

EDITORIAL

My proposal is, therefore, surely the mildest possible. Oh, it is so weak! My proposal is that at least we should make the true state of affairs known.

(Kierkegaard)

As this issue of PPI goes into production, the UK has just been hit by severe flooding for the second time in a month. Climate change is clearly implicated: although these things have always happened occasionally, here as across the world they are happening much more often. This is only the beginning.

And yet we still see only the smallest signs of real action to change the cause of climate change, the emission of carbon into the atmosphere. As therapists perhaps we should be a little less surprised about this than most: we have a great deal of experience of the human capacity to delay, to deceive oneself, to fend off inconvenient truths. We know something about how to help people through this process, on an individual level. Do we have anything to offer on the collective level, given that 40 years of warnings have been ignored and that it will soon be too late for action?

I am reminded of a story about Winnicott, which I may or may not be remembering accurately: that during a meeting of the London Institute of Psychoanalysis during World War II, while many interesting issues of technique and theory were being debated, he stood up and said ‘I wish to point out that an air raid is going on’; then sat down again. Sometimes the obvious (but inconvenient) needs to be pointed out. How many therapists and counsellors are there in the world? And what effect might it have if they all made a point of mentioning to their clients

that the world may in very real senses be coming to an end?

There is of course an argument that this would be unethical. But I also remember that during the Cold War, the International Psychoanalytic Association, having always held the view that analysts should not collectively campaign for any position, made an exception for anti-nuclear campaigning on the grounds that if there was no world there could be no psychoanalysis. The danger we are currently facing seems no less than that of nuclear war; the difference is just that nuclear war was – and remains – a possibility, while global warming appears to be a near certainty. Do we not have responsibilities, both as therapists and as citizens, to speak this truth?

This issue of PPI – trivial in comparison! – is unusual. Most of the content is a special issue, guest edited by Stephen Soldz, which replicates an online discussion hosted by the PsyBC Web site on the theme ‘Thinking critically in the midst of the maelstrom: can psychoanalysis help us stay sane in an insane world?’ As you might expect, the discussion, based around two papers by Neil Altman and Nancy Hollander, covers some of the same ground as the editorial above – for example, Lynne Layton’s question of whether practitioners may ‘omit from clinical conversation’ some forms of ‘painful awareness’. It is an important and fascinating debate, and we are delighted to host it, and grateful to Stephen Soldz and to PsyBC for making this possible. The remaining part of the discussion, which covers Nancy Hollander’s paper, will appear in the next issue.

Also appearing in this issue is a paper by Dr Gottfried Heuer, which, like several previous contributions to the journal, looks at the effects of the Holocaust on later generations. Heuer's paper takes a rather different approach, being an account of an initiative to offer a psychotherapy group for not only the descendants of survivors, but also those of 'perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust. We were thinking of a group in which the descendants of survivors of the Shoah could meet with descendants of both German

perpetrators and bystanders as well as those of the former Allied nations who had mostly stood by in passive silence.'

The article details the response to this initiative, which was entitled 'Attending to the silence' – and explains that a great deal of the response was itself silence! This is in fact another example of therapy's ability to point out difficult aspects of reality; and of people's capacity to ignore, resist and get angry about it. Together with three interesting reviews, this completes the issue.