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Psychoanalyzing the Apocalypse: A Virtual Roundtable Discussion

Melvin Bornstein, M.D., Cynthia Chalker, MSS, LCSW, Mauricio Cortina, M.D., Daniel Goldin, Psy.D., George Hagman, LCSW, Gianni Nebbiosi, Ph.D., Donna Orange, Ph.D., Psy.D., Judith Rustin, LCSW, Andrew Samuels, D.H.L., and Joye Weisel-Barth, Ph.D., Psy.D.

Apocalypse: Week 1

Daniel – “First thoughts and notes” – 4/23

The word “apocalypse” comes from the Greek “*apokaluptein*,” meaning “to uncover or disclose.” In many myths, the darkness of mass destruction becomes also a kind of light that reveals the invisible corruption of things. In Jewish and Christian texts, this revealing takes the form of judgment, the blowback the good of this earth have been half wishing for. Our current experience of secular apocalypse — nuclear, climate and now viral — feels not only to be a commentary on man’s hubris but also a light that shines on our particular lives, picking out what’s important to us and what’s not — a different kind of revealing. And yet blowback it is too — not from a vengeful or merciful God but from indifferent nature under strain. We are dealing with the quasi-biological entity of a virion, a blue ball with bulbous red surface projections, whose sole object is to duplicate itself. Can something so pointless in its destruction reveal anything of meaning?

Hagman – Re: First thoughts and notes – 4/23

Hi Daniel and All. Starting with a definition of “apocalypse” is important, because the term has of late been used very loosely, with little reference to the ancient sources of the term and the different ways in which the concept has been used. As a Catholic I grew up with the apocalypse as a central part of the beliefs and liturgy which made up my childhood life. “Revelations” was central to the Catholic/Christian bible, and we were taught that it was the summation and fulfillment of all that we believed. Jesus would return and we would all join him in heaven. Of course most of the people of the world would be excluded, but we, the special ones, would be saved - if we behaved ourselves. The fact that the apocalypse involved the end of the world was not considered a problem, but a necessary conclusion of the process initiated by Jesus’ death and resurrection. We were taught to look forward to it and prepare. Historically this was how the early church organized and motivated the faithful, and even in my time the end of the world was something which unified us and made us all feel “chosen”. Ridiculous and dangerous ideas to be sure.

Lately all the good stuff has been removed from the concept. The word apocalypse is now applied to any seriously negative experience, which we endure as a community. It is not viewed as good or a source of revelation. For example, when the zombies take over they are only interested in eating you, and given the collapse of civilization, you are very much on your own. In the end things don’t go so well. You either get killed by marauding survivors or eaten by the undead. A revelation - hardly. Heaven? Forget it.

I guess my point is that the concept of apocalypse has been used over the centuries as a metaphor for a variety of extreme situations, some real, most imagined and imbued with a powerful relevance

to a particular social context in relation to which the concept is developed and promoted. We should try to situate the way we understand the concept in our current time and place.

If we want to use the concept of apocalypse to describe the current Covid 19 Pandemic we are already organizing our experience of the illness through particular types of tropes, with rich cultural and historical roots. We should reflect on our rhetoric and the way it molds our individual and shared experience of the disease. For example, in the Times this morning the headline was: “Virus Stalked U.S. for Weeks Before Authorities Knew.” The personification of a virus as a type of demon stalking the community, a biblical metaphor of special resonance in our culture, impacts on how we experience the pandemic and react emotionally.

My answer to Daniel about the meaning which the virus reveals, is that it reveals only the meanings with which we invest it. An inert, senseless organism becomes a powerful representation of our unconscious fears and fantasies (as well as our current political debate).

Best to all, and stay safe, George Hagman

Mauricio – “Finding meaning during the pandemic” – 4/24

There is no inherent meaning to the virus and its opportunistic invasive capacity to sow havoc on its human hosts. That is just nature doing its thing. The meaning resides in what we learn and how we respond to the deadly pandemic and the economic catastrophe that has come in its wake.

What are we learning or re-learning?

- That the social and the personal are intimately linked and that we are all in this together. We can respond by becoming paralyzed by fear, act in panic or foment divisiveness, or we can respond with a sense of social solidarity and compassion. We are seeing both responses, but the predominant response all over the world has been to follow guidelines to flatten the curve and take measures to protect ourselves and protect others, at great sacrifice to all of us. People are reaching out in many ways to their loved ones, neighbors, colleagues and communities through the Internet and phones and giving what they can.
- The sacrifices, however, are terribly uneven. The pandemic is laying bare the consequences of savage economic and social inequalities for billions of people around the world who lack social safety nets, live from paycheck to paycheck, or are unable to scrape together a living.
- The pandemic is showing us the enormous importance of good leadership and the deadly effects of bad leaders. There is a huge social experiment showing us how good leadership builds on a sense of social solidarity that supports shared sacrifices, provides factual information based on science and creates hope.
- The pandemic is showing us that science and knowledge matters, that good governance matters and that words matter. We should be speaking of *physical distancing* and *social connection*. I think *apocalypse* is the wrong metaphor for thinking about this pandemic. The word has resonances of despair and hopelessness. To combat despair we need words of hope backed by action.

The pandemic has created enormous opportunities for progressive social change that might have been considered radical just a few months ago: such as addressing the savage economic and social income inequalities through progressive taxation, empowering workers and creating social safety nets. In the US health insurance has to become universal and not tied to employment. We need to find a path to citizenship for 11 million immigrants who are paying taxes and contributing to the economy, but are left without any supports to take care of their families.

Another major opportunity that the pandemic has created is to connect the dots and see the connection between flattening the pandemic curve and flattening the curve on carbon emissions. With much less economic sacrifice than has been required to stop the spread of the virus, we can invest in the future of green technologies and put an end to an economy based on fossil fuels. We

have a short window of 10 years to make these changes, and this pandemic is showing us why we have to act now.

Joye – “Apocalyptic Loss and Grief” – April 25

“By the Waters of Babylon, I sat and wept for thee, Oh Zion.” Psalm 137

Hi Everyone,

First, I want to say “Thank you” Daniel for providing this forum to join fellow thoughtful colleagues in exploring this extraordinary world event. I’m both appreciative for this space to dialogue and learn and also unsure of what I can contribute.

Apocalypse seems to me an apt term for the cataclysmic threats (nuclear) and actual occurrences (climate derived destructive crises, including the current viral nightmare) we are living with and through. The catastrophic nature of Covid 19 and the global uprooting of expectations for stable home and work and predictable daily routine, for functioning schools and communal institutions and public spaces, for access to goods and services and medical treatment, for reliable financial order and social protections, for sober and informed government leaders and policies, in short, the upending of expectations for a secure life geography—all of these constitute the kinds of events that define apocalypse. The second meaning of the term, that it uncovers and reveals what has previously been hidden, also applies. Mauricio itemizes many of the meanings revealed by this pandemic, and George underlines the contextual and subjective nature of the meanings we ascribe to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

Personally, my sense of space and time has been radically disrupted. The shift from flesh to screen has been disorienting, and the constraint of my special freedom is strange and distressing. In my lucky life I have never before felt frightened simply going to the grocery store. I find myself living out shifting and contradictory emotional states on any given day, a kind of surreal kaleidoscope: I have a safe and regulated work day online, cushy comfort in familiar surroundings, and plenty of food and my partner’s companionship. For all this I am grateful. But, then, I’m suffering physical distance from close friends and family, horror at the virus’ destruction to life and culture, and helplessness and uncertainty about what lies ahead. The rhythm of my life seems slower and quieter than formerly, but my sleep is spotty and my anxiety intense. I try to stay in the moment and avoid too much useless speculation about the future; but when I fail, things become confused and murky, and I am upset.

As the weeks go by, I realize that I am grieving for my real life. Where did it go so suddenly? I want it back, but it seems unalterably changed and maybe disappeared. Thus, I think about the grief-filled Biblical trope, referring to another ancient Apocalypse, that heads this piece: “By the Waters of Babylon, I sat and wept for thee, Oh Zion.” With mourning for home and familiarity and stability in mind and heart, I find myself profoundly sad but also clinically available to and in synch with my fellow sufferers, my patients.

Mel – Apocalypse and meaning

Dan concludes his first message to us with, “We are dealing with the quasi-biological entity of a virion ball with bilious red surface projections, whose sole object is to duplicate itself. Can something so pointless in destruction reveal anything of meaning.”

Clinical psychoanalysis has much to offer about finding meaning and being human. Finding meaning is intrinsic to being human. An objective-inhuman vision of Covid 19 is chilling and monstrous. It is indifferent to pain, suffering and the destruction of our way of life. It can cause an APOCALYPSE. Clinical Psychoanalysis gives us a completely different picture. It adds to our understanding of an indifferent mother-nature and the awe of being alive.

I will follow with an example: In the third year of analysis Pat called me ten minutes after his session was to begin. He said that he can't make his session today because he is sick in bed. He thinks he has Covid 19. He is terrified that he has infected his family and will lose everything. He began treatment because of incapacitating anxiety. He was worried that he was sick and would die.

Early in the analysis I learned that he was born with an esophageal atresia. For the first four months of life he would throw up after eating. He eventually had the atresia repaired. He also had a traumatic tonsillectomy when he was four years old. His mother was overwhelmed by the demands of caring for him. His father remained distant. Pat had phobic symptoms through childhood.

Some of this history moved into his experience with me as the analysis proceeded. Sessions were filled with hopelessness and not being understood. He would complain about me because I was only interested in his telling me about the emotional parts of his distress. He thinks that there is something really physically wrong with him. I didn't have the ability to help him. I only spoke about his past and his inability in getting over his overwhelming experiences.

For those three years my interventions were directed at helping him develop meaning to his suffering by adding the present moment. I would interpret that he wanted me to help him feel alive and live with his painful traumatic experiences. His problem was that he avoided living in the present with his painful traumatic experiences by living as if time had stopped and he was devoid of feeling. When he avoids living with his painful past he substitutes it with anxiety and inhibitions which is the very thing that he is experiencing and doing with me. In other words, he has difficulty feeling alive and telling me his story. The good thing about that is he is safe and capable of feeling and telling me about this in a very human intimate fashion which was what he could not do in the past. He is living in the present right now with me who is helping him put meaning onto his experience. I am helping him find his narrative and identity. This was my basic message to him said in various ways.

For me to be able to empathize with him I had to use my inner experiences which were mobilized consciously and unconsciously in our interactions. They were my traumatic experiences that I had struggled with at first unsuccessfully. I needed them to help me understand Pat's experiences so I could use them to help him. Without them I could not easily bring meaning to them. These experiences had to do with my mother losing interest in me when I was 7 because of mental illness. She was hospitalized and I never lived with her again. I became phobic until my two partially failed analysis and eventually my self-analysis.

My experience of my first wife's diagnosis of breast cancer when we both were 32 with three young children. The youngest was 10 months old. In those days breast cancer was virtually a death sentence. We all did well for sixteen years when she eventually died of metastasis. I learned that the only way I could help my family and self is to embrace our living in the present moment and work at keeping the past memories and fantasies as part of my narrative.

I have been trying to convey the demand of analysis directed at putting meaning to Pat's experiences as I move in concert with him, finding meaning in my experiences. My writing this is part of my joy of this living.

But what about Covid 19 and apocalypse. You can see that for my patient and myself the meaning of these horrors and unremitting exposure to them had to do with our individual struggles in living with our past and the joys of success. Covid 19 is part of our minds and uniquely our own. It is part of our narrative.

So I would say to him after he reminded me that there is a real pandemic out there that can kill us. "Of course and it does scare me, but the reality of you and me now is that we are living sharing being with one another communicating our narratives and sharing in the safety of being together which is joyous and which is *really* real. With that we can turn to Covid 19 and figure out what we can do to make our lives better with a powerful feeling of love. If we can do that, it makes life worthwhile and joyous, as we are experiencing ourselves in the here and now regardless of what mother nature has in store for us.

Donna – The end of time – 4/25

Though tempted to comment gratefully on the wonderful and thought-provoking contributions already in the soup, I will for the moment put on my phenomenologist's hat and go in another direction.

Apocalypse has always signified to me, among all the other connotations, the end of days, a moment when the past has been catastrophically destroyed and there is no future. Apart from the images after category five hurricanes and after tornadoes, what is this experientially, and how are we living it now?

In ordinary circumstances, we ask "do you have time?" Time seems to us a commodity, of which we can have more or less, a container to be filled or already too full. Even when death threatens, we may ask, "How much time do I have?" Time is something we can waste or use productively. Usually we are thinking of what Henri Bergson described as clock time, but with a good dose of experiential time as well, inviting or threatening, musical or dull.

Now, suddenly transformed by COVID19, our personal and communal sense of time is transformed. Scientists show us time graphed against infections and deaths, with an overlay of threat or possible relief. But I, and others who talk to me, speak of feeling disoriented time-wise. Not only do I often need to ask what day it is, now that school, church, work, and other regularities are missing, as if someone had disabled all the clocks. Much more disturbing, we may find it difficult or impossible to believe that life as we knew it until very recently could ever have been real. Live in the moment, people tell us. There is no time to mourn.

For me, even more disorienting is the loss of future. Having survived both my early life and much trauma in adult life by planning escapes, and looking forward to what I imagined would be better, I am lost. Having oriented myself toward tasks, chosen or unchosen, as long as I can remember, I have lost my capacity to plan beyond this evening, for work projects, for seeing friends and family again, for the next bicycle race. There is only today, without the textured and overlapping sense of past and future, of subjective or communal temporality.

Enough for now. Maybe some new sense of future, in which things again become meaningful, will arise from our current ashes. I do not know.

Please stay well, all you dear ones.

Andrew Samuels – "Apocalypticism and the Return to 'Normality' and 'Business as Usual'" – 4/25

When we awake from all of this, are we going to run our economies differently, finally commit to engaging with the climate crisis, challenge national and international discrimination and privilege?

I hope we will, though I fear we won't. For, as well as all being in it together, *we are not*. We are in a world in which one country tries to buy up all the medicine. And politicians in receipt of secret information sell their shares. And clients in some places can't afford phone calls to their therapists. And clowning leaders tell lie after lie.

I've been writing about psychoanalysis and politics since the 1970s. One thing I've discovered is that psychoanalysis is useful in exposing why we cannot achieve what we desire.

As Daniel knows, I've been using the word 'apocalypticism' for quite a while. Originally, in connection with the climate crisis, now the virus. It is my attempt to think about why we won't change (because we don't want to), why we may return to 'normality' and 'business as usual'.

When deployed by Puritan sects, the term apocalypse originally referred to a revelation of God's will, but now usually refers to the belief that the world will come to an end very soon, even within one's own lifetime. This belief is usually accompanied by the idea that civilization will soon come to a tumultuous conclusion due to some sort of catastrophic global event.

The notion that the world is coming to an end is fairly called 'archetypal', found in many religions, paths and 'ways'. This is what gives apocalypse the power to possess groups and individuals who do not belong to Puritan sects. To possess all of us, perhaps? Is this what has happened in relation to our virus?

Covid-19 turns out to inspire images of an apocalypse which one would imagine to be horrid – but which may be oddly pleasing and reassuring. The global breakdown will happen, nothing to be done about it. And that could be for some people an oddly reassuring thought – *because it justifies inaction*. Sheltering in place may also be a metaphor as much as an injunction.

Fantasies of an apocalyptic end are rooted in reality and it is right to point them out. But these may be deep signs of a self-punishing contempt for ourselves. Apocalypticism is not based on fear of an end but rather on desire of it. *Perhaps some people think we deserve to perish like this*.

The climate crisis is a useful portal to the viral crisis. Perhaps this self-loathing is a shadow element for many people, including me, with concerns about politics generally and climate change in particular. It exists alongside our excitement at witnessing the rise of a responsible tending for the planet, and the flowering of depth psychological interpretation of climate change denial, disavowal and despair. We desire, we actually want the whole earthly temple to crash down. It is a tad exciting, a macabre spectator sport, a form of political pornography, masochism in an environmental setting.

Why do I end on this note? Because I feel obliged to say, in inflated and prophetic mode, it is *the very love of catastrophe* that contributes to our paralysis. What do we want? Apocalypse. When do we want it? NOW! We will return to ‘normality’, to ‘business as usual’ if we don’t think about this thing of darkness that is holding us back. Hamlet got it:

To die:—to sleep:

No more; and, by a sleep to say we end

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to, **‘tis a consummation**

Devoutly to be wished (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 21-26)

Mauricio – “Apocalypse versus Eros: A response to Andrew” – 4-25

Andrew says he feels compelled and obligated to point out that there is an archetypal tendency and attraction to a sense of dread and darkness (Jung’s shadow) that he has coined as *apocalypticism*. Andrew rightly focuses on this darkness, because it justifies and leads to inaction and paralysis. I agree that analyzing this darkness (often the result of traumatic conditions) leads to paralysis, fear, shame, self-loathing and despair. But this analysis is a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* condition to produce positive change and hope. To produce change we have to mobilize what Freud called Eros, Erich Fromm called biophilia, and Lincoln once called “the better angels of our nature”.

Andrew and I might disagree on just how pervasive this darkness is in individuals and in our species. This is ultimately an empirical question, but also a question of “human nature”—what others and I prefer to reframe in terms of *what made us human*.

My own view from reading the evolutionary and developmental literature over the past 40 years is that what made us human was our ability to cooperate and become ultrasocial animals as small groups of nomadic hunter-gatherers. This occurred at a time when Africa was hit by major cataclysmic climate changes brought about by the effects of ice ages in East and South Africa, the cradle of humanity. The ice ages in Africa created extreme cycles of dry savannah-type of environments followed by wet, torrential monsoon-type of environments. For our hominin ancestors to adapt to these dramatic changes, selective pressure favored a remarkably adaptive developmental flexibility in our species, and the emergence of prosocial motivations and sociocognitive and normative capacities. This led us to become an ultrasocial and cooperative animal with a strong tendency to tribalism (a strong identification with the groups we grow up in).

There is a growing developmental literature that shows that we can see the footprints of these evolutionary changes during early development. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth were the first to describe the importance of prosocial attachment bonds, showing that their *quality* strongly predicts healthy and pathological outcomes. But attachment bonds are just part of the story. Three to twelve

month-old infants show strong preferences for puppets or figures that help others over those that obstruct the help. Michael Tomasello at the Max Plank Institute in Germany shows that 14 to 18 month-olds spontaneously help others (see his 2019 book *Becoming Humans A Theory of Ontogeny*). Paul Bloom at Harvard shows similar prosocial tendencies (*The Origins of Good and Evil 2013*), as has Carolyn Zahn-Waxler's work on empathy at NIMH. This does not mean that young children cannot be ornery, difficult and possessive at times. What it does mean is that we have strong tendencies for seeking connections, helping others and for empathy that show up very early in development. These are the "better angels of our nature" that we need to support and nourish, particularly in times of crisis that can bring out the best or the worst in us.

Mauricio Cortina

Andrew – "Response to Mauricio's 'Apocalypse versus Eros. A response to Andrew's Post'" – 4/25

Dear Mauricio,

With Winnicott, I do not think infants are born amoral. I've made a short study of the way moral sensibility develops and is structured in different individuals, and I will share it with you another time

Let's agree on Eros AND Apocalypse?!

My interests are bifurcated. First, what do people desire in 'the future'? Second, what will stop them achieving those desires?

My evolving thinking is that this apocalypticism needs addressing because, like with Hamlet, the deep search for a cessation of consciousness may be present in many people. It may be a contextual expression of the death drive. I predict it will have (negative) political implications.

In a way, the expressions of how beautiful the virus crisis is, say in term of a return of 'nature', or those fucking awful virtual cocktail parties, can be understood as an expression of awareness of apocalypse: 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die' (Ecclesiastes).

More and more, I am focusing on the ways in which what was already there in our world, in terms of inequality, discrimination/racism and ugliness is coming out into the open and even dominating the *Weltanschauung*. Therapists need to make their contribution to the political struggle that is going to take place as the forces of capital, neoliberalism and privilege stage their attempted counter-coup.

My clients are teaching me more and more about these things, by the way. And thank God for the clients, their existence keeps fear of death away.

I will conclude, in harmony with the evolving social practice of out-of-control sharing, by including three links here:

- (1) Yesterday was the day Italy was liberated in 1945, and there have been so many circulations of Bella Ciao. Here is one in Arabic:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lpGLjs3dr0&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2ZCH-hAnk0zwpCztG4R-C7vU6MHF2nBpoGkFl-Uu7BRPMgRD7g8DvV4gQ
- (2) Leonard Cohen's song 'The Partisan' honours those who contributed to the liberation, also of Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland and other countries. I see the future in this as well: <https://youtu.be/S34cVkl6zCE>
- (3) Here's a video I made several days ago with its mission statement:

Making no claim for psychology as a solution to anything, Andrew Samuels and Stefano Carpani discussed a wide range of psychosocial (and more personal) questions. They spoke about the struggle that is to come when some of us refuse to countenance a return to normality. The grim possibility

was raised that many people are attracted to apocalypse - and that there can be little hope without acceptance and embrace of risk.

<https://youtu.be/fda-yNmW7jI>

Best wishes, Andrew

Mauricio – “Our genius for good and evil” – 4/26

Dear Andrew

I can agree with you that we have a “genius for good and evil” (the quote comes from a subtitle of Fromm’s 1964 book *The Heart of Man*) but disagree on how we understand this phenomenon. Understanding the biological evolutionary, developmental and historical origins of our capacity for good and evil is one of the most important contributions that psychoanalysis can make.

I disagree with you that reviving Freud’s hypothesis of a death instinct is a place to start. Postulating a biological drive gets in the way of understanding why some people and some groups and nations have destructive and self-destructive tendencies or impulses, and some do not. But even as a biological speculation, a death instinct is unsustainable. Natural selection is about differential reproductive success. Let’s say a random genetic mutation emerged that created such a destructive phenotype. Any organism or subpopulation with this phenotype would quickly disappear from the gene pool.

