



# Global Crisis or Opportunity: We Do Therefore We Evolve

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*The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) warns that humanity is in a perilous position (Harvey, 2013). Indeed, the scale of the global crises before us is monumental in terms of the potential impact on human communities, other species and nature as a whole. We are facing the devastating consequences of a warming climate, which is predicted to cause catastrophic damage to habitats and ecosystems, resulting in a gradual decline in food production and access to fresh water. Other problems include an expected increase in climate refugees, a rapidly increasing world population, species extinction, and the continuing threat of economic instability. It is evident that our planet cannot sustain or endure the rate and pace of consumption championed by Western industrialised nations, which is now being imitated by new economic powerhouses like China and India. Interestingly, we in the West are slowly beginning to realise that material consumption does not make us any happier (Gold, 2014). Indeed, research into the lives of moderate consumers by Dr Teresa Belton (2014), University of East Anglia, explored people's experiences of satisfaction in life, and found that their wellbeing was not driven by the need to consume. Belton's research has highlighted an important correlation, that is a reciprocal relationship between moderate consumer's experiences of wellbeing, can contribute to the health of the planet.*

## Working for the greater good

It is beyond doubt that in the very near future climate change will increasingly affect millions of people living on the planet, adding to existing levels of poverty, inequality and poor health. The world's problems will undoubtedly be compounded by predictions of global population rises which are set to explode, from around 9 billion by 2050, to a staggering 12 billion people by 2100. There is an increasing tension between the growing numbers of people on the planet and the demands we are putting on natural resources, year on year. It is evident that we are a successful species, which is reflected in our ability to continually thrive (Emmott, 2013). Yet, we are also in danger of becoming victims of our success as we reach the limits of sustainability in terms of our current ways of living on the Earth. The burgeoning global crisis is presenting humanity with a reality check, in that, we cannot continue living on the planet believing that it has infinite resources to satisfy all our consumer-based needs. We are being confronted with a challenge to *craft* adaptive responses to the global situation – at the same time the crisis is unfolding – and it will require all of us to use our intelligence, ingenuity and initiative like never before.

There are no simple answers to the global challenges before us; however, we can all play our part in adapting our lifestyle behaviours. For example, Caroline Lucas (2014) commenting on the threat of global warming has stated that tackling the problem is as much about psychology as it is about climate science. This means that we need to galvanise our collective motivation for change. At some point in the very near future we will need to ask ourselves if our lifestyles are contributing to the greater good, or whether our individual *appetites* are only focused on satisfying our personal ambitions and desires. For example, do we think about the food we consume daily, our appetites and habits? Do we reflect on the fact that every year around a third of all the food produced in the world is wasted or lost? This wastage is happening at the same

time as experts are calling for a 70% global increase in food production by 2050 to meet the demands of a growing world population (Van Vark, 2014). The sums do not add up, neither does the ethics of global food production and consumption. Our Western consumer based appetites extend into all areas of modern life, including the latest model cars, new technologies, exotic holidays and household luxuries etc. The question is how can we begin to shift our appetites and adapt our lifestyle behaviours for the greater good?

There is one particular lifestyle behaviour that we could all be encouraged to develop, and that is to work-up an appetite for wholeness. We need to recognise that our participation in the world in a time of global crisis also requires us to live responsibly and make life-choices that resolve our sense of disconnectedness from the natural world, whilst fostering a more holistic connection with life (Berry, 1999). Reclaiming a sense of wholeness in an age of scientific and technological advances is well within our capabilities. Indeed, it has been the collective avoidance of engaging our full human potential (psycho-spiritual growth) that has played a part in our inability to *craft* (techne) adaptive ways of living that are more in harmony with the containing eco-system to which we belong. Our Western model of using (and often abusing) the natural world – our one and only life-support system – has had unintended consequence, that is, we have lost a vital connection to the world soul, the *anima mundi* (Baring, 2013). In short, we have failed to notice that underneath the burgeoning global crisis is a spiritual crisis. Collectively, we somehow need to reformulate a new myth and relationship to life as a sacred whole (Skolimowski, 1993) for a *New Renaissance* to emerge (Lorimer & Robinson, 2010).

In terms of collective behaviour change, there is a growing body of literature that points to our place in an interconnected cosmos (Laszlo, 2008, 2014). Ervin Laszlo makes a

persuasive argument for radical transformation, underpinned by a shift in our consciousness and behaviours towards a greater whole. In this time of global crisis our *actions in an interconnected world* are more enmeshed than we may care to admit. What we do in the world will have consequences for our self, others (including other species) and nature (Collins, 2014). If our awareness was awakened to life's interconnectedness – that we belong to One World – it could encourage all of us to reflect on our lifestyle choices and actions. This perspective champions the idea that our everyday actions and interactions in an interconnected world are *occupationally entangled*, meaning, that whatever we do in life can have both personal and global impacts.

