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**This Changes Everything: The Anthropocene Age and Psychoanalysis**

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For the penalty of wakefulness is to encounter ever more violence and horror than the sensibilities can sustain unless translated into some course of social action. (Ellison, 1964, p.92)

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. (Baldwin, 2010, p.34).

Our science is a drop, our ignorance a sea. (William James, 1956, p.54)

Imagine a group of psychoanalysts and other therapists discussing clinical theory, methodology, and education in a conference room on one of the upper decks of the Titanic—after it hits the iceberg. Imagine further several psychoanalytically informed therapists listening to the travails of patients as the ship sinks into the frigid waters of the Atlantic. Both scenarios are, of course, ludicrous. The conference and consulting rooms would be emptied, as therapists frantically scramble to be rescued along with other passengers. These imaginary situations, while absurd, may have analogical significance when we consider that spaceship earth has already hit the iceberg of climate change, though there are no rescue ships deployed to save us.

Like the Titanic, human hubris and denial, mixed with technological acumen and creativity, have met the implacable realities of nature, except in this case human beings have created the iceberg of climate change.[[1]](#footnote-2) Unlike the Titanic, spaceship earth will continue, though the jury is still out whether human beings will go the way of the dinosaurs. My allusion to the Titanic is also partially apt because many psychoanalysts and attending institutions, generally speaking, have a penchant for doing their work as if it is isolated from political and economic realities (Orange 2017, pp.99ff). What, in other words, does it mean to be a psychoanalytic therapist or to do therapy when the ship has hit the iceberg? Or, as Donna Orange wonders, as therapists, “Are we helping to silence the canary in the coal mine” with our lack of political agency vis-à-vis climate change? (p.xii).

When the Titanic slammed into the iceberg, it changed everything for the crew and passengers.[[2]](#footnote-3) Naomi Klein’s (2014) work, *This Changes Everything,* passionately argues that the reality and consequences of global warming are a world crisis that changes everything (or perhaps will change everything). If we heed her and others’ warnings, there are several possible directions to head. We might consider how to alter psychoanalytic theory, which Joseph Dodds (2011) attempts to do in his construction of an ecopsychoanalysis. Another possible avenue is to amend psychoanalytic methodology or ethics, as Donna Orange (2017) posits, asking “patients [and analysts] about what really matters in this time of crisis” (p.xiii) and offering a radical ethics for therapists. A third approach is to shift analytic focus to understand the psychology of climate deniers (Hamilton 2013) or to understand and respond to the psychological traumas and anxieties that result from the effects of climate change (Rust 2012; Weintrobe 2013).

In this article, given the present and future consequences of climate change, I reflect on some possible changes to psychoanalytic method, organizations, and education. More specifically, I argue that psychoanalytically informed therapists need *not* develop a radically new methodology, since one already exists, namely a Fanonian[[3]](#footnote-4) approach to working with patients impacted by or anxious about climate change. A Fanonian approach is not simply about working with patients. Frantz Fanon (2017), whom I will say more about below, was a psychiatrist treating patients in Algeria, a French colony at the time, *and* he was also very involved in the political movement to liberate Algeria and other colonies. The consulting room, for Fanon (2008/1952), was distinct from, but connected to, political and economic realities. To move this argument along, I begin with a brief discussion on climate change and its material and psychological impacts—now and in the future. This is to establish that we are in the midst of an unfolding global crisis. The iceberg is not ahead of us; we have already slammed into it. I then move to explicate what I mean by a Fanonian approach to therapy and its relation to the realities of climate change. I conclude with a discussion of proposed changes to psychoanalytic education and professional organizations.

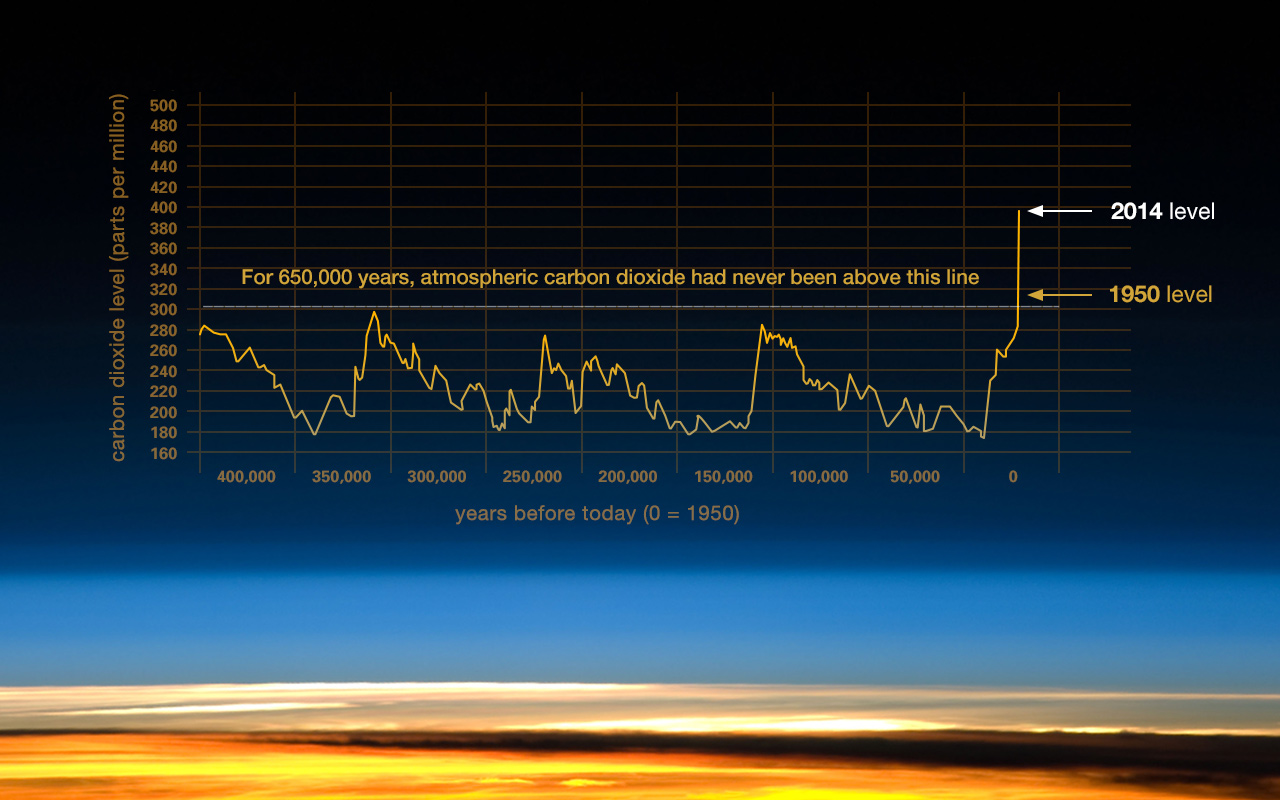
Before embarking, it is necessary to offer a few clarifications. As mentioned above, there are psychoanalysts who are concerned about climate change, but when we compare this to the breadth of psychoanalytic literature, the percentage of articles and books on the topic is paltry. For instance, the Psychoanalytic-Electronic-Publishing database, which is being updated quarterly, lists approximately 73 journals (about 116,000 articles) and over 80 books, not counting Freud’s works. A quick search reveals 124 mentions of climate change in articles/books and only 12 with climate change in the title. Even if we incorporated articles published since 1980 (nearly 40 years), when the issue of climate change was becoming more public, 124 articles seems miniscule. There is not, in my view, enough collective discussion about this topic and I am guessing—after reviewing six websites—the issue is not addressed in any significant way in psychoanalytic education. The motivation for this article stems from this dearth and the hope that more analytically informed therapists and educators will take this up. Second, while I agree with Donna Orange (2017) that therapists, in general, seem passive, especially in so-called developed countries, about climate change and its attending political and economic realities, there are numerous therapists in the analytic traditions who are and were deeply concerned about political, economic, and social forces and structures and their impact on psychological well-being (e.g., Altman 2000, 2004; Cushman 1995; Dalal 2006; Fromm 1955; Kovel 1970; Layton, Hollander, & Gutwell 2006; Samuels 1993, 2001, 2004).

