



REVIEW

‘Engaging Our Hearts in Dangerous Times’

A Humanistic Psychology Café Event:

Greed, Hate and Mega Delusion: Challenging disconnection in the modern age, *with* Caroline Brazier

Reviewed by **Lucy Scurfield**

The Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHPb) held the first of a series of low-cost humanistic café-style events in London hosted at the wonderful Study Society on 20 March 2019. We were warmly welcomed by the staff, some of whom joined us for the evening which started with a bring-and-share supper. The theme of the evening was ‘Greed, Hate and Mega Delusion: Challenging disconnection in the modern age’, and the speaker was Caroline Brazier, a practising psychotherapist and Buddhist trainer.

Before Caroline spoke, Dr Dina Zohar Glouberman gave a brief overview of the history of Humanistic Psychology, relating its beginnings in the 1950s with Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers offering an alternative to behavioural and Freudian psychology. This new approach brought the notion that *there’s nothing wrong*. Maslow said there was much to discover

rather than heal. In the 1960s, followers of the new way didn’t want to be ‘normal’ and learn only in the professional consulting room. We also learn about each other *through* each other.

Zohar invited us to start by going into groups of three. Each person in turn would share something of themselves for three minutes whilst the other two remained silent and listened. It seemed a good way of leading into being comfortable for the remainder of the evening.

Caroline started her presentation with a minute of silence.

She spoke for half an hour in which she explored the processes and impulses which drive individuals and society, whilst living with the tension between denial and acknowledgement that there is No Planet B. She

emphasized how the attitude of human supremacy has been damaging.

Our fear of Impermanence, of the unknown and our existential vulnerability, cause us to grasp at straws. Under an illusion of permanence we want things. In a moment of greed and from a place of fear, we look for the familiar. For example, we are drawn to someone whose values we share, or move away from someone because ‘I’m not like that’; or we reject something because ‘I hate that and want nothing to do with it’. In this process we disconnect from the environment, from others, from self, in a bubble of delusion. We do this individually and collectively. We might think we’re all fine and safe whilst others are deluded. This occurs at a national and global level. We create a sense of ‘We’re right. We know who we are.’

Caroline alluded to a creeping counter-movement to Humanistic Psychology and, in the face of these developments, to the importance of eco therapy – of the outdoors and the environment. We need to think about our values and how they impact on the world. Now there is a movement of environmental activism.

Question for today –

What is the role of the therapy world and Humanistic Psychology?

The Buddhist perspective: as tension and fear build up, the bubble grows and with it a spiral of fear. We rarely think beyond the human level. We don’t think about the whole ecosystem. As a consequence, we’re wiping out species.

What is packaging for?

Why do we need it? It is about outside and not inside. It is what we show the world, what we choose to present – a product. Most people present something manufactured.

Some therapists believe they have to market themselves and present themselves in a certain way – for example, by using a counselling directory,

obeying regulations, making a diagnosis; but diagnosis puts people in boxes: it is fear driven

How does the global situation influence the therapeutic process?

There is a global shadow across the personal sphere; unconscious preoccupation and repeating dynamics and rhythm. We’re the product of different conditions and influences. There are trans-generational, cultural and global influences. These are aspects that need to be worked with, with awareness.

There is also the mythic realm: growth, entitlement, invincibility and normality. Why should everything revolve around us?

This kind of awareness incorporates insight and having a sense of what’s going on. For example, talking about mindfulness is a kind of packaging. Mindfulness is one kind of observation.

Mention was made of the Buddhist Gisho Saiko’s *Foundation of Faith*. When two people meet, they are equal. The client gradually picks up faith which, beneath the surface, they lack. In time, the therapist’s trust in this begins to rub off on the client. Initially, the therapy room becomes the place that allows vulnerability and letting go. Growth is possible. But ultimately, the client begins to understand that this movement towards the light is possible anywhere – inside or outside the therapy space.

Then reconnection becomes possible through: curiosity, explanation and enquiry, not knowing, trust/faith, contact.... If we’re going to meet others, we need to trust.

Caroline’s engaging was then opened up to the whole group for discussion and comment.

Certain themes emerged. The therapeutic relationship is crucial. The therapist is interested in how the client relates to the world.

The themes presented were appreciated as a synthesis. The self has a function, and we need a benign sense of self. Group work can be very

effective in challenging narcissism, and is less therapist-centred.

Many therapists believe politics shouldn't be in the arena. Politics in this context is in the sense of relating, e.g. power dynamics with the global, cultural and personal, all coming into play.

About the contributor:

Lucy Scurfield is Chair of the AHPb and an IPN-recognized therapist living in Norwich, UK. She founded the pioneering charity Strong Roots – see <http://www.strongroots.org.uk/>