My views on the roots of good and evil are based on the evolutionary–developmental (evo-devo) framework that is taking root in modern evolutionary theory. From this perspective, adaptive and un-adaptive phenotypes, health and pathology are all the products of development. This is because natural selection operates on phenotypes, not on genes directly, and phenotypes are part and parcel of developmental processes.

My own view about “our genius for good and evil” is that the same motivations and capacities that made us such an ultrasocial and cooperative species are closely tied to what makes us capable of becoming a destructive animal. This would require a book length explanation, but I will give you just one example of several I have been thinking about. We have two security systems, an attachment system and a system based on group identities. These two systems can be thought of as adaptive and plastic instincts, or “motivational systems”, to use Joe Lichtenberg’s terms (attachment and affiliation respectively).

We survived as cooperative and nomadic hunter-gatherers for over 2 million years—when the first *Homo* family of our species emerge—by developing cooperative nomadic groups. Our survival depended on sticking together. Part of the social glue that helped us stick together was based on identifying with the groups we grow up in by internalizing shared social norms that support cooperation (roughly Freud’s super ego, and more accurately Fromm’s social character theory).

This worked fine as long as we were nomadic societies. Most of the time conflicts among groups could be resolved by moving away. There were no possessions worth fighting for. But as soon as we invented agriculture, domesticated animals and became sedentary agricultural societies (just 10,000 years ago), the potential for conflict increased by several orders of magnitude. Leaders and elites that wanted to stay in power could easily manipulate our security system based on group identity creating an “us versus them mentality”. We are seeing this all over the world and it is what Trump has used with great success.

Times of crisis, such as the global one we are living in, create great opportunities to develop a wider identification with people and cultures that are different from us. We can begin to see the truth in what Harry Stack Sullivan once said “we are all much more alike than otherwise”. As Judith said in a previous post, these are indeed opportunities for “moments of meeting”.

Andrew – Quick comment from Andrew on Posting for Mauricio – “Our genius for good and evil” – 4/26

Dear Mauricio,

Please don't exaggerate the importance of any traditional reading of the death drive in my understanding of apocalypticism.

For those who would surely be forgiven for not remembering, this is what I wrote. (Such a pity that there are so few threads here to enable readers to track the stuff as it comes in.):

My evolving thinking is that this apocalypticism needs addressing because, like with Hamlet, the deep search for a cessation of consciousness may be present in many people. It may be a contextual expression of the death drive. I predict it will have (negative) political implications.

I think these negative political implications should necessarily concern us.

Moving on in this comment on your fascinating and ingenious post, I think you are approaching the conundrum in political (and economic) thought as to whether the quintessential human quality is co-operation or competition. Like, you, I think the answer is 'both'. The unconscious pushes us in creative and in destructive directions but is the same unconscious.

So these questions concerning the post-virus political future are also psychological matters. As the French writer Charles Peguy put it: 'Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics'.

When considering Covid-19, I beg to differ from Harry Stack Sullivan's aphorism that you approve of: "we are all much more alike than otherwise".

Whilst I see what you are getting at, naturally, and I can feel that way rather easily (too easily), the knock-on effects of such liberal thinking in terms of equality and social justice are unpropitious.

We are learning virally that we are not alike. Well, we always knew it anyway but, in our richness and ease, we ducked it.

Best wishes, Andrew

Mauricio – Cooperation, competition and our common humanity – 4/26

Dear Andrew

Yes cooperation and competition are present, but competition plays a role predominately at the level of groups and organizations in our species. It was suppressed at an individual level as long as we remained in small groups of nomadic foragers (see Christopher Boehm's 1999 book *Hierarchy in the Forest; The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*). Everything changed once we became sedentary agricultural societies. Hierarchy re-appears in many and sundry ways.

We will have to agree to disagree on the enormous importance of affirming our common humanity. This passionate affirmation is based on my conviction that it brings out the best in us, and is necessary for the future of our species. So be it if it's a liberal belief. it also happens to be a humanistic belief.

Mauricio

Judith – The apocalypse - a “now” moment ??? – 4/26

Dear Colleagues,

I immediately resonated with Daniel's definition of the apocalypse, a commentary on "man's hubris but also ... a different kind of revealing". He then described the apocalypse as taking the form of a virion, "whose sole object is to duplicate itself." For me the virion is a metaphor for the socio/

cultural/political environment we are and have been living in here in the U.S. Our political, social and cultural context is permeated by people and institutions whose primary if not sole purpose is to hold onto power. Throughout, the current nightmare, I have held onto a hope and belief that the enormity of this pandemic may be revealing; the “now” moment that results in some substantive societal change – “the moment of meeting”.

These “moments” as defined by the Boston Process Change Study Group (Stern et al., 1998) derive from infant-mother interactions and patient-therapist dyads. The “now” moments in the therapeutic dyad are those that become hot affectively, full of the possibility for change in the therapeutic process. When a “now” moment is seized a “moment-of-meeting” occurs that creates a new intersubjective environment and a different relation between self and other. It may be a stretch to compare a two-person dyad, also a complex system, to an entire society, but complex systems share many characteristics. The idea that this may be a “now” moment has kept me going during this very difficult time.

I write this from my home in NY City the epicenter of the pandemic in the U.S. Like Joye and Donna, I am profoundly personally shaken by the pandemic; my life has changed dramatically. I am now a primary caretaker for my vulnerable husband. The daily aides who have helped care for him over the last 5 years cannot enter my house; they are potential carriers of this deadly virus. I am now both a full time primary giver and a working psychoanalyst from home. What makes this pandemic different from climate change or potential nuclear devastation is the immediate, personal impact of this virus on each individual’s life in the “here and now”; It is an experience-near phenomenon. How many people do I know who died from this virus? Will I ever be able to hug my grandchildren and other loved ones again? Do I have a job to return to? Can I pay my rent/mortgage? Will I be able to go to the supermarket, movies, my house of worship, sports event, etc.? Will I ever feel safe again? What will the future be? Will there be a future if I get sick? I experience these questions myself and from patients, friends, colleagues, children, etc. This pandemic is not something that we have to imagine happening - It is happening! It is my belief and hope this collective distress may be the catalyst for must needed societal change.

Stay well and stay safe,
Judith Rustin,
NYC

Mel – Continuation of Discussion – 4/28

Further thought from clinical psychoanalysis. I recently posted a description of my experience in conducting an analysis of a patient who was inundated with apocalyptic ideas about everything that was dear to him. I described how in the analysis these apocalyptic ideas were connected to early trauma which included neglect in helping him deal with the trauma, leaving him hopeless.

I was able to follow the source of the apocalyptic ideas because he began repeating them with me as if time had stopped (helpless terror rage aloneness). We connected them to his current symptoms.

When I spoke to him in the here and now, our focus shifted to the safety of our present reality, including dealing with the pandemic in the here and now. I think of the patient’s withdrawal from the hope and love of reality into a repetition, as if time has stopped, as a demonstration of the death instinct. Freud thought so. In the clinical situation the power of reaching for reality in the here and now demonstrates the dominating power to grow and get better. The love of life invariably wins out over the death instinct. In Hamlet, it is Shakespeare and the power of creativity and love of life that succeeds over Hamlet’s death instinct.

Sixty years ago one of my fellow residents said that there is a gold mine in psychoanalysis. He was right.

Mel

Cynthia – By and By: Apocalypse and the Future – 4/27

“By and by
 When the morning comes
 All the saints of God are gathered home
 We will tell the story of how we’ve overcome
 And we’ll understand them better by and by.”

Arrangement by Sweet Honey in the Rock

Thank you Daniel for inviting me to be a part of this round table with colleagues far and wide.

I also live in New York City, the epicenter of the pandemic. The streets are eerily still. The silence is loud. Only the sound of sirens are louder. I am privileged that we have the means that will keep us fed, sheltered. We also have the ability to work from home. We are fortunate that the very elderly in our families are, so far, relatively well and safe. My patients, a number who live in Brooklyn and Queens, hear many more sirens than I do in Manhattan. Some live close enough to hospitals, where the view from their windows are the refrigerated trucks being used to store the bodies of those who have died, because there is no room in the morgue of the hospital.

I have never indulged the idea of an Apocalypse or even End Times. Why? Slavery. Jim Crow. The Holocaust. The Great Depression. Wars. Wars. Wars. More Wars. In all of those scenarios, there was tremendous loss, suffering and grief. And there will continue to be those things in the current pandemic. And those who survived, moved into a future that was changed and troubled, but a future none the less.

Almost two months into the shutdown, some of my patients are beginning to be furloughed. Lose health benefits. Artists, writers, performers who make their rent working as bartenders and waitstaff are out of work but fortunate enough to receive unemployment for as long as it lasts. The stimulus checks have helped. All are concerned about what is now and what will come. That said, no one is thinking this is the end. Even the most depressed among us, are planning, with fingers crossed, for a world on the other side. They continue to radiate courage. Many have experienced trauma and are using skills acquired to offer comfort and care to those around them. myself included.

“By and By” was a song hummed by my grandmother, as did work around the house. It was one of the songs I loved to hear during Sunday afternoon services in rural Virginia. A song my grandfather strummed on his guitar before he fell asleep at night or played quietly after dawn. Songs of hope, redemption, of better times to come. Theirs was closely tied to Christian ideas of how to get to heaven. But also from their own lives of struggles, successes. Loss and resilience. There is also an eye toward a better place here, despite it all.

To me, the song radiates hope for the future. A time when the data is gathered. When we pick up the shards and create a new normal with the pieces. A normal where more people have access to food, shelter, medical care. Where we nod hello to a stranger. We will say thank you to those who make our lives work; bus drivers, janitors, sanitation workers. Our partners. Our families and friends. And as the song says,

“We will tell the story of how we’ve overcome,
 And we’ll understand it better by and by”

Mauricio – response – 4/28

What a beautiful post Cynthia

Mauricio

Judith – response

I second Mauricio's appreciation Cynthia – a beautiful post. I ended my post with the hope that this pandemic might be a catalyst for change. Constrained by the 500 word limit, I ended there. Your post delineated so many of the specifics I had in mind: the majority having access to the basics of living - food, shelter, health care, etc. and acknowledgement and gratitude to those who make our lives work – the bus drivers, janitors, sanitation workers, etc. The forgotten and too often left behind. Thank you.

Judith

Donna – response – 4/28

Dear Cynthia,

Your post is the perfect antidote to mine, about the traumatic loss of a sense of temporality. You actually make and live a case for the future, even when we can't find it for now. I remember your clear voice of challenge from Division 39, for example. Injustice cannot destroy the "by and by when the morning comes." And you sent me back to Sweet Honey in the Rock, exactly what I needed to hear in this time.

Hans Loewald constantly explained that the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis orients to the future, makes no sense without future. The language of apocalypse seems to lose this orientation. Thank you, Cynthia!

Mel – Addendum – 4/28

An addendum. This was left out of my last communication. "As I conducted this analysis, the scholarly posts by Mauricio, George, and Andrew, the prose and poetry by Cynthia and Judith, the quote of Fromm, embellished my awareness of the human condition in discussing apocalypse and enriched my understanding of the patient and myself.

There is a gold mine

Mauricio – Re: continuation of the discussion

Dear Mel

I agree with your sentiment about the power of being connected and of love, but why oppose that to a death instinct when we have much better ways to understand despair and self-destructiveness?

Mel – response to Mauricio – 4/28

Dear Mauricio,

Your question helps me elaborate my ideas. I am writing from a clinical perspective.

Patients are vital human beings who are powerfully motivated to continue life and improve. Even when they appear uninterested in improving.

I have seen this over and over again in my patients and myself: At times when it appears that patients are in love with life with exuberance, it feels as if it is too much. They withdraw from being engaged with me in the present moment. They grow numb. In the withdrawal inward they immerse themselves in a repetition as if time and life has stopped. They immerse themselves in

sadomasochistic fantasies. Freud called this the clinical manifestation of the death instinct. I agree.

Now to address your question. The withdrawal from the power of loving life in the present moment into sadomasochism or the death instinct is an attempt at hiding the power of the life instinct and its demands. The repetition and sadomasochism is basically the more powerful life instinct but in disguise. The enormous demands of life can be easily converted to the death instinct.

Mel

Mauricio – Death instinct versus a developmental disorder – 4/28

Dear Mel

What you are describing by the death instinct is a developmental disorder, not a drive, motivation or instinct. The end result of this form of developmental psychopathology might be self-destructive or destructive impulses. But by calling these secondary impulses a drive or instinct, we are putting the cart before the horse. This is a common categorical mistake.

Every outcome of development is biological *and* environmental; *intrapsychic and interpersonal*. The great Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky said it best: “development happens twice, first *interpersonally* and then *intra-personally*” (it becomes internalized).

Mauricio

Apocalypse? – George – April 27

Dear Panel,

Of course it seems natural, given our current terrible situation, to use the fantasy of the Apocalypse as a means to organize our experience and capture the weight of what we are feeling. However, this makes me wonder about what it is about the Covid-19 epidemic which feels apocalyptic to us. Donna gives her definition as the following: “Apocalypse has always signified to me, among all the other connotations, the end of days, a moment when the past has been catastrophically destroyed and there is no future.” and Daniel adds to Donn’s definition the idea of “revealing”, that beyond destruction there is a way in which what is important to us is made clearer.

So does the Covid-19 Pandemic meet this definition I don’t think so. The world is very much here with us, although thoroughly disrupted. If anything, life has intensified, albeit to an uncomfortable degree. Destruction is occurring and may be massive, but not world ending. Hopefully, light shall be shed on what is important to us, but we will have to see about this in time.

Covid-19 poses many difficult problems, which for better or worse are being addressed. It is a big deal and is having a vast impact. It is stressing our social, political and economic systems and will probably lead to enduring changes in our lives. But it is far from apocalyptic.

The concept of Apocalypse is a fantasy, which we have been relying on, when we are faced with problems of sufficient scope, before which we feel frightened and helpless. And we feel that cherished personal and cultural assumptions about our world are radically challenged. Apocalypse has become the default position which we fall back to when we feel that our capacity to give meaning to experience is overwhelmed. Kohut might refer to this as a symptom of annihilation anxiety.

However, I would like to caution us from confusing our fearful fantasies from the challenging reality which we are faced with.

I think it would be interesting to conduct research to determine if the a persons experience of a situation is apocalyptic increases the motivation to actively adapt, or does it tend to paralyze and inhibit adaptation.

My concern is that the recent tendency to apocalypticize (not a word) problems distorts our assessment of reality, and reduces our confidence in being able to deal with it. I find the concept of apocalypse to be an interesting psychological phenomenon, but not a useful idea when applied to the real world. Rather than the global terror of apocalypse, we should try to stay grounded in the specific problems which make up the pandemic. This is one of the reasons why Andrew Cuomo is so reassuring to people. In his daily briefings Cuomo, a political pragmatist, breaks down the current problems and solutions to specifics, does not minimize the challenge, and honestly shares the fears and hopes with which we are faced.

Apocalypse makes us want to get down on our knees to pray, a pragmatic and realistic perspective motivates us to “get to work” (a favorite phrase of Cuomo).

Best to all and good health.

George Hagman

Donna – Response to “Apocalypse?” – April 30

Yes, George, it would be interesting to think about apocalypse talk as escapism, or as defense against overwhelming fragmentation anxiety.

George – Response to Donna – April 30

Hi Donna. Thank you for sending me your note. Actually I was thinking about you and wondering about what you think about the impact of apocalyptic imagery on climate change politics. It appears to me that often, at least in the media, apocalyptic imagery is used to attempt to motivate people. I don’t know for sure but my hunch is that it’s not useful, and may in fact reduce motivation in people and increase a sense of helplessness. what do you think. George

Sent from my iPhone

Andrew – Response to George and Donna – April 30

From Andrew

I am going to join this thread without changing the Subject line.

The nub of ‘apocalypticism’ for me is that there is a kind of desire to perish as a form of self-punishment. We deserve it.

This paralyzes thought and action in the direction of a different future. (Yes, maybe Donna’s ‘defense’ is relevant here.)

No-one is saying in this discussion that there will be a literal apocalypse. I wonder why we have allowed that idea to come in? Maybe this is what we might be talking about, the difficulty in staying with metaphor – with depth psychology, really.

In the paper from which my ideas are drawn I continue my critique of environmental activism stemming from 1989 for making people feel bad, for idealizing ‘nature’, and for dissing human achievement and culture, particularly in the urban context.

How to bring the ‘green agenda’ in from the margins was my interest then.

Now it is how to take all the current wonderful sounding ideas about a better future and make it happen, to bring idealism and resistance in from the margins. That is where political struggle comes in.

Donna – Response to Andrew – April 30

Agree! Thanks, Donna

Mauricio – Response to George and Andrew about the usefulness (or not) of the apocalypses metaphor/fantasy – April 30

Dear all

I would like to pick up on something that George said in an earlier post.

“However, I would like to caution us from confusing our fearful fantasies with the challenging reality which we are faced with”.

I think it would be interesting to conduct research to determine if a person’s experience of a situation as apocalyptic increases the motivation to actively adapt, or does it tend to paralyze and inhibit adaptation.

I completely agree with George: we should not confuse fearful fantasies with the reality we are faced with. The reality of this pandemic, while catastrophic, was not inevitable. Warnings that a pandemic of this nature was likely to hit us were ignored. SARS and MEARS were clear warnings. At a tiny fraction of our Pentagon budget, we could have been prepared. Instead we were caught off guard and unprepared. But even after COVID-19 hit, China and many other countries took the seriousness of the threat seriously. South Korea, Germany, New Zealand, Denmark and Norway acted promptly. The results of not flattening the curve earlier in many countries has been deadly. The inability to do massive testing has made it more difficult to plan ahead when shelter-in-place orders gradually relaxed. We are learning why not having good leadership can be a matter of life and death. We are learning that social trust and social solidarity allow some countries with good and competent leadership to cope better than others.

Now, to George’s second point. The emphasis on inevitability and catastrophe associated with apocalypse is not a useful fantasy or metaphor. Yes, some people can get caught in apocalyptic thinking and fantasies. But the issue is how do we help them out of this state of despair and self-destructiveness? While it is important to psychoanalyze how they got there, this developmental analysis is just a means to get them out of it. To combat catastrophic thinking and despair we also need to help people mobilize new ways of learning and adapting.

Mitchel once said that pathology was ultimately a case of lack of imagination. When we are in a traumatic, frightened state, our capacity for imagination collapses. We are unable to look at our present and future from different and more hopeful perspectives. Despair, fear and panic are like black holes that suck us into hopelessness and radical disconnection from our capacity for vitality and hope. As George said, these are testable hypotheses, with major clinical and social implications.

Mauricio Cortina

Daniel – A brief announcement on week 2 – May 1

I will be posting a summary of what has transpired in this panel during our first week. This summary will be by definition imperfect and leaves much out – so please forgive omissions – and feel free to correct misrepresentations.

I will also post, separately, four ruminations/questions, inspired by our conversation. Thank you all for your wonderful, wise and heart-felt contributions.

Apocalypse: Week 2

Daniel – Summary of our first week of posts – May 1

When I first asked Cynthia to join the group of discussants, she wrote, “Some days I feel like there is so much to say and other days it feels like there are no words.” As I read over these many brilliant posts and musings on the subject of the apocalypse, the effect is kaleidoscopic – so many different ways to experience the same great communal trauma – and I find myself nodding inwardly in agreement with every comment, even when they contradict one another.

George Hagman

Please see post titled “‘Apocalypse’ the word” for a brief summary of George’s posts.

Mauricio Cortina and Andrew Samuels

Mauricio and Andrew look to the possibilities revealed by Covid-19 in strikingly different ways. Mauricio sees this plague as revealing stark moral and economic injustices and sees an opportunity to connect dots that have been invisible to many till now. Andrew argues that the ancient trope of apocalypse is something we need to come to terms with, that it not only serves to justify inaction but attracts us to the fires of mass destruction. “Apocalypse,” he writes, “is not based on a fear of death but on a desire for it.” He speaks of Freud’s death wish – as does Mel – and quotes Hamlet’s famous existential monologue on ceasing to be: “’tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

Both Mauricio and Andrew seem to want the same thing – a better world. It is a question of how to get there and what to emphasize. Do we focus on the cooperative, adaptive nature of being human, or do we focus on the thrill of destruction, focus on it as a kind of inoculation. Do we pay obeisance to Eros or Thanatos? I go back and forth. In a more pessimistic (and messianic) mood, I dream of mass destruction. I want humanity to feel what humanity has wrought. Most of the time I find hope in humanity’s versatility, our brains forged, as Mauricio argues, in nomadic times of extreme climate cycles and unprecedented environmental change, connecting-brains rather than blood-and-soil-brains.

Judith Rustin

Judith writes a beautiful evocation of her particular circumstances in New York City taking care of her ill husband in the epicenter of the pandemic. She sees the virus – with its single mandate to duplicate itself – as a potent metaphor for all the politicians and institutions “whose primary if not sole purpose is to hold onto power.” She notes that the feel of this time being apocalyptic comes from its being a “now” moment rather than a fantasied religious event, with its messiahs and thousand year utopias. This is happening here! Today! “Now” moments and “moments of meeting” in the infant literature represent moments of sudden interpersonal insight with a possibility for change. These moments are disorienting and destabilizing, like all paradigm shifts. That this might be such a moment sustains Judith’s hope. After all, the black death in 14th century Florence ushered in the renaissance. Dan Perlitz, who wrote to me privately, suggests the need for “a radical transformation of the way humanity relates to each other and to the world. We need to organize an entirely new system of which we have little comprehension because it is so radically different than how we are organized now.”

Joye Weisel-Barth

“By the Waters of Babylon, I sat and wept for thee, Oh Zion.”

So Joye begins her lovely story about grief and mourning and loss of place in the world, which she likens to exile. We are “sheltering in place,” yes, most of us in fairly privileged homes, and yet covid-19 has “upended our secure life geography.” She bemoans the “shift from flesh to screen” and experiences herself as “living out shifting and contradictory emotional states.” And she speaks of time and the breakup of the rhythms of time: “The rhythm of my life seems slower and quieter than formerly, but my sleep is spotty and my anxiety intense. I try to stay in the moment and avoid too much useless speculation about the future; but when I fail, things become confused and murky, and I am upset.”

