Illusions, Political Selves, and Responses to the Anthropocene Age: A Political-Psychoanalytic Perspective
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If we conquer nature, we will find ourselves among the defeated.[1]

Freud, not without some grandiosity, argued that there have been three blows to human narcissism. The first shock was Copernicus, when human beings learned that we are not the center of the universe. The second jolt was Darwin, when we learned that human beings were part of evolution, like all other living creatures. Freud (1917) contended that human "megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house" (p.285). What is intriguing about Freud's claims is that he assumes that these narcissistic blows involve all human beings. It is more accurate to say that these were shocks to the Western psyche. Another interesting aspect of his perspective is that, while these may have been moments of painful realization for millions of people, there does not seem to be much evidence that Westerners have changed as a result. Indeed, Western psyches appear to be remarkably resilient, not only in warding off these blows, but in continuing to operate with impunity with regard to three megalomaniac trajectories, namely, Western imperialism, capitalism, and nationalism.

Two possible explanations for this may simply be that core illusions of Western psyches remain untouched or unexamined because the political (and religious) apparatuses do not change and, therefore, illusions are maintained.[2] For instance, the first two blows had zero effect in giving pause to the brutal imperialistic march of Western European nations and the United States in their colonial expansion during the 19th and 20th centuries, which is evidence that core Western illusions remained ensconced in Western psyches. A second explanation is that "blows" to the psyche are not confronted by direct consequences or realities that disconfirm the illusions. But this may be changing with the consequences of climate change in the Anthropocene Age.[3] It is sobering to

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[1] Schell (2020, p.19). Alan Watts (1957, pp.174-175) also points out the Western preoccupations with conquering nature, as if nature is an object to serve the needs of humanity.

[2] For Giorgi Agamben (2009) the term "apparatus" refers to "a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings" (p.13). Referencing Foucault, Agamben writes that "in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create—through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge—docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their 'freedom' as subjects" (p.19).

[3] Scientist Paul Crutzen, decades ago, coined the term Anthropocene Age to indicate that we are now out of the Holocene Age. There is much debate about when this new age began, but there is little doubt we are in the midst of a sixth extinction event brought on by human activities. Moreover, the scientific evidence regarding climate change is readily available and

realize that a million species will become extinct by 2050 as a result of climate change (Leahy, 2019) and that the very real possibility exists that human beings will pass into history like our dinosaur ancestors. As Albert Camus (1947/2002) writes in the novel *The Plague*, "when an abstraction starts to kill you, you have to get to work on it" (p.69), which means letting go of the illusions that sustain denial and impede appropriate and effective responses to the real present and future dangers of climate change. The realities of the Anthropocene Age may be the jolts that shatter the megalomanic illusions of Western psyches in ways that Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud could not.

In this paper, I am interested in how to account, from a political-psychoanalytic perspective, for the varied responses to the realities of climate change. In particular, I address the emergence and features of the Western political psyche: a psyche, I believe, Freud was referring to when depicting the three blows to our collective narcissism. I argue that the Western political self, which is supported by varied political and religious apparatuses, comprises four central interrelated illusions that shape our perceptions and organize our relations to other human beings, other species, and to nature. Moreover, these illusions can be seen as collective defenses against existential vulnerability and dependency. By identifying and understanding these illusions, we can better grasp the complexity of some responses to the news of climate change, such as eco-anxiety, eco-denial, eco-mourning, eco-melancholia, etc. and their connection to larger apparatuses that shape Western psyches.

These responses, it should be pointed out, are evident in the larger society (Pihkala, 2019) and in the consulting room (Kassouf, 2017; LaMothe, 2020). To make my case, I begin by discussing the notion of the "political self" or "political psyche" and its relation to psychoanalysis. This sets the stage for identifying and describing four core illusions of the Western psyche and their relation to apparatuses. I conclude by suggesting that this perspective serves to explain, in part, the narcissistic wounds evident in varied responses (e.g., eco-anxiety, eco-mourning, eco-melancholia, and eco-denial) to the dire realities of the Anthropocene Age. By better understanding the relation between Western selves and their illusions and responses to climate change, we might, as I think Freud hoped, find ways to see with greater clarity and act more constructively toward the present and future dangers of climate change.