There is, then, a precedent for therapists and theorists to use psychoanalytic theory and concepts to address, understand, and act against macro realities that give rise to unnecessary human (and non-human) suffering. Third, I came to this issue as an analytically trained and informed therapist. A major strand of my graduate education included psychoanalytic theories and my postdoctoral work included four years of psychoanalytic education at a psychoanalytic institute. All of this is to say that my suggestions below are based on my education and longstanding interest in and use of psychoanalytic theories. Finally, my suggested alterations to psychoanalytic method, education, and organizations are obviously not definitive. My aim instead is to continue a discussion that moves readers to act toward the real sources of psychosocial suffering.

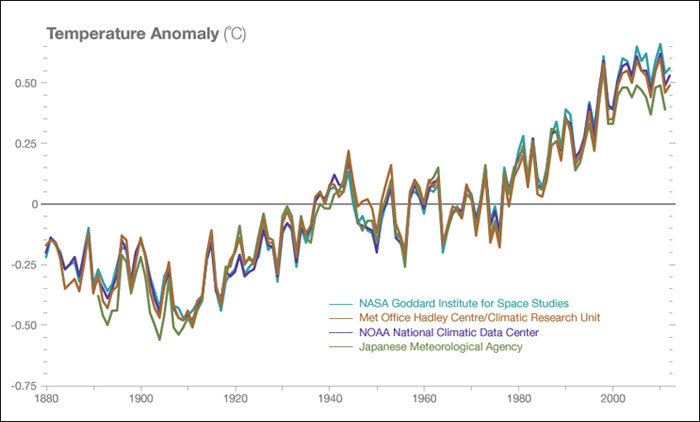
**Realities of Climate Change**

Human beings have a unique status in the history of this planet. We are the only species to have initiated its own extinction event. Elizabeth Kolbert (2014) indicates that there have been five previous extinction events in the earth’s history. For instance, it is likely that most of us have heard the hypothesis that a massive meteor caused an extinction event wherein the dinosaurs perished. Kolbert argues that we are in the midst of the sixth extinction, which she and others have called the Anthropocene Era, indicating that humanity is the main source of climate change, which is currently causing extinctions of vulnerable species and will continue to do so. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) notes, human beings have always been biological agents, but we are also individually and collectively geological agents that, in the words of Edward Wilson, are planetary killers (p.210). To complicate this further, Chakrabarty recognizes that “modern freedoms stand on an ever-expanding base of fossil fuels” (in Emmett & Lekan 2016, p.8). That is, the very exercise of our agency in the 21st century is largely contingent on the very systems implicated as sources of climate change.

Of course, not everyone believes climate change is real, though a lack of political and public consensus does not imply that scientific data is ambiguous [97% of the world’s climate scientists and 18 leading scientific organizations point to irrefutable evidence that human beings are the cause of global warming].[[4]](#footnote-5) For instance, the NASA website on climate change refers to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—a group of independent scientific experts from countries all over the world—that “concluded there’s a more than 90 percent probability that human activities over the past 250 years have warmed our planet.”[[5]](#footnote-6) A more recent report in October of 2018 reconfirms this.[[6]](#footnote-7) Human activities the report refers to are those that heighten CO2 emissions, as well as other greenhouse gases[[7]](#footnote-8) that are implicated in the warming of the planet. Wagner and Weitzman (2015) note that carbon dioxide levels are currently at over 400 parts per million (ppm) and the last time they were that high was over 3 million years ago during the Pliocene Era when “sea levels were up to 20 meters higher and camels lived in Canada” (p. 10).