## Collective adaptation and archetypal occupations

Humanity has never been challenged to adapt and change on such a monumental scale before. The global crisis unfolding before us, is already presenting us with a dilemma, where we either *pull together* collectively and work towards an improved future for all, or *fall apart* and fragment into groups of self-interest. If we pull together we will need to find effective ways of reflecting, acting and interacting to support holistic ways of living. We cannot underestimate the importance of the opportunity to develop a renewed relationship to life in all that we do. For example, we know that 'doing' has been pivotal in the ways that our ancestors adapted, survived and thrived as they met environmental challenges, including a previous ice age (Wilcock, 1998/2006; Yerxa, 2000). Adaptation is part of our human heritage, and so, in this time of global crisis we need a renewed sense of purpose, participation and action that champions our potential for wholeness. This proposition identifies that evolution is powered by collective doing (Collins, 2014). We find an evolutionary trajectory in the history of human actions, which are full of innovation, from early toolmakers to the technological advances that are continually shaping what we do in the world today. However, we need to re-examine our collective understanding of *doing*, particularly as this is an area of human functioning that holds so much of our psycho-spiritual potential (Collins, 1998; 2004; 2007; 20010a; 2010b). However, we first need to reframe self-limiting statements, such as: *we are not human doings, we are human beings*. Indeed, we are human beings, but without a complementary understanding of the depth and dynamism of doing, the engagement and expression of our full human potential is compromised considerably (Collins, 2014).

Based on the points that have been discussed so far, we could say that our evolutionary trajectory is intimately connected to our collective actions, where the *forms and functions of doing* have an archetypal root. I refer to these deep actions as *archetypal occupations* (Collins, 2014). For example, as well as their symbolic forms, it has been noted that archetypal representations are *graspable* in terms of our lived experiences and work (Von Franz, 1975/1998). We can see how doing is patterned in our ancestor's actions and how these still resonate in the present day. We only need to look at a clay pot from the ancient world to see how it is close to what we still make and use today. Doing is ancient, and it connects us all to a shared human heritage. We can find further examples of our ancient connections to doing in our everyday modern activities, for example, we can observe cross-cultural patterns of doing that are recognisable to all humans: cooking, art, craft work or agriculture and gardening etc. Awareness of archetypal occupations enables a lived connection to spirit in action, where we can encounter a deep sense of flow.

Jung tells us that the archetypes are systems that are ready for action (Scarpelli, 2009), and this point underscores why *doing with depth* may add an important dynamic element when working with our collective potential. Jung also noted that the archetypes bring us into contact with the sacred, by virtue of the numinous power that often accompanies them. Therefore, when we connect with the archetype of doing, through engaging in meaningful and purposeful activities, not

only do we find that the numinous can be encountered, but such experiences have the potential to make whatever we do sacramental (Collins, 2014). Doing has the capacity to bring about deep encounters in the ways that we live, and it was Jung who stated that we know so little about the *demands* of the unconscious, and this is why he would often leave it to his hands to express what he could not articulate in words (Von Franz, 1975/1998). Doing brings a wonderful sense of discovery to our lives, and it engages our co-creative potential for exploring and expressing our wholeness.

Archetypal occupations (doing with depth) help us to align our actions with an ancient human lineage, where our endeavours as *meaning makers* can unleash a creative spark in our ongoing evolutionary journey (Collins, 2014). Human beings function very well when our ideas, innovations and creativity are embedded and expressed in cooperative ways, where our actions are expressed as a lived connection to life's wholeness. If we become too divorced from our archetypal roots and our deeper connection to doing (as expressions of wholeness) then our actions are in danger of compounding our sense of disconnectedness. For example, research is beginning to identify how *occupational imbalances* are starting to impact on employee's lives that work in corporations with increasing workload demands and pressures, driven by performance targets and fiscal efficiencies (Clouston, 2014). The modern world is in the grip of a fiscal obsession that is anti-life and anti-wholeness, yet the seeds of our current demise were noted years ago. It was Jungian Analyst Erich Neumann (1954) who in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century offered a diagnosis about the state of the modern psyche, suggesting that it is our consciousness that is bankrupt. Therefore, if our modern psyche is out of synch with life as a whole, we can easily understand how our ways of doing have become so divorced from actions that contribute to our wellbeing. So, how can we shift our consciousness and behaviours towards greater wholeness, sustainability and survival for humanity, other species and the planet?