Before beginning, it is important to offer a few clarifications and caveats. First, the term "Western psyche" is obviously a large generalization that screens the complexity and variety of millions of individuals and their psyches across the centuries. It is not uncommon in psychoanalytic history for analytic thinkers to make even larger claims (e.g., Freud, 1927, 1930, 1939, 1950; Brown, 1959; Marcuse, 1966; Bollas, 2018). The

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overwhelming, which is why I am not taking time to detail the evidence in this article (See Klein, 2014; Kolbert, 2014; Bilgrami, 2020). It is also worth mentioning that Jason Moore (2016) prefers the term "Capitalocene Era" because, he argues, capitalism is the primary culprit in global warming. While there is much to be said for this term, I will use the more common Anthropocene Era, in part because it is more inclusive of the many human factors causing climate change and species extinctions.

question is whether these works are heuristic, which is the intention in this paper. Second and relatedly, some analysts (Randall, 2005, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013, 2021) have been concerned about understanding the psychological responses to the realities of climate change, as well as some of the sources for these responses (e.g., greed, consumerism, Weintrobe, 2010). There is a tendency to globalize these responses and, worse, pathologize them. This is similar to Freud's claims about the narcissistic blows to humanity, which is debatable since there may be other cultures that do not hold the same illusions that shield them from vulnerability and dependency. It is more accurate to suggest that some of the responses to climate change may be peculiar to the Western psyche. Third, using psychoanalytic theory and concepts to describe political, social, and economic realities is not simply an academic exercise.

In the case of global warming, a psychoanalytic approach invites us to become conscious of the illusions and how these illusions shape perceptions and behaviors so, as Fanon (2008/1952, p.80) notes, *we can act toward the real social sources of suffering*. Fourth, while the focus of the article is on Western political psyche and its relation to responses to global warming, it is implicit that the Western political psyches (and the apparatuses that support them) are largely responsible for the Anthropocene Age. This is a large claim, no doubt, and one that cannot be addressed in this article. However, I need only point out that the emergence of Western imperialism, between the 16th and 21st centuries, and the concomitant globalization of capitalism(s), have served as the major contributors to climate change (see Moore, 2016; Woods, 2017).

The Western Political Psyche and Its Sources

A central premise of Aristotle's anthropology is that human beings are political animals. We are "by nature adapted to life in a polis or city state" (Bambrough, 1963, p.379). Millennia later, Agamben (2011) echoes this, arguing that politics is humankind's "most proper dimension" (p.xiii). But what does this proper dimension mean? For human beings, the political actualizes what is potential (an individual's singularity), but in Agamben's view, the political does not exhaust potentiality (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p.25). This perspective suggests that human beings, in one sense, become more fully human by virtue of engaging in the polis. This can be understood to mean—relying on Hannah Arendt's (1958) political philosophy—that by participating in the polis' space of appearances, wherein there is mutual personal recognition that founds speaking and acting together, individuals experience a sense of suchness or being a person—a unique, valued, inviolable, responsive subject. Experiences of being a person are, in my view, what Agamben and Levinas understand as experiences of singularity. Andrew Samuels (1993) gives further weight to this, claiming "There is no personal outside the political; the political is itself a precondition for subjectivity" and agency (p.50). The subjectivity that Samuels refers to is also depicted, for Axel Honneth (1995), as self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, which are necessary features for the political agency needed to participate in the polis' space of appearances.

To say that the political psyche is formed in the spaces of speaking and acting together necessarily implies socially shared narratives, practices, etc., as well as public and political institutions. These public and political institutions or apparatuses function to

form and guide political psyches and, in some cases, discipline those whose psyches are deemed to be transgressive. Positively, the polis' apparatuses found the space of speaking and acting together such that individuals discover and internalize the senses of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect (experience of singularity or personhood) necessary for the exercise of political agency. In addition, the apparatuses of a polis provide the particularity of residents' political psyches. For instance, the political psyches of Athenians differed from the political psyches of Sparta, but did not radically differ.

Since I mentioned Athens, it is important to point out that not everyone in the polis possesses the same level of political agency. Women, children, slaves, and barbarians were included-excluded others in the Greek polis. The apparatuses of Athens, for instance, did not allow for women's political agency to the same degree as those identified as male citizens. There are also numerous illustrations where the polis' apparatuses are used to humiliate groups of people. These are indecent societies (Margalit, 1996), wherein humiliated others are either on the fringe of the polis' space of appearances (women and children) or excluded from this space altogether (see Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020). In these cases, individuals cannot discover or appropriate self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect in the political realm, which means their political agency is minimized or outright denied. One could say their political psyches are constructed in terms of the humiliations received from the apparatuses of the dominant group(s).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, we need to include the notion of the unconscious when discussing the political psyche (Samuels, 1993, 2001, 2004, 2015; McAfee, 2008), which can be understood in two ways. First, there is the individual's unconscious in his/her psychosocial development. In other words, the individual's political psyche and accompanying senses of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, while partially conscious, have unconscious elements. A negative illustration will help here. James Baldwin (1963/1990), writing about his father, said, "He was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him" (p.4). What Baldwin was pointing to was how his father, like many African Americans, had unconsciously internalized the negative representations projected onto him by a white racist, indecent political milieu and its apparatuses. Recognition of the impact of unconscious elements vis-à-vis the political psyche is also evident in Frantz Fanon's (1952/2008) liberative view of the aims of psychoanalysis. He wrote that the aims of psychoanalytic therapies are (a) "to *'consciousnessize'* [the patient's] unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification," and (b) "to enable [the patient] to choose an action with respect to the *real source of the conflict*, i.e., the social structure" (p. 80; emphasis mine).

