing share-holder value and the pursuit of short-term returns.

Diamond (2005) and Mulgan (2006) have each proposed strategies to counter the sense of powerlessness that regularly affects members of the professions, company boards and members of parliament, as well as individual citizens who wish for their voice to be taken seriously. Diamond pointed out that Kennedy completely altered the 'kitchen cabinet' approach to government between the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Cuban Missile Crisis. He recognized that 'groupthink' had guided decisionmaking during the former crisis. 'Groupthink' occurs where personal doubts and contrary views are suppressed. With the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy ordered his groups of advisers to think sceptically and to raise all the objections they could think of in a free-wheeling way. He insisted that his advisers should regularly meet without him to avoid undue conscious and unconscious pressure on them to say what they thought he wanted to hear.

Mulgan argued that every society, including the emerging world society, needs a 'party for the future'. This would involve institutions inside and outside government devoted to countering the gaps between the interests of the people and the interests of states and their ruling elites. Such a party would need to integrate

the idealism of youth with the knowledge of mortality of the older generations. The idea of such groups evokes the 'specialist work group' function described by Freud (1921) and Bion (1961) for the Church and the Army whereby groups or institutions carry out essential functions on behalf of society as a whole, which would here extend to the future of the planet. This is an enlivening idea, but such movements would constantly have to be on guard against their marginalization by those with more powerful competing interests. They require stimulation and contributions from every level of organization in society from the individual upwards. For each level there would need to be an assessment of the dominant state of mind of the group: whether it lacked awareness of the problem, was complacent or was paralysed by anxiety. This could not be a once-only assessment but would need to be something akin to a psychoanalyst's ongoing monitoring of the patient's state of mind during a session.

Movements that want to influence states have to learn how to argue not only for the welcome benefits of their proposals and provide positive narratives for change, but they also need to concentrate their forces on the ruling groups' pressure points, such as their electoral majorities, tax receipts, company profits or party funding. Shame is a powerful motivator, and some major companies are well aware that environmental awareness is good for business. Public pressure crucially can reinforce this, although it has so far had little success in bringing the environmental and social costs of business activity (described by economists as 'externalities' or more vividly as the 'zones of sacrifice' referred to above) on to companies' balance sheets.

Mulgan emphasized ways in which the mental models required for such a work group are very different from those needed for quick decision-making, rationalization and dramatic sound bites. They require openness to the unexpected, respect for the time it takes to become conversant with a complex system, familiarity with many disciplines and the mental toughness needed to escape the tyranny of the status quo. They require counterbalances to the current emphasis on the tactical and the contingent, which includes the fear of leaks that crushes honest debate, the insecurity that prevents rigorous self-scrutiny and the wishful thinking that prefers not to contemplate unpleasant possibilities. Governments have to wean themselves from their need for *certain* forecasts of what the future will bring and develop, rather, methods that prepare them for both more and less likely possibilities. Mulgan observes that smaller countries seem to do this better than those with a greater sense of their global significance.

These are challenging but not impossible tasks for individuals and states that frequently use the excuse that there are higher priorities for time and attention. Yet, contrary to the widespread fantasy, in group life *not* to act or speak is not to do nothing. Rather, it constitutes collusion with whatever is happening. To paraphrase an earlier slogan, quoted by Segal (1987) in her work on the threat of nuclear weapons, 'silence remains the real crime'. Individuals and societies that avoid the challenge will prove correct Yeats' dark view of leaders – and, by implication, of followers too:

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned:

. . .

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

(Yeats 1920)

Fortunately, this is not the total picture. Melanie Klein (1959) observed how some children by being predominantly friendly and helpful improve the family atmosphere and have an integrating effect on the whole of family life. Klein emphasized the influence of people with integrity, sincerity and strength of character on others around them. Even people who do not possess the same qualities are impressed and cannot help feeling some respect for integrity and sincerity, 'for these qualities arouse in them a picture of what they might themselves have become or perhaps still might become. Such personalities give . . . some hopefulness about the world in general and greater trust in goodness' (Klein 1959: 14–15). A reconsideration of what is needed for a good and sustainable life on the planet depends on social and national policies that foster such qualities and reinstate the values and practices that provide security for the development of loving relationships and creativity and respect for the planetary environment.