This graph, based on the comparison of atmospheric samples contained in ice cores and more recent direct measurements, provides evidence that atmospheric CO2 has increased since the Industrial Revolution.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Wagner and Weitzman state further that the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that “the world is currently on track to increase total greenhouse gas concentrations to around 700 ppm by 2100” (p.31). These increases, they point out, are almost entirely due to human activities (p.31) and are the cause of global warming.[[9]](#footnote-10) Christian Parenti (2011) also points out that the “11 warmest years on record (since 1850) have occurred in the past 13 years. The five warmest years to date are 2005, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2007” (p.6). We can now add 2015, 2016, and 2017 to that list. Unfortunately, high “levels of carbon dioxide remain in the atmosphere for centuries and millennia. Getting them down is extremely difficult” (p. 40)—even if there was consensus about what to do. The momentum for increased warming of the planet appears inevitable.[[10]](#footnote-11)



Given this, what are the present and possible foreseeable consequences of climate change? Of course, there are all kinds of questions and debates about the consequences of global warming, but one very conservative group takes climate change seriously and has for some years. Davenport (2014) writes that the “Pentagon… released a report asserting decisively that climate change poses an immediate threat to national security, with increased risks from terrorism, infectious disease, global poverty and food shortages.” The report also “predicted a rising demand for military disaster responses as extreme weather creates more global humanitarian crises.” In this report, the Department of Defense also “lays out a road map to show how the military will adapt to rising sea levels, more violent storms and widespread droughts. The Defense Department will begin by integrating plans for climate change risks across all of its operations, from war games and strategic military planning situations to a rethinking of the movement of supplies.”

The Pentagon report is based on scientific predictions, though as Wagner and Weitzman (2015) point out, predictions can be wrong, both in terms of actual effect or extent of harm. This said, let me identify some likely consequences. While there is no clear data about the specific rise in temperature, it is clear, however, that it will continue. With an increase in temperature, there is a corresponding intensification of melting ice sheets. Recently, NASA scientists predicted that the 10,000-year-old Larsen B Ice Shelf will melt by 2020.[[11]](#footnote-12) The ice shelf has shrunk from 4,445 square miles in 1995 to 618 square miles. Melting of glaciers is not only happening on the poles, but throughout the world’s mountainous regions. This will inevitably lead to higher sea levels, though it is not clear exactly how high they will rise.

Wagner and Weitzman write that the melting of the “Greenland and the West Antarctic ice sheets alone already raise sea levels by up to one centimeter each decade. If the Greenland ice sheet fully melted, sea levels would rise 7 meters (23 feet). Full melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet would add another 3.3 meters (11 feet)” (pp. 56-57). This said, recent predictions indicate that, with current levels of global warming, the sea levels will rise 3 feet by the end of this century. This may not seem like a great deal, but it is. Coastal cities will experience significant flooding, if not become uninhabitable, which, in turn, will cause huge migrations of people and loss of arable land for agricultural production. Indeed, some places are already experiencing significant problems due to rising sea levels (Lewis 2015).

Let’s remain with the oceans and the climate. The oceans have functioned as CO2 storage containers, but with increasing CO2 emissions the oceans are becoming more acidic, with devastating effects on coral reefs[[12]](#footnote-13) (already happening) and fish populations.[[13]](#footnote-14) Changes in ocean temperature are also related to the increase in the intensity and breadth of storms, or what are called extreme weather events.[[14]](#footnote-15) These storms affect coastal regions (e.g., flooding), but also impact other areas by virtue of changes in weather patterns that will affect places far from the coast. Some areas may get excessive amounts of rainfall, while other areas will become more arid—desertification.[[15]](#footnote-16) Extreme weather events will no longer be anomalies that happen every 100 years. As Governor Andrew Cuomo remarked to President Obama: “We have a 100-year flood every two years” (in Wagner & Weitzman 2015, p.2). And for those areas of the continent that will become drier for long periods of time, there will be concurrent losses in agriculture and water supplies, resulting in huge economic losses and likely migration of peoples.[[16]](#footnote-17) Flooding, drought, or massive storm damage likely will also result in migration of peoples to less stricken areas. Sassen (2014) points out that 6.5 million people in Bangladesh have already been displaced by climate change and rising sea levels (p.62). Also, Mozambique has had to resettle its climate-displaced population, though with other attending environmental, social and economic difficulties (p.63). Some coastal cities will become uninhabitable. Large migrations will and are the result of places becoming uninhabitable or unable to sustain life. And joined to the movement of peoples are untold losses and suffering.

Many of us who have not been directly impacted by the effects of global warming have observed, from a distance, the human suffering that results from massive storms such as Hurricane Sandy or Typhoon Haiyan (killing 6,000) or Typhoon Bopha (displaced 1.8 million persons). These natural disasters and other global warming consequences are intertwined with economic and political systems and structures that frequently exacerbate human suffering, which the Pentagon knows all too well. Sassen (2014) remarks that “we face shrinking economies in much of the world, escalating destructions of the biosphere all over the globe, and the reemergence of extreme forms of poverty and brutalization” (p.12). She argues that “predatory ‘formations,’ a mix of elites and systemic capacities with finance as a key enabler” (p.13) are increasingly involved in brutal expulsions from what she calls life spaces, which can be homes, habitable areas of cities, etc. Parenti (2011) similarly argues that there is a “collision of political, economic, and environmental disasters,” which he calls the catastrophic convergence (p.7).

This does not necessarily mean that some human beings are taking advantage of other persons’ vulnerabilities, as in the case of economic exploitation such as price gouging (e.g., Sandel 2012). To be sure, this does happen, but Parenti and Sassen are identifying and describing systemic networks of political and economic power that provide security for the privileged while brutally expelling the less privileged from life spaces. Stated differently, the real impacts of global warming, in partnership with “Global North’s use and abuse of the Global South” (Parenti 2011, p.8; see also Chakrabarty 2016, p.107), destabilize some societies and nation-states, while securing their own societies in the Global North. And instability leads to greater insecurity, violence, and oppression as people scramble to survive—something that the Pentagon report clearly takes into account. Parenti writes:

Between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer lies what I call the *Tropic of Chaos*, a belt of economically and politically battered postcolonial states girding the planet’s mid-latitudes. In this band, around the tropics, climate change is beginning to hit hard. The societies in this belt are also heavily dependent on agriculture and fishing, thus very vulnerable to shifts in weather patterns. This region was also on the front lines of the cold War and of neoliberal economic restructuring. As a result, in this belt we find clustered most of the failed or semi-failed states of the developing world. (p.9)

But it is not simply postcolonial states that are susceptible to exploitative disciplinary regimes. Hedges and Sacco (2012) document how political and economic elites in the United States have exploited vulnerable peoples (issues of racism and classism), which I will say more about below. The point here is that Parenti and Sassen highlight the reality that catastrophes of global warming are exacerbated by political and economic systems that rely on violence, oppression, and marginalization to secure privileges for the few. In short, we cannot adequately address the consequences of global warming without also considering the political and economic networks or systems of power that add to the catastrophic effects of global warming (see Hartmann 2015; Klein 2014).