The second point is noted in the examples above. The political psyche's unconscious is inextricably joined to the collective unconscious. Andrew Samuels (1993), picking up on Freud's original writings, argues that "the unconscious itself may be understood as having some origins outside the individual," which he argues as involving the internalization of social institutions and political processes" (p.56). Echoing this, Gary Walls (2006) calls the collective unconscious a political unconscious, which "is a socialization process" (p.122; see also Schafer, 1968). More strongly stated, Samuels

(1993) claims that "any conception of the unconscious or the psyche that omits to refer to social institutions and political processes will be inadequate" (p.56). To return to James Baldwin's comment about his father, Baldwin recognized that to grow up in the United States as a black person meant unconsciously internalizing the negative representations projected onto African Americans.

The idea of and focus on the political unconscious is a relatively recent phenomena in psychoanalytic theory, but there are glimpses of this beginning with Freud. Freud did not directly address the political psyche/unconscious, but one could argue it is evident in his writings. For instance, Freud (1950), like Hobbes and Rousseau, imagined the origins of civilization, positing that it involved the sons' murder of their father and that this murder/guilt found its way across subsequent generations. In one sense, this was a political murder aimed at securing leadership of the group. If we turn to Freud's use of the Greek story of Oedipus, one can see the political unconscious evident in this Greek myth. It is a political myth that functions, in part, as an apparatus that contains unconscious illusions of male superiority and female inferiority—a central illusion of patriarchal political systems and accompanying political psyches. Freud used this myth to explain psychic development, which may be seen as yet another apparatus of society securing patriarchal political arrangements. I would add that Freud was interested in bringing unconscious or unacknowledged collective political illusions to consciousness in two later works, namely, *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*.[4] By awakening people to their religious illusions, Freud, in part, hoped for the benefits of science in ordering society—the polis.

There is one more point to be made about the political psyche. A question may arise as to when in development do political psyches emerge. Any perusal of African American literature provides clear evidence that the political psyche is being formed from the moments when parents begin to care for children. James Baldwin (1984) notes, "Long before the Negro child perceives this difference [the illusion of white superiority], and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it" (p. 26). The autobiographies of Malcolm X (Haley, 1964) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1998) both detail a moment in their childhood when they became painfully aware of the political-personal realities of racism. Prior to these epiphanies, they were unaware of the realities and illusions of racism. It is necessary, then, to stress that the formation of the political psyche is not simply occurring in public spaces, wherein young children engage in play. It already is occurring in the home.

Another recent example is Ta-Nehisi Coates's (2015) memoir for his son. He writes, "My father was so very afraid. I felt it in the sting of his black leather belt, which he applied with more anxiety than anger" (p.15). His father's physical discipline took place against the background of pervasive violence—rooted in the apparatuses of racism—and was aimed at protecting his son. "Everyone," Coates writes, "has lost a child, somehow to the streets, to jail, to drugs, to guns" (p.16). Recalling his dad's voice, "Either I can beat him, or the police," Coates struggles with whether or not that saved

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[4] For a more detailed history of the politics and psychoanalysis, see Zaretsky (2015).

him. "All I know," he writes, "is the violence rose from the fear like smoke from a fire, and I cannot say whether that violence, even administered in fear and love, sounded the alarm or choked us at the exit" (pp.16-17). As Coates tells us, "It was a loving house even as it was besieged by its country, but it *was* hard" (p.126). This and other works reveal that the political psyche is being formed long before children engage in public-political spaces.

In brief, the political psyche is understood as initially emerging in the space of parents and children speaking and acting together, wherein parents' personal attunements enable the child to organize pre-representational experiences of singularity and corresponding senses of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. The parents' attunements are shaped by the polis' apparatuses and dominant narratives, which suggests that the political psyche is already being shaped in the earliest periods of childhood. As children develop, their participation in public-political spaces means they are further internalizing the collective stories, ideas, illusions, values, etc. of the polis. Ideally, this participation in the polis' spaces of speaking and acting together means that they are finding and experiencing suchness, which is understood as self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect associated with the political agency necessary to participate in the polis. The political psyche, while having conscious elements, is largely unconscious, shaping our perceptions and behaviors.