Donna Orange

As with Judith and Joye, Donna notes most of all a change in her sense of time that fits with the idea of the “end of days.” “The past has been catastrophic destruction and the future is no longer.” She mourns the loss of her ability to fantasize and plan forward in time. “There is only today, without the textured and overlapping sense of past and future, of subjective or communal temporality.” And yet life goes on. We see patients. We teach. We discourse in online roundtables. A patient of mind described his simultaneously hinged and unhinged state of mind in this way. He said, “It is like we’re at a play and someone yells ‘fire!’ Smoke begins to pour through the walls. But the actors keep going on stage, and we’re expected to continue to follow the story.”

Mel Bornstein

Mel brings us a story of a patient convinced he has Covid-19, a patient so drawn to the no-longer-reality of his past physical trauma that he reverses his temporal depth-of-field, blurring the present and bringing the past into sharp focus. As with Donna, “Time had stopped.” Pat had “difficulty feeling alive and telling his story.” Mel draws on his own traumas to put meaning to his patient’s experience, but most of all he takes joy in feeling love and connection with his patient in the moment, a moment of helping him through his fears. When his patient brings up the reality of Covid-19, Mel says, and I quote at some length: “Of course and it does scare me, but the reality of you and me now is that we are living sharing being with one another communicating our narratives and sharing in the safety of being together which is joyous and which is really real. With that we can turn to Covid 19 and figure out what we can do to make our lives better with a powerful feeling of love. If we can do that it makes life worthwhile and joyous as we are experiencing ourselves in the here and now regardless what mother nature has in store for us.” I am reminded of a Vietnam War vet I am currently seeing, a man who saw horrific action. A Chicano artist in the age of Trump, his flashback experiences take the form of apocalyptic terrors: the world is going to end. Seeing me and talking always makes him feel better, even though I provide little insight; I just enjoy talking to him because he loves talking about art and I grew up among art and love talking about art too. One day he told me a story about Vietnam. It was at night that the Viet Cong would attack, and they were silent and quick. No night goggles then. Each soldier was in his foxhole holding a length of string held by a partner in another foxhole. Tug it if you hear something. My patient said it was that taut string that kept him sane, not because he felt safe using it as a warning system, but because he knew another human was attached to it.

Cynthia Chalker

Cynthia opens her lovely piece by quoting Charles Tindley’s gorgeous hymn “We’ll Understand It Better By and By.”

By and by
When the morning comes,

All the saints of God are gathered home,
 We'll tell the story how we've overcome:
 For we'll understand it better by and by.

She speaks of the world's great catastrophes: slavery, the holocaust, endless wars. And throughout it all a sense of just going, knowing and believing in life and knowing that there will be a future – different, maybe permanently altered, but a future nonetheless. In this celebration or ordinariness, I am reminded of the last lines of Auden's last poem: "History is made by the criminal in us/ Goodness is timeless." Cynthia speaks of her mother singing this hymn in rural Virginia while doing housework on a Sunday afternoon. I imagine a child dreaming of a vague by-and-by future with those warm melodies drifting over her. The hymn is tinged with apocalyptic intimations ("by and by," "promised land," "when the saints of God are gathered around."), but in this context it is an earth-bound song of home with a real future in mind, far away, yes, but maybe reachable in Cynthia's lifetime. Cynthia's post is indeed a perfect complement to Donna's and Joye's future that has turned in on itself and become a perpetual now. But I see both views as true – although opposite.

Daniel – First rumination/question: "Apocalypse" – the word – May 1

George opens by critiquing the very use of the word "apocalypse" as a description of what's happening now, fearing that the idea reduces motivation. Others have touched on a similar critique. Is the "apocalypse" not a trope from our religious past designed to lull us into surrendering to a fantasy with little contemporary relevance? Is it not obvious that humanity will survive Covid-19? George cites Cuomo as an ideal leader who confronts the problem in terms of data and pragmatic action.

I conceived this notion of "psychoanalyzing the apocalypse" as a standalone issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* several years ago, when the climate crisis was on my mind. My young adult sons were certain they would witness horrors within their lifetime. They saw their futures as tightly bounded in ways I had not at their age. It has been said that Covid-19 is a coming attraction for climate change. My interest was not in using the term apocalypse as a call to action but to understand it as an experience that affects how we think and feel, and what better time to explore this experience than when it is suddenly omnipresent in TV imagery and masks and depleted grocery stores and the in the tragic plights of people close to us? As Andrew noted, the "apocalypse" is a metaphor. And an old persistent one at that. I grew up with stories from the old testament. One of my favorites was Noah's ark. I loved the idea of travelling an infinite expanse of water with a boat full of animals. I was also struck by the scenes of boredom and waiting and uncertainty – and then the dove with the olive branch. Death has always been paired with renewal. My Grandmother, a holocaust survivor, told me those stories. A communist, she didn't really believe them, but she also did. I pose this question. Is the trope of the apocalypse merely problematic and dispiriting? Or does it tell us something about our deepest nature? Is there a danger in denying the continuities between now and then?

Daniel – Second rumination/question: time – May 1

Many of the discussants have spoken of their different relationship to time. Our clocks still turn, but our routines have changed, and our clocks don't attach to events in our lifeworlds with the same tenacity and regularity. This can be both good and bad. Bad because we can be left unmoored. Good because we are free of the temporal grid. My fifteen year old can sleep till noon, which is her natural way, and I don't have to rush her out of the house in the morning and get pissed off because her indecision about an outfit breaks my calendar, to name a trivial example. I would love to hear more about time during this seeming-apocalypse.

Daniel – Third rumination/question: our common (or not so common) humanity – May 1

As psychoanalysts, we see so many people who struggle to emerge from unique, overly defining situations in their pasts – what we loosely call trauma. Putting these unique situations into a common language is the poetry of psychoanalysis. But in a time of pandemic, we are all experiencing something close to the same situation. We don't have to search as hard for personal analogues to understand the other. The news is in our bedrooms, and not just on our cell-phones, TVs and I pads. It is in us. As psychoanalysts, in our confrontations with so many minds, we are in a position to experience the zeitgeist in ways inaccessible to most professions. Is there an apocalyptic zeitgeist – in all the many ways we have come to know this term – a common feeling – or have we fragmented into a million points around these current or future happenings – depending on how much money we have in the bank, the color of our skin, our age, our health. Is the judgment to befall us a Godless, social Darwinist judgment? Are we, In Sullivan's words, "all more human than otherwise," or has Covid-19 exposed ways that race, economic status (and I'll add, youth and age) revealed unbridgeable differences? Does Sullivan's famous adage "We are all more human than otherwise" develop new meanings in this context?

Daniel – Fourth rumination/question: The Uncanny – May 1

Many of my patients experience what Freud once called "the uncanny," in which the unique and strange is also at the same time familiar. Are we recognizing aspects of our ancestral past? My daughter has been showing me Tic-Toks that have been trending on social media, a montage of photos of odd places – parking-lots, suburban living-rooms, empty school rooms – images meant to produce a feeling of frightening nostalgia. Is it helpful to revive Freud's old term to understand what we are going through?

Andrew Samuels – May 4

Hey Daniel! I don't want to be the party pooper, but I am not getting on well with responding to these four (extremely interesting) ruminations/questions. Not at all well

This is not like me. I am an over-eager contributor to things like this. I enjoy the brickbats as much as the praise. All contributes to a sense of being alive, and being at or near the centre of things.

Anyway, at first I blamed **you**. The questions seemed naff, too controlling, to reside too conservatively within the psychoanalytic canon, even the one on humanity.

Then I blamed **myself** for undertaking this project when I am caught up with several new and substantial projects, including a good deal of broadcasting and webinar-ing.

Then I blamed **the structure**, the apparent dialogue that, to be honest, has sometimes failed to be dialogue. (but with much of interest, too.) Here, I am as guilty as anyone.

Now, what is supposed to happen now is that I finally reveal what is really going on, and drop the blame game.

But that is not happening and I have to be true to myself and leave these complaints and complaints where they are.

I do have one suggestion which is that the people 'auditing' this get in on the act pronto. In one of my broadcasts, I said that we urgently need to spread leadership around.

Finally, here is a You Tube that went up yesterday. There was to have been the London Climate Theatre Season. Live. Well, it has changed in many respects, obvs, and this is what I ended up contributing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXg9cEb08Z0>

Andrew

Daniel – The Process – May 4th

First off, I want to thank everyone for participating in this experiment. However, it is an experiment, meant to proceed at a leisurely pace, and meant to evolve as we go along. Feel free to give feedback about the process of this discussion, whether as an audience member or as a discussant, but please back-channel me at danielgoldin@gmail.com so we can keep focus on the topic.

I plan to include more audience comments and ideas as we go along, as well as questions, so keep your thoughts coming. The discussion will likely expand to include direct audience feedback in about 6 weeks, although the timing is fluid.

Daniel

Mauricio – Humanism and Sullivan’s adage “We are all much more human than otherwise” – May 1

We are both different and alike. Our differences based on gender, culture, socioeconomic status, color of our skin, religion, and philosophic beliefs can, and many times do, divide us. It takes a world-wide crisis to make it clear that Sullivan was right “we are much more human than otherwise”. We are alike in our hopes, in our grief, in our care for our loved ones, in our vulnerabilities and our capacity to come together and help each other during catastrophic events.

There is a long humanistic tradition affirming our common humanity. All the great religions that Karl Jasper called the Axial Period affirm the message of compassion for the least among us. The Hebrew scriptures remind us: “you have been strangers in the land of Egypt. Therefore love the stranger” (Deuteronomy 10:19). There is no guarantee that collective solidarity will develop. In fact, the opposite might be the case, with wars, greater divisiveness, and suffering. It is up to all of us to do what we can to see to it that “the better angels of our nature” will prevail.

Mauricio Cortina

George – response – May 7

Hi Apocalyptic Friends,

As Daniel suggests, I think there is an Apocalyptic zeitgeist which is both common to all, but experienced in extremely diverse ways. As I noted in an earlier posting, the postwar generation (baby boomers) grew up with the real possibility of Apocalypse through nuclear war. For the first time in human history, the end of time seemed possible, if not imminent. So we all shared this common fear, but we also organized our fears into individual and diverse fantasies reflecting our familial, cultural and personal characteristics. Over the years the Apocalyptic zeitgeist has been elaborated and expressed in many ways, religiously, socially and in popular culture. One of my interests has been in the narrative of the Zombie Apocalypse. In my investigation of the expression of this fantasy, I was led to think about Heinz Kohut’s theory that human beings continue to require access to selfobject experiences, and relationships that provide the opportunities for these self-sustaining experiences, throughout life. Kohut specifically argued that the fear of death (which he felt as unknowable) was actually the fear of the loss of connection to others and the feared collapse of a sustaining selfobject milieu. Extending this idea to the Zombie Apocalypse (and many other permutations of that theme) may explain the prevalence of the narrative. In every case the story line involves the complete collapse of the social and cultural milieu, family life and intimate ties are destroyed, or at least mortally threatened, followed by (and this is always the main story) the dramatization of the impact these traumatic losses have on any survivors. The fans of the Walking Dead for example, passionately immerse themselves in the lives of survivors undergoing

and coping with this massive Apocalyptic trauma - and for a time it was the most watched series on Television. My point is that the prevalence and popularity of Apocalyptic entertainment in popular culture probably represents a profound preoccupation with fears of massive loss of selfobject ties and relational connections. We are given the opportunity to consider “what would I do?” from the safety of our living room couch, or our bed with a tablet propped up on our pillow. We get a chance to experience vicariously the terror of being overrun by a zombie horde, and if it gets too much for us we can throw the kindle to the floor and go to sleep. Are we trying to master our fears, or indulging in some bizarre titillation (probably both). But now we have the Covid Pandemic provoking all our latent fears of annihilation and loss - but this is apparently real, or is it? (Many people seem able to completely deny the reality) Daniel quotes Sullivan: “We are all more simply human than otherwise.” And of course we are all human, but what did he mean by “otherwise” and what would that “otherwise” be - are we also “simply” the Walking Dead (as Rick Grimes says in the TV series). From the perspective of the Apocalyptic Zeitgeist we run the risk of our fantasies and fears overrunning reality. Will the selfobject milieu of our culture, economies, our relationships etc. survive or will we be irrevocably altered, cast into a world where an as yet unknown but fearful “otherwise” predominates. I think our panel’s discussion of these Apocalyptic fears and fantasies is a central one for our modern world and our individual psychological lives - they are latent in our preconscious, ready to be activated for well or ill.

Good health and safety to all. George Hagman

Cynthia – I wrote this to post just as I saw George’s great post –

The Apocalypse Metaphor – May 7

I have been ruminating over a question posed by one of the discussants in our round table: Why is it difficult to stay with the metaphor of the apocalypse?

One morning last week I thought about this as I put my coffee in the microwave to reheat.

The question was top of mind as I waited for the microwave to signal my coffee was done. Deep in thought, I suddenly remembered I needed to write down a meeting in my calendar before I forgot. I needed my glasses to do that.

Why can’t we hold onto the metaphor?

Searching for my glasses to write down the appointment, I realized I didn’t put my phone on the charger the night before. Now I am looking for the charger. Did I move it into another room yesterday . . . why? Who knows. Victory! I found my glasses!

But what did I do with my coffee, and why can’t we hold onto the metaphor?

Now I am running out of time. I have to shower and dress, i.e., find a shirt and sweater suitable for a video call but that also goes well with my black yoga pants.

Now what did I do with my coffee? Why can’t I hold onto the metaphor of the apocalypse?

I set up for my zoom sessions for the day: laptop, notebook, pens, pillow, my phone. Where’s my phone? Here it is. Never made it to the charger. Just as well. I won’t need it until session #3 . . .

I take a deep cleansing breath and press start. The face of my first patient of the day appears. Five minutes into our session, their tears begin to fall freely. Mine are building. In the counter-transference, I want MY tears to flow. I am exhausted too. In New York City, this is the 8th week of the shutdown. We all seem to be battling the Pandemic Zeitgeist. Riding the waves of despair, hope, anger. Losing time, unable to focus. I connect with my patient and their tears as we dive into the places where the Zeitgeist has wreaked havoc in the past week.

Why can’t I hold onto the metaphor of the apocalypse?

By day’s end, the answer to the query comes to me. It’s hard to hold onto to the metaphor because we are *living* the metaphor. We are being whipped up in the winds and storms of this apocalypse. In the last few weeks I’ve had a hard time seeing the horizon. Along with the masks, will part of our

new normal be always to feel out of sync? To feel even less in control than we imagined we were before the pandemic? Become practiced in acknowledging grief and understanding the importance of grieving? In the new normal, might we clinicians give ourselves a break when we don't meet the high bars we set for ourselves?

Speaking of which, I never found my coffee . . .

Just then, my spouse from the kitchen calls, "Is this your coffee from this morning?

You left it in the microwave."

George – This is not an Apocalypse – May 7

Thank you Cynthia. Good question: Why can't we hold onto the metaphor? Part of the problem I think is that the Covid Pandemic may evoke Apocalyptic Fantasies, but it is not in fact Apocalyptic. In the end the metaphor does not fit with the reality. Over the last several decades we have actively created an extraordinarily complex world in which innumerable threats and hazards have been slowly developing in plain view. To name a few. The obvious slow relentless catastrophe of climate change. The massive distribution of firearms and resulting carnage in every community. The insidious expansion of Republican political power and its mission to undermine our democracy and realize the interests of the extraordinarily wealthy. Russian hegemony and intent to undermine democracy. The growing threat of epidemics and now pandemics. And that's just a few. These are complex problems demanding careful study and strong political, social and economic action. But this has not happened. We have continued on with our lives as the threats have accumulated and the solutions have become even more out of reach. We should not be at all surprised that we are in the situation we are in. This is not an Apocalypse, it is a giant mess of problems which we need to deal with. It makes perfect sense and was made almost inevitable by the election of Donald Trump. We may use Apocalypse as a metaphor, but it romanticizes something far more mundane. The Covid Epidemic is a case of political and administrative mismanagement, poisonous right wing political policies and leadership failure. The morning after Trump's election I experienced a rush of terror. I did not know what was going to happen, but I knew it was going to be real bad. And here we are. When you have a president who is incompetent and without scruples, who systematically destroys the administrative capabilities of government and spends all day watching TV, what do you think will happen? If Trump had been a competent leader he would have shut the country down in January for a few weeks, and the situation would have gone entirely differently - no Covid Pandemic. At least not in the U.S. Regarding the rest of the world, just suppose that Trump's had never undermined the U.S. world leadership role and the integrity of the UN, the EU and NATO, just maybe the U.S. President could have provided leadership internationally and reduced the spread and infiltration of the virus. But no, this is what we got: President Donald Trump and the end of the world. Pathetic. So let's drop the Apocalyptic talk and get worried about a real life terror - the threat of Trump's reelection in November and the possibility of another four years of a Republican senate. Not to mention the precarious state of Ruth Bader Ginsberg's health - the possibility of her death before next January - now that would be apocalyptic. So let's support the Democratic party, campaign against the real problem, and vote.

Best again, George Hagman

Daniel – Response – May 7

A fascinating exchange. It seems to me there are two views of the apocalypse here. Cynthia speaks of her apocalyptic experience – a feeling of being in the fog of apocalypse that makes it hard even to see

that she is in it. Of course, her experience is neither true nor false. It is an experience – but probably one many of us recognize. George questions whether these times can be categorized as apocalyptic at all and whether it is dangerously self-defeating to think in such terms.

I was going to ask this question in a few days. But now might be a good time.

Does our contemplation of apocalypse reveal things (as the original Greek word suggests) or cover things up? Is the idea of apocalypse a defense or dissociative response?

Daniel

Mauricio Cortina – Response to George and to Daniel's question

I completely agree with George's analysis. Speaking in apocalyptic terms paralyzes us into fear and despair rather than mobilizing us to action to address the issues that George mentions. There are many creative solutions to the problems George enumerates. The issue is not the lack of technical, scientific, economic and social solutions, but lack of political will. To build this political will we need to make these creative solutions available to the public. We need to unmask a neoliberal ideology that has led us to believe economic growth is a zero sum game where there *has to be* winners and losers. There is no inexorable economic law that forces us into brutal social and economic disparities and that assumes that scarcity is inevitable. Ecologists and economists working together have proposed new economic models where recycling, cooperation and exchange can coexist with competition.

We create wealth by redefining it as social capital that builds social trust and social solidarity, by investing in creative solutions that spread the gains of economic growth and productivity. We need a revolution of hope, and for that we need good leadership at multiple levels that spearhead the most creative approaches. But first and foremost as George mentions, we need to defeat Trump in November and regain the senate, not just for the sake of our country but also the world.

Apocalypse: Week 3

Editor's note: I did not put together a summary for the previous week, as I didn't want to interrupt the flow of a discussion which had not yet, in my opinion, reached an intermediate place of pause.

Mel – Response – May 8

Conducting an analysis forces us to consider the bewildering character of time. Carlo Rovelli, a theoretical physicist recently wrote a book on time in which he describes from a perspective of thermomechanics that time does not exist. What could you do with time when calling from one galaxy to another?

Patients seek help because they are suffering and are blinded by memories as if time does not exist. The psychoanalysis is directed to demonstrate the present, which is all we have. Therapists are with their patients in the present and communicating, which is a continual reminder that therapists and patients are in the here and now focusing on the patient's difficulties with their inner and outer lives. Patients have been afraid and unable to bring past and present together and therefore do not feel fully alive. "Now it is safe because now we are not what you once were". There is hope.

Turning to the apocalypse in the clinical situation where patient and analyst are focused on achievement. In other words, two humans focused on the *idea* of apocalypse. The word is a metaphor signifying living moving in time with hope for achievement. The term even though it is archaic, having to do with getting rid of the bad by a catastrophic event, can be understood as the communication of hope.

Mel

Donna – Response – May 9

Dan and all,

Though not from the interpersonalist tradition, I often think fondly of Sullivan's famous adage: we are all more simply human than otherwise. Thank you for invoking it. In this moment it reminds me that "simply human" may be the opposite of godlike. Simply human is vulnerable, frightened, uncertain, and liable to die. I don't have to be superwoman.

The problem, as others have pointed out, is that some of us are much more vulnerable and likely to die than others, while others of us are still wildly privileged. We still have trouble noticing the suffering of people Judith Butler describes as living "ungrievable lives." Or in Levinasian language, we are still leaving people to die alone, especially those who cannot afford medical care or those who cannot afford to stay at home.

"More simply human than otherwise" might hint at the as-if-subhuman, as-if-disposable lives menaced by jogging while Black. That is one kind of otherwise. Or it may mean that refusal of vulnerability (we are not gods) creates a world of others who threaten our superiority. (Written before I read Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste* (2020).

Mel – response – May 10

Donna shared with us some of her musings. So will I. After many years of immersing myself in psychoanalysis, I begin always searching for real. Real at each moment includes that I am a whole person communicating to other whole people. Everything goes through my lens of being human. To do this I focus on the here and now, the present moment. I also understand that every human being is continually organizing all that is inside: fantasy, memories, past present moments while reaching out in the present moment through their love of life.

The Herculean task is the inclusion of our love of life and our enormous vulnerability. When pandemics hit or we recognize we are being led by a Con Man or loved ones die, if we turn to focus on the present moment, here and now, we are able to include all that in our process of organizing ourselves. In other words, we face the work of finding a way to love our vulnerability which is just part of loving life. One beautiful evening several years ago as I was trying to make sense out of what I had just written. I looked up at the sky which was filled with star lights. With a shock, I realized those lights have been there for light-years. I have been given the evolutionary gift of human life as I pass through. No more than that.

Daniel – On time – some thoughts on Mel’s post

Mel writes about his interactions with a patient: “Now we are after because now we are not what we once were.”