Increasing temperatures, melting glaciers, rising ocean levels, more acidic oceans, desertification, flooding, extreme weather events, loss of habitable locales and loss of arable lands are some of the ongoing and predicted consequences of global warming—consequences that accompany tremendous human material and psychological suffering. I cannot leave this without also emphasizing that the principal sources for both global warming and human suffering identified by Parenti, Klein, Sassen, and numerous others are the Global North and the prevalence of neoliberal capitalism.[[17]](#footnote-18) While I appreciate the focus on how citizens and nations can work together to mitigate global warming, this can be a distraction from critiquing and changing more systemic culprits in global warming and human suffering. Naomi Klein’s (2014) compelling book depicts numerous examples of how state-corporate capitalism contributes to global warming and actively impedes local and national efforts to reduce carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases. In addition, many political-economic elites within the Trump Administration deny that human beings are the cause of climate change, while working assiduously to remove small protections aimed at mitigating some of the effects of climate change and opting out of global treaties that challenge countries to reduce carbon emissions. Hedges and Sacco (2012) provide examples of the disasters that result from political-economic elites who laud capitalism while exploiting people and devastating their local habitats. They identify five sacrifice zones throughout the United States. For instance, they describe Welch, West Virginia, which was exploited by coal mining companies with the blessing of political leaders, leaving polluted waterways, toxic coal dams, devastated landscapes, and pervasive negative health effects (pp.115-175).

Parenti (2011) argues that neoliberal capitalism, which has been forcefully expanded throughout the world over the last five decades (see Klein 2007), has led to unstable and dependent governments in the Global South, as well as a great deal of violence and brutality. These authors contend that neoliberal capitalism or state-corporate capitalism—as an economic and political system with networks of political, social, and economic power—is largely to blame for global warming and its consequences, as well as actively blocking necessary changes that would benefit the common good of all people and not merely the Global North.[[18]](#footnote-19)

In summary, there is a nearly unanimous consensus among climate scientists that the earth is warming and that this warming is primarily due to human activities that involve the rise of greenhouse gases. While science provides evidence for warming, it is more difficult to predict with accuracy the consequences of climate change. Some areas of the world may obtain some short-term benefits, but many scientists predict and take note of extreme weather patterns, flooding, desertification, etc. These predictions are based on what is taking place today across the planet. These natural disasters and the increase of uninhabitable land will create huge economic costs and migrations of millions of people. As the Pentagon and others predict, these changes will create instability and insecurity within and between nations and will likely be accompanied by violence and brutality, especially toward vulnerable populations. Again, these predictions are also linked to what is happening in many countries today—countries that are already encountering the material and psychological effects of climate change. Finally, climate change and its consequences are exacerbated by political and economic disciplinary regimes that are bent on securing the privilege of a particular group of people.

**A Fanonian Approach to Psychoanalytic Therapies**

Given the stark realities of climate change, how might we think about possible implications for psychoanalytic therapy, especially when the consulting room often seems far removed from the consequences of climate change? I suggest that Frantz Fanon might be helpful here. Frantz Fanon, a psychoanalyst born in Martinique, observed the psychological toll French colonization had on Algerians (and others), many of whom were forced to live beyond their psychological means. Fanon (1963), for instance, recalls an encounter with a 14-year-old Algerian boy who murdered a French teenager—ostensibly a friend. As a psychiatrist, Fanon was asked to evaluate the teenager. When Fanon asked why he murdered his friend, the Algerian boy shot back, “Why are there only Algerians in prison?” (p. 200). The youngster was referring to the recent massacre of people in the village of Rivet by the French militia. Two of his family members had been brutally murdered. He asks again if any Frenchmen have been held accountable. Fanon responded “no.”

Situations like that and his own experience as a French colonial subject led Fanon to reframe psychoanalytic therapy. For Fanon (2008/1952), the aims of psychotherapy 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). Interestingly, around the same time and on another continent, Ralph Ellison (1995/1953), commenting about the psychiatric clinic in Harlem, wrote: “As such, and in spite of the very fine work it is doing, a thousand Lafargue (psychiatric) clinics could not dispel the sense of unreality that haunts Harlem. Knowing this, Dr. Wertham and his interracial staff seek a modest achievement: to give each bewildered patient an insight into the relation between his problems and his environment, and out of this understanding to reforge the will” (p.302). The reforging of the will is aimed, like Fanon, toward action in relation to the real source of psychological suffering, namely, political-economic racism.

Of course, Fanon was focused on the psychological and material sufferings resulting from French colonial (and racist) oppression and Ellison was referring to the suffering that comes from systemic racism. Although their contexts varied, both Ellison and Fanon recognized: (a) the political and economic disciplinary regimes that supported colonialism and racism and (b) that some patients needed to become aware that much of their suffering was due to these realities. Of course, these political and economic realities are still with us and, as Parenti notes above, are connected to current and future realities of global warming. Given this, how do we adopt this Fanonian approach? There are three parts in answering this question. First, there are patients who may be anxious and depressed, in part, because of their awareness of the realities of global warming (see Weintrobe 2013).

Their anxiety and depression may be linked to a sense of helplessness or powerlessness when faced with the complexities and consequences of climate change. What can one person possibly do when facing the array of political and economic realities that resist making changes? An individual who decides to recycle recognizes that this is hardly a solution to the crisis. Of course, in a neoliberal society, persons are encouraged to see themselves primarily as individuals, which can exacerbate a sense of being overwhelmed and powerless (Silva 2013). To complicate this further, when it comes to climate change human beings exercise (individually and collectively) biological and geological agency (Chakrabarty 2009). This means that attending anxiety may also be guilt due to the fact that we are participants, in various ways, to increases in greenhouse gasses. Guilt can be paralyzing, but not inevitably so. When faced it can result in changes, even if those changes will not completely remove us from the fabric of individual and collective responsibility.[[19]](#footnote-20) To turn to Fanon, I would have, when appropriate (and here is another key question), asked the patient to consider his/her emotional experiences while working with others toward the real sources of their suffering.