Four Core Illusions of Western Political Psyche

Given the reality of political psyches, I now turn to identify and discuss the four interrelated illusions of Western psyches, which Western apparatuses (e.g., philosophies, theologies, sciences) have maintained. These anthropocentric beliefs or, more accurately, illusions are and will continue to be shattered by the realities of the Anthropocene Age and, in particular, the looming possibility of human and other species' extinctions. Western human beings, in other words, could, after Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud, continue to retain their anthropocentrism, because reality did not forcibly deny these illusions. However, the realities of climate change are and will continue to invite disillusionment, exposing people to vulnerability and dependency.

Colby Dickinson (2015) points to Italian philosopher Giorgi Agamben contention that there is a "deep ontological rift…between animal and human" (p.173), and it is this rift, this alienation (Tully, 2020, pp.164—174), that has been a central theme in Western political philosophies and theologies. Agamben (2004) writes:

> It is as if determining the border between human and animal were not just one question among many discussed by philosophers and theologians, scientists and politicians, but rather a fundamental metaphysico-political operation in which alone something like 'man' can be decided upon and produced. If animal life and human life could be superimposed perfectly, then neither man nor animal—and, perhaps, not even the divine—would any longer be thinkable. (p.92)

This ongoing drive in the West to differentiate between human beings and animals, which is a project of philosophy, theology, and some of the sciences, leads to "a radical and total discontinuity between human and nonhuman" (Kompridis, 2020, p.252) and,

consequently, the privileging of human beings over all other species. This strand of Western philosophy is also evident in some of the human and hard sciences. For instance, Freud's (1927) view of civilization where he contends that civilization's aim is "to defend us against nature" (p.15) is an example of this alienation, as if "nature" is our enemy and an object different from human beings. Freud's view is part of the Western psyche wherein we have the illusion that human beings are distinct from nature and nature is to be excluded from the polis, from civilization. In brief, for Agamben, Western philosophies (and theologies), starting with the Greeks, have maintained a split between the political and natural world (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2015, pp.1-17).

The illusion here is not that human beings are distinct from other species, which Agamben clearly acknowledges. It is that "difference" or distinction is equated with exclusion or alienation of nature. Other species are excluded from political theorizing because of the illusion that human beings are not animals or more than animals. When Aristotle said human beings are political animals, he was at the same time excluding other animals from political philosophizing—other species or nature were and are excluded-included Others. The fact that many people may find this confusing (How do we include other species and nature into our political philosophies?[5]) simply confirms the Western psyche's illusion of nature being excised from the political, which is seen as the sole realm of human beings. The reality is the polis is part of nature and depends on it. Without a viable earth, there is no polis and a viable earth depends on the diversity of species.

The belief that human beings are separate from other species is joined to the illusion that human beings are *independent* of nature, which is the second related illusion. When Freud wrote that nature is our enemy, he asserted not simply that nature, is somehow excluded from humanity, but that human beings possess a kind of independence from nature and this is manifested in our ability to control nature. Interestingly, Freud (1930) also recognized the danger of this: "Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man" (p.135). What Freud could not foresee is that human beings are a force of nature (not separated from it), and we are on track to cause the extinction of over a million species by 2050 (Leahy, 2019) and, according to famed sociobiologist Edward Wilson (2005), the extinction of half of known species by the end of the century. I would add here that the reality is that human beings are part of nature and, as part of nature, it seems quite odd we would make ourselves enemies of ourselves. Though, given the realities of the Anthropocene Age, we are tragically our own worse enemies.

The illusion that human beings are separate or independent from nature is intricately connected to another illusion or fantasy, which is that human beings are superior to other animals and, thus, have sovereignty or dominion over them. This third illusion is ensconced in and produced by Western philosophies and Judeo-Christian traditions that have long served as anthropological machines or apparatuses that produce

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[5] There are scholars and activists who advocate for nature being represented in politics (Meijer, 2019, 2020; Rousseau, 2016).

Western political psyches. In Judeo-Christian scriptures, for instance, human dominion over nature is ontologized in that God proclaims that human beings are sovereign over nature and are thus commanded to be stewards of creation. Put another way, God has dominion over human beings and nature and, it is believed, God creates human beings to have dominion over other species. Western political philosophies, before and after the Enlightenment, have largely perpetuated the belief that human beings are superior to and thus sovereign over all other creatures. This is also evident in scientific apparatuses, going back to Aristotle and later Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who claimed that "the practical aim of improving humanity's lot [depended on] increased understanding and control of nature" (Grayling, 2019, p.197), which fits neatly with the scriptural command to subdue the earth and have dominion over all life.