What a strange and revealing comment. I have been reading an interesting book called “The Self in Time,” in which many authors from many fields describe the development of a sense of time in children – in particular the development of a sense of enduring in time, of forming a continuous identity. Hoerl and McCormack (a philosopher and a developmental psychologist working together) propose that the child’s discovery of a sense of time happens in three parts. The child discovers that an event can cause another event to happen *and* – this is the important part – that a third, later event, perhaps one of his own making, can change and even obliterate the nature of that paired happening. The child is no longer locked into a world of cause and effect and conditioning. He enters an ever-evolving story of himself in the world. This three part process describes the structure of story-making and of how humans live in time.

So what about apocalypse, the revealing, the end of times, spinning out of climate-cycles gone mad or out of a quasi-dead virus merely following the duplication orders of its innermost being? Once we have entered human time or narrative time, there is no escaping it. Death becomes the most difficult of problems, as it ends our stories from the outside, as it were, in the middle of things. This might be why the Greeks held tragedy to be the highest art. Tragedy brings death *into* the human story and ushers in a world ennobled by the hero’s loss. “Let four captains/Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage”

I don’t see apocalypse as a fantasy (not the secular version). If we can imagine our own death, we can imagine the death of humanity. Both events are not only possible but inevitable. Here is Stolorow on the subject in an article just published in *American Imago*.

For humans, to be is to dwell on earth, and to dwell requires that they safeguard and preserve the earth that grounds them. Characteristically, such protectedness is sought in metaphysical illusion—the transformation of this vulnerable planet into an invincible everlasting entity. This age-old metaphysical illusion is not faring well in the face of the perils of climate change.

As one of our audience members Richard Kim put it “COVID-19 has unveiled the illusion that we through science and technology can master nature and eliminate death, disease, and suffering.

The virus and its effects don’t necessarily herald the end of the world, but it is the end of our utopian illusions that what was our civilized world is safe and forever.”

To quote Shakespeare, “All that lives must die/It is drawing days out that men count upon.” Ditto, planet earth. George writes, “This is not an apocalypse.” But perhaps it is a quasi-apocalypse. Certainly life as we know it will change. Certainly Covid-19 provides an intimation of earth’s end. Certainly it reveals something, if only the end of our utopian faith in everlasting protection from nature. Perhaps it opens the possibility of new stories we hadn’t dreamed of until now. Perhaps that is just a return to an age-old myth of renewal. Perhaps, as both Mel and Stolorow suggest, it puts a spotlight on our dwelling with each other in the present. But perhaps that can be construed as a form of surrender as well.

George – The Apocalypse as a narrative device – May 8

I think it is important to continue to think about what we mean when we talk about the Apocalypse. In modern popular culture when we talk about Apocalypse we are telling different types of stories which are developed around the dramatic device of “the end of the world, the end of everything as we know it.” Modern apocalyptic narratives are of two types. The first type of narrative is about events “before” the Apocalypse, the second type is about the time “during or after” the Apocalypse. The “before” type is the story of a series of events, or rather mishaps, which occur, resulting in the Apocalypse. My favorite example of this narrative is “Dr. Strangelove” in which all of the standard, “reliable” protections against Nuclear War, go array and human flaws are given free rein over the system, resulting in a cascading series of insane decisions and at times ludicrous events, the outcome of which is world destruction. Alternate versions of this narrative describe similar failures in the system of security and human nature in which Apocalypse becomes a probable outcome (The book and movie “Fail Safe” is an example). These “before” narratives are not so much about the Apocalypse per se, rather their focus is on the human beings in interaction and how they cope with the dangerous situation in which they find themselves. The Apocalypse is a narrative device, the meaning of the drama is the dynamic human process which is set in motion, given vividness and intensity by the gravity of the possible outcome. The second “during or after” type of apocalyptic narrative, dramatizes the experience of people who cope with the events of the Apocalypse as it is unfolding, and those people who are adapting to a changed world after the Apocalypse has occurred. A recent example of this type is the television program “The Walking Dead” which concerns groups of people attempting to survive in the time after a Zombie Apocalypse” has occurred and all of human civilization has been destroyed. A major ongoing theme of “The Walking Dead” is the struggle of the protagonists to come to terms with a world in which their old values, social roles and belief systems no longer make sense. Who are they now, and how do they live their lives in this new world. The experience of the Apocalypse as existential trauma leading to struggle and ultimate transformation is a central theme.

In these modern narratives the idea of Apocalypse is a dramatic device by which particular human traits are brought into stark relief by the enormity and gravity of the Apocalyptic event, highlighting both flaws and strengths in human beings and human relationships. The Apocalyptic Narrative Device is simply one of the newest techniques to organize a story and dramatize human experience. The history of these types of dramatic devices, such as a great war, love betrayal, royal succession, a dangerous journey, endlessly illustrate the reliability and usefulness of similar devices in our cultural narratives.

In this sense the Apocalyptic Narrative is an expression of human creative drive to imagine new, darker aspects of human fantasy life and unconscious desires. It is not about the End. It is another example of how Art endlessly seeks to represent human subjective life, to get it right, and thereby transcend the limitations of time and mortality. I agree with Mel – it’s about hope.

Best to all, George Hagman

Cynthia – Thoughts to add to the discussion – May 8

I am appreciating the comments to these posts. It’s giving much to think about, including how to contextualize what is killing us in the present.

This pandemic has laid bare the lack of care given to public health, universal healthcare, livable wages and checks and balances in all things governmental. The news dominating my social media feeds in the last few days, are the statistics in the US and UK of Black and Brown people, relative to their populations, are the majority of Covid-19 deaths. The other news is the death of Ahmaud Arbery whose crime was jogging while Black in a neighborhood in Georgia. He was killed by two white men who grabbed their guns, got in their car and went after him. They said later they thought he was armed and they used the guns to protect themselves.

George writes, “Will the selfobject milieu of our culture, economies, our relationships etc. survive or will we be irrevocably altered, cast into a world where an as yet unknown but fearful “otherwise” predominate.” Today, I am not sure.

Daniel – Re: [psychoanalyzing the apocalypse] Thoughts to add to the discussion – May 8

I very much appreciate Cynthia’s glance in an important direction. We have been thinking about the apocalypse as representing fear, hope or a desire for death, and at this moment in the discussion we seem to have settled on hope as a common theme. But maybe we are overly hopeful about hope.

I quote from CBS news online:

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday the coronavirus pandemic keeps unleashing “a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering” and appealed for “an all-out effort to end hate speech globally.”

The U.N. chief said “anti-foreigner sentiment has surged online and in the streets, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spread, and COVID-19-related anti-Muslim attacks have occurred.”

“With older persons among the most vulnerable, contemptible memes have emerged suggesting they are also the most expendable,” he said. “And journalists, whistleblowers, health professionals, aid workers and human rights defenders are being targeted simply for doing their jobs.”

Guterres doesn’t mention the uneven distribution of death among black and brown people in America, revealing long-standing structural inequalities as well as current racially tinged priorities. It is hard not to read Ahmaud Arbery’s death as a response to the pandemic.

Some of us hope for a green new deal and believe the pandemic has revealed the urgent need for such a thing and made it more plausible. Some of us are wearing paramilitary outfits adorned with swastikas and nooses. Is it possible both groups are motivated by hope? Or is a different kind of schism at work?

Mauricio – response – May 9

The paradoxical nature of Hope

I want to respond to Daniel’s last post about hope (maybe we are being too hopeful about hope?) by quoting Erich Fromm in his 1968 book *The Revolution of Hope*: “Hope is paradoxical. It is neither a passive waiting nor unrealistic forcing the circumstances that cannot occur. It is like a crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tired reformism nor pseudo-radical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope is to be ready at every moment for that that is yet to be born, and yet not to become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime.”

We are living in an extraordinary time in history. It is crucial to analyze how this time affects us and our patients, and to analyze how it affects our outlook on life and society. But how we frame the issues is important. I think apocalyptic thinking, whether you think about it as a fantasy or a destructive urge, is a symptom of individual and social despair. We have to take the symptom seriously but not get stuck in it.

I am seeing some people who are more stressed, frightened and not doing well, while others are making significant gains. One bright 50 year old patient told me that the pandemic has made him feel much less of an outsider and a failure due to his checkered career. The fact that everybody is anxious and struggling has made his sense of being an outsider less acute and shameful, and has allowed him to explore some very creative projects that could lead to employment. He is no longer feeling so stuck.

Another divorced male patient who is in his late 30s has been terrified of death since he was a child. In the last few sessions, we have been able to explore in greater depth when the terror began and how it is connected to his symptoms of existential anxiety, aloneness, regrets about lost time, and that he is a failure (which he is not). He was working with his father, a brilliant physicist, when he was 6 or 7 years old, developing a computer program that created birthday reminders for the family with little birthdays songs. The computer program had to have an end date to work. As soon

as he learned about this end date, he became terrified. His life would also have an end date too. In a situation that reminds me of Freud's description of the uncanny, we discovered that his father had a very similar terror of death and existential angst. We speculated that due to this fear his father could not comfort him—nor could his mother who was caring but very intellectualized. Both parents are alive and they remembered the incident well. They confirmed that their son was indeed inconsolable. Understanding this “model scene” (Lichtenberg) and all its implications for his life, has allowed us to put many symptoms and issues together for the first time. All this started by my being curious about how he was strangely unafraid of the pandemic. The threat of being infected was outside, he told me. He could cope with that. But the internal terror was something else.

These clinical vignettes are instructive and suggest ways to look at the opportunities that have opened up at a macro social level. The pandemic and its economic devastation has shaken us up and forced us to contemplate what this pandemic reveals about the world, about leadership and about its numerous socio-economic, racial, and cultural contradictions and brutal inequities. The oft quoted saying of the Spanish philosopher Miquel de Unamuno comes to mind: “we are ourselves and our circumstances. If I cannot change my circumstances, I cannot change myself.” Our circumstances are changing radically. We can become the crouching tiger ready to leap and seize the moment. Changes may or may not occur in our lifetime, that is part of the paradox of hope, but we have no right to give up on hope and we must do what we can to give birth to a new world.

Mauricio Cortina

Joye – Re: [psychoanalyzing the apocalypse] Thoughts to add to the discussion – May 9

If this is apocalyptic, for me it's mostly psychological and looming. The apocalypse hasn't quite happened yet, except in my grief for shattered illusions. It's like being on a streamlined train that's heading in slow motion toward a horrible train wreck. Out the window there are scenes of social disorder, disease, dissolution and death, but inside things are pretty spiffy and pleasant—if it weren't for anxious intimations of disaster ahead. Right now, in my real life, it's much as Cynthia described so wonderfully: regular life ongoing with unusual and unwanted distractions that take me by surprise. While I play out my ordinary busy days, I'm also finding many forgotten and abandoned cups of coffee in the microwave. They're quotidian intimations of inner destruction.

Yes, I know I'm grieving. It's not so much for what's practically lost: so much of life's “in personhood,” with family, friends, and patients, and the social and aesthetic and travel breaks that provide pleasure and uplift. So far, Zoomage is helping to mitigate the loss of in-flesh contacts, and YouTube is a substitute—pale that it is—for uplift.

Rather, my grief is for the loss of settled hopeful fantasies about the future: for a safe earth for my grandchildren, for progressive movement toward human equality, for trust in the ultimate wisdom of human beings, for that long arc of the moral universe bending toward justice. These days that arc seems bent all right but unfortunately not toward justice after all. Climate change, unbridled individualism and capitalism, mendacity and corruption and unleashed racism—all these conditions created Trumpism and, in turn, is fed by it, and it all feels so depressing.

I'm pretty old and, as my women's group was lamenting, part of “those expendable people,” the aged ones vulnerable to Covid 19. Let the virus take us so that the economy may heal and thereby assure Trump's reelection. This also is not one of the future fantasies I have cherished as consolation for mortality. For now I guess this is my version of apocalypse.

Joye

Mel – response to Cynthia et al – May 9

George and Dan continue this dialogue. The apocalypse as a hopeful narrative (George) and “Now we are after because now we are not what we once were” (Dan). Since clinical psychoanalysis forces

us to recognize that we are not much different from our patients, we are continually moving with time and creating our hopeful narratives.

I have struggled for years to fit their descriptions with the influence of the workings of our bodies. In fact, the mind and body are more one than they are two. Freud understood this when he began with development of sex as a model of the development of the mind and body. The movement toward more sophisticated and loving sex with a mounting of tension and an enormous pleasurable release. When there are barriers to living life openly and lovingly there is trouble in the mind and brain.

The metaphor of an apocalypse, the darkness of clearing, problems followed by a new beginning, has some of the characteristics of a good analysis and good sex.

Mel

Judith – Re: [psychoanalyzing the apocalypse] Thoughts to add to the discussion – May 10

Further thoughts on hope

“Are we too hopeful about hope?” It’s all I have at this otherwise very dark moment in my history. I echo Cynthia’s synthesis of some of the issues “this pandemic has laid bare, the lack of care given to public health, universal health care, livable wages and checks and balances in all things governmental.” And Mauricio’s we are living an extraordinary time in history and how crucial it is to analyze how it affects us and our patients, and how it affects our outlook on life and society.

The pandemic has also brought to the fore our interdependency, separate from race, class and ethnicity. Essential workers, in my neighborhood of Greenwich Village, NY City, include the people stocking shelves in grocery and drug stores, clerks at registers, delivery men bringing food from restaurants, janitors keeping stores and hospitals clean and sanitized, EMT workers who drive the ill COVID patients to the hospital. A majority of these unseen and unrecognized workers are people of color. I see extra gratitude given to them in the markets that I enter every few days to keep my home stocked with food. My hope springs from seeing this awareness and support for the unseen people who contribute to my/our “web of life”.

Following the election of DJT in 2016, my office was filled with anger, despair and/or disbelief expressed by a majority of my patients. I worked clinically with each patient informed by each one’s particular history and subjectivity. Since I resonated with their feelings, I also started to consider the unthinkable – does psychoanalysis with its’ body of knowledge have anything to offer the larger society outside the consulting room? I began reading voraciously and found a significant literature on the subject; I was late to the party.

Both Freud and Kohut, viewed social change as relevant for psychoanalytic theory and psychoanalytic leadership. In a special issue of *Psychoanalytic Psychology* (2006, 23;2) on Freud’s Legacy, authors’ Stuart Twemlow and Henri Parens state, “But we, as did Freud himself (Freud, 1933/1964) . . . hold the position that until psychoanalysis is recognized as a body of knowledge that can be applied to understanding and solving pressing community and social problems, rather than hold to its limited application to the treatment of patients with specific psychiatric diseases, or in training those who treat them, it will lose its’ pioneering relevance in the ‘social brain’ initiative in the 21st Century” (p. 431). The authors outline basic principles of clinical psychoanalysis that can easily be applied to what they call community psychoanalysis. Many of these principles have already been used particularly in schools around bullying and prejudice, etc.

Kohut, in a 1980 letter (*Search for the Self – Vol. IV*) described how the group self, deprived of the supports needed for nurturance from its intellectual and political leaders, might respond with serious and long lasting disturbances (chronic narcissistic rage, self-righteousness) and turn to messianic leaders to restore a sense of self-esteem, in the face of fragmentation and depletion. In *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016), Arlie Russell Hochschild seems to confirm Kohut’s description

of the group self. Based on face-to-face interviews with conservative, white working class Americans she concludes they are the ones who feel “left behind”. The American Dream they were promised in the 1950’s seems increasingly out of their reach.

This is a moment in time where what has been “normal” is paused. From my perch here in NY City, it will be quite a while before the pause button is released. I hope we can seize this moment with the spotlight shining on both our inequities and our interdependence to consider what we as a collective of psychoanalysts might contribute to change.

Judith

Re: [psychoanalyzing the apocalypse] “Away from hiding” - Gianni from Rome

Dear all,

I am very sorry that I could not follow this group as much as I would have had. Health problems, as well as the Covid-19 situation here in **Rome, Italy** have made it difficult for me. But I thank you all for letting me be part of it.

I am 76 years old. Last August I had colon surgery. Thus I am in the high risk category, so I literally have been locked in my apartment for almost three months now. I could go on seeing patients and teaching thanks to Skype and Zoom.

The situation here in Italy is eerie and surreal (Rome in silence . . . ! with no traffic . . . !) and the beauty that surrounds us here makes our experience even more surreal. “Surreal” is a word that has a meaning only when compared with what we thought as “real” until mid February; but now it is more and more difficult to believe we will be going back to what - until a few months ago - we called Reality.

One thing that I have learned in this period from my patients, family, friends and colleagues is that the new reality we will all contribute to create, the new co-construction of our new reality, is based on one crucial word, one idea, one feeling: **Care**.

We will have to care more for nature, or “Anima Mundi”, the soul of the World, as I prefer to call it. And we will have to care more for people, all people, whatever price and renounce it may imply.

As Psychoanalysts we will also have to care more for words.

The world **Apocalypse**, among the old Greeks (where it was created) meant to unveil something (from Kalypto = to hide, and apò = away from), away from concealed truths, away from hiding to us and to others things, facts, ideas - that our intuition or knowledge has always been aware of - such as the massive pollution of our earth, the super-massive financial and existential difference among human beings, the discrimination based on any possible - sometimes impossible - difference.

When no future image seems possible let us send our imagery backwards: I am perfectly aware of the devastating effects of some apocalyptic fantasies during this dramatic moment. So let us use our memory to give again the word **Apocalypse** the meaning it once had: **away from hiding**. If we will try hard with our hearts and minds, if we will not be overwhelmed from fear or terror of the unknown, maybe we will co-create a better reality. It is going to be a long and difficult journey, but it is worth trying.

With much love to you all

Gianni

Daniel – Les Lenoff song – May 10

Les Lenoff, one of our audience members, offers the following rendition of “No depression in Heaven,” a Carter family classic from 1936.

Les Lenoff - rhythm guitar and lead vocals
 Janie Barnett - keyboard, guitar, and harmony
 Paul Guzzone - bass, mandolin, and harmony

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1cIMGBkKNEunMsWiggSg3FG6wsEgmD14R>

Daniel – Thoughts – May 10

This Thursday I will try to summarize and bring together in a more thorough way what I see going on in these discussions – and perhaps add some questions that come to my mind. But for now I want first to express my gratitude. Many of you are in vulnerable situations or caring for people who are vulnerable. And I have asked that you reflect on your circumstances in a public forum. That you have done so with so much honesty, wisdom and love is a source of hope in all the many ways we understand that word.

I appreciate the appearance of Gianni and a return to the etymological meaning of “apocalypse” as an unveiling. Your recent posts bring to my mind two divergent questions. First, how can our work with our patients help unveil the current situation? Judith touches upon Kohut’s views on the group self and a tendency for masses of people to latch onto messianic figures when narcissistically wounded. This helps explain some of the more fascistic reactions to Covid-19. Certainly Erich Fromm has a lot to say here as well. Second, in a somewhat opposite vein, how do these times reveal new aspects of our patients’ minds and experiences? What new are we seeing day to day as we talk to our patients through our screens?

Daniel – Posting for Darren Haber – May 11

I have been encouraging members of the audience to send their thoughts back-channel to me (danielgoldin@gmail.com), so I can include them in my summaries and reflections and sometimes verbatim. The following email from audience member Darren Haber seems particularly relevant at this moment in our round-table, so I offer it up:

Darren Haber – thoughts on time

Thank you Daniel for bringing up this phenomenological theme. I have felt the loss of the transition from here to there, from office to home, for example, as have many of my patients. Everything blurs together. I try to find a quiet space to work with patients while my restless, housebound first-grader is having a feisty and loud (and necessary) virtual playdate in the next room. My analytic schedule competes with parenting time, staggered as my wife and I “tag team” supervising and homeschooling our child, all while trying to stay “composed” and professional for our zoom calls. (Me, tired? No, I’m not tired. (Nervous laugh)

The collapse of temporal transitions and boundaries makes it difficult to maintain affective space for patients, many of whom are terrified of their own feelings, which had been stifled in the past. We are pulled back in time without realizing it.

One patient this week said to me that his analysis on some days is strangely “just another Zoom call in my calendar, which is stacked with them.” This has a dulling effect on our proceedings, adding to that “blur”. Like several other patients, he has a wariness of his own strong feelings, organized archaically as threatening to a system in which he was the “little caregiver.” His emotions seem dangerous or impossible to express, given the video conferences he must attend as soon as we are done, again in his home, where everything else is going on.

We discovered how important was the transition time from analysis to his work, a transition now lost, echoing the loss of subjective “space” in his childhood. We have spent much time discussing how even the “peep” of such frustration or grief feels dangerous in a way familiar to him from

childhood, a parental transference to the pandemic itself, whose disruptive influence he cannot note even to himself in order to maintain a calm necessary in his very stressful job. To get through this time, many patients—as well as this former “little therapist” – now accompanying the chaos of the pandemic, have had to ignore these temporal collapses or cover them up in rituals and adjustments. But they became an emotional “poll tax” that adds up over the days and weeks. This too carries archaic resonance, again in my case and with patients, in regard to chaos and accommodation of old; a recurrence of the overburdening Brandchaft speaks of so eloquently.

Hope everyone stays safe!

Darren

Andrew – Politics, economics, America, rectitude, and transference-countertransference – May 10

From Andrew

[I prefer to use the terms, therapy, therapist and client. I think that in the Covid age these terms are the preferred ones. (I don't expect total agreement on this one!)]

I am recalling what Sally Swartz from Cape Town pointed out in the last (and soon to be repeated, and overlapping with this project) IARPP Colloquium on working in the Covid age.

Sally urged that we should not forget those clients who cannot simply do their work on line. They may not even be able to do it on a cell phone, for economic and cultural reasons.

This is the backdrop to my saying that I am sickened by reading some posts that subtly or otherwise announce that the analyst-writer is communicating from somewhere safe, on the coast, upstate, rural, safe. I can't deny such people their reality nor begrudge them their success - but the optics are not good, is all I want to say. (Here, in the UK, the references to one's garden are ubiquitous. I live in the Caledonian Road; not so many private gardens)

Moving on, I have been thinking that surely thoughts of death and thoughts of the future are inextricably linked? That is why I can resonate with those, here and elsewhere, who cannot countenance a future that would be like the past.