A second and related response is that the therapist needs to discern with the patient whether the object (climate change) of his/her anxiety and depression is a screen for unconscious sources of anxiety and depression. Would choosing to act against the manifest sources of psychological distress serve to avoid other sources closer to home? We all know that what a patient may present as his/her own understanding of the source of anxiety may be incorrect, just as Fanon recognized when some of his patients simply located the source of their maladies within themselves or their families. To be sure, their psychological suffering may have roots in their developmental history, but Fanon knew that the oppression of colonialism impacted family life. It is not so much a case of either/or, but both/and.

For instance, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) writes poignantly about the suffering he experienced in relation to his father, but he knew that this was inextricably related to racism. Racism heightened his father’s fears and anxieties for his son and gave rise to behavior that, while hurtful, was aimed at protecting him. Coates knew the real culprit of his suffering was not his father, but the invidious realities of racism. If a therapist would focus solely on Coates’ unconscious and family of origin, the therapist would be colluding with the systemic realities of suffering and mystifying the sources of Coates’ suffering, which together would result in him not choosing a social action toward the real sources of suffering. I add here that the patient who arrives knowing that the sources of his anxiety, depression, and guilt are related to the systemic realities and consequences of global warming will also need to look closer to home for his suffering, which does not mean denying these other sources.

Third, there are people, as I indicated above, who are currently experiencing the effects of climate change, such as the destruction of their habitat. It is not simply South Pacific islanders, living far from our shores, who are experiencing the destruction of their habitats and ways of life. While Hedges and Sacco (2011) do not link the sacrifice zones in the U.S. with climate change, they do convincingly argue that these sacrifice zones are the consequences of cruel neoliberal political and economic policies—the very same policies that are implicated in global warming. These communities are the canaries in the coal mine of climate change. Inhabitants are impoverished, have higher incidents of anxiety and depression, and indicate greater likelihood of getting cancer or other physical illnesses. These inhabitants are not anxious about the possible future consequences of global warming. They are dealing with consequences of political and economic elites who have exploited their lands, leaving the inhabitants to deal with a toxic environment. If a therapist is working in one of these zones, then the sources of suffering are quite clear and immediate, requiring not only analysis but also action.

But we do not have to remain with these sacrifice zones to see the real effects of climate change on the psyches of people. As indicated above, scientists recognize that climate change leads to more violent weather events, which can devastate communities (e.g., Hurricanes Sandy, Katrina, Camp Fire). Naturally, psychological services need to focus on people’s ability to cope with the aftermath of these disasters, so they can get back on their feet. However, at some point, for some people, it would be important to identify the real sources of the disaster, which is climate change coupled with the systemic realities that are implicated in climate change.

Moreover, anxiety and depression are also not necessarily focused on one’s own life, but on the lives of others. Parents of young children may feel this when they become aware of the consequences of climate change and their role in it. What kind of world will my children have to live in? Others may be concerned about the earth becoming inhospitable to other species, feeling powerless to stem the tide of destruction. A Fanonian approach would, of course, acknowledge their anxiety and depression, while attempting to discern other sources and intensity. In other words, are the patient’s voiced concerns about climate change and attending anxieties neurotic or part of a characterological issue? Regardless, the challenge is to facilitate constructive behavior toward the real sources of their suffering, even if individual behaviors will not solve systemic problems. As James Baldwin (2010) notes, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced” (p.34).

Let me offer an example to illustrate this further. Last fall, a report released on global warming (an update) pointed to a surprising and disconcerting acceleration of ice-melt. A client had read the report and expressed anxiety about the seemingly unstoppable realities associated with global warming. Her anxiety was focused mainly on her two young children and what they would face as adults. Having worked with her for many months, I made the judgment that her anxiety was not screening or deflecting a deeper anxiety associated with her history. Indeed, in general, she was not an anxious person. More positively, she was a thoughtful person with considerable intellectual gifts. In my view, her anxiety about her children’s well-being was realistic. Her anxiety was also closely joined with a feeling of helplessness, as well as some guilt related to the knowledge that she was participating in systems leading to the rise of greenhouse gasses. I recall her saying something like “what can I do? It is not as if anything I will do will stop this from happening.” I wondered if she was aware of other parents who had similar concerns. She responded by saying that most everyone knows about global warming, but the topic is more often than not an abstraction, though this, for her, was no longer the case after reading the report. After talking about this for a time, I asked whether she had thought about taking any action toward the sources of climate change. The response was, of course, and that she and her husband were diligent about recycling, planting trees, etc.

Here is agency yoked to guilt. But, she said, “What in the end do any of these small things accomplish? My kids will likely still have to face some of the negative impacts of climate change.” I acknowledged her sense of helplessness, if not futility, with regard to her and her husband’s actions, but I wondered if she would feel any better doing nothing. And I wondered if she thought of getting involved in groups that address the sources of climate change. I explained that this might not resolve her sense of helplessness with regard to creating a better future for her children, but she would be acting with others to work toward changes. This exchange felt less like traditional psychodynamic explorations and more like a Fanonian kind of encounter where the patient, in becoming more aware of the sources of her anxiety (ang guilt) and helplessness (bordering on hopelessness), is invited to decide to act toward these sources.

I would like to linger here, because the experience of hopelessness vis-à-vis climate change does not necessarily lead to despair. My client’s anxiety was accompanied by a sense of hopelessness, as if the dark future was inevitable. Considering the evidence, this would not necessarily be an unrealistic emotion. If we shift a bit to consider that hopelessness is often an experience of people who have been forced to live on the margins, whether that is associated with colonial or racist systems of oppression, they often continue to struggle for change (De La Torre 2017). For instance, it is likely that many Algerians experienced times of hopelessness and rage, living under the French colonial boot. Closer to home, psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear (2006) describes the sense of hopelessness Plenty Coups and the Crow people experienced when facing the onslaught of white Euro-American colonists taking their land and subverting their customs.