Closely allied with the illusion of dominion is the belief that nature is meant to serve the needs of humankind. If we jump to the present, scientist Paul Crutzen, who coined the term "Anthropocene Age," was a strong advocate of geoengineering, which, in my view, is connected to the illusions that human beings have dominion and are superior—the earth exists for the sake of human beings. Geoengineering the earth is aimed at altering the earth to serve the needs of human beings and only secondarily other species. Michael Northcott (2017) writes that "Crutzen does not call for a moral and spiritual renewal to reduce humanity's impacts and tread more gently on the earth. Instead, his call is for a new intentionality in the human management of the Earth System, and for a significant ramping up of research and development by scientists and technologists of the technical means for intentional intervention in the Earth System, including active geoengineering of the atmosphere" (p.24). There is hubris and grandiosity in the impulse to geoengineer the earth, which stems, in part, to the apparatuses that maintain the illusions of human superiority and the inferiority of other species.

Many people may point to evidence of human superiority vis-à-vis other species. Numerous engineering and scientific feats serve as evidence. The arts, religion, and other cultural activities "prove" human creativity, which is lacking in "animals." There are two responses to this. First, human beings are the ones determining their own superiority and, among human beings, we are forever claiming superiority of one group over others. As for superiority over other species, there are no other species that can confirm this. It is a belief of our own creation and an illusion that Western individuals seem to be pre-occupied with producing. Second, the very likelihood that human beings will become extinct by our own hands is hardly proof of superiority.

The belief in superiority attends a fourth illusion that human beings have a telos distinct and separate from nature and other species. To be sure, each of us will die, but there is an unconscious belief that human beings, because we are special and superior, will continue to survive. Human beings will have a future. In 2016, the docudrama-fiction TV series *Mars* debuted, telling the story of an attempt to colonize Mars in 2033. At times, there were flashbacks to 2016 or earlier, where real scientists and engineers would exclaim their excitement and enthusiasm for the possibility of interplanetary travel and life on other planets and moons. There was one videoclip where Elon Musk remarked that human beings are destined to become an interplanetary species. Maybe human

beings will find ways to live on other moons and planets, but my point here is that it seems inconceivable to the Western psyche that we may simply be one more species on earth that goes extinct. We are no more or less special than the dinosaurs. Our "telos" may be extinction, which means we have no telos.

These four illusions of the Western psyche have particular functions and consequences, like all other illusions. The two most important functions have to do with distracting us from our existential vulnerability and dependency. Dinosaurs were around for millions of years and we have been around for a fraction of the time. Why would we be any different from species that adapted and survived for millennia? We may believe we have power over nature, but that does not negate the fact that, as part of nature, we are contributing to the changes of our own extinction. Like other species, we are vulnerable and are making ourselves more so (along with other species). These illusions, however, distract us from our existential dependency and vulnerability, making it difficult to face and take accountability for it. In other words, beliefs we are independent of and in control of nature, we are superior to nature, we are special, serve to deflect us from accepting our vulnerability. I believe the more we experience the looming disasters of global warming, the more difficult it will be to be distracted by these illusions. At the same time, many Westerners are facing our dependence on nature. The polis itself is dependent on a viable habitat. Destroy the habitat and we destroy ourselves and other species.

Strongly associated with distracting us from existential vulnerability and dependency is how these illusions support individual and collective sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. We also note this in relations where one group of human beings believe they are superior to another group that is constructed as inferior (e.g., racism, classism, sexism). Those who believe in their own superiority depend on this illusion for a sense of self-esteem, confidence, and respect. Of course, the illusion also distracts them from recognizing just how dependent they are on enforcing the "inferiority" onto Othered human beings. In terms of the Western psyches' illusions, individuals, who hold onto these illusions, are not aware that they must continually construct "nature" as inferior, while also avoiding facing not simply the illusion of superiority, but individuals' actual dependence on "inferior" nature, for a sense of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence.

These illusions also shape perception and behavior, which has consequences. The beliefs in excluding nature, independence from nature, superiority over nature, and human specialness are embedded in and produced by Western systems of thought, including economic (e.g., various forms of capitalism) and scientific apparatuses. These apparatuses not only form and sustain psyches and attending illusions; they also function to legitimate various kinds of objectifying, instrumental relations toward Othered human beings, other species, and the earth. Put differently, Western apparatuses promulgate the belief that earth and other species exist to serve the well-being of humankind (in particular, Westerners), which gives rise to all kinds of exploitative knowledge (instrumental and objectifying forms of knowing) and relations that have devastating consequences for other species and the earth. Westerners, especially those able to benefit, have largely been the beneficiaries of these illusions, while people from colonized cultures have not.