But the hard thing to think about is what the politics of a different future would be. We can already see that there will be a concerted attempt to stick to the same old same old. *Cui bono?*, we ask – who benefits? I think answers to this will tend to blend the psychological and the economic.

As Laurie Garrett said in a recent interview with Frank Bruni in *The New York Times*:

“If America enters the next wave of coronavirus infections with the wealthy having gotten somehow wealthier off this pandemic by hedging, by shorting, by doing all the nasty things that they do, and we come out of our rabbit holes and realize, ‘Oh, my God, it's not just that everyone I love is unemployed or underemployed and can't make their maintenance or their mortgage payments or their rent payments, but now all of a sudden those jerks that were flying around in private helicopters are now flying on private personal jets and they own an island that they go to and they don't care whether or not our streets are safe,’ then I think we could have massive political disruption. Just as we come out of our holes and see what 25 percent unemployment looks like, we may also see what collective rage looks like.”

One thing I have been writing about for a long time is the need for a colossal increase in what we in the UK call inheritance tax, sometimes known in the US as the ‘death tax’. This, the pundits say, cannot be raised too high for psychological reasons. Is that so? This, and many other economic assumptions, cry out for therapy's contribution.

Here, I remember Mauricio's first posts about the benevolence of human nature; I don't know if he had in mind Adam Smith's idea in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.

My questions have been: what can ‘therapy thinking’ contribute to an understanding of *the obstacles in the way towards a different kind of future*? And with whom should therapists ally in pursuit of something better?

I am interested, reading some of these posts, including (I am mortified to add) parts of my own, that are full of what my friend the Jungian analyst John Beebe calls ‘the maddening rectitude of the psychoanalyst’. If we stick with being the one who is supposed to know, we may prove that we do know, on a certain level - but we will be of little use.

Hence, I am concerned to read ‘differential diagnoses’ as to whether apocalypse is a defence or not, a fantasy or delusion or not, an internal phenomenon or an external phenomenon. So apocalypticism is something for the others (the patients?) to suffer from, not the professionals. I think Cynthia’s lost coffee mug post shows that this is far from being the case.

Now, onto America: So much of what is being written, again elsewhere as well as here, about Mr Trump tends to overlook that he is, in many respects, just the culmination of the degradation of American politics, specifically of campaign finance. I have been watching videos of Trump supporters and it is really interesting how many of them say they really want ‘a businessman in the White House’.

But maybe enough of the US! Isn’t it important that psychoanalysts affirm that they/we are part of something international, and always have been? So what happens in Brazil, South Africa and the UK might receive as much attention as what is unfolding in the US. The images of the dead in Manaus, the troops on the scene in South Africa, and the shambles in the UK need to be clocked. More than clocked, actually. Maybe a conscious effort to internationalise this more would be a good idea. I acknowledge the quotes from the UN, but I am thinking more about the profession worldwide.

If we broaden psychoanalysis to bring it under the banner of psychotherapy, where it belongs, then we shouldn’t overlook that there is a financial meltdown affecting therapists and counsellors, especially those working outside state or private insurance schemes. I am hearing this all the time, that people’s practices have collapsed.

Turning now to clinical work, for some of us, the idea that political and social issues are fit and even central topics for exploration in therapy is not new. We have been adding ‘the political turn’ to ‘the relational turn’ for half a century. That means that what links therapist and client is not only common humanity, not only conscious-to-unconscious communication – but also immersion in the same social order as our clients. The therapy relationship is always already a political relation.

That is what closes the gap between me and you. Politics. Society. It has always been there, hiding in the open. And, it goes without saying, being in the same society does absolutely not mean experiencing it in the same way as the Other. That is where the mortality rates of people of colour are so vitally important.

On this last point, when working with people who are different from us, we are now beginning to realize that it is the history of our differences with the client that forms a crucial element in the transference-countertransference.

I am glad to see that there are so many quotes from Hamlet, whom I brought in earlier to deepen what drives the fascination of and even the desire for apocalypticism – ‘a consummation devoutly to be wished’.

But I will end with one from Jung in 1946:

“We are living in times of great disruption: political passions are aflame, internal upheavals have brought nations to the brink of chaos. ... The analyst feels the violence even in the quiet of his (sic) consulting room. ... The psychologist (sic) cannot avoid coming to grips with contemporary history... We need not mention his duties as a citizen.” ***

*** Cited in *Analysis and Activism: Social and Political Contributions of Jungian Psychology*. London and New York: Routledge (2016).

Mauricio – Response – May 10

“How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.”

Yes Andrew, I relish that passage from Adam Smith that is the first paragraph at the beginning of his book on the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The same person that believed in the invisible hand of markets and an “enlightened self-interest” would benefit all, had an abiding faith in the benevolent side of human nature.

Mauricio

Joye – response – May 12

I have loved how this conversation has opened: in so many directions with so many diverse minds and styles of thinking. We are philosophers and literary sensibilities, but mostly we meet in our human and therapeutic experiences as we live through this passage of social solitariness, each of us trying to reach out for human touch. I have been interested in whether we will move toward more openness and relatedness as this conversation unfolds.

And so, I’m troubled by the seeming contempt and divisiveness in your last note, Andrew. We don’t know each other although I have been curious about you from your writings. But the way you have dismissed me and those of us, who are momentarily safe in this rickety world, has stopped the conversation. Your positions deserve respect and airing, but so do those of the rest of us. I feel “othered” as though having a garden disqualifies me somehow from some place of moral and political validity and righteousness. I also wonder if you have not “othered” those who do not have a garden; they seem to occupy some shadowland of disadvantage, in which aesthetics and an appreciation of greenery can have no place. It feels hurtful and patronizing, offering thin categories that miss the complex humanity that this conversation reaches toward.

Joye Weisel-Barth

Andrew Samuels – RE: [psychoanalyzing the apocalypse] Response to Joye’s comment on Politics, economics, America, rectitude, and transference-countertransference – May 13**From Andrew**

I am glad you have brought certain differences into the open, Joye. I am not so glad to have offended you.

Surely my post didn’t create the ‘divisiveness’ which, I suggest, was there always already within national societies and, from an international perspective, between them?

In a way, what is wrong with my post is that it is rather conventional, from a political point of view. My ideas are not original, really. Nor, it seems, are they as offensive as you have insisted they are, given the positive tone of e-mails I have received off-list.

In several Western countries, issues such as ‘second homes’ are causing frictions in many rural and more remote areas due to the influx of weekenders on a seemingly permanent basis.

The pattern of infection, hospitalisation, disability resulting from the illness, and death may be mapped in almost every country onto the pre-existing socioeconomic structures of the society.

The ethnic/racial aspect of suffering and death from Covid-19 is right now a matter of intense concern and rage.

Well, I won’t insert a huge series of links here but I suppose many reading us will know what I am talking about. That is where we find ‘othering’.

I have re-read my post and I can’t see how my words lead to this:

I also wonder if you have not “othered” those who do not have a garden; they seem to occupy some shadowland of disadvantage, in which aesthetics and an appreciation of greenery can have no place.

People living in poverty and disadvantage in urban areas may be said to ‘occupy some shadowland’, but I did not assert that they *lack* aesthetics and an appreciation of greenery. Of course they don’t. But isn’t it a question of access to ‘greenery’, of property ownership, of wealth and income – of all the factors that made for our ‘rickety’ pre-virus world?

I think that our (psychoanalytic) approach to the psyche has been changing over the past quarter-century (at least). Feminist approaches led the way. What looks like superficial political discourse is so deep, so inner, so intimate, so capable of irradiating the personal as well as the public domains.

Because of the way this Google Group works, memories of my post may have faded, so I will paste the relevant passages below my signature to further facilitate debate. For the same reason, I have left your message intact at the foot of this e-mail.

Again, thank you for your trenchant frankness. From your writings, I know that we share a concern for ‘the future’ and for ‘prospective thinking’ within clinical work.

Best wishes, Andrew

EXTRACTS:

I am recalling what Sally Swartz from Cape Town pointed out in the last (and soon to be repeated, and overlapping with this project) IARPP Colloquium on working in the Covid age.

Sally urged that we should not forget those clients who cannot simply do their work on line. They may not even be able to do it on a cell phone, for economic and cultural reasons.

This is the backdrop to my saying that I am sickened by reading some posts that subtly or otherwise announce that the analyst-writer is communicating from somewhere safe, on the coast, upstate, rural, safe. I can’t deny such people their reality nor begrudge them their success – but the optics are not good, is all I want to say. (Here, in the UK, the references to one’s garden are ubiquitous. I live in the Caledonian Road; not so many private gardens ...)

That is what closes the gap between me and you. Politics. Society. It has always been there, hiding in the open. And, it goes without saying, being in the same society does absolutely not mean experiencing it in the same way as the Other. That is where the mortality rates of people of colour are so vitally important.

Orange – Response, to Joye – May 13

To Joye,

Though Andrew has already responded and does not need defense from me, I want to say that recognizing our extreme privilege and being haunted by what Judith Butler calls “ungrievable” lives is not contempt. Andrew, like a biblical prophet or Socratic gadfly, can make us uncomfortable, in ways that we need to be. This interruption of our comfortable and consuming lives may be the condition for the possibility of any ethical turn. Such a turn upends the “normal,” and challenges us to respond to the fragile and vulnerable other, even as we feel our own fragility and vulnerability.

Donna O.

Daniel – Champagne Problems: reflecting on the discussion between Andrew, Joye and Donna – May 13

I have had many patients stop themselves mid-conversation to say, “I’m sorry, champagne problems.” I appreciate these pauses as moments of recognition that others have far less and may suffer

more. But the pause often reflects a deeper feeling that “I have no claim to my experiences at all.” I see a patient who suffers from great financial hardship and racism, who often stops talking when an ambulance drives by, realizing to her shame that “what I’m talking about is nothing compared to what that person is going through.” There is no limit to our capacity to feel entitlement, leaving us blind to the suffering of others, but also no limit to our ability to feel shame that our experiences are trivial and that we have no right to them, because the experiences of others are more important.

Moving things back to the subject of the apocalypse and to the original mission of this roundtable: “to look at the experience of an impending, irreversible apocalypse – not as a truth or a call to arms – but as an experience that affects us all in multiple ways.” Gianni speaks of the apocalypse as “an unveiling.” Is this mostly “the frozen moment,” as Burroghs put it in *Naked Lunch* “when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork?” Or are there many unveilings? Can Andrew’s outrage share space with Mel’s “looking at the sky filled with starlight” and marveling at “the gift of human life he has been given as he passes through,” as well as with Joye’s experience of disjunction between her spiffy “refuge” and her dread. I for one am fearful of putting these experiences in competition with one another and creating a hierarchy in the service of social justice.

Joye – Response to Andrew and Donna – May 13

I certainly don’t want this to become a predictable and redundant political argument, especially because, ironically, I’m left-leaning politically and committed to radical social reorganization. I wrote my note to Andrew’s because I was offended by what seemed to me a simplistic equating of comfort with moral ignorance and selfishness. It didn’t feel good when he wrote that those of us living in relative safety made him sick.

Now, I simply mean to state the obvious: poverty and suffering do not confer virtue, although many poor and struggling people are good and decent; and privilege is not an ethical failing, although many privileged people are selfish and grasping. The inverse is also true: there are despicable poor people and kind and giving advantaged ones. The imaginative capacity for empathy and compassion and the moral acts of selflessness and generosity cut across social and economic lines. Gautama Buddha, remember, was born a prince, and I would hate to think that good fortune disqualifies us from being healing voices and agents. I believe our profession is foundationally a place to practice empathy and compassion regardless of our social and economic stations or whether or not we keep personal gardens.

That living and working in dense and cramped environments breeds Covid 19 contamination is information for developing public health strategies. This information also elicits compassion for anyone trapped and without the opportunity to pursue safe quarters. Our obligation is to digest and develop humane responses to this information. It does not follow from any of this that living in secure space is an occasion for castigation and contempt. That is not a satisfactory response to the current Apocalyptic world experience.

Joye

Cynthia – Response to Andrew – May 13

Hi All and in response to Andrew’s 10 May post.

I, too, experience Andrew’s post(s) as dismissive and condescending.

I understand the urgency in the topics we are discussing, from Covid-19, climate change, failure of governments and care of its citizens. And I am spending a fair amount of time re-reading Andrew’s posts to understand the essence and motivations. As I said, there is an urgency to all of this and I have no objections to his passionate activism.

But why, Andrew, are you shouting?

You write:

... This is the backdrop to my saying that I am sickened by reading some posts that subtly or otherwise announce that the analyst-writer is communicating from somewhere safe, on the coast, upstate, rural, safe. I can't deny such people their reality nor begrudge them their success ...

I, too, view this as contempt.

The first lesson in Social Work training is lesson is to start where the person is. I do not know the lives people have led, what circumstances in which they find themselves. The joys, pain, sorrow. What we know or don't about the poverty, wealth, or health of our colleagues and patients.

By vocation, education and lived experience, since I was 17, I have been doing equity and inclusion work in the arts, non-profits, educational institutions, up to, and including my analytic training and now my work as a therapist and an analyst. With that lens, I ask, of whom are you speaking Andrew, when you say "We", "Us," which, by default, is "Them" and "Other"?

That is what closes the gap between me and you. Politics. Society. It has always been there, hiding in the open. And, it goes without saying, being in the same society does absolutely not mean experiencing it in the same way as the Other. That is where the mortality rates of people of color are so vitally important.

On this last point, when working with people who are different from us, we are now beginning to realize that it is the history of our differences with the client that forms a crucial element in the transference-countertransference.

I think your assumptions, the ones you use as the basis of your contempt, perpetuate white supremacy. When you say 'see people who look different than ourselves' – again, how do you know the make up of one's practice? By your calculus, since I am Black, and see Black patients, I need to seek out White patients because they are different from me. Also, when you speak of People of Color in your advocacy, "they", or "we", because I am a Person of Color, are linked to the idea of "less than and in need of your advocacy.

I asked earlier, why are you shouting Andrew? But as I re-read and write, I understand better that your shouting is necessary, justified and well documented. I think what I mean to say is that your analysis of the world and the field of psychoanalysis renders me invisible. There isn't room for complexity or curiosity. Which then feels to me, as if you are lecturing me on activism, social justice, race or the 'other'. It's as if to not take up the issues with your sense of ferocity, again, overlooks the work of those of us who live and work for 'the struggle' in our own ways.

People get to do work in places with internet capabilities, food and the ability to see sunshine as they work. Why should anyone be in a position to justify to you or anyone the way they live? What of those who have written about no longer having the help of a caregiver in taking care of their loved one, which has ramifications for their work and income? What about those living with physical illness that limit their ability to participate in this round table as fully as they would like? I don't know individual circumstances by looking at apartment buildings, homes away from the city or relocating to somewhere more suitable for a family of 5. Neither do you."

Daniel and Joye have added to this conversation which I really appreciate and speak to these issues more eloquently in the time it's taken me to write this post.

Gianni wrote this in his post which is the bases of my advocacy:

*One thing that I have learned in this period from my patients, family, friends and colleagues is that the new reality we will all contribute to create, the new co-construction of our new reality, is based on one crucial word, one idea, one feeling: **Care.***

Cynthia

Apocalypse: Week 4

Daniel – Week 4 – Summary – May 15

“Apocalypse” – the word

George sees our obsession with apocalypse in pop narratives as representing “a profound preoccupation with fears of massive loss of selfobject ties and relational connections,” rather than with real world-ending events. Donna wonders too if people may not be taking refuge in the concept of apocalypse as a “defense against overwhelming fragmentation anxiety.”

Cynthia describes contemplating the difficulty of staying within this metaphor as she simultaneously tries to remember where she put her coffee. “By day’s end, the answer to the query comes to me. It’s hard to hold onto to the metaphor because we are *living* the metaphor. We are being whipped up in the winds and storms of this apocalypse.”

Is the apocalypse a disorganizing event or an organizing defense? Perhaps the answer lies in whether we take a secular or a religious view of the matter.

Joye takes a middle view. “If this is apocalyptic,” she writes, “for me it’s mostly psychological and looming. The apocalypse hasn’t quite happened yet, except in my grief for shattered illusions. It’s like being on a streamlined train that’s heading in slow motion toward a horrible train wreck. Out the window there are scenes of social disorder, disease, dissolution and death, but inside things are pretty spiffy and pleasant—if it weren’t for anxious intimations of disaster ahead.”

Mel considers the word in two ways, as a political concept having to do with where the world may or may not be headed, and as a clinical concept, a process by which a person’s archaic ideas disintegrate to bring in something new. In both cases, he sees the apocalyptic idea as being about hope.

Gianni apologizes for his late appearance in this discussion, as he has not been well. He proposes that we forgo the religious meanings of the word, which tends to foster cozy fantasies, and return to the Greek etymology of the word. “The world **Apocalypse**, among the old Greeks (where it was created) meant to unveil something (from Kalypto = to hide, and apò = away from), away from concealed truths, away from hiding to us and to others things, facts, ideas - that our intuition or knowledge has always been aware of - such as the massive pollution of our earth, the super-massive financial and existential difference among human beings, the discrimination based on any possible - sometimes impossible - difference.”

Finally, audience member Anthony Wilson has alerted me to an interesting critique of the concept of apocalypse from a Diné Perspective, which understands the Western view as locked in a linear view of time. <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-other-house/>.

Our common (or not so common) humanity

We wondered in light of our world-altering pandemic if there might be new meaning in Sullivan’s famous maxim: “We are all more simply human than otherwise.” George wonders what Sullivan meant by “otherwise,” and whether “the selfobject milieu of our culture, economies, our relationships, etc. will survive or will be irrevocably altered, casting us into a world where an as yet unknown but fearful “otherwise” predominates.”

Cynthia considers the unequal plight of black and brown people during the pandemic and the murder of Ahmaud Arbery for the crime of jogging while black. Donna notes that we already have trouble noticing what “Judith Butler describes as people living ‘ungrievable lives.’” She further muses that “otherwise” might hint at the subhuman, disposable lives menaced by jogging while Black. That is one kind of otherwise. Or it may mean that refusal of vulnerability (we are not gods) creates a world of others who threaten our superiority.”

Time in the shadow of apocalypse

Cynthia's lost cup of coffee while she contemplates the relevance of the idea of apocalypse dramatizes a particular kind of temporal disruption, the pockets of forgetfulness that appear in the midst of intense stress, only noticeable when we find that cold coffee mug in the microwave without having put it there.

Mel cites "Carlo Rovelli, a theoretical physicist who recently wrote a book on time in which he describes from a perspective of thermomechanics that time does not exist. What could you do with time when calling from one galaxy to another?" He finds hope and solace in focusing intensely on relating with his patient in the here and now,

One of our audience members Darren Haber notices how the destruction of transitions – from home to office, for example – creates for himself and some of his patients a blurring of time and place, in which a session becomes "just another zoom call on a patient's calendar."

Unveiling of patients' worlds

I appreciate Mauricio's glance at new revelations in the lives of his patients. One man is strangely relieved to find that the world shares his anxiety. He is no longer alone in his fear. Covid-19 helped reveal the rationale behind another man's intense focus on his own inevitable death. He traces his obsession with death to a model scene (Lichtenberg) in childhood, when he discovered that a computer program had to have an end-date to work. "In a situation that reminds me of Freud's description of the uncanny," Mauricio explains, "we discovered that his father had a very similar terror of death. We speculated that his father could not comfort him—nor could his mother, who was a caring but very intellectual woman. Both parents are alive and they remembered the incident well. Their son was indeed inconsolable and they confirmed most of our hypothesis. Understanding this "model scene" and all its implications for his life has allowed us to put many symptoms and issues together for the first time. All this started by my being curious about how he was strangely unafraid of the pandemic. The threat of being infected was outside, he told me. He could cope with that. But the internal terror was something else."

Does psychoanalysis have anything to offer society?

Judith's post stands alone in posing this most difficult of questions. She notes Stuart Twemlow and Henri Parens work in extending Freud's insights towards "solving pressing community and social problems." She also considers Kohut's theory of how the group self, in the face of intense fragmentation and depletion, tends to turn to messianic leaders for restoration. She hopes that in this desperate moment we consider "how as a collective of psychoanalysts we might contribute to change."

A rift in our group

Andrew writes, "I am sickened by reading some posts that subtly or otherwise announce that the analyst-writer is communicating from somewhere safe, on the coast, upstate, rural, safe. I can't deny such people their reality nor begrudge them their success – but the optics are not good, is all I want to say. (Here, in the UK, the references to one's garden are ubiquitous. I live in the Caledonian Road; not so many private gardens . . .)

On reading this, my mind wandered to the various posts and immediately thought of Joye's post, which describes a simultaneous sense of refuge and being under siege. Joye responds that she is "troubled by the seeming contempt and divisiveness in your last note, Andrew." She goes on to say that she feels "othered," as though having a garden disqualifies me somehow from some place of moral and political validity and righteousness. I also wonder if you have not "othered" those who do not have a garden; they seem to occupy some shadowland of disadvantage, in which aesthetics and

an appreciation of greenery can have no place. It feels hurtful and patronizing, offering thin categories that miss the complex humanity that this conversation reaches toward.”

Andrew expresses some regret for offending Joye but insists that he is only reiterating divisions that already exist. He writes, “The pattern of infection, hospitalisation, disability resulting from the illness, and death may be mapped in almost every country onto the pre-existing socioeconomic structures of the society.”

Donna speaks directly to Joye. She detects no contempt in Andrew’s post, understanding his words simply as recognition of “our extreme privilege.” She writes that “Andrew, like a biblical prophet or Socratic gadfly, can make us uncomfortable, in ways that we need to be.”

Cynthia understands Andrew’s passionate activism but asks “why, Andrew, are you shouting?” She adds, “The first lesson in Social Work training is to start where the person is. I do not know the lives people have led, what circumstances in which they find themselves. The joys, pain, sorrow. What we know or don’t about the poverty, wealth, or health of our colleagues and patients.” Cynthia detects a latent racism in Andrew’s posts. She writes, “By your calculus, since I am Black, and see Black patients, I need to seek out White patients because they are different from me. Also, when you speak of People of Color in your advocacy, “they”, or “we”, because I am a Person of Color, are linked to the idea of “less than and in need of your advocacy . . . ”

And on this uncomfortable note, our discussion hangs.