Lear argued that Plenty Coups’ creative response was an example of radical hope—a hope with no clear vision of the future. Also, many African Americans, past and present, have had to deal with feelings of hopelessness in the face of the implacable realities of racism. Some, as James Baldwin notes about his father,[[20]](#footnote-21) succumb to despair, but not all. Miguel de la Torre (2017) notes that marginalized communities that exist and live at the edge of political and economic life often embrace hopelessness. That is, they do not act as though expecting the near future to change, but rather their acts of resistance to the powers and principalities reflect hopelessness—of hope without hope—that refuses to succumb to despair. More positively, the embrace of hopelessness in acts of resistance toward the real sources of suffering represents an embrace of the present, real possibility of justice, of good for all. This is not despair. For instance, it is likely that Nelson Mandela knew that he might never be freed from prison on Robben Island, but this did not stop him from demanding justice. Another illustration can be found in the 19th century, where many women recognized that they might never gain the vote in their lifetimes, but continued to agitate for change. To embrace hopelessness, then, is not to refrain from acting, but rather to be free to act despite realities that are portents of further oppression and destruction.

The realities of climate change in the present and the future invite us to consider a Fanonian approach to analytic therapies. This approach considers political, social, and economic factors that are implicated in the psychological and material suffering of some patients who find their way to our consulting rooms. To be sure, this means carefully discerning the degree to which these sources impact the psychosocial well-being of patients. A highly anxious person may gravitate toward the topic of climate change as a way to focus his/her anxiety without exploring other psychic and developmental sources. In addition, working with someone who clearly suffers from the realities of climate change does not mean analytically informed therapists ignore or overlook the person’s present and past relational experiences. The main point with regard to a Fanonian approach is to raise consciousness (expose illusions that mystify the sources of suffering) regarding the real sources of suffering so that a patient can make a decision with regard to acting in relation to these sources.

**Adjustments in Psychoanalytic Education and Organizations**

There can be little doubt about climate change and its effects, but will it change anything in psychoanalysis? Does or will climate change impact psychoanalytic education or will it alter the mission or ethics statement of psychoanalytic professional organizations? In terms of education, I have viewed the websites of major psychoanalytic educational institutions from areas across the U.S. (e.g., New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Los Angeles). Most institutions have introductory courses in psychoanalysis (1st year) and advanced courses in analysis the 2nd year (and subsequent years). It is obvious that the main goal is to teach students what the particular institute deems to be core texts of the tradition(s) and their associated concepts, theories, and methods. This is completely understandable. However, is there a place in the advanced curriculum for raising questions about the relation between subjectivity and political, economic, and cultural systems and how these are implicated in the psychological suffering of clients? We could simply acknowledge the long history of racism in the U.S. or the effects of colonialism to be able to draw innumerable examples of past and present psychological suffering and its political, economic sources. The next step would be to add climate change and its effects on human suffering. This said, I found no clear reference in any of the curricula that would address this topic, though this does not mean that instructors do not make references to political and economic oppression and psychological suffering or even the psychological and material effects of climate change. But, in my view, if something is not clearly represented in the curriculum, then it is not addressed in any significant way.

A friendly critic might say that there is not enough time to do this in two or six years, given all the readings students are expected to study. And, she adds, not many patients are clearly dealing with the effects of climate change. As to the first comment, it involves a question of priority. Let’s consider Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies (LAISPS). They have a five-year program of study. In the fourth year, there is one course that deals with culture and, in particular, immigration on character formation.[[21]](#footnote-22) This makes sense, considering the location of the Institute. Perhaps the faculty made this a priority because of the number of immigrants in California. Before moving on, since the Institute is in Los Angeles, why are there no courses that deal with racism and classism, given these clear realities in the city? That said, the realities of climate change are already occurring, so when will it or will it ever be priority enough to address in the curriculum? Do we wait until there are more frequent natural disasters (in LA, long drought, lack of water—already happening) or mass migrations because some of the coastal cities will no longer be habitable?

Do we wait until it becomes impossible to overlook the economic disparities that leave the elites protected from the worse effects of climate change, while poor and working-class persons are left to bear the brunt? And maybe this raises another question about whether psychoanalysts are trained, inadvertently, to care for the middle and upper-classes. This naturally moves me to a second comment. I have worked with poor and working-class persons, as well as African-Americans. More often than not, questions of class and race did not come up directly, until I raised the topics. Indeed, there have been some occasions where patients understand the source of their suffering to be simply and solely in their families of origin, and it has taken timely interventions for them to consider other sources (LaMothe 2017). Do we wait until it becomes clear that a patient is dealing with anxiety and depression associated with the effects of climate change or wait until they bring it up? Can analytic educational institutions prepare students to be able to discern the connections between the social, political, and economic realities of climate change, the resulting psychological and material suffering, and ways of responding therapeutically? Currently, I see no evidence of this in the six institutes I explored.

There is another related area of psychoanalytic education (and professional organizations) to address. As far as I can tell, every institute attends to the issues of ethics regarding analytic therapies. From what I can see and from my own experience, ethics is primarily centered around the practice of therapy, which is understandable. Yet, Franz Fanon did not see the ethics of the psychoanalyst as confined to the consulting room. It is not simply the patient who is invited to decide to act toward the real social sources of suffering; the analyst is as well. Fanon, for example, was very involved in postcolonial movements to free people. Would it have been ethical for him to treat patients and do nothing about the very sources that created their suffering? What would it mean to treat people and help them get better so they can go back into the very system that caused the suffering? It would be like treating a shell-shocked soldier so that he could get better to return to the madness of war. At best, this would be ethically ambiguous, at least for some people. If we turn to the present, Donna Orange (2017) offers a radical ethics, which means that analysts do not simply have a responsibility to care for their patients; they also have a responsibility to engage in the social-political-economic realm to address the sources of psychological and material sufferings (regardless of whether evident in their practice) associated with climate change (and related political-economic injustices).

I am not suggesting that every therapist or student become an activist or revolutionary, like Fanon, but I am saying that students (and practicing psychotherapists) might consider the ways they are or are not acting responsibly vis-à-vis larger systemic realities that are causes of suffering. If we do nothing but see patients, in my view, this would be unethical. It would be analogous, if I may use a dramatic example, to a psychoanalyst treating a Jewish patient for anxiety and depression in Germany 1933-36. To have failed to act toward the real sources of suffering would have been colluding with, if not also mystifying, in the case of Nazi Germany, a demonstrable evil. While there were negative consequences for acting against the Nazi regime (making it understandable to not act politically), there are few negative consequences today in the U.S. Also, the tradition(s) of psychoanalysis include analysts who were politically engaged, but I would bet that most psychoanalytic educational institutions do not address social-political ethics and the history of psychoanalytic activism—given the information provided on their websites. If I am incorrect, then it would seem important to include the complex realities of climate change and their impact on the psychological health of persons for students preparing to be psychoanalytically informed therapists.