Add to this the idea that philosophical, theological, and scientific legitimation of exploitation functions to remove the possibility of remorse, whether that is in relation to colonized peoples or a degraded earth. It is important to point out that when these illusions are present in relation to other "inferior" human beings, the same kind of objectifying, exploitative relations exist without remorse. For millennia, Western philosophies, sciences, and religions have treated nature and other species as objects (as well as othered human beings) to be used for our own well-being, failing to realize (and have remorse about) that the destruction to other species and the earth undermines the very habitat upon which the polis is dependent.

Western Psyches and Responses to Global Warming

I suggested above that the three blows to human narcissism had little effect on Western psyches because there were few consequences. Many people found ways to retain their illusions. Individuals may acknowledge that human beings are not the center of the universe, but still believe, philosophically and religiously, that we are the dominant or highest life-form to evolve on earth. We can agree we are not in as much control as we might wish to believe, but yet work hard as a society to exert greater control through our technological achievements. However, the increasing frequency and destructive nature of storms, increase in desertification of large tracks of arable land, massive frequent floods, rising sea levels are present-day realities that heighten our sense of vulnerability, make it difficult, though not impossible, to hold on to these illusions. In this section I consider several responses to climate change in light of the illusions that are part of Western psyches.

Sally Weintrobe (2013) and others (e.g., Dodds, 2011; Pihkala, 2020) have discussed the notion of eco-anxiety related to the Anthropocene Age. Weintrobe (2013) distinguishes between paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxiety that emerge in response to the realities of climate change (pp.35-37). One might suggest that there is a paranoid-schizoid kind of anxiety evident in splitting off nature from human beings—constructing nature as the enemy out to destroy or punish human beings. Turning to depressive anxiety, she writes, it "is not meant to convey that this part is depressed in a clinical sense, but, rather, that it is burdened with sadness, guilt and shame" (p.35). Of course, it is important to acknowledge that people may simply be anxious and sad when they are confronted with the science of climate change. In other words, it is not clear that eco-anxiety in itself is necessarily paranoid-schizoid or depressive. Over the last several years, several patients have expressed anxiety and sadness about climate change, not so much about themselves, but for their children and what they will face in the future. The danger of the use of terms such as paranoid-schizoid or depressive in relation to anxiety is that they can tend to pathologize normal emotional responses and behaviors. Of course, Weintrobe and others are not using these terms in a pathological sense, but in the way human beings (ala Melanie Klein) organize experiences. Nevertheless, the use of these terms is problematic when considering the range of emotional responses that are normal or healthy. This said, there are pathological responses and we need to find ways to understand and name these responses, being sure to differentiate these from healthy responses that lead to constructive behavior.

What I want to suggest here, without turning to categories like paranoid-schizoid or depressive, is that eco-anxiety for Western individuals may also be connected to a conscious or unconscious realization that our illusions of superiority, dominance, and independence no longer effectively hide or distract us from our existential vulnerability and dependency. Weintrobe (2013) points to this, arguing that annihilation anxiety evoked by climate change results "from our denial of our real dependence on nature and based on the illusion of our own autonomy" (p.41)—a view that is entirely Western. It is not simply facing our own mortality, vulnerability, and dependence that evokes this anxiety. Rather, it is the very possibility of the degraded lives and premature mortality of our children and, worse, the ultimate mortality of humanity that heightens fear and anxiety. We are indeed vulnerable, exposed, and dependent creatures. That being said, it is not clear that all cultures would respond in this way, given that they may not have illusions of superiority over nature.

There is more to eco-anxiety and the loss or threatened loss of these illusions. These illusions, as mentioned above, function collectively as sources of individual's senses of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. It is not, then, simply facing our vulnerability and dependency. The loss of these illusions also raises questions about what grounds our social-political esteem, confidence, and respect. Moreover, if there is a collective loss of these illusions, the attending question is what founds our political agency—agency necessary for speaking and acting together in relation to other species and the earth. It is not unlike persons waking up one day to discover that the illusions they depend on regarding America (e.g., exceptional, superior, enduring) no longer apply. It would not only be a question of identity (e.g., what does it mean to be an American?), but also a question upon what we will base our self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. Another analogy is the awakening of white persons who unconsciously hold on to and depend on white supremacist illusions. What value do they have if they are not superior? How will they engage in the political realm if they no longer believe they are superior? The very movement toward disillusionment evokes anxiety, and we can understand, in part, the eco-anxiety associated with becoming aware of the falsehood of the four illusions outlined above.