Daniel – First rumination/question – the personal and the political – May 15

The phrase “the personal is political” has been a mantra of the feminist movement (and other left-wing movements) since the 60s. The idea has infiltrated psychoanalysis, which has struggled to reconcile a call to political activism with values of empathy and “negative capability” and meeting the patient where they are. I am hoping we can come to terms with Andrew’s words of “being sickened by reading some posts that subtly or otherwise announce that the analyst-writer is communicating from somewhere safe, on the coast, upstate, rural, safe.” After Joye expresses her hurt at being targeted, Andrew states his regret for her pain but insists that his words were merely pointing out pre-existing structural divisions in society. He adds, “what looks like superficial political discourse is so deep, so inner, so intimate, so capable of irradiating the personal as well as the public domains.” Is Andrew a “Socratic gadfly” or “biblical prophet” as Donna suggests, creating discomfort to bring home a political point? Or can we understand this exchange as an unfortunate blurring of the political and the personal, in which a particular person, with all her unknown nuances and circumstances, draws ire as an exemplar of a system that needs to be torn down? Is this what Joye means by “thin categories?” Is this what Cynthia means when she says, “I don’t know individual circumstances by looking at an apartment building or homes away from the city?” Is there any middle ground here or room for repair? And what does this rift say, if anything, about the linking of the political with the personal and the fate of the “political turn” in psychoanalysis?

I hope we can get beyond this.

Daniel – Second rumination/question: unveiling in the room(s) – May 15

I mentioned in an earlier post how much I appreciate the appearance of Gianni and a return to the etymological meaning of “apocalypse” as an unveiling. I am curious about a particular kind of unveiling. How do these times reveal new aspects of our patients’ minds and experiences? What new are we seeing day to day as we talk to our patients through our screens?

Daniel Goldin – Third rumination/question: Can we look at “the political” through a psychoanalytic lens? – May 15

This is a repeat of an earlier post in a place where it might get more attention. Judith wonders from her perch in a devastated New York City how our theories and our work with our patients might help unveil our frightening political situation? Judith touches upon Kohut’s views on the group self and a tendency for masses of people to latch onto messianic figures when narcissistically wounded and shorn of self-esteem. This helps explain some of the more fascistic reactions to Covid-19. My question is this: Can we analyze society through a lens used to know a particular person?

Andrew Samuels – Brief e-mail to Joye from Andrew – May 15

Dear Joye,

I am glad you have brought politics (back) into it, especially of the left-leaning kind.

The Covid crisis has become an economic crisis. I read today of 36,000,000 Americans unemployed and predictions of a second Great Depression.

In ‘that’ post, I focused on developing psychoanalytic explorations of economic assumptions because I think it is a contribution our profession can make to the struggle for a refusal of ‘business as usual’.

In Britain, whistle-blowers have leaked a range of policy documents on the topic of future taxation scenarios emanating from Her Majesty’s Treasury. The one that explored raising taxes and, centrally, raising Death Taxes (Inheritance Tax) has not been at all welcomed by the Conservative party, business, industry, and the right-wing press.

Those famous 1992 Clinton campaigners were right. But maybe we can say ‘It’s the economy, psyche!’

Best wishes,

Andrew

Andrew Samuels – Brief e-mail to Cynthia from Andrew – May 15

Dear Cynthia,

I take responsibility for the impression I have left you with; including that I perpetuate white supremacy and impose my advocacy upon others, thereby inferiorising them. And that I rendered you invisible.

I appreciated your passage on your own history and experience. This is not the time for me to do the same. I have angered you, rather than the other way around, and that is where it is.

In a reflective spirit, and with not a little self-mockery, I do feel like adding that it is a new experience for me to be the one accused of these things. I am more used to being the one who dishes it out, as an officially ‘woke’ person. ‘The biter gets bit’, as the traditional English adage has it.

Maybe we can meet again some time (it would be the second time, I think) and go over all of this in person.

Best wishes, Andrew

Mauricio – Response to third rumination/question: Can we analyze the political through a psychoanalytic lens – May 16

I would like to respond to the question of what psychoanalysis can contribute to society.

Judith wonders from her perch in a devastated New York City how our theories and our work with our patients might help unveil our frightening political situation. Judith touches upon Kohut's views on the group self and a tendency for masses of people to latch onto messianic figures when narcissistically wounded and shorn of self-esteem. This helps explain some of the more fascist reactions to Covid-19. My question is this: Can we analyze society through a lens used to know a particular person?

My answer. Not through the lens of a particular person, but by understanding how society influences the way a particular person sees and reacts to society. When these societal influences are broadly shared they become ideologies that can have positive or negative effects. I will start by quoting Marx:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already from the past. The effects of all these dead generations and their traditions, weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living”

One of the ways psychoanalysis can contribute to bettering society is by deconstructing and unmasking ideologies that have convinced us that self-interest is what drives market economies and that human nature is at bottom aggressive and power hungry. These ideologies have dominated economic thinking and the social sciences.

In psychoanalysis we have had to overcome Freud's pessimistic view of humans driven by aggressive and by ego instincts that are self-serving. We have to make these unconscious beliefs and ideologies fully conscious so we can examine their pernicious effects in order to create more compassionate and hopeful approaches to understanding individuals and societies.

Beginning with Bowlby and Ainsworth we have been able to develop a more hopeful view of the human condition. But Bowlby and Ainsworth were just the beginning of a radical change of paradigm—I would include Kohut in this list but his impact was more on clinical practice. By providing empirical support for how responsive care effects development, attachment theory has had a much larger social impact. There is now a very large interdisciplinary literature that goes beyond Bowlby, Ainsworth and Kohut showing that young children have strong prosocial and normative capacities that help them adapt to the cultures they grew up in. This view is not naïve. It recognizes our enormous potential as a species for good and evil. But it sees these capacities for good and evil as the result of environmental, cultural and historical conditions that we humans create, mostly unconsciously, acting on ideologies that support social and economic conditions, and help maintain privileged elites in power.

As I noted, this new view is not naïve. Following Fromm, I will call this new view a “radical humanism”. It recognizes our enormous potential as a species for good and evil. But it sees our capacities for good and evil as the result of environmental, cultural, socioeconomic and historical conditions. Anatomy is not destiny and genes are not computer programs that determine who we will be. Development integrates biology, culture, economic conditions that have powerful effects on parental caring responses. Development determines who we become by integrating in each person biology, culture, history and parental responses.

In a related issue I would also like to call attention to an article that appeared in the Washington Post noting that countries led by women leaders are doing very well in South Korea, New Zealand, Finland and Germany. This has to be more than a coincidence. Good women leaders (there are bad ones too) are more likely to build on cooperation and empathy to bring communities together, and are more likely to be responsive to others. As mothers, they are socialized to develop cooperative and empathic characteristics that are essential to developing secure attachments with their children. Therefore, they are more likely to listen to others and take science seriously. We need leaders like these women to combat apocalyptic thinking and create real conditions for change and hope.

Three cheers for these women leaders!

Mauricio Cortina

Mel – response – May 16

This is a response to Judith's question and Mauricio's cogent description of the components of the lenses that are available. My response is based upon a lens of the clinical analytic relationship where one human being communicates an ever changing panoply of experiences while working at bringing coherence to this confusion by separating past from present, fantasy from actuality, to achieve more coherence, communicable in the reality of the here and now to the other human being in the room, the analyst. The powerful desire toward greater coherence is a desire to live, love life and communicate, which enhances one's narrative and identity. Freud describes it as the life instinct. In all of this there is plenty of anger, hurt and frustration because of the nature of life and reality. The analyst responds and demonstrates that the patient can bring coherence and communicate their experience with pleasure, intimacy and hope.

Analysis shows us that this is what living is about. The task of sharing and loving is what living is all about.

Now what does one do with poverty, Covid 19 and the Holocaust and other overwhelming parts of living. What does one do with massive hurt and injury caused by loved ones?

We share and communicate them after the enormous work of putting them into our narratives. We join panels. We go out there and use our love and courage to improve the world that we live in. This is what clinical analysis can offer.

Mauricio – Correction – May 16

Correction. The article I cited about women doing better in the countries they lead was published in the New York Times May 15 not the Washington Post.

A comment on Mel's post. Unconscious processes in individuals are not just the product of parental and family environments. They are also based on shared norms and ideologies, what Lynn Layton has called the normative unconscious and Fromm called the social unconscious. This is one way we can put the individual back into a societal context.

Mel – Response to Mauricio last comment to Mel – May 17

If you agree to include shared norms and ideology in the repeated past and the present moment that are included in the patient's and analysts' narratives which are worked on together in the intimacy of the moment, we agree completely!!!

Mauricio – Response – May 17

Yes we do agree completely

Mauricio

George – leadership – May 19

In an earlier post, Judith reflected on one of Kohut's early papers on leadership. I agree that Kohut has many useful things to say about what he called the Grandiose Leader and his or her relationship to followers. Recently Henry Paul and I extended Kohut's ideas to the current leadership crisis in the U.S. In particular, we focused on Donald Trump's relationship to his "base" and how his lack of broad leadership skills and intentions has led us to the current crisis we are in. Here is a quote:

The Grandiose leader is viewed as powerful, perhaps also aggressive. Rather than simply admiring the grandiose leader the voter wants to become like him or her. In other words, he or she identifies with him or her and in this way shares in the power and grandeur. This type of leader attracts those voters

who feel disenfranchised, disrespected and unsuccessful. The shame and humiliation of their disaffection and sense of being forgotten propel the grandiose leader's followers. They seek to cure their shame and humiliation by melding into the omnipotence and grandiosity of the leader. He or she offers them a fantasy of success and even revenge for grievances. In his or her presence, especially when in the midst of an emotionally charged rally, the voter feels at one with both the leader and the group. Together they feel powerful, justified and restored by dreams of restitution. The unity of the "movement" is part of its appeal; foreignness and difference are hated and repudiated.

Harry and I extended this idea of a "grandiose bond" to the chaos in leadership regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. The link to the article is: <https://iapsp.org/our-leadership-crisis-and-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

On the other hand, regarding the hopeful view that psychoanalysis may contribute something of significance to society, I am skeptical that we can have much of an impact if we do not change our attitudes and policies as a profession and as individual practitioners. Over the past few decades we have become more insular and peripheral to the broad cultural discussion in our societies. We talk to ourselves, We publish articles only in our journals, and we define our professional identities by our private practices (I know that there are some exceptions to this, but not enough). We have allowed other disciplines and methodology to assume ascendancy in cultural and professional domains. So we are not in the position to have much influence.

If we want to have an impact we have to get involved. We need to step away from our private practices, and the insularity of our professional organizations, and assume positions of leadership in the public mental health and political world. We need to pressure our professional organizations to advocate for new policies and laws which reflect our values and address our professional concerns. We need to advocate for our patients' interests. We need to join political parties which reflect our perspectives and get engage in developing those parties in which we need to be vocal as members. Finally we must do what we can to insure that the Democratic party wins in November.

I also think that some of us need to hold political office. Many professional groups do, and you can see the impact that this type of engagement has had on policy.

The bottom line is that we are not going to have much impact on society simply because we are great analysts and we publish innovative professional papers in our journals. We can have an impact if we take steps to use the authority we have more assertively, be politically active, and acquire and use real political and economic power.

For a variety of reasons most psychoanalysts have been reluctant to be politically involved and to seek power. But if we truly want to matter and have an impact, that's the way to go.

Best to all, George Hagman

Judith – Response – May 19

Thank you for this passionate posting, George. I share your belief that we as individual psychoanalysts who make up a collective, need to move our knowledge and concepts out of our individual offices into the community and into the larger political arena. I'm in the process of preparing a posting that addresses this from a different angle.

Judith Re: [psychoanalyzing the apocalypse] Interdependence and radical change – May 20

In response to Daniel's question – can we analyze society through the same lens we use to know a particular person? I answer, NO. When I wondered "can (we) seize this moment with the spotlight shining on both our inequities and our interdependence to consider what we as a collective of psychoanalysts might contribute to change?" I didn't mean to change society. I meant, can we bring our knowledge and skills to those who don't enter our consulting rooms? And/or might we use our formidable knowledge and skills and psychoanalytic concepts, such as resistance to change, fear

of “the other”, why we need to “other”, power as a defense against self doubt, etc., to raise awareness in the larger community and more particularly with those who make policy that we are indeed an interdependent system; by embracing our interconnection we may all be better off – i.e., the power and satisfaction that flows from attachment.

This past Sunday (5/17/20) the entire Sunday Review of the New York Times was dedicated to precisely this issue, entitled, *The Cities We Need*. Each Op-Ed addressed a particular component of how our interdependency goes unrecognized, is denied, ignored, etc. This results in two separate cities within the one. The opening piece, written by the editorial board to introduce the theme quotes the economist Joseph Stiglitz: “The affluent . . . have the best houses, the best educations, the best doctors, and the best lifestyles. But there is one thing that money doesn’t seem to have bought: An understanding that their fate is bound up with how the other 99 percent live.” The editors conclude: “But, the crisis is a reminder that segregation is an illusion. The halves depend upon one another. The rich need labor; the poor need capital. And the city needs both.” Throughout the op eds two themes emerge – the need for affordable housing salted throughout the city rather than limited to a few areas and the foundational importance of public education; the latter is tied to housing; zip codes determine access to the local public school.

Although, the societal changes implied in these analyses and assessments belong to the politicians, not to us, I believe we can bring our skills to the parts of the cities that house the poor and working classes. For the most part, this group, often people of color, do not end up in our offices for treatment. Yet, they can benefit from what we have to offer. Can we bring our knowledge to them about development, healthy relationships, communication, etc. into the venues they inhabit in their daily lives (schools, places of worship, etc.)? Is there a way to keep the awareness of our interdependence in the minds and souls of the larger community and bring it to the attention of politicians who are capable of making some of these changes?

These are the things I had in mind when I wondered whether psychoanalysts have anything to contribute to this moment. George argues passionately for our profession to move out of the insularity of our consulting rooms, institutes and professional organizations into public policy and even political office. This pandemic, as devastating as it is, is also a moment of opportunity for change. Other industries and institutions, for example, the banking industry, the public transportation system in NY City are considering radical changes going forward. Can we? Do we want to? And if so, how?

Judith Rustin

Andrew – Good-enough leadership - thoughts stimulated by George Hagman’s post – May 20

From Andrew Samuels

I agree unreservedly with George Hagman that many more therapists need to join in the drive to get out of the consulting room, reform the organisational structures of our profession, challenge received clinical and theoretical wisdoms, forge respectful alliances across the political spectrum, and think about how to make therapy accessible to more people.

I like to call these ongoing phenomena “the political turn” in the therapies, aping “the relational turn”

I also agree with George’s focus on leadership, which is what I want to write about from a perspective of therapy thinking.

Political theory and practice have assumed there are two main approaches to leadership. There is hierarchical and heroic leadership usually based on male authority and on a masculinist approach to knowledge that assumes there is one objectively true social story.

In this model, there are “good” leaders and there are “bad” leaders, and we all have our lists of them. Weber had this kind of leader in mind when he referred in 1924 to the “charismatic leader”. This kind of leader is, as we see from George’s post, often seen these days as a problem. But is not a new problem. Nor an American problem.

The second approach to leadership is much more collaborative, involving a kind of metaphorical “sibling” model of leadership. In Western countries, this was inspired by feminist thought, and also the experience gained in relation to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

But although appealing and sometimes usable, sibling leadership can feel too demanding on citizens to be in operation all the time. People duck dive for cover; they do not necessarily mean to become bystanders; but they do not see any other way to manage the burden of being collaborative, sibling leaders.

So there is heroic leadership and there is sibling leadership. For many years, in consultancy work in the political arena, I have been advocating for a third kind of leader – the good-enough leader. It is an idea taken from therapy thinking about the family. Donald Winnicott said that parents and babies have to find a middle way between the baby’s idealization and denigration of the parent. There is a natural tendency of a baby to idealize their parent but when things go in a less than perfect way (as they surely will), it flips over into denigration. Then the baby accepts that the parent cannot be more than good-enough.

I think this process can fit political leadership. An initial idealization, then a failure to deliver things perfectly, then denigration. The media depends on it. Because this is how we in the West respond to leaders, first by passively following the idealized leader then seeking out their feet of clay. What can we do about the pattern?

I think we could try to change how we position “success” and “failure”. I know the word “failure” hurts people’s feelings because it is so in-your-face. Failure means falling short, being imperfect, fallible, only passable, fucking up - an all too human a lack of potency. Yet maybe what we need nowadays are “can’t do” politicians, impotent politicians - they are that, anyway, are they not?, as the Covid crisis shows us.

Maybe being only “in control” is not always valuable. Winnicott wrote that “the parent fails the baby but in the baby’s own way”. I would add that failure by a leader paves the way for greater contributions and more autonomy on the part of citizens. The leader fails the citizens but in the citizens’ own way.

Bob Dylan nibbled away at the success-failure binary when he sang “There’s no success like failure and failure’s no success at all”.

When Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, was asked by a journalist in 1963 what had brought him down, he replied “Events, dear boy, events”.

Rumi wrote in his poem “Desire and the importance of failing” that “failure is the key to the kingdom”.

T. S. Eliot wrote that “every attempt is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure”

Good-enoughness always involves failure. The key thing is how to manage failure, even to speak of the art of failure. People often quote Samuel Beckett that we have to “fail better”. Disappointment is difficult, for sure, but it, too, has to be managed.

So the good-enough leader can accept the likelihood of failure, in a post-heroic take on leadership. But, for the citizen(s) there can be a head-heart problem here, and it is a dire cultural complex.

In their heads, people often know that the old-style leaders (Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, Johnson) are dangerous. They might agree with Brecht’s Galileo: “Unhappy is the land that has need of heroes”.

But in their hearts and guts many people *feel they need the “fatherly” protection seemingly on offer*. As election results can demonstrate, many are in love with the heroic leader whose Fuhrer-eroticism apparently turns them on.

This viral tipping point in political matters is the opportune time to try to understand more deeply what happens in the abusive love affair with heroic leaders.

Mauricio – remembering our forefathers of the political turn – May 20

Remembering the forefathers of the “political turn” in psychoanalysis. Andrew, Judith, George and I are all in agreement that for psychoanalysis to remain relevant it has to move beyond the confines

of the consulting room and expand the relational turn to include what Andrew calls the “political turn”. Similar calls for action have been made by others, such as Lynne Layton in her excellent recently published book, *Toward a Social Psychoanalysis*.

But let’s not forget two important pioneers in this effort. Harry Stack Sullivan collaborated very closely with very prominent social scientists of his time, such as the political scientist Harold Laswell and the cultural anthropologists Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, and Erich Fromm. Fromm was one of the most prominent members of the Frankfurt School in Germany that had as a mission to create a critical psychoanalysis of society in the 1930s. Fromm developed the most sophisticated and empirically grounded effort to integrate Freud with Marx. Fromm advocated for a democratic form of socialism with policies not unlike those proposed 50 years later by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. What once seemed radical is now becoming a necessity.

Ilene Philipson (2017) has written a splendid article on Fromm entitled: *The Last Public Psychoanalyst? Why Fromm Matters in the 21st Century*. In the article Ilene not only restores Fromm as one of the leading forefathers of relational psychoanalysis, but examines his passionate and courageous effort to speak against the dangers of alienation created by consumerism and materialism in advanced industrial societies and the dangers of nuclear war. Ilene concludes her article by saying “it is for his enduring hopefulness, the tireless work for social change, his refusal to be cowed by his critics and remarkable success at speaking to the public as fellow subjects that I embrace Fromm as a model for us in the 21st century”

This brings me to the article that George wrote with Paul on leadership based on Kohut’s work *“the Grandiose leader is viewed as powerful, perhaps also aggressive. Rather than simply admiring the grandiose leader the voter wants to become like him or her. In other words, he or she identifies with him or her and in this way shares in the power and grandeur. This type of leader attracts those voters who feel disenfranchised, disrespected and unsuccessful. The shame and humiliation of their disaffection and sense of being forgotten propel the grandiose leader’s followers. They seek to cure their shame and humiliation by melding into the omnipotence and grandiosity of the leader. He or she offers them a fantasy of success and even revenge for grievances. In his or her presence, especially when in the midst of an emotionally charged rally, the voter feels at one with both the leader and the group. Together they feel powerful, justified and restored by dreams of restitution. The unity of the “movement” is part of its appeal; foreignness and difference are hated and repudiated.”*

Compare George and Paul’s analysis with what Fromm wrote in 1941 in *Escape From Freedom* in relation to the reaction of a majority of German people to their defeat after WWI, the punishing conditions imposed by the Versailles treaty following the war, and the major economic crisis of the late 1920s. Fromm shows how their intense humiliation created a fertile ground for the German people to fall under the spell of Hitler’s authoritarianism and grandiosity:

“The annihilation of the individual self and the unbearable feeling of powerlessness is one side of the masochistic submission (here Fromm is referring to submission to authoritarian leaders). The other side is an attempt to be part of a bigger and more powerful whole outside of oneself . . . by becoming part of the power which is felt unshakably strong, eternal and glamorous, one participates in its strength and glory.”

Mauricio Cortina

Daniel – announcement – May 22

I will be putting out a summary later today or early tomorrow (that’s Pacific Standard Time in the US) and perhaps adding some thoughts and questions. I don’t want to divert the conversation from its current course, so if you have more to say, please go on, even if the discussion forks.

Apocalypse: Week 5

Daniel – Week 5, summary – May 23

The rift in our group

Mostly we seem to have moved on – although the conflict doesn't feel completely settled to me. I wonder if my hope “that we get beyond this” foreclosed necessary further conversation. I hope not.