Let me shift to psychoanalytic professional organizations and their ethics statements. For purposes of illustration, I consider two psychoanalytic organizations, namely, the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP) and the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA). NPAP provides a brief statement that acknowledges their founders. In particular, it mentions Theodor Reik, who escaped the horrors of Nazi Germany and found himself unfairly excluded from U.S. psychoanalysts who were medical doctors. The organization concludes the brief description with this: “By way of honoring and upholding the vision handed down from Freud and Reik, NPAP is committed to psychoanalysis as an independent profession, to providing sound training for competent practice to all qualified applicants, and to furthering public understanding of psychoanalytic principles.”[[22]](#footnote-23) It is interesting that the focus of justice is restricted, at least here, to professional discrimination, leaving aside the economic, political, and social realities that led Reik to flee Germany and the unjust exclusion from psychoanalytic associations. If we turn to the vision and mission statements, we might discover further possibilities. The vision statement[[23]](#footnote-24) is brief and broad, like most organizations: “Creating a more humane world through the transformative power of psychoanalysis.” The mission statement follows: “NPAP educates psychoanalysts in diverse theories, provides a public forum for interdisciplinary discussion of contemporary issues, and delivers affordable psychotherapy and psychoanalysis to the community.” “Creating a more humane world” would appear to be a large enough umbrella to include psychoanalytic critical analysis of political, economic, and social structures and forces that make the world less humane, less habitable. However, the mission statement focuses on the delivery of psychoanalytic services to people in the community. To be sure, there is a possibility of interdisciplinary discussion of contemporary issues, but this is sandwiched between psychoanalytic education and the delivery of services.

So, we need to turn to the training programs to see how the mission and vision are to be carried out. What I found was one course (Sociocultural Influence on the Development of Psychopathology) in the entire curriculum where systemic factors are engaged. In the description, issues of class, race, and gender are addressed, though nothing about climate change. A point here is that mission, vision, and ethic statements, while sufficiently vague to include macro realities associated with the degradation of well-being, avoid, in general, any systemic attention to political, economic, and social sources of psychological and material suffering (or more particularly climate change). When we turn to the specifics of the organization’s practice, we find a preponderance of evidence that the embodiment of the vision and mission are focused primarily on the practice of psychoanalysis vis-à-vis the consulting room. In other words, there would likely be no Fanonian type of therapy that would involve an analysis of the social, political, and economic forces and structures that contribute to climate change and attending material and psychological suffering of individuals, couples, families, and communities.

The American Psychoanalytic Association’s vision[[24]](#footnote-25) seems to be a close sibling of NPAP in terms of its vision: “The members of APsaA envision a world in which psychoanalytic knowledge advances human potential and relieves suffering.” When we turn to the mission, the areas of focus provide a bit more clarity on the direction of the organization. Six goals are identified, namely, 1) professional education and development, 2) research and scholarship, 3) advocacy and public relations, 4) marketing, advancement, and communications, 5) membership, institute, center, and local society operations, 6) governance and management. Advocacy sounds promising, but it is more likely to do with advancing psychoanalysis, instead of advocacy for justice, rights, etc. That said, the Association’s ethics[[25]](#footnote-26) includes social responsibility:

A psychoanalyst should comply with the law and with social policies that serve the interests of patients and the public. The Principles recognize that there are times when conscientious refusal to obey a law or policy constitutes the most ethical action. If a third-party or patient or in the case of minor patients, the parent(s) or guardian(s) demands actions contrary to ethical principles or scientific knowledge, the psychoanalyst should refuse. A psychoanalyst is encouraged to contribute a portion of his or her time and talents to activities that serve the interests of patients and the public good.

1. The psychoanalyst should make use of all legal, civil, and administrative means to safeguard patients' rights to confidentiality, to ensure the protection of patient treatment records from third party access, and to utilize any other ethical measures to ensure and maintain the privacy essential to the conduct of psychoanalytic treatment.

2. The psychoanalyst is urged to support laws and social policies that promote the best interests of patients and the ethical practice of psychoanalysis.

3. The psychoanalyst is encouraged to contribute his or her time and talents, if necessary, without monetary compensation, to consultative and educational activities intended to improve public welfare and enhance the quality of life for the mentally ill and economically deprived members of the community.

In reading this, there is a hint of a Fanonian kind of therapy and activism that might lend itself to considering the political and economic intricacies and consequences of climate change. However, the trajectory is to focus on the practice of psychoanalysis vis-à-vis treatment (e.g., privacy/confidentiality). In other words, there is an intimation of social-political activism, which seems stronger than the NPAP statements. That said, if we turn to the Association’s standards for psychoanalytic education,[[26]](#footnote-27) we find no mention of the analysis of systemic realities. For those interested in psychoanalytic education, the Association provides links to various institutes around the country. Yet, as mentioned above, the various curricula make little reference of engaging systemic realities (relation to suffering), psychoanalytic activism, etc.

One might inquire about how one would include the realities of climate change in a vision and mission statement or at least foster its inclusion. Let me take a stab at this by altering NPAP’s mission: NPAP 1) educates psychoanalysts to use diverse theories to identify and understand varied intersecting sources (individual, biological, family, political, economic, cultural, climate) of psychosocial and material suffering, and to develop clinical and social interventions to alleviate suffering and promote well-being, and 2) delivers affordable psychotherapy and psychoanalysis to the community. Mission and vision statements need not mention the specific crisis associated with climate change and its effects, but the attending curricula or training would need to attend to this more clearly. In brief, the mission and vision statements, while broad, take on flesh in the work (e.g., training, outreach) of the organization. If climate change changes everything, then psychoanalytic professional organizations may need to amend their vision and mission statements and, more importantly, how they understand their work vis-à-vis the intersecting political, economic, and social realities associated with the consequences of climate change.