Naturally, even before we are aware of eco-anxiety, human beings can depend on eco-denial, rationalization, and rage to maintain prized illusions.[6] Rather than face the loss of these illusions, people can simply deny that there is global warming or that human beings are the cause, though over the last few years more and more people are finding it difficult to deny the facts of global warming.[7] In the U.S., for instance, the percentage of Republican climate deniers has diminished over the last 10 years. And yet, there continue

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[6] It is important to mention that there are also political and economic reasons for some people to advocate for denial or inactivism vis-à-vis climate change. Politicians may publicly question climate change because their constituents are conservative voters who do not believe in climate change. Those leaders, employees, and beneficiaries associated with gas and oil businesses may know the science, but publicly deny that climate change is a problem because they wish to retain their short-term privileges.

[7] Climate change news: Most Americans say climate change should be addressed now in new CBS News poll - CBS News accessed 12 February 2021.

to be a significant number of citizens in the U.S. who deny the evidence of climate change. Eco-denial can also be connected to rage directed against those who are climate activists (Gelin, 2019).[8] One possible function of denial and rage is to retain the four illusions (and for male misogynistic climate deniers—male superiority) even when faced with overwhelming evidence, which is akin to those who continue to believe in white supremacy or male superiority. Another example of the resistance to letting go of illusions through denial and rage is the long history of white rage and denial aimed at African Americans who, by their public success, threaten the cherished illusions of white superiority and black inferiority (see Alexander, 2011; Anderson, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020). Denial and rage, then, are potent psychosocial strategies for maintaining illusions, which is evident in eco-denial and the rage directed at climate activists.

Another likely feature of eco-anxiety is shame. When self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect are founded on the illusion of superiority of ourselves and the illusion of the inferiority of nature, we can expect that vulnerability and dependency are structured around shame. Imagine that for millennia Westerners have developed apparatuses to keep ourselves from facing our existential transience, vulnerability, and dependency. To explain this further, let me turn to an analogy taken from Daniel Stern's (1985) work. He points out that when parents remain silent about something that is developmentally present (e.g., masturbation), the child will construct the experience in terms of shame (p.210). The illusions identified above function not only to distract, but also to discourage us from facing directly our collective existential vulnerability and dependency. We, in turn, construct vulnerability, exposure, and dependency in terms of shame. Eco-shame, if you will, is the recognition we are not superior and, instead, are quite frail, insignificant, and transient creatures.

Eco-shame may be a step toward the process of letting go, of mourning. Joseph Dodds (2011) notes that eco-anxieties "related to Klein's depressive position involve mourning for the damage done and a reparative drive to restore, repair, and recreate the lost and damaged world' (p.69). Of course, this involves recognizing that human beings are the source of the damage that has been done and is happening. There is also anticipatory mourning that, for Dodds, is related to realizing "the fact that nothing is permanent and everything, including our civilization and even the wider natural system of the Earth, will eventually disappear" (p.72). This view, however, is true whether we are facing a climate crisis or not. All is flux, as Heraclitus observed, and nothing is permanent. A more apt consideration of anticipatory mourning is the realization that millions of species will become extinct because of human activity vis-à-vis global warming (Wilson, 2005). Mourning and anticipatory mourning comes from seeing or hearing about current (Parenti, 2011; Sassen, 2014) and future losses of habitable spaces for human beings and other species. And, as anyone who has mourned knows, other intense feelings are part of the process, for instance, moments of anxiety, rage, help-

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[8] I recognize that rage can also be an emotional response of climate activists toward politicians and others who are seen as obstacles in moving toward realistic actions aimed at reducing the effects of climate change. Here I am only addressing the rage of those who are staunch climate deniers.

lessness, despair, sorrow, etc. I mention this to emphasize that cognitive-emotional responses to the Anthropocene Era are diverse and variable, which points to the reality of being complex selves.

But there is more to eco-mourning, for Western individuals. I suspect that one feature of eco-mourning is grieving the loss of the illusions (disillusionment) we have depended on to organize our experiences and relations. In other words, it is not merely the anxiety and shame that accompanies the growing recognition that we are not superior, privileged/special, in control, and independent of nature, but also grieving these beliefs, which includes living in the liminal space of uncertainty with regard to what we will depend on in organizing our relations with each other and to other species and the earth. One of things Freud (1917) noted about mourning is that eventually we become less preoccupied by the loss and associated emotions, which accompanies extending our libidos to new relationships.

In terms of eco-mourning and the process of letting go of the illusions, there is, ideally, opportunities to relate to other species and the earth in ways that do not involve exploitation, instrumental thinking, and objectification. As Tim Middleton (2020) notes, "the ability to mourn…helps us understand the earth as related and relating" (p.91). Add to this Hannah Malcolm's (2020) comment that "our grief can be powerful," making possible the "tenderness of caring for the dying" (pp. xxxiv-xxxv). The "dying" here is not simply human beings, but for other species and the earth. If we mourn these Western illusions, we can get in touch with our existential vulnerability and dependency, inviting the possibility of empathy for ourselves, for other species, and for the earth itself as a living system. Indeed, Western responses to global warming, in my view, will necessarily involve mourning these illusions if we are going to change how we engage other human beings, other species, and the earth more constructively.

