

Book Review

A Jungian perspective on the Climate Crisis

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This book is an in-depth psychological exploration of the most urgent issue of our time. The climate and eco-logical crisis resulting from the human-induced impacts on our atmosphere and biosphere, threatens nothing less than near-term collapse of our civilisation.

James Hansen former director of NASA said in relation to the climate crisis

'The Earth's warming has brought us to the precipice of a great tipping point. If we go over the edge, it will be a transition to a different planet; an environment far outside the range that has been experienced by humanity. There will be no return within the lifetime of any generation that can be imagined, and it will exterminate a large fraction of species on the planet'

There is every indication that we are going over this edge, and we urgently need action. But this action must be informed by a thorough understanding of the roots of the crisis if it is not to compound the problem or just paper over the cracks.

This book offers such understanding from a Jungian depth-psychology perspective. There are perspectives from psychology, spirituality, science and from anthropology. Some of the chapters are focused on dream and myth and perhaps difficult for a non-Jungian such as myself to relate to. Other chapters however are much more relatable for the general reader.

Although there are many suggested causes to the crisis, many of the authors conclude that the root cause is our relationship to the natural world and to our selves. This might be summarized as a relationship dominated by anthropomorphism or 'human exceptionalism' the assumption that humans are distinct, superior to and separate from life on Earth. This dominant paradigm has for example, led to the

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development of an economic model which is essentially divorced from reality. A model that pursues endless growth on a finite planet and that ignores the resulting decimation of human and non-human life as long as it does not impact on profit. This destruction is supported by a view of non-human nature as object or resource, rather than as a living web of which we are but a small part and on which we utterly depend.

The author Rosie Mathers in her chapter 'an anthropology of climate change deniers', expresses it this way

'Our long history of earthly othering and objectification has brought us to a place where we can routinely and subconsciously dismiss our natural embeddedness in the world. We completely deny the truth of our ecological symbioses. The result is the sense of earth as 'object' a 'stable immutable permanent mass without any internal ecological processes'.

The pursuit of consumer goods as a route to happiness, our dependency on technology and the fact that we now spend on average 95% of our time indoors, perpetuates our separation from the natural world. The costs of this rupture from the living fabric of our world are ecological, psychological and spiritual. Jon Colverson in his chapter 'At war with the natural world: nature as Other describes a 'loss of soul' an experience of meaninglessness leading to epidemic levels of depression, a sense of emptiness and dislocation. Attempts to fill this emptiness by consuming food or material goods, simply compounds the problem. Colverson compares our growth-obsessed and consumptive lifestyles to an eating disorder, and it prevents us from recognizing the true reason for our hunger. It is he says. A manic avoidance of our collective starvation and emptiness, a rupture in our relationship with the natural world. Consumerism is driven by a fear of emptiness as we are fighting to deny the need for love and nourishment from the Mother Goddess.'

In our objectification of the world as resource we have de-animated it. It has become a resource or thing for our use. And in the process we have become consumers of this resource: surely a denigratory objectifying adjective for ourselves which shockingly, has met with widespread acceptance.

What we truly need then, according to many of the authors in this volume, is reconnection, or remembering of our connection with the web of life and our place within it.

We have forgotten we belong. This is nothing less than tragic as it is lethal for our world. Other cultures have not forgotten. For example the indigenous cultures of North America and Australia. These cultures have a deep respect for the land, a relationship to it which recognises its animacy, its inherent right to flourish, and possessing wisdom. From a western perspective this has been called the 'ecological self', a term coined by philosopher Arne Naess: A self that is not solitary but which that knows the deep connectivity with the community of beings which comprise this Earth.

Mary Jane Rust in her chapter ‘Eye of the Storm’ references this. She urges us to re-ignite our community with the world and each other. She writes

‘My greatest hope is that we do not walk into the fires and floods asleep. That as many people as possible can wake up and attend to the crisis at hand. That we can work together That we can be tender with one another offering gratitude to the earth over and over again for all we have been given.’

So much flows from this recognition, this move from ourselves as separate atoms in a colourless de-animated world into the vivid richness of connectedness and aliveness. Where we find ourselves connected and embedded we can no longer act in ways that do harm, that endanger this world or ourselves. Instead we are moved to hold all of life in gratitude and compassion, just as we do with our family our children.

In his chapter ‘Imagining Earth’ Jules Cashford beckons us toward an interconnected universe with these words

“If you know and love the meadows and the woodlands and the rivers and all creatures who live in their community, then you feel with them and understand they need to flourish.

Their wounds become our wounds: we are all mutually dependant. That is why we need to learn the language of mountains and rivers, trees and birds, animals, insects, and also the language of the stars in the heavens’.

This book is an urgent call for awakening to an animate, richly interconnected world. And this is now nothing less than a matter of survival. And it is nothing more than a shift in perspective, a different story, an awakening to reality, a remembering of what we have forgotten.

I would recommend this book for anyone wanting to encounter and metabolise the existential threat we are now facing as a species. It provides a rich offering in the form of ideas, stories, poetry and structures with which we can meet and truly live in our world.



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