Andrew takes responsibility for having offended Cynthia with his impression that “I impose my advocacy upon others, thereby inferiorising them.” He adds the wish that someday he and Cynthia could “go over all of this in person.” Audience member Teresa Rose also believes “in person likely would have yielded a different discussion or way to repair.”

But a central question emerges from this conversation. Is there a trace of colonial condescension in the idea of white, relatively affluent clinicians *seeking* to work with the poor and particularly with “people of color” (who are not necessarily poor)?

Some twists and turns around the question: “Can we analyze the political through a psychoanalytic lens?”

The conversation seems to have moved in three directions in considering the “political turn” in psychoanalysis. Our discussants have alternately addressed 1) how psychoanalytic theory might inform our understanding of the current political situation, 2) how psychoanalysts can help create social change, and 3) how political ideologies take unconscious shape in the individual mind. Let's start with number 3.

Unconscious ideology

Mauricio begins by quoting Marx, “Men make their own history . . . but under circumstances existing already from the past.” In a later post, Mauricio refers to “what Lynn Layton calls the ‘normative unconscious’ and Fromm calls the ‘social unconscious.’” I am reminded also of what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls, with a less negative connotation, “the social imaginary.” All of these terms refer to the ways collective practices get compacted into ideologies that shape how individuals experience the world. Mauricio notes how Freud's pessimistic view of “humans as aggressive and driven by ego instincts” dovetails with a capitalist ideology that valorizes competition and greed. He argues passionately that we counter these inherited ideas – as we encounter them within ourselves and within our patients – with more optimistic principles drawn from attachment theory (as well as from self psychology) that reveal humans as fundamentally cooperative and tending toward warm connection with one another.

Mel argues that analyst and patient inevitably strive for connection, coherence and love. The relationship is a powerful counterforce to destructive schemas drawn from the patient's past and from the culture.

Considering politics through a psychoanalytic lens

George applies Kohut's ideas about the grandiose leader directly to our current political situation in America. He writes with Harry Paul about a “grandiose bond” between the disenfranchised and Trump, who presents himself as an all-powerful embodiment of collective anger. “In his or her presence, especially when in the midst of an emotionally charged rally, the voter feels at one with both the leader and the group. . . The unity of the “movement” is part of its appeal; foreignness and difference are hated and repudiated.”

Mauricio points us to a New York Times article that argues that we look to female leaders in this time of crisis, who might “build on cooperation and empathy to bring communities together, and are more likely to be more responsive to others.”

Andrew considers several modes of leadership: Weber's “heroic leader” (not unlike Kohut's grandiose leader), a collaborative model of “sibling leadership,” and what he refers to, after

Winnicott, as “the good enough leader,” who accepts failure as inevitable, reverses course as necessary, and moves on, in much the same spirit as a good-enough mother with her baby.

Mauricio reminds us of the philosophic and psychoanalytic forefathers who spawned many of the ideas about the grandiose leader others have put forth in Kohut’s name. Andrew had already mentioned Weber. Mauricio reminds us of the work of Harold Laswell and the cultural anthropologists Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, and especially of the interpersonal psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. He quotes from Erich Fromm’s masterpiece *Escape from Freedom*, written during the heat of World War 2. “The annihilation of the individual self and the unbearable feeling of powerlessness is one side of the masochistic submission (here Fromm is referring to submission to authoritarian leaders). The other side is an attempt to be part of a bigger and more powerful whole outside of oneself by becoming part of the power which is felt unshakably, strong, eternal and glamorous, one participates in its strength and glory.”

How can psychoanalysts help create change?

Mel offers these simple words on how we might affect change in the world: “We share and communicate . . . we join panels. We go out there and use our love and courage to improve the world that we live in. This is what clinical analysis can offer.” George takes a more radical stance, proposing that “We need to step away from our private practices, and the insularity of our professional organizations, and assume positions of leadership in the public mental health and political world.” Judith notes the interdependence of each strata of society on the other and urges that we “bring our skills to the parts of the cities that house the poor and working classes.” She wonders, “can we bring our knowledge to them about development, healthy relationships, communication, etc. into the venues they inhabit in their daily lives (schools, places of worship, etc.)?”

Colonialism and the anthropocene

I want to thank audience member Anthony Wilson for alerting me to an interesting article by culture scholar Heather Davis and social anthropologist Zoe Todd (see attached file). These two authors identify the anthropocene (the widely accepted idea that we have entered a geologic era defined by human domination of the environment and climate) with colonization and argue for including indigenous knowledges into the discussion. They write:

Anthropocene is not a new event, but is rather the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have been at work for the last five hundred years. Further, the Anthropocene continues a logic of the universal which is structured to sever the relations between mind, body, and land. In dating the Anthropocene from the time of colonialization, the historical and ideological links between the events would become obvious, providing a basis for the possibility of decolonization within this framework.

If we consider the anthropocene less as an inevitable stage of the world and more as the product of an ideology that views the earth, and the people who dwell in it, as an object to be colonized and exploited, then it is not hard to see how the apocalypse storyline might emerge as a needed myth. After all, the world we colonize is also our dwelling place and part of our being. We are just stupidly devouring ourselves unless we imagine a future after this devouring, an unveiling of our own hubris to be followed by a millennium of peace.

Daniel – First rumination/question: cultural schemas – May 23

Several of the discussants have touched upon the ways cultural ideas constrain the individual mind outside of consciousness. It would be interesting to see how this phenomenon shows itself in a particular case. I am also curious whether we can apply this notion to our theme. Do these quasi-apocalyptic times bring out these usually invisible schemas in any way?

Daniel – Second rumination/question: leadership – May 23

We have talked about the ways people fall under the sway of a grandiose leader. The beam of our attention has mostly fallen on the “followers” of such a leader. But what about the leader himself? Many have speculated here in the U.S. about Trump’s psychopathology, but I have read little about the psychological dangers inherent in assuming the role of leader.

Mauricio – On what’s happening with the group – May 23

Thanks Daniel

That was a very good summary of the discussions.

I only wish that among ourselves there was more of an effort to recognize and respond to each other – regardless of whether we agree or disagree with each other.

Online posts can be frustrating and remind me of young children engaged in parallel play. To a point this lack of interaction is inevitable because we cannot see each other. This puts serious limitations on natural responses of sympathy, let alone empathy. The written word can be powerful but clumsy in comparison.

We are all feeling at times overwhelmed and stretched - at least I am. But as a small group let’s try to do a better job, and not leave it up to Daniel to help us engage in a more interactive dialogue.

Mauricio

Mel – Response to question about leadership – May 23

For the last two weeks I have been thinking of Dan’s, Cynthia’s, George’s, Mauricio’s and Joye’s responses about what we are doing as analysts and where to find hope in all our troubles. To each, time is an enigma. Dan conveyed my thoughts into poetry. “Now we are after because now we are not what we once were.” He cites Hoerl and McCormack who suggest that the child’s discovery of a sense of time happens in three parts. The child discovers that an event can cause another event to happen, and this is the important part, that a third later event, perhaps one of his own making, can change and even obliterate the nature of the past happening. The child is no longer locked into a world of cause and effect and conditioning. He enters into an ever-evolving story of himself in the world. The three-part process describes the structure of story making and how humans live in time.

Several years ago as I was conducting an analysis with a patient who was experiencing deep affect because of the shocking realization that his distant and indifferent mother really didn’t love him enough to try to change. I was emotional responding to his unconscious and conscious communication which brought up a traumatic recognition. When I was seven, I realized that my mother was not going to get over her emotional disturbance and would have to be institutionalized. If she had sufficient love for my father and me and her own life she would not have given up so easily.

I grew up with the awareness that if I were to live and live well, I would have to move out of my internal world of cause and effect and conditioning. I would have to live in a world where I could take hold of my evolving story, which included trauma, vulnerability, rage and the enormous desire to reach out to communicate my narrative with joy and love of life.

A patient spent hours with her mother who was drinking and non-communicative. In this setting the patient recalled how she withdrew and became numb. This was repeated with me. For many sessions I felt bored, numb and unable to connect with her. Following my self-analysis, I realized that my ruminating, as I tried to reach her with insight, was itself a resistance against just letting myself go with the flow, feeling alive, funny, and in touch with her. I was hiding from life in the transference until I was able to move from it into living with my patient. I could demonstrate to her I could feel alive as she repeated her mother's state not like in the past. I think that this is what Hoerl and McCormack were getting at when they described the child as no longer locked into a world of cause and effect and conditioning, but reaching toward an ever-evolving story of himself in the world.

So my answer to what can clinical analysis do to deal with the problem of Covid-19 and the apocalypse. The answer is in the clinical relationship. One sees that everything is in the patient's mind, everything is connected. The patient owns everything that she experiences. The task in life is to organize as much of experience as possible into a narrative and express it. Analysis shows us that it can be done. This makes life worthwhile and the source of hope.

Mauricio – Response

Thank you, Mel, for that moving clinical vignette and sharing how you used your own sense of being able to reach your mother to work with your patient,

I thought of sharing this op ed piece published in a major Mexican newspaper *Reforma*, August 19, 2017. Here is the translated version.

I am indebted to my good and dear friend who died a year ago, Giovanni Liotti, for introducing me to the drama triangle and pointing out its origin in disorganized/avoidant attachment history that takes a grandiose developmental path – showing this possible connection would be too long for this already long post.

Trump, fairy tales and the drama triangle

Stephen Karpman's 1968 classic article *Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis* showed that many popular fairy tales contain three invariant characters or roles: the persecutor or aggressor, the victim, and the rescuer. Trump plays all three roles. The allure of these tales is that they are simple morality plays in which there are good guys, the rescuers, bad guys, the persecutors, and poor victims. The tales are effective because they elicit basic emotions that do not lend themselves to complexity. Their dramatic effect is achieved by characters switching roles. The victim can become an aggressor and take revenge on an evil persecutor; the persecutor can become a rescuer or a victim; or a victim a rescuer. Karpman applied this script analysis to work with families and organizations to help them get out of this drama triangle with its destructive scapegoating and blaming.

Throughout his business career, candidacy, and presidency Trump has honed his media skills to enact the drama triangle to pursue his goals, protect his thin-skinned grandiosity and dupe his victims. Trump assumes the rescuer role, promising to bring back millions of manufacturing jobs and “make America great again.” He blames bad trade deals with Mexico and China's currency manipulation for job losses. He willfully ignores the fact that automatization and decades of economic policies have greatly benefited the rich and superrich at the expense of the working class, and he convinces people by appealing to basic emotions heightened within his simple morality play. He frightens and divides by creating a dystopian view of the world in which we are threatened by radical Muslim jihadists and “bad hombres” from Mexico who rape and kill. Appealing to racism and tribalism he creates an us versus them mentality and promises to make America safe by “extreme vetting”, building walls. and deporting millions. Trump is a master of portraying himself as a victim and blames the corrupt press and the “deep state” of creating false news. To what extent he believes the lies and falsehoods he creates is hard to tell. What is clear is that when his grandiosity

is challenged and his false proclamations and claims are exposed, he becomes enraged and viciously goes on the attack, becoming a vengeful persecutor. His followers have developed a strong and loyal identification with Trump, who they see as their strong rescuer who will take on Washington and “drain the swamp”.

One cannot get out of a drama triangle by staying within its roles. All the analysis of Trump’s megalomania, authoritarianism and incompetence will only convince his followers that the liberal press with its “fake news”, the corrupt “deep state”, and feminists and multiculturalists are out to get him. Trump’s world is a fairy tale built on lies, exaggerations, false claims and fraudulent promises. Rather than attacking Trump and entering into the drama triangle, we will do much better by taking inspiration in another fairy tale: the emperor has no clothes, and accelerate the time when his followers will realize that they have been betrayed by a con man.

Mauricio Cortina

Mel – response – May 25

Dan’s rumination about the effect of the role of leadership promoted my continued thinking about applying clinical experience toward understanding and solving pressing community and social issues i.e. analyzing the apocalypse. In my last two emails I got this far: I described a patient speaking about the shock of realizing that his distant mother did not love him enough to change. In response to my patient, I thought that I was traumatized at seven, when I realized my mother did not love my father nor me enough to overcome her mental illness sufficiently to be discharged from the institutions that held her for most of the remainder of her life. Using this experience in the deep analytic interaction with my patient enabled me to understand his experience, and interpret it in the present moment, demonstrating that I could move beyond the trauma. I could remain in the here and now and reality with him. But it involved enormous hard work which I know will never end. This is how I see therapeutic action in psychoanalysis. It involves a real demonstration that with love one can live beyond a trauma that rife with disappointment, vulnerability and humiliation.

I have had several patients in leadership roles, some who have been extremely successful, who have worked through fantasies that their achievement of leadership will be like a fairy tale (thank you, Mauricio). Working through means accepting the limitations of reality and accepting that their fantasy only diverts them from a love of life, a love which requires lots of work, but is the only way one can remain focused on truth and be successful as a leader.

Mel

Cynthia – What can we do? – May 28

My apologies for not responding after my last post. I want to thank Andrew for his heartfelt words. And yes Andrew, we were on a panel together long ago and I know we’ll meet up again, gladly, when our worlds and health allow. I wasn’t angry and didn’t mean my silence to communicate a rift.

Judith writes:

“These are the things I had in mind when I wondered whether psychoanalysts have anything to contribute to this moment. George argues passionately for our profession to move out of the insularity of our consulting rooms, institutes and professional organizations into public policy and even political office. This pandemic, as devastating as it is also is a moment of opportunity for change. Other industries and institutions, for example, the banking industry, the public transportation system in NY City are considering radical changes going forward. Can we? Do we want to? And if so, how?”

I too am thinking a lot about what psychoanalysts have to contribute to this moment. There have been so many deaths, so many people sick, so many countries and communities devastated by the pandemic. As many in the roundtable have said, Covid-19 has exposed the hard truths about the interdependence of our country, those that benefit and those who work for the benefit of others.

Then, in the last few weeks, it has come to light that a Black man, jogging in a Georgia neighborhood, was run down and killed by white men who felt it was their right to go after the man because he could have been a burglar.

The unarmed Black man in Minneapolis who was killed by 4 police officers who handcuffed the man and kept a knee on his neck until he stopped breathing.

Then there was the actions of a white woman who was antagonistic towards a Black man, an avid birder, who asked that she follow the sign and leash her dog in the part of the park known for bird watching. White woman, incensed, threatens to call the police, makes the call and says an African American man is threatening me and my dog. Said it twice. Finally she leashed the dog she had been choking by his collar while arguing her right to disobey the signs. This is the type of phone call that can easily lead an unarmed man into a confrontation with law enforcement.

Fear of the Black body. Fear of Black men. Fear of Black boys.

Covid-19 kills. Racism and Covid-19 combined, kills absolutely.

These are the conversations happening in my “office.” These are the choked back tears I hear during phone sessions with my patients. These are the stories my 6’4 brother tells. A scary confrontation with a police officer over a parking sign with my brown nephew and niece, ages 11 and 7 witnessed. And knew exactly what was happening.

The Amy Coopers in a patients’ place of work who, after asking the Amy Cooper to consider another point of view, the Amy Cooper shows up in their office in tears, to say it was wrong to challenge their opinion, that she’s not racist (who said you were?) and goes to the director’s office, in tears, which leads to a negative performance evaluation for lack of collegiality. Then there is the depression of living in fear that there is no safe place.

The ‘community’ is in my office.

As psychoanalysts, perhaps our work inside and outside of our consulting rooms, to quote Donna Orange in her book, *Psychoanalysis, History and Radical Ethics: Learning to Hear*, is to consider **“reading history as a psychoanalytic and ethical project”** (p. 88). And by history, I join Donna in recommending we seek out the history that is not told by the winners and conquerors. Again quoting Donna, **“Though all literature points to otherness and vulnerability, ethical reading means searching out those whose voices tend to remain unheard, listening to their version of history, making an effort to decenter from our ordinarily lives. It wakes us up, surprises us, surprises us, creates and restores lost links to a shared humanity, links broken by racism and hatred, conscious of not.”**

As a Black American and an analyst, I include myself in the ‘we’ that needs to do more and better. To increase my understanding of communities and cultures different from my own. Two books that gave me a perspective I did not have include Neil Ivan Painter’s *The History of White People* and *The Warmth of other Sons* by Isabel Wilkens, which chronicles the history of The Great Migration.

What can we do? I think we need to remember that before, during, and after the pandemic, racism kills.

These are news links I referenced in my post.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/opinion/ahmaud-arbery-killing.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

I can’t breathe in Minneapolis:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/us/minneapolis-police-man-died.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

Historically speaking, when white people are afraid, it is usually people of color who get hurt:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/opinion/amy-cooper-central-park-racism.html>

This writer speaks, not ironically, about the mental health benefits of sheltering in place as a black man which includes conversations with his therapist:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/opinion/central-park-amy-cooper-racism-covid.html>

Donna – response – May 29

Dear Cynthia,

I am so sorry not to have responded sooner in this terrible time, of course embedded in 400 terrible years. It is terrible to leave your post hanging (wrong word!) and exposed just now. My own black/African American family members are in so much pain that they can not watch the videos any more.

Thank you for adding to my “reading history” project. I have read Isabel Wilkerson, but not Painter. These readings don’t remove my god-awful whiteness, but do make me recognize the havoc it continues to wreak. I am ashamed, and know that doesn’t help.

Your voice is indispensable in our psychoanalytic world. Please let me know anytime I can support it.

With gratitude and admiration,

Donna O.

Judith – the meaning of silence – May 29

A kind and gentle inquiry from Daniel re: my silence, prodded me to think about it beyond the practical realities of continuing to deal with the limitations imposed by this pandemic while managing my professional life and caring for my medically challenged and very vulnerable husband.

Over the 2 previous weeks, I had felt significant “burnout” re: professional list serves, institutes, etc. all offering to address the professional effects of this pandemic on clinical practice, moving from embodied to virtual work, isolation, anxiety, depression, etc. Initially, these conversations were a welcome opportunity for collegial sharing. For me though, they had become “too much of a good thing”. I was hearing the same from my patients who are psychoanalysts and therapists as well.

Shortly after receiving Daniel’s gentle prodding, I received Cynthia’s latest posting, which included: “What can we do? I think I need to remember that before, during, and after the pandemic, racism kills”. I would add poverty and powerlessness kills! Daniel’s gentle prodding and Cynthia’s posting uncorked the powerful emotions I had been avoiding during the past 2 weeks.

I was honored to be invited to participate in this roundtable and thoroughly enjoyed the initial postings. Increasingly, I felt the postings drifting apart or as Mauricio noted – we weren’t talking to each other. Sometimes, I had trouble understanding what the postings had to do with the apocalypse, the pandemic we are currently living with that is defining our personal and professional lives in the near and probably foreseeable future. As my denial and avoidance (my default response to fear) lifted, I began to wonder – is the fragmentation in this roundtable, a response to fear? I noted a lot of aggression (fight) in some of the responses and a focus on lovely clinical work which privileges the insularity of the consulting room (safety and comfort in the face of anxiety).

I don’t think the world is coming to an end - I do believe the world as we have known it will be dramatically different at least in the foreseeable future. Although the loss of the world as we’ve known it is a very frightening possibility/reality, I also viewed it as an opportunity for sharing about change, thereby expanding the purview of psychoanalysis.

Best to all,

Judith

Joye – My musings – May 29

I was touched by your post, Gianni, so personal, so infused with caring and grief and hope about both local and global problems. I thank you for presenting a model that lets me speak from my heart. Although I've been loath to join the conversation again—I don't have time or energy for voluntary conflict these days—the latest current calamity made me change my mind.

I feel heartbroken today over George Floyd's death, not surprised at the event itself—God knows, our national days are peppered with instances of racist atrocities—but stunned, shocked, sickened by the murderer's dispassion, his work-a-day and matter-of-fact hate as revealed in the video. And the work-a-day, matter-of-fact complicity by the other policemen! I never saw such a thing or quite imagined it. This event seems a piece with other revelatory aspects of the fallout from the pandemic apocalypse—at least for me.

I think both definitions of apocalypse capture aspects of my experience of Covid 19. First, it marks a cataclysmic event that feels destructive on every level: personal, political, social and economic. I'm old and my husband is older and so I'm protective of our fragility, not sure that I'll ever return to familiar and loved activities. Catching a concert or movie or play, stopping for drinks with friends or grabbing a quick flight to visit my sick BFF in San Francisco—these now feel like lost and fading memories, lovely toys from a vibrant and more playful life. It all makes me very sad.

Gianni's other definition, the uncovering of what was previously unknown or vaguely intuited, also obtains. The dispassion of the Floyd murder is just one such heartbreaking revelation. Here are some others:

1. The failure of our American educational system to teach evaluative thinking. I am floored that so many people substitute wishful thinking for reliance on science, paranoid fantasies for fact-based information, and the inflated sense of human power for respect for natural forces. Surely more loss and death will follow from this failure.
2. How fragile and vulnerable democracy is and how credulous many people are in the face of a grandiose and simple-minded leader. Erich Fromm told us about German Nazis, but I always thought Americans were different. What more ever needs to be said about Donald Trump? Who he is has always been clear—his malignant narcissism, envy, and soulless emptiness are perfectly transparent—yet, how much destruction and division he has wrought and how many people follow him are the shattering revelations. Can we recover from him?
3. How many of my certainties have crumbled: that I can do my work until I decide to retire; that I can visit and hug my grandchildren; that I can invite friends, loved ones, and helping people into my home safely; that I can trust my lifelong vision of a rational future built on planning and hard work; that I can trust there will be any future at all. It's an apocalypse for sure!

So, the question is how, in the face of so much disillusion, can one maintain hope and some shred of optimism? Today I'm not sure I can, and this makes holding hope and optimism for my patients really problematic. It's painful to write this down. In wrestling with my dark thoughts, I remembered Auden's wonderful poem—September 1939—about another moment of personal and global darkness and the poet's concluding words:

Defenceless under the night
 Our world in stupor lies;
 Yet, dotted everywhere,
 Ironic points of light
 Flash out wherever the Just
 Exchange their messages:
 May I, composed like them
 Of Eros and of dust,

Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Creating such points of light seems to be Daniel's goal in creating our conversation.