## We do, therefore we evolve

Humanity continues on its evolutionary journey, but we must always bear in mind that evolution is never prescribed, as our pioneering ancestors have continually demonstrated. Indeed, our evolutionary heritage is about facing challenges, cooperating, innovating and adapting (Collins, 2014). In this time of global decay, we need to passionately co-create a new vision of reality, one that connects us deeply to what we do in life (in our homes, communities and corporations). We need to be firm in our collective resolve that we have an obligation to engage our evolutionary potential, wholeness and sustainability for future generations, not only today's fiscal bottom line. It is through a renewed alignment with our transformative potential that we can encourage a healing relationship to all facets of our daily lives, including self, other and the planet. If we can transform our worldviews and behaviours for the greater good and begin to support the idea that *we are all in this together*, we may be able to harness the best of our human heritage and enable personal and social transformation in all that we do (Townsend, 1997). Jungian Analyst, Marie Louise Von Franz (1975/1998) makes an important point, that before the emergence of ego-consciousness, our ancestors functioned in groups and they were connected to archetypal behaviour patterns, such as found in collective rituals etc. The question is how can we collectively harness the best of our human lineage to do the right thing today?

We cannot avoid or bypass the complexities of our current global state of emergency. This is a time of *epic* global confrontation, yet we are more than capable of co-creating an improved future. Elsewhere I have written about our *epic* human potential and how we can draw upon the best of our human legacy – doing and adaptation – to respond to the current global crisis, which is summarised and adapted below (Collins, 2014):

**Quality of Experience:** What experiences and ways of living further our sense of wholeness?

**Quality of Participation:** How are we connecting with others and working for the greater good?

**Quality of Intelligence:** How are we engaging our talents, passions, and skills to find solutions that serve the whole?

**Quality of Consciousness:** How are we engaging our psycho-spiritual potential for living and contributing to a greater whole?

Our collective transformation is dependent upon what we do together to meet the challenge of sustainable living, which is a call for greater cooperation in our reflections and actions. Therefore, we need to become empowered to evolve a renewed vision of soulful and sustainable transformation into realisable action (through doing and being). We could say that a 21<sup>st</sup> century spiritual practice is possible through participative, co-creative and transformative actions in everyday life contexts. It is in our daily lives and actions that each one of us can bring about the birth of a new era of shared responsibility and sustainability. I have previously suggested that human beings are more than capable of co-creating an improved future through our collective efforts, and such a proposition is aligned with our evolutionary potential: *we do, therefore we evolve* (Collins, 2014). It is through a shared understanding of the power of doing that we are able to galvanise a new spirit of human action to engage our unexplored potential, which is based on a collective sense of responsibility, sustainability and togetherness. To be able to accomplish such a transformative shift in consciousness and behaviours at this point in human history will require each of us to participate and do what we can to co-create an improved future. It means we have to work together and reach beyond our differences.

The work of Arnold Mindell and his colleagues is at the forefront of collective ideas about transformation. Mindell, originally a physicist and Jungian Analyst, has developed theoretical concepts that help to facilitate greater collective awareness of diversity between people and cultures. His approach takes a *world work* perspective (Mindell, 1999), which is about engaging people in large group processes, based on principles of deep democracy (Mindell, 2002). This approach means that dominant cultural viewpoints are challenged to hear other perspectives, such as the voice of minority groups, the disenfranchised and dispossessed. In such a sensitive system even nature can have a voice (Mindell, 2007, 2013). The value of Mindell's work to the current global state of emergency is important, in that it shows us we can work together and evolve greater awareness and respect for diversity in life (including other species). It means we are invested in finding out about how to survive and thrive in this brave new world. We can all reach beyond our differences and encourage one another to engage our talents, skills and passions to co-create an improved future. Such a proposition starts with what we do today in our homes, communities and corporations. It begins by cultivating an appetite for wholeness.

## Conclusion

Doing can bring us to a co-creative edge, where we have opportunities for active engagement in new thresholds of emancipation. In this time of global crisis the value of doing could be revitalised as a way of serving the collective, where we forge new appetites that are connected to our wholeness, and where we encourage one another to serve the greater good. In this time of global crisis we will soon be forced to examine our collective sense of meaning and how our daily actions can be aligned more intimately to interconnectivity and wholeness (Collins, 2014). To begin this renewed relationship to doing we have to reframe our intentions and actions for how we live, in the belief that we can all contribute to the greater good. If we are to survive and thrive in the coming decades we will have to develop a greater sense of *altruism*, based on cultivating our transformative potential, which acts in accord with our shared heritage. We do, therefore we evolve.

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