Notes

1 For earlier examples see Freud (1915, 1930), Bion (1991), Fromm (1974), Hobsbawm (1994).
2 The creation of excess greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is just over two centuries old, a by-product of the industrial revolution, while our evolutionary history as a separate species is perhaps one million years long, and our adaptations to city life began 5,000 years ago.
3 *The Guardian*, 3 Feb. 2010.

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Discussion

Unconscious obstacles to caring for the planet: facing up to human nature

Michael Brearley

I would like to open the discussion of John Keene's excellent chapter by underlining and elaborating on his central point: the difficulties, general and particular, of following the reality principle with regard to the topic of climate change. Keene sums up one of Freud's (1911) main claims as follows: the task of the ego (is) to wean itself away from its early reliance on magical and wishful thinking and painfully attempt to represent to itself what really is the case. This is a lifelong struggle. And, as Keene shows, there are particular obstacles to reality-principle functioning when it comes to climate change. I see the whole of my contribution as a discussion of what lies behind these difficulties.

I will begin with another battle, the battle over smoking, and hope to draw out from this some similarities and differences from the battle over climate change. From the 1950s, it has been known that smoking is bad for your health. It was also known that secondary smoking is bad for us. Evidence for all this was widely suppressed by tobacco companies.

Of course, smoking has its attractions. The nicotine and the psychological addiction ease tension. Cigarettes offer something for restless hands. There may be worse ways of dealing with anxiety or low-level depression. It is a hard addiction to give up. My own tastes in this matter involved seeking out the non-smoking carriages on the London Tube trains (in those days, two out of seven on the District Line). As a boy I was excited by what felt like the manly atmosphere of the bridge evenings my father had with three male friends, where cigars would be smoked and the room carried the fug for days afterwards. But, except for a few weeks at university when I briefly smoked a pipe in retaliation against a friend whose smoke seemed to be used to supplement his arguments in debate, I never smoked.

As I grew older, I resented more and more having the stuff blown into my face. It gave me a slight allergy – a sort of physiological reaction to add to my psychological one. I believed that we would always have to submit to this tyranny of the smoker. I thought that the force of destructiveness – the damage done by smokers and the connivance in this by Society at large – would prevail. I had no trust in the capacity of Society to overcome the inertia that allowed us to accept it, no hope that rational decisions to save people from lung cancer and other dreadful diseases would be taken.

And yet change has happened: one of the most significant social changes in my lifetime. Smoking is now banned from all indoor public places in Britain and in many other countries. Wonderful! One can enjoy one's meal without this pollution; fewer young people will take up this noxious habit; lives are already being saved, as is the financial cost to us all in Britain via the National Health Service.

The massive, long-term, multi-faceted campaign against smoking, with its small but incremental shifts, is an example of what Keene is suggesting we need to do on the crucial issue of climate change. Across many countries people got together to combat the attractions and the lure of smoking, the pernicious assumptions and lies of the powerful tobacco lobby and the general inertia. They forced through restrictions that gradually led to the current, healthier situation. No doubt there is further to go. No doubt too there will be difficult lines to be drawn between freedom and enforcement.

If it was difficult to drive through change in our attitudes to smoking, how much bulkier and more powerful are the obstacles to thinking clearly and taking appropriate action in relation to the much larger issue of climate change! The implications of the reality principle in relation to climate change are more complex, harder to assess, and more challenging to our narcissism.