And yet, if past is prologue, many human beings will resist mourning. To return to Freud, he was concerned with understanding the differences and similarities between adaptive and maladaptive mourning or melancholia. "The distinguishing mental features of melancholia," Freud (1917) wrote, "are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterances in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (p.244). Differentiating melancholia from mourning, Freud wrote that in "mourning it is the world which becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (p.246). The source of this bleak picture, Freud believed, is a "loss of a more ideal kind" (p.245). It is not the object who has died, but the loss of the person as an object of love (p.245). Because the object remains in the neighborhood, "one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost…he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him" (p.245). This is complex, but for my purposes we can see that the failure to mourn is related not necessarily to an "object," but rather to cherished beliefs that have provided individuals with a sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect.

There is a kind of Anthropocentric narcissism in eco-melancholia, wherein individuals are concerned about holding on to their cherished illusions and failing to

acknowledge the losses of other human beings and other species. We feel poor and empty (shame) if we let go of these illusions, and eco-melancholia deflects people from the real work of mourning. It deflects persons from accountability and eco-agency or actions that lead to constructive responses to the real challenges we all face today and in the future. I add that eco-melancholic persons know the facts of global warming and hold on to the helplessness and powerlessness that accompanies this, which distracts them from letting go of the illusions—the illusions remain in the neighborhood. It may also be expressed in self-revilings (shame) evident in misanthropic stances. In either case, the refusal to mourn these four illusions remain in the neighborhood.

While not using the language of eco-melancholia, climate activist Hannah Malcom (2020) writes:

> Grief is not only or always an expression of love but can also be wielded as power … we have to fully appreciate the ways power also manifests in the content of the grief itself. For example, despairing language about climate collapse in the minority world often reflects a kind of hubris: this despair rests on the assumption that the future is known and nothing can be done. The dominant culture I inhabit is a post-colonial one, founded on the assumption of the superior capacity for rule, seized through violence against land and people. In the West, we have imagined ourselves as great problem-solvers and architects of the earth. Perhaps we are not pricked by guilt at the cost of our position, but we still assume that our position is the one from which improvement, or even salvation will emerge. (p.xxxi)

The emergence of despair narratives in the West, which I believe is better seen as illustrations of eco-melancholy, is, for Malcolm, connected to the beliefs we have about ourselves and the world—beliefs we are reluctant to let go of, because of the power and control these beliefs or illusions afford Western persons.

It is important to recognize the complexity of eco-despair or eco-melancholia. Above I made clear that the four illusions are continually produced and maintained by Western apparatuses. These apparatuses are themselves obstacles to mourning and contribute to eco-melancholia. Eco-melancholia can be understood as being in a state of limbo—between complete denial and actual mourning. As Freud points out, the melancholic person knows there is a loss; they just have not accurately recognized what is actually lost, and the result is that nothing changes. The eco-melancholic person, caught in the web of apparatuses, can acknowledge climate damage, but does not want to mourn and let go of the illusions—the illusions remain in the neighborhood. The result is that they will not change and, worse, will collude with maintaining apparatuses that contribute to instrumental thinking and exploitative relations vis-à-vis other species and the earth.

Our cognitive-emotional responses to the realities of climate change are variable. That said, I argue that we can frame these responses, such as eco-anxiety, eco-denial, eco-rage, eco-shame, and eco-mourning and melancholia, in terms of the four illusions that are integral to Western psyches. A challenge is to see how to respond, whether in a clinical or public-political venue.

Conclusion

To rephrase Camus, when illusions start to kill you, you have to get to work on them. Human beings are amazing creatures in that we can produce illusions; ensconce them in social, political, and economic apparatuses; and, as a result, believe them to be facts of human existence. It is difficult and painful to face and let go of these illusions because they shape our perceptions and behaviors—our way of being in the world. It is especially difficult to let go for those in the West who have largely benefited from the exercise of these illusions. While some illusions, as Winnicott (1971) noted, are benign and even necessary, there are, as I have argued, illusions that are profoundly destructive.

The four illusions that have undergirded Western political selves have served as major factors in Western ways of relating instrumentally and exploitatively toward each other, other species, and the earth. The realities and consequences of climate change elicit varied responses, which include eco-anxiety, eco-denial, eco-shame, eco-mourning, and eco-melancholia. These responses can be, in part, understood in terms of Western political psyches and their illusions. In realizing that these illusions are killing us and other species, we are afforded opportunities to let these go and find new ways to relate to each other, as well as to other species and the earth.

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