



Psychotherapy and Ecology

Miranda Cox

Psychotherapy examines the human condition in an insular way. It sees how our suffering is caused before and during birth, in our upbringing, schooling, relationships, trauma. It looks at our reactions and our beliefs about the world. But it usually leaves out the effect that a split, chaotic and repressive internal world on the external world — the destruction, negligence, speediness and materialism. This is not just in how we treat ourselves and fellow human beings, but the whole global environment. When this is ignored it is no wonder there is so much depression and apathy — which are about denied and repressed feelings.

Our main effect is indirect, but the impact is big. We do not purposefully go

out to add to global warming, pollute, kill animals, and cut trees down. We are not personally out there gouging through the countryside and putting tarmac down. But we are allowing it to happen.

I drive a car and sometimes enjoy it if I'm not in a rush. It gives me space, I listen to tapes, the radio, work things out in my head, cry, sing, laugh, shout, feel angry at dangerous drivers, frightened of great juggernauts bearing down on me, quite therapeutic really but at what cost? I love the countryside I drive through, and hate its destruction and division by the road I am on. I also feel increasingly poisoned by car fumes.

So I ride a bike, catch buses, coaches, trains and walk too, but is that enough?

Would it ever be to the inner judge? If I sold my car would it make much difference? Or just be too inconvenient to me living in a rural area with no train station?

I left CND and became involved in psychotherapy (core process trained) partly because I saw a lot of anger in the peace movement and wanted to explore the search for peace within. I think things need to be tackled at both ends. Studying, experiencing and practising compassionate psychotherapy, meditation and self awareness can bring understanding of our inner processes. Seeing what beliefs are running us and ways through them is liberating, helps ease our own suffering and enables us to support others. As we become more aware, we see how we are living our lives and affecting other people, and can choose to be and act differently. But from what I have seen our changes do not usually extend in any meaningful way to the rest of the environment.

What is the aim of psychotherapy? If its aim is to heal past trauma and become more at ease with ourselves, can someone feel at ease when they are still living in a destructive way in relationship to the environment? There must be some denial going on, some shutting out and splitting again. How do we face what is going on in the world, without giving up in despair and overwhelm?

Practising psychotherapy can be exhausting. It can lead to burn-out as we are hit by clients' transferences and caught in our own countertransferences. We can be burdened by the motives for doing the work — needing to please, help, rescue, prove ourselves worthy, wanting to feel powerful and/or earn lots of money all of which can obscure the clarity of our pres-

ence. So there is the desire for rest, comfort, treats and rewards, a quick fix. For me, it can be chocolate and cakes, or going to see a film to have a break from mental ramblings.

So we support the multinationals, they have their insidious effect on us and on government. We do not hear much about their inhumanity to the Third World and the environment, although Monsanto is currently being highlighted by the GM scandal. We buy their goods and services because we're tired or we're too busy. We are angry that life is not easy, we never had enough, it is someone else's fault, we feel powerless and helpless, suffering is the human condition and this is the effect of duality. There is so much pain we are trying to assuage and avoid — because we do not want to admit we are responsible? As Nelson Mandela said in his inaugural speech, we are most afraid of our limitless potential, creativity and power.

On the positive side, there are great movements into organic farming, fair trade, ecological banking, environmental action, Amnesty International, alternative lifestyles and holidays. Greenpeace use a quote from Harold Zindler, a German campaigner, 'The optimism of the action is better than the pessimism of the thought.' This is tackling things at the other end. It can take courage to speak out against the grain, to be different from the 'norm', to stir things up and to cope with the reactions of people who do not want to look into anything too deeply. So it is important to have support, to know like-minded people, to be kind to oneself and not act out of 'oughts' or invite aggression. But it can feel great to act with integrity, with passion and aliveness to do what feels right and in harmony,

to do what we want to do and be how we want to be without fitting into a mould (and thus stopping ourselves from going mouldy!). And cutting out the inner pressures rather than the beautiful world we live in and are part of.

Life is easier with a clear conscience. Most guilt goes back to very early times. We do not have to keep this mistaken guilt going by doing ourselves down, and implicitly the world too, with how we live our lives now. Recently it took two letters to remind the local council to do their duty and tell builders to replant a long strip of hedge. It was wonderful to see it completed and extra trees planted.

Sometimes I look at the concrete

buildings, roads and machines covering the earth and think about the webs of illusion spun so thick. These material forms masquerade as civilisation, advancement and technology; the addiction to economic growth reflects the vast complicated webs of deception in our minds, tying us down into painful, limiting beliefs and inertia.

And here I am in it all too, caught up a lot of the time and grateful for reminders to step outside myself, to watch and see the emptiness, space and vastness in my mind — the mind — and the connection to everything. All made of the same atom in different arrangements. I am in everything and everything is in me.