Joye Weisel-Barth

Mauricio – response to Joye and others – May 30

This week has been particularly harrowing, beginning with Trump falsely accusing MSNBC host Joe Scarborough of killing Lori Klausutis who worked for him while he was a congressman, reaching 100,000 mark of people killed by the pandemic in the US, the brutal killing of George Floyd by a police officer followed by the massive protests, some violent, some not, that are convulsing the United States. I am saddened and infuriated by it all and resonate with the chants of people saying “enough is enough”. There is a growing consensus building in the US and in many countries, that we cannot return to where we were before COVID-19. Things have to change drastically for the better.

My outrage is being channeled by joining others in thinking what we need to do to radically change society and imagine the possibilities of creating a more just compassionate and caring society, a society, as Gianni mentioned, in which love becomes a guiding light. I'd much rather light a candle that supports social solidarity and love than to curse the darkness.

In her post, Joye notes some of the many failures of our educational system and society and asks “how in face of so much disillusion can we maintain hope?”

Let's start with leadership.

We are sitting on a tinderbox that can explode into further chaos and anarchy. Decades of savage inequalities, racism and blighted communities are boiling to the surface. And in this explosive situation we have by far the most destructive president this nation has ever had. Trump's megalomania knows no limits. His destructive instincts have always led him to fan the flames of discontent, divisiveness and racism. But the most ugly aspect of his personality is his cruelty. People that oppose him are demonized and dehumanized using tactics honed by fascist dictators and racist leaders in the US based on conspiratorial thinking and lies. He believes he can be re-elected and distract from his abysmal failures in handling the pandemic by creating more chaos. He will then blame democratic governors and mayors and assume the role of the victim following the script of the triangle of conflict that I mentioned before. Trump is a gambler, but he has no idea how out of hand and ugly things can get. In using incendiary and divisive rhetoric to gamble he can be re-elected, he will explode the tinderbox. Let us all hope that this terrifying, but very real possibility does not happen.

For now, our efforts and only avenue of hope depends on defeating Trump and regaining the Senate. Let us also hope that if elected, Joe Biden will surround himself with people such as Elizabeth Warren who has the brains and vision to create a more just and humane society that we all desperately need.

To create a more just and humane society that takes on racism toward blacks, Latinos, Asians and gay and transgender people, we will need exceptional leadership. We have seen in our history examples of this exceptional leadership in Lincoln, FDR and Martin Luther King. We are seeing examples in some governors and mayors in the US that are stepping up to the plate. We are also seeing this type of leadership in the commissioner of the European Union who is calling for a new economic order that turns away quickly from fossil fuels and invests in the future of green energies. We also see examples of exceptional leadership in countries such as New Zealand. With simplicity, grace and expertise gained by assembling a competent team, Jacinda Arden is guiding her country through the pandemic and creating the building blocks to construct a better future.

Now let me turn to our own field. Psychoanalysis has had the goal to unmask illusions as Freud expressed clearly in *The Future of an Illusion*. What I would call the humanistic wing

of psychoanalysis, has always seen the unmasking of illusions as a means to develop more compassionate and empathic connections that affirm our shared humanity. I would like to see us reaching across our psychoanalytic tribal identities and find common ground in this humanism. Donna Orange has been inspired in the ethical project and humanism of Levinas. I would like her and others to also embrace the ethical project developed by Harry Stack Sullivan, who was inspired by the American pragmatic tradition of William James, George Herbert Mead and John Dewey; Erich Fromm who was inspired by humanists like Aristotle, Spinoza, Goethe and the Jewish humanistic tradition. I know that many of you have found inspiration in the teachings of Heinz Kohut and his “empathic turn” of psychoanalysis. Bernard Brandchaft and Joe Lichtenberg also embrace the large tent of humanism. I would also include in this large tent the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, the intersubjective clinicians and researchers that are part of the Boston Process of Change Group, and other intersubjective thinkers such as Jessica Benjamin, Lewis Aron and Philip Bromberg, among many others. Their humanism is implicit in all the work they do. I hope that Andrew, who has been inspired by Jung, could also embrace this humanistic and ethical project.

I believe that we can only call for change that will make us better human beings and create better societies if we are inspired by the ethical project embodied by the humanistic tradition. This pandemic has revealed that we cannot and must not separate the political, social, economic and cultural from what is singular and idiosyncratic in each one of us. The relational turn in psychoanalysis must also include what Andrew has called the “political turn” in psychoanalysis.

Daniel – Announcement – June 1

Our discussants are preparing comments for the final week of the roundtable.

Apocalypse: Week 6

Final comment – From Mel – June 1

I see much more hope in the clinical psychoanalytic model than some of the other contributors because of the importance to me of classical ego psychology that evolved from drive and tripartite theories. I know it sounds cold as hell. In my application it is warm with humanity and hope and includes concepts derived from Relational, Kleinian, Intersubjective, Bionian, Self and Social Psychoanalytic Theories. The value of thinking in terms of drives and the tripartite theories, i.e. Ego Psychology- ego, id and superego- is that the mind and body are viewed as one and the same - only the mind exists in four dimensions. The mind is not linear and it moves with time. The body is infused with energy that seeks discharge. The same for the mind, through the capacity to communicate in language and relate to others which is its source of discharge, growth and pleasure.

All energy comes from the body. Freud described the energy as drives The ego then gets its energy from the body only, unlike the id, it organizes, relates, and finds a way to transform the energy from trauma, damage and hurt into creativity and growth.

One last thing: how do I fit social analysis into these ideas? Social analysis belongs within the mind even if its source is outside of the mind. We only know it through the lens of our mind, fixed often enough by trauma and repetition, needing to be reorganized with pleasure to be used creatively in the external world.

Look, I am 87 years old. I have experienced lots of bad things in my life and through working and organizing and communicating (i.e. lots of work of my ego), I feel like 50 until I look in the mirror.

One more example. I started psychoanalysis with a 45-year-old single man complaining of depression and disappointment in his relations with women. After one year of analysis and the progress that ensued, he was diagnosed with ALS. He understood his fate of losing control of all his muscles. He got married, had a child as he was deteriorating. He lived for 5 years until he was locked into his paralyzed body. He still had a desire to live with his family, daughter and me.

This is what I mean.

Mel

Final comment – from Donna – June 1

We began with pandemic, apocalyptic or no, surely yes for our communities of color and immigrant communities. Now we finish by living out what many have called America's original sin, evident in the overwhelming impact of the virus on those who suffer most from both pervasive and the extremely violent injustice we are seeing now.

What psychoanalysis can offer, as both Lynne Layton and I have written, is to focus on motivated (thank you, Freud) unconsciousness. Lynne's normative unconsciousness, and my double consciousness (borrowed from Du Bois) suggest a need to make the unconscious conscious. Politicians and religious leaders will need to construct solutions, but at least we will know better how much injustice we are supporting and benefitting from.

Myself, I was born into housing project poverty, but because we were white, we had the chance to climb out, at least somewhat. We worked in the fields segregated from the Mexican farm workers, and were able to go home at night. It takes a long life, it seems, even to catch on to what it is I take for granted. An encounter with police has never turned violent for me. So first I need to develop a more integrated consciousness that can see and feel my unjust presumptions, then the shame that may begin to change me and allow me to see my wrongly suffering sisters and brothers as siblings.

I have said little about apocalypse, but there is plenty to worry about without this concept. Thank you, Dan and all of you, for your very thoughtful contributions.

Donna O.

Mauricio – Last thoughts. We need a humanistic renaissance of values to build a new future – June 1

Andrew opened this discussion of psychoanalyzing the apocalypse by quoting from Hamlet's soliloquy:

To die:—to sleep:
 No more; and, by a sleep to say we end
 The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to, **'tis a consummation**
 Devoutly to be wished
 (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 21-26)

By giving voice to this “consumption Devoutly to be wished” Andrew believes Hamlet is evoking Jung's concept of the shadow that is part of human nature. Andrew believes this wish has to be fully recognized if we are to come to terms with the world crisis we are experiencing and witnessing. But it is crucial to understand the reasons for Hamlet's despair and impotent rage. His despair and suicidal thoughts are not the product of a wanton destructive instinct. Hamlet is grieving his father's death murdered by Claudius, and he feels betrayed by his mother, who marries his father's brother shortly after her husband's death.

If Hamlet's soliloquy best captures the despair and impotent rage of one man, then Shylock's soliloquy in the *Merchant of Venice* best captures and explains the social origin of despair and impotent rage of millions of people.

He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million,
 laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains,
 scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,
 Cooled my friends, heated mine enemies,
 And what's his reason?
 Hath not a Jew eyes?
 Has not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses,
 affections, passions?
 Fed with the same food,
 Hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same means,
 Warmed and cooled by the same winter
 and cooled by the summer as Christians?
 If you prick us, do we not bleed?
 If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
 If you poison us do we not die?
 And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

Shylock is not just speaking for himself, but for all his people. But he could just as well be speaking about any social group or class of people in which virulent racism and rampant social injustice prevails—be it racism against blacks, Latinos and Latinas or white working class people that have seen their good jobs and communities disseminated and destroyed. When chronic conditions of racism, oppression, hatred and social injustice are ignored by governments, institutions and leaders, despair and impotent rage can turn into social

dynamite tearing societies apart. This is exactly what we are seeing in the United States at this moment.

Decades of neoliberal economic models and hundreds of years of racism have created savage inequalities. As a result, social solidarity and the ability to cooperate as a nation have crumbled. These inequalities have accelerated since 1980 to grotesque proportions (particularly in the United States) as Thomas Piketty documents in his recent 2020 book *Capitalism and Ideology* – a must read book for anybody concerned with building more just societies.

If we are to build from the ruins of current societies ravaged by the pandemic and an economic meltdown of epic proportions toward more humane and just societies, we will have to start with a humanistic renaissance and a revolution in values. Where *being* is valued more than *having*, where success is measured by social solidarity and mutual aid, and not by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), where the wealth of nations is measured by how we treat the most disadvantaged among us, and not by the value of the stock market, where we create a sustainable future based on investing in green energies and we recycle waste, and not despoil the earth with CO2 emissions and toxic pesticides, where everyone has an opportunity for a decent living and taking care of their children and families, not just the privileged few, and where human dignity is valued above the color of our skin, our religious beliefs, or our gender.

With my best wishes to all,

Mauricio Cortina

Final post from Andrew Samuels; 'Contribution - is there one?'

In an earlier post, I suggested we use the words 'therapist' and 'client'. I did this to challenge a situation in which psychoanalysis gets split off from the other therapies. There are mutual losses all round to this.

So with contributions to social and political matters in mind, let's have a big tent and add in things like humanistic psychology, body psychotherapy, transpersonal psychotherapy, group and family therapy. This may be an incomplete list. The psychologists are missing. Oh, nearly forgot Jungian analysis

Surely all therapists including psychoanalysts should look closely at our own politics, rivalries and hierarchies before saying anything about politics *per se*?

Then, we can consider the contribution to political discourse of 'the therapies' seen as a potential broad and united front. In my imagination, this would be an international project, spearheaded by Indigenous peoples across the globe. Contemporary indigeneity, whether in Brazil or in Africa, is where you see the fusion of ethnic politics, the climate crisis, and economic reform of a fundamental nature.

Moving on to consider the therapies' contribution, my view, worked out over many years, is that, *on its own*, the therapy project can contribute very little to political thought and – above all - to political action.

We have to find activist groups and even mainstream political parties and politicians that welcome our contribution, not as foundational experts, but as modest and humble allies. I've been very lucky in finding various homes for such a perspective, including Britain's Financial Services Authority. (That was quite a trip but not for detailing now.)

One area where this is happening is in connection with the climate crisis where Extinction Rebellion (for example) utilizes therapy thinking to a considerable extent.

To give a further example: Could the therapies contribute to the revisioning of economic thinking helping to bring about the overturn of the economic system that lies at the root of many of the world's injustices? Including, right now, who gets to die from the virus – internationally and within, for example, the United States.

With whom would we work to achieve such a goal? I think there are radical and progressive groups seeking to end the domination of the City of London, Wall Street, the World Bank and the IMF.

Or, may I recommend a look at the work of Elizabeth Cotton, whose blog ‘Surviving Work’, which focuses on ‘mental health’ aspects of (un)employment and economy explicitly teams up with Partners for Counselling and Psychotherapy and with Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility (UK).

(Cotton’s most controversial work was entitled ‘Do you have to be married to a banker to train as a psychoanalyst?’)

I suggest that therapy thinking is useful, not only in assisting in the development of new knowledge structures and political aspirations, but in understanding why **‘you can’t always get what you want’** (Rolling Stones).

My last point involves a return to Hamlet whom I quoted earlier as providing evidence of the seductions of and fantasied desire for a deathly apocalypse (**‘tis a consummation devoutly to be wished’**).

Therapists, absolutely including me, tend to think far too much and tend to act or join in actions far too little. We kid ourselves into thinking this devotion to reflection is our strength. But it is a weakness as well. Hamlet again:

**Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action**

In this regard, can’t we learn a helluva lot from what is happening on American streets right now?

Final comment – Joye – June 1

Editor’s note: Joye wanted her last post to stand as her final comment. I am re-posting it, so it can stand with the others:

I was touched by your post, Gianni, so personal, so infused with caring and grief and hope about both local and global problems. I thank you for presenting a model that lets me speak from my heart. Although I’ve been loath to join the conversation again—I don’t have time or energy for voluntary conflict these days—the latest current calamity made me change my mind.

I feel heartbroken today over George Floyd’s death, not surprised at the event itself—God knows, our national days are peppered with instances of racist atrocities—but stunned, shocked, sickened by the murderer’s dispassion, his work-a-day and matter-of-fact hate as revealed in the video. And the work-a-day, matter-of-fact complicity by the other policemen! I never saw such a thing or quite imagined it. This event seems a piece with other revelatory aspects of the fallout from the pandemic apocalypse—at least for me.

I think both definitions of apocalypse capture aspects of my experience of Covid 19. First, it marks a cataclysmic event that feels destructive on every level: personal, political, social and economic. I’m old and my husband is older and so I’m protective of our fragility, not sure that I’ll ever return to familiar and loved activities. Catching a concert or movie or play, stopping for drinks with friends or grabbing a quick flight to visit my sick BFF in San Francisco—these now feel like lost and fading memories, lovely toys from a vibrant and more playful life. It all makes me very sad.

Gianni’s other definition, the uncovering of what was previously unknown or vaguely intuited, also obtains. The dispassion of the Floyd murder is just one such heartbreaking revelation. Here are some others:

1. The failure of our American educational system to teach evaluative thinking. I am floored that so many people substitute wishful thinking for reliance on science, paranoid fantasies for fact-based information, and the inflated sense of human power for respect for natural forces. Surely more loss and death will follow from this failure.
2. How fragile and vulnerable democracy is and how credulous many people are in the face of a grandiose and simple-minded leader. Erich Fromm told us about German Nazis, but I always thought Americans were different. What more ever needs to be said about Donald Trump? Who he is has always been clear—his malignant narcissism, envy, and soulless emptiness are perfectly transparent—yet, how much destruction and division he has wrought and how many people follow him are the shattering revelations. Can we recover from him?
3. How many of my certainties have crumbled: that I can do my work until I decide to retire; that I can visit and hug my grandchildren; that I can invite friends, loved ones, and helping people into my home safely; that I can trust my lifelong vision of a rational future built on planning and hard work; that I can trust there will be any future at all. It's an apocalypse for sure!

So, the question is how, in the face of so much disillusion, can one maintain hope and some shred of optimism? Today I'm not sure I can, and this makes holding hope and optimism for my patients really problematic. It's painful to write this down. In wrestling with my dark thoughts, I remembered Auden's wonderful poem—September 1939—about another moment of personal and global darkness and the poet's concluding words:

Defenceless under the night
 Our world in stupor lies;
 Yet, dotted everywhere,
 Ironic points of light
 Flash out wherever the Just
 Exchange their messages:
 May I, composed like them
 Of Eros and of dust,
 Beleaguered by the same
 Negation and despair,
 Show an affirming flame.

Creating such points of light seems to be Daniel's goal in creating our conversation.

Joye Weisel-Barth

George – Final Post – Donald Trump – June 2

Dear All,

I think we have to be brutally honest with ourselves, the terrible crimes, illnesses, and deaths with which we are confronted are directly attributable to Donald Trump. The apocalyptic edge to our lives would not be as sharp without him. Racial injustice and economic inequality have been permanent wounds on our country, accompanied by periodic explosions of rage. This pandemic was anticipated and would have erupted regardless of the party in power. Climate Change looms unaddressed, a true apocalyptic scenario. But under another president (think Obama, or Biden) these significant problems would have been addressed with honesty and competence, if not success. All of these terrible problems have spun out of control, such that we appear to be doomed to even more suffering, because of this President. Given this, I do not think that we can discuss the meaning of these dire events without first addressing the meaning of Donald Trump the true engine of our chaos and strife. When there is civil unrest he divides and provokes. When there is a developing pandemic he denies and blames. When environmental catastrophe looms, he attacks the protections and

mitigations which might save us. I am not saying that these problems don't matter and of course they must be addressed, but Trump repeatedly fans the flames of rage, of prejudice, of inequality and fear, to serve his own purposes. And He will not stop.

Trump thrives on chaos. He uses it to manipulate and hide his crimes. As we grieve and worry, he gets more and more right wing judges approved, as Moscow Mitch seeds the conflicts of the future.

In "Revelations" the Anti-Christ breeds chaos and disorder. He is the great deceiver, repudiating the truth and raising himself as a competitor to God. Who does that remind you of?

The morning after the 2016 election, upon awakening to the news of Trump's victory, I felt terror. The notion that such a man would be granted such power was terrifying. That he could be the leader upon which the nation depends had seemed, the day before, inconceivable. I could never have imagined the terrible consequences which we are now enduring. As I have said "This is not an apocalypse" but if Trump has his way, it will become one.

As we work with our patients in the privacy and intimacy of our analytic relationships, there is a mad dog at the door who will not be quiet and who is wreaking havoc with our country and world. Until the real source of our crises is addressed, we will have to wait to heal the endemic inequality and prejudice in our nation. Over the next few years, we have to cope with a unresolved health crisis. Until the nightmare is over, we cannot resume the work of environmental healing.

Right now, as psychoanalysts and citizens, we must rise up and defeat Trump, casting him out of the White House. Engaging in political action to assure Biden's victory in November is the first and only priority.

Stay safe and healthy, George Hagman

Cynthia – Final Post: I was Wrong – June 3

Dear All:

At the beginning of this round table I was optimistic, not ready to call Covid-19 pandemic a sign of the apocalypse. That we can't guess what the end is going to be, but confident we will be ready and able to deal when the time comes.

I was wrong.

What is happening in this country right now is an apocalypse.

And there are those of us who are not mad about it. For all the reasons I spoke of in my last post.

This president didn't start this fire, though he is has fanned the flames. But this isn't just on him. Where is congress? Where is the judicial branch?

Silence.

I end with a passage from Angela Y. Davis in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*.

The use of state violence against Black people, people of color has its origins in an era long before the civil rights movement—in colonization and slavery ... So we don't have to stop at the era of the civil rights movement, we can recognize the practice that originated with slavery were not resolved by the civil rights movement. We may not experience lynching and Ku Klux Klan violence in the same way we did earlier but there still is a state violence, police violence, military violence. And to a certain extent the Ku Klux Klan.

Thank you to everyone for the opportunity to be in conversation in these times.

Cynthia

Judith – Final post – June 5

I initially read the apocalypse as a metaphor – the end of the world as we have known it with the hope of a future society of greater equality (racial, income, justice, opportunity, etc.). 3 months later with the murder of a black man at the hands of a policeman, the eruption of protests against racial injustice, police brutality the apocalypse seems even more real. For me whether these events are apocalyptic or not is a distraction from the seriousness and enormity of what these events exposed.

Following the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016, I became obsessed with what I as a psychoanalyst and what psychoanalysis in general might contribute to social justice and change. I reclaimed my activist marching boots of the 1960's from the uppermost corners of my closets. I worked actively for political change in N.Y. State to elect officials who would help unlock progressive legislation in the New York State legislature with significant success. I plan to continue this activist work. This roundtable gave me the opportunity to reflect specifically on what we, as psychoanalysts might do to bring our specific knowledge and skills to the larger societal problems.

As we are wrapping up, I feel heartened that the issue of what psychoanalysis specifically might offer to social change was engaged and addressed clearly: Andrew suggests we find activist groups and politicians who welcome our contributions, offered from a stance of humility and modesty; George suggests we become involved in public policy and work to abolish our current President (I would add and his enablers); Donna privileges making our unconscious conscious so we may better understand ourselves and better understand how much we contribute to and benefit from our privilege; Cynthia reminds us that COVID-19 kills and racism kills. Therefore, we each need to work on ourselves to learn more about those of other backgrounds and to expose our personal biases. Mauricio and Gianni stress the importance of care and our shared humanity inside and outside the consulting room; Mel and Mauricio privilege the clinical value of working with individual patients – the clinical endeavor has the potential to change attitudes and ideologies. I believe all of the above are pieces of the mosaic that will hopefully result in change that are specific to what psychoanalysts have to offer. I'm sure there are many others; those delineated above are a good beginning for me. Joye has shared her grief for what we have lost in our personal lives – embodied contact with our families, grandchildren, work and beloved cultural events. As a Senior citizen I personally resonate with Joye's sensibilities.

Finally, I am very grateful to Daniel for this roundtable, his intelligent summaries, even-handed moderation of this roundtable which at times hit some turbulent waters and the questions he raised that extended and facilitated our dialogue.

Best to all,

Judith

Daniel – Goodbye to all – June 14

I am now officially closing our discussion group, or perhaps I should say, moving it to a new home. Our conversation will emerge again as an issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, coming out most likely in January 2021, with some additional reflective material.

I have very much enjoyed this discussion, with all its smoke, fire, and calm. I want to thank all who persevered with me in conversation during this time. I hope to see you again, in print, if not in real life.

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