First, the demand that people restrict their smoking meant that only smokers (and manufacturers) had to give something up. The rest of us did not. The rest of us stood to gain, both in the short and the longer term. And, as Keene says and Harrison's chapter 10 in this volume makes clear, the threats of climate change are patchy: not everyone is equally affected in the short term. With climate change, everyone has to give up something, now and in the future. Second, cigarette smoke is visible and unpleasant. CO_2 and other greenhouse gases are invisible and apparently harmless. Third, the consequences of climate change, as of the financial crisis, are vast, and much more difficult to hold in mind and deal with than a relatively isolated arena of conflict and controversy. More radical and more ramifying changes are called for. As Keene says, 'so many of our inherited adaptive patterns were developed for challenges on a family and local scale', and 'early man survived if he could make an immediate response to a sharply defined threat'. Opposing smoking did indeed call for recognition of long-term damage; but how much harder to rethink all our attitudes and behaviours in the light of threats to the Earth that are large-scale, distant (relatively) from us in their impact and in the long term so all-encompassing, frightening and difficult to predict. What might, for instance, be the consequences, in terms of famine, migration and violence, if climate change does bring rapidly escalating drought in Africa? What would be the economic and social consequences of a possible flooding of the London Underground system with salt water from the Thames, or of the rapid transformation of the UK climate to something like that of Labrador if the Gulf Stream were to cease to warm us? Moreover, while we are so afraid of disaster scenarios that we cannot bear to think of them, less disastrous scenarios fail to trouble us enough.

Thinking according to the reality principle means challenging one's narcissism, as Keene spells out in many detailed ways. We cannot have all that we want. I find

persuasive his linking of our attitude to the Earth, seen as Mother Earth, to our persisting attitudes (ruthless, entitled, and indifferent) to our actual mothers or to the mothering we received. He rightly adds that we are not only indifferent but also cruel and punitive to our mothers; as he says, how much quicker destructiveness is than repair! The point is beautifully expressed by Homer; he had this to say about Sin and Prayer:

> Destructiveness, sure-footed and strong, races around the world doing harm, followed haltingly by Prayer, which is lame, wrinkled, and has difficulty seeing, and goes to great lengths trying to put things right.
>
> (*The Iliad*, Book 9, ll 502ff: my translation)

Keene also makes cogent comments about groups, about the ideals of trusteeship and about failed societies. As members of groups, people are liable to behave like lemmings (Bion 1961). Trusteeship: the less-narcissistic person is concerned for future generations as his or her arc of concern goes beyond the limit of personal death. And those societies that have been unable to rethink their central values at times of threat and enforced change are more likely to fail, as Diamond (2005) has illustrated. Keene importantly adds that the culture of consumerism encourages our wishful thinking and militates against our facing the facts.

I think that there is a danger of oscillation between opposing values from one generation to the next. As the philosopher John Wisdom wrote:

> In ethical effort people take note of the voice or prick of conscience – of the immediate response, 'O no, mustn't do that.' But they do not always take this as final. They say, 'But there's no harm in it really, it's only my puritanical conscience', and a small Dionysian voice grows louder, 'It's foolish but it's fun.' They join in the frolic of the Restoration. And then they turn again and say, 'The Puritans had something after all', and take to driving in a Victoria round Balmoral – only to leave it for a faster car and the dancing twenties and so on.
>
> (Wisdom 1953: 107–108)

Similarly, we moved from over-valuing dependence and superego obedience in the 1950s to over-valuing competition in the 1980s. Keene is particularly keen to emphasize the 'me-culture' that became more predominant in the 1980s.

He calls on us to have different attitudes, both as leaders and as followers. We have to struggle with the lack of a good superego and the lack of a strong ego, lacks that both create and live off our sense of entitlement to unlimited growth. Projecting our responsibility, we bask in passivity. Internationally, if we risk taking measures against global warming, we fear (partly realistically) the rapacity and mockery of others. Individually, too, we are liable, as he says, to hand over power to elements – 'internal organizations', in the helpful notion familiar to psychoanalysts – that mock our own inclinations to restraint and cooperativeness.

Keene's picture of our current society is richly drawn. He has important things to say about the role of tragedy in life (psychoanalysis has underlined our universal capacity for damaging what we value and need), about the need for grieving (and the danger that this tips over into grievance) and about infantile ways of mistaking hyper-sensitivity to unfairness for fairness.

Keene also has some suggestions for change. One practice he refers to that I particularly admire was J. F. Kennedy's fostering, as President of the United States, of rigorous criticism of his ideas. We need non-narcissistically to encourage the willingness of others to 'tell truth to power' (in the Quaker phrase). We need to foster that quality in ourselves. Gordon Lawrence's (2000) 'specialist work groups' – think-tanks on climate change – are another attempt to build what Bion called 'work-groups', which work to oppose short-termism and subservience to the status quo.