**Conclusion**

Naomi Klein’s title “This Changes Everything” may not be true today, but in the years ahead it is likely. As the consequences of climate change become more severe and pervasive, then our very lives will change. This seemingly slow rolling crisis will no longer be something that can be ignored or denied, expect perhaps by a few holdouts. Will the realities of global warming alter psychoanalysis? Will it change how we think about psychoanalytic methodology and ethics? Will it alter how we think about analysts (and their professional organizations and educational institutes) and their relation to macro structures and forces (e.g., political, economic, and social)?

I am reminded of Karl Marx, who said that the aim of most philosophers is to interpret the world, while he believed philosophy should attempt to change the world. Psychoanalytically informed therapists establish a process and method that invites patients to change and, for Fanon, this involves raising consciousness for patients to decide to act toward the real sources of suffering. Perhaps we can also explore how psychoanalysis can both interpret the conscious and unconscious aspects of human communication and set out to change the world by deciding to act toward the very real sources of suffering connected to climate change. If we do not change ourselves and the world, there is little hope the world will, in the end, support human life.

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1. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) notes that climate change has brought to the foreground the geological agency of human beings. Individually and collectively, human beings have acted in ways that have led to climate change, which results in his thesis that there is no longer a distinction between natural history and human history. For Chakrabarty, climate change has altered how he understands history. In this essay, I am musing how it might change psychoanalysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Perhaps not everything. As some authors note, the realities of racism and classism shaped who had the better chance of surviving. These and other human ills continue (e.g., environmental racism/classism) and will almost assuredly continue as we face declining resources and more frequent natural disasters. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Fanon has been of interest to people in a variety of fields, including psychoanalysis (Calvo 2008; LaMothe 2017; Macey 2002; Truscott & Hook 2014). I coined the term “Fanonian therapy” to indicate an approach to working with patients who suffered from the effects of macro social, political, and economic sources. That said, Fanon was not interested in developing a new method or in having his name attached to his way of working with patients, while also being engaged in the work of liberation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/> Accessed 20 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <http://climate.nasa.gov/causes/> accessed 20 January 2019.

   <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf> accessed 20 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> Accessed 20 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Wagner and Weitzman (2015) point out that hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are “10,000 times as potent as carbon dioxide when it comes to global warming” (p.45). So, the Montreal Protocol that banned gases (chlorofluorocarbons—CFS) that were harming the ozone layer led to the production of HFCs. The ozone layer is expected to be healed by 2050, but we continue to use HFCs, though in smaller emission numbers than CO2. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/> accessed 21 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Two interesting facts that Wagner and Weitzman point out is that the effects of greenhouse gases had been discovered in the 19th century (p.35). The second interesting fact is that King Edward I “established the first air pollution commission in 1285. In 1306, he made it illegal to burn coal,” though the law was soon vacated (p. 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <http://climate.nasa.gov/news/468/> accessed 19 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/16/us/antarctica-larsen-b-ice-shelf-to-disappear/index.html> accessed 22 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. <http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/impacts/early-warning-signs-of-global-2.html#.VWSFqUa94dw> accessed 21 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. <http://news.discovery.com/earth/global-warming/climate-change-has-raised-ocean-acidity-by-a-quarter-141008.htm> accessed 21 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. <http://www.ucsusa.org/our-work/global-warming/science-and-impacts/global-warming-impacts#.VWSHqka94dw> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. <http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/ekocd/chapter4.html> accessed 21 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. <http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/impacts/causes-of-drought-climate-change-connection.html#.VWSKUEa94dw> accessed 21 January 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Hardt and Negri (2000) discuss the networks of power related to empire and capitalism with the United States as the linchpin. They do not discuss global warming, but clearly their depiction of modern empire reveals the entrenched networks of power that ignore the common good and that are sources of oppression, alienation, and marginalization of millions of people. Neoliberal capitalism alone fosters a great deal of psychological suffering (Brown 1995, 2015; Cushman 1995; Mander 2012; Silva 2013), yet it is not alone in the causal factors of global warming. Global warming, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) is deeply complicated and as a result “calls on academics to rise above their disciplinary prejudices” (p.215). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Wagner and Wietzman (2015) differ, arguing instead that “it’s capitalism with all of its innovative and entrepreneurial powers that is our only hope of steering clear of the looming climate shock” (p.151). According to them, all we need to do, apparently, is to give the invisible hand of the market free reign to reduce carbon emissions through carbon taxing, leaving neoliberal capitalism uncriticized and the economic-political system unchanged. They reduce, for instance, Klein’s extensive analysis to one phrase, tax the rich (p.151). Their view is an extremely naïve, ahistorical perspective, not only because it overlooks the history and nature of capitalism (Woods 2017), but also because it eschews innumerable examples of political-economic elites—past and present—serving as obstacles in reducing carbon emissions and, at the same time, exploiting people and the earth (see Klein 2014). While we can agree that an entrepreneurial spirit, energy, and innovation seem to accompany capitalism, capitalism focuses on short-term profits, expansion of markets/profits, privatization, and it tends to foster greed, hubris, as well as lust for political and economic power. Put another way, Wagner and Weitzman do not see how capitalism enervates large numbers of people or proles and that it is not the only source of creativity. Moreover, as they clearly ignore in their book, retaining an unchanged economic system that has been responsible for huge increases in greenhouse gases with little in contribution to reductions, overlooks the critical notion of the common good—a notion that does not inform neoliberal capitalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Implied here is the importance of the therapist dealing with his/her own emotions and beliefs, including a sense of guilt and helplessness. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. James Baldwin (1990) said this of his father: “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). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. I can’t help but wonder about the character formation of those who marginalize immigrants. Also, I wonder whether this course deals with the political and economic disciplinary regimes in the U.S. that give rise, not to character formation, but to the psychological suffering of immigrants. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. <https://npap.org/about-us/> accessed 2 February 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. <https://npap.org/vision-mission-values/> accessed 2 February 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. <http://www.apsa.org/content/apsaa-mission-vision#overlay-context=about-apsaa> accessed 2 February 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. <http://www.apsa.org/code-of-ethics> accessed 2 February 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. <http://www.apsa.org/sites/default/files/StandardsForPsaEducation.pdf> accessed 2 February 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)