There is always the risk that such healthy challenging may degenerate into oppositional stances driven by envy, cantankerousness, self-righteousness or triumph. Narcissism, as we know from our work as psychoanalysts and from our own analyses, creeps back in all sorts of ways – and we have to be on the lookout for such tendencies on an occasion such as this: we may slip into self-righteousness and superiority, or become excited by catastrophe-scenarios.

Keene starts his chapter with his conversation with his nine-year old grandson, and one of the questions this leads on to is how we should educate our children and grandchildren to be more deeply involved in protecting the planet than we have been. Daniel Barenboim was asked by a sceptical questioner whether children should be taught Beethoven sonatas when they cannot understand the range of emotions expressed. His response was that there are two dangers: one of pushing children to be adult too soon, to force on them things they cannot understand, while the other is of babying. When it comes to Beethoven, he preferred to take the former risk rather than the latter. No one can fully understand these works, he went on; he himself has been playing and studying them for 50 years, and he does not. Familiarity, he said, need not breed contempt. Keene and Barenboim would, I think, be on the same side, encouraging children to take up challenges with whatever level of emotional and intellectual understanding they are ready for rather than protect them too much from difficulties.

Keene ends his chapter as he starts it by talking about children, those mentioned by Klein as having 'an integrating effect on the whole of family life', who, 'by being predominantly friendly and helpful, improve the family atmosphere' (Klein 1959: 261). So it is not only a matter of educating children, but also being open to being improved by them, 'for these qualities arouse in people a picture of what they might themselves have become, or perhaps still might become'.

Perhaps this framing with references to children is a clue to one of its central messages: that it is our children (and theirs) that we need to focus on and rely on when it comes to fighting against the pressures to ignore the risks of climate change.

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Discussion

Unconscious obstacles to caring for the planet: facing up to human nature

Bob Hinshelwood

Goods and bads

John Keene's chapter is extraordinarily rich in offering us an understanding of *unconscious* aspects of humans. It shows us the intersection of the unconscious with conscious thinking and, moreover, indicates the unconscious aspects of the individual intersecting with group and social dynamics. It also links more biological factors that are connected with human survival with the intense and painful dependency of a baby on its mother. Climate change issues provoke similar intense feelings of dependency to survive biologically as individuals and as a species. It is important to recognize how those baby-like feelings have a role in powerful cultural and commercial forces, self-seeking interests, and politics.[1]

At all these levels, Keene shows the conflicts, and conflicts of interest, that form the heart of human affairs. We may wonder how, with all this complex variation among individuals, anything collective could emerge at all – and yet it does. Keene shows how individuals *do* line up with specific social issues, though not necessarily *why* they do. From Freud (1921, 1930) onwards psychoanalysts have puzzled about how social order seeps across this individual diversity. If individuals collectively constitute the social, they do so with an implicit cooperation only partially explained by conscious negotiation and agreement. Beyond the conscious motives there are implicit and unconscious coordinating influences as well. Keene implies, and I agree, that without a knowledge of those unconscious influences we are culturally and individually at their mercy.

I should like to use this space to discuss how individual experiences are swept together by a culture, and then a particular type of group dynamic that ensues.

Cultural icons

One of the organizing principles in society is iconic cultural entities. The display of the national flag, or the chords of a national anthem, call people to a solidarity, a sense of belonging to a nation, whatever the mosaic of differences it otherwise displays.

For example, in an earlier paper I explored cultural icons that represented the countryside (Hinshelwood 1993). I argued that, historically, attitudes appear to have changed radically. In Shakespearean times, the countryside was seen within a dominant cultural form – that of literature – as the domain of highwaymen, of madmen (just as the three witches of *Macbeth* exemplified that sinister and all-powerful quality). Known as the heath, the countryside was seen as a dangerous place, in contrast to the safety of the hearth, as the warmth of civilized life. These opposing sets of views, which place nature and civilization at opposite ends of a spectrum of safety, are foreign to ways of thinking in the twenty-first century. In recent times, that dimension seems to have reversed. Nature is now seen as a sad and threatened victim of civilization. A contemporary icon might be the Disney cartoon of Bambi the baby deer whose mother was shot by human hunters. Today civilization seems to be the sinister villain armed with murderous technology. So, I argued, the experience of nature has moved from being a fear of its danger to a concern for a forlorn and sentimentalized Disney caricature. Neither is perhaps valid, and *both* are one-dimensional. Fearfulness versus concern appears to be a defining feature of the Shakespearean/Disney pair of icons (although with very different means of expression).

If the cultural icons Shakespeare and Disney purvey express certain latent and available human emotions, at the same time they coordinate those individual perceptions within a culture. The Ancient world has handed down its versions of such coordinating iconic signals, as psychoanalysis has consistently proclaimed. The Oedipus story was extremely popular in Greek theatre two and a half millennia ago. It captured some profound response in individuals through the cultural form of a drama. The extraordinary Greek discovery that tragedy is entertainment now seems commonplace, but it is difficult to explain. How can fear and pity be 'enjoyed'? Aristotle found that he could give only an analogical explanation on the basis that the body humours need purging from time to time, and similarly the emotions do as well (see also Lear 1992; Nussbaum 1986; Nuttall 1996).

These icons energize a two-way response – the inner emotional life of a person's imagination, and a cultural form that can bring out those imaginary configurations *en masse*. It is this coordinated interaction between individuals and social culture that I think needs to be added to the psychoanalytic account. The point of turning to psychoanalysis is to find some explanation of what drives these cultural icons (though it says little about the *nature* of cultural forms in themselves).

Idealization and demonization

One extraordinary principle of group life is the 'us-and-them' dynamic. It is the enhanced capacity in groups to make either over-valuations or under-valuations and, moreover, to believe intensely in those distorted evaluations. Freud characterized this as 'the narcissism of minor differences' (Freud 1930: 114). One could say that groups are narcissistic. But it is more that groups bring out and support the narcissism of the individuals who make up the group. So, groups maximize

the individual's belief that 'we' are right and good. At the same time, this superiority is welded with the certainty that 'they' are wrong and bad. So, experiences at multiple levels – personal, group, societal – cohere, and they do so around the axis of good–bad, right–wrong. Individuals employ the divisive processes of idealization or of demonization and when those processes cohere at the group level, they create the familiar us-and-them pattern.

In a psychoanalytic account, idealization and demonization are not merely descriptive terms. Idealization is a defence against the hatred of demonization. The belief that something is 'all good' (idealization) is selectively emphasized in order to obliterate awareness of dangerous things. To quote Melanie Klein, 'The idealized breast forms the corollary of the persecuting breast; and in so far as idealization is derived from the need to be protected from persecuting objects, it is a method of defence against anxiety' (Klein 1952: 64).

Defensive idealization is necessary to cope with the bad intentions and destructive elements of self and others. However, in groups a demonization of the 'other' is licensed, and possibly our species evolved an us-and-them destructiveness to survive biologically through eliminating rivals for the food supply – a brutal strategy that nature seems to adopt rather readily. However, the brutality of nature, of the Shakespearian 'heath', is not incompatible with a cooperativeness – within a group, or even between species in an ecological niche. Reality is a pretty mixed bag.

Nothing is perfect, as everything has pros and cons. The perception of ideal persons, however comforting, distorts realistic perceptions, excludes intermediate evaluations, and consigns us merely to a world of oppositions. For instance, industrial exploitation is not simplistically destructive. It is also beneficent in some measure, providing health and wealth. It is complex: exploitation is neither all bad, nor all good. Making fine distinctions between the actual benign and malign influences is not easy, especially on a global scale. Instead, we may relax into easy polarized thinking and feeling, such as the Shakespeare/Disney icons.

Good/bad knee-jerk reactions avoid assessing the real balance, especially when a group of colleagues support easy, minimalist thinking. Adding the us-and-them narcissism to the avoidance of difficult thought produces a potent pressure to mis-evaluate others. The various groups arguing about nature and climate are not immune from these instant reactions.

Nature is our sustenance. We will still plant seeds in the good earth and depend on climate for them to grow. At the same time, the destruction of large areas of Japan and its tragic inhabitants by the earthquake and tsunami in 2011 make nature double-edged. Tsunamis, tornados, and natural disasters remain to terrorize us. We are, every one of us, vulnerable until we die, when nature finally triumphs over our puny efforts to survive. Nature and climate are a very mixed bag. As Keene says in this chapter, the complexity of dependency is always with us. We are needy and we are concerned, we hate and we fear. This multi-valent but realistic dependence is hard to keep fully in mind. Zoos and circuses are perhaps icons for simplifying our attitudes to dependence by showing our hoped-for control.

Like the Disney stories, cultural icons grab us deep in our souls, at the place where we were once children.

That does not mean that the notion of climate change as an evil done to nature by human beings is not true. In part. But layers of meaning need to be unpicked, otherwise we lose the fact that at least in some respects there is a two-way mutual dependence. Humans are deeply dependent on nature and its arbitrariness, as many Japanese families must be pondering. But nature and the climate are increasingly vulnerable to human industrial production, car use, deforestation and so on. Sometimes humans are good to nature and sometimes bad, according to our purposes. And sometimes nature is good to us and sometimes not, according to conditions.

The role of the climate change activist

Psychoanalysts and psychotherapists may slot the climate automatically into the role of a 'patient' to be cared for. And a range of views on that therapeutic power relation may then be unthinkingly activated. For others, different roles and attitudes may spring up with an equal lack of reflection, as if similarly self-evident. For instance, for the owners of shares in Rio Tinto Zinc, exploiting the Earth's resources is a vital necessity, so that cautious reflection threatens a number of things – their identity, their way of life, and awareness of a potential guilty responsibility.

The two groups I have just characterized – the 'therapists' and the 'exploiters' – may exemplify the us-and-them group dynamic. Their very perceptions may form on the basis of attitudes arising from their separate social locations. With such a mindset, therapists will tend to see the exploiters as greedy and self-seeking, oblivious to Bambi-like nature; and the exploiters will tend to disparage the therapists as do-gooders manufacturing the guilt and blame they spread liberally around. Such perceptions winging back and forth enable the two groups to establish convincingly for themselves that the other is wrong-headed, maybe even maliciously so. And therefore 'they' are beyond the pale of understanding and sympathy.

'Us', the therapists (climate carers), who wish to *do something* about climate change, can be identified simply as do-gooders and disparaged as such. It is a complicated place to be; we are marginalized but also, at a very unconscious level, we represent that caring side of society in a rapacious culture. Even the most avid stock-market follower has had to disown his uneasy conscience in order to remain in line with his group, and he does so by leaving others to have the uneasy conscience on his behalf. The complex point is that group dynamics allot to carers the role of care and 'good sense' *on behalf of* everyone else. We are *needed* to represent the conscience of an exploitative society. But located as a do-gooder group, sufficiently denigrated, the social conscience is rendered both marginal and ineffective.

This unconscious strategy of making a smallish group of people the *sole* representatives of one function of human thoughtfulness, in order to immobilize it, can play out with other groups. If the scientists represent that aspect of society devoted

to reality-testing, it means that we can rely on them to do that thinking-work. But the function, too, can be reduced to impotence, as were the climate scientists at the University of East Anglia in the so-called 'climategate scandal' (e.g. Adam 2010). At the same time, wealth-creators who keep us warm, housed, fed and entertained can be disparaged as simply greedy, callous, and the carriers of all *our* guilt.

The importance of these group dynamics is that they seriously inhibit everyone's capacity to see the full picture. We end up thinking in partial terms, locked in a restricted cultural location, and trapped with everyone else into simply allotting good versus bad evaluations to ourselves and others. We, of all people, who study these impelling and unconscious processes, should draw back a little from simplistic and polarized thinking and shake free some of our hard-earned capacity to understand others and our understanding of ourselves *with* others. Since we do have that understanding, maybe we must avoid becoming merely do-gooders and take responsibility for recognizing the range of others' positions, even if they seem not so good.

If we engage in polarizations about nature and climate, or about other groups' attitudes to them, we only engage in defensive postures and functions. Politics may be the art of the possible, but it will only effectively realize the possibilities if it addresses the unconscious dynamics as well as the thoroughly conscious issues.

Note

1 See also Averill (2007).

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