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# "Think different" to prevent extinction. Connecting Gregory Bateson's Cybernetic Epistemology with Posthumanism

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**Abstract**

Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) left a stark warning to humanity; either change how we think or face extinction. He warned that three drivers are leading us to catastrophe; our reliance upon ever developing technology, population increase and the way we think. Bateson offered what he termed a "cybernetic epistemology" as an alternative way of thinking, and I will offer some thoughts about how this might be made more accessible to help us find a route out of the panmorphic crisis described by Simon (2021) of multiple threats to our existence.

As part of the discussion, I will outline the concepts of conscious purpose, dualistic thinking, and other Batesonian ideas, including his understanding of "mind" and of schismogenesis, with the hope of encouraging the changes to our thinking that Bateson hoped we might make. I will connect with more recent posthumanist writers who have been directly or indirectly influenced by Bateson and identify common areas of concern, and I suggest that much posthumanist discourse is remarkably similar to Bateson's cybernetic epistemology.

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> The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself
>
> Gregory Bateson, 1972, p. 493

> Agent Smith: I'd like to share a revelation that I've had during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species and I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment; but you humans do not. Instead you multiply, and multiply, until every resource is consumed.
>
> Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999

## Introduction

Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) left a stark warning to humanity; either change how we think or face extinction. He warned that three drivers are leading us to catastrophe; our reliance on ever-developing technology, population increase and the way we think. Bateson offered what he termed a "cybernetic epistemology" as an alternative way of thinking, and I will offer some thoughts about how this might be made more accessible to help us find a route out of the panmorphic crisis described by Simon (2021) of multiple threats to our existence.

This is no mere philosophical exercise; I am not arguing about how many angels (or virus particles, for that matter) can dance on the end of a pin. If we do not change how we think in the face of the panmorphic crisis, we are finished as a species. Now is no longer the time for clever thought games; there is little time left, and our children and grandchildren will struggle to survive on a planet undergoing catastrophic climate change. Climate change is urgently pressing, yet it is inextricably linked to other aspects of social injustice. Changing the way we think might help us co-create a more just, as well as sustainable existence.

As part of the discussion, I will outline the concepts of conscious purpose, dualistic thinking, and other Batesonian ideas, including his understanding of "mind" and of schismogenesis, with the hope of encouraging the changes to our thinking that Bateson hoped we might make. I will connect with more recent posthumanist writers who have been directly or indirectly influenced by Bateson and identify common areas of concern, and I suggest that much posthumanist discourse is remarkably similar to Bateson's cybernetic epistemology.

## Revisiting "The Roots of Ecological Crisis"

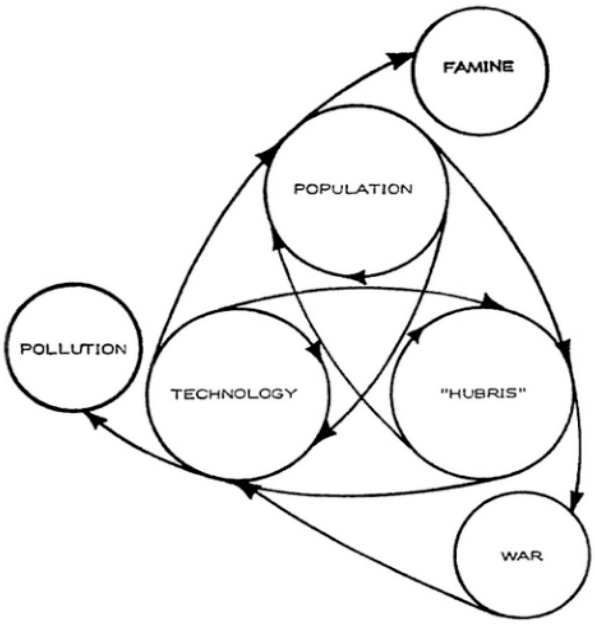


*Fig. 1 The Dynamics of Ecological Crisis, Gregory Bateson, 1972*

Bateson explained that due to the way we think (our dualistic thinking and conscious purpose), we are destroying the very ecology of which we are a part. We *are* nature, along with the rest of the planet and its other inhabitants. He frequently warned of ecological crisis in his writing, yet we still are trapped in the ways of thinking that have led to imminent disaster for our species and many others. In a 1970 paper entitled "The Roots of Ecological Crisis" (included in Steps to an Ecology of Mind, Bateson, 1972), Bateson identified three root causes of the many current threats to our survival. These comprise of technological progress, population increase and what he described as errors in the thinking and attitudes of Occidental culture (Bateson frequently used the terms "Occidental" and "Oriental" to refer to what might be broadly termed "Western" and "[Far] Eastern" thinking styles). All three of these factors interact together; population increase provokes further technological progress, and this mix of growth and progress creates anxiety which sets us in opposition to our environment. Simultaneously, technology enables further population growth and reinforces our arrogance (or hubris) towards the natural environment.

Bateson hoped that reversing any of these three drivers towards extinction might create change. He declined to make suggestions regarding limiting population growth or technology, but believed that changing the way we think about ourselves and our relationship to nature (wisdom instead of hubris) might offer a route to ensure the survival of our species.

## Conscious purpose and dualistic thinking

There are two broad themes that Bateson identified regarding the way humans think, and of course, these are interconnected. He described them as "conscious purpose" and "dualistic thinking". These combine to create what Bateson frequently calls "hubris", which is essentially pride and over-confidence, even arrogance, in one's thinking. The concept of conscious purpose is reasonably self-explanatory; it is to seek solutions to situations without considering broader systemic implications. An example Bateson used was that of DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), an insecticide developed with the virtuous intention of controlling mosquitoes that spread malaria but brought unforeseen long-term ecological consequences impacting upon other creatures, including humans. This kind of purposive thinking is rife in current Western culture and is not helped by political systems where politicians have an eye on the next election and seek quick (and popular) answers to what often are complex problems.

Dualistic thinking is typified by Rene Descartes (in)famous splitting of mind and body – and Bateson comments:

> If we continue to operate in terms of a Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter, we shall probably also continue to see the world in terms of God versus man; elite versus people; chosen race versus others; nation versus nation; and man versus environment. It is doubtful whether a species having both an advanced technology and this strange way of looking at its world can endure
>
> Gregory Bateson, 1972, p. 343

Thinking non-dualistically means thinking in wholes and understanding that everything is connected. We tend to draw boundaries and frames around things, including "systems", but these are merely

conceptual tools that help us make sense of the world; tools which are undoubtedly useful, but double-edged in that they can contribute to the "othering" of groups of people and creatures, or mask connections and relationships.

The kind of wisdom that Bateson asks us to develop is to become more humble and to accept that we cannot know everything; as the biologist, J.B.S. Haldane wrote, "Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose" (1927, p.176). This wisdom means understanding that we are part of a dynamic environment that we affect and, in turn, affects us, sometimes in ways that may not immediately be apparent.

Yet, watching or reading the news or looking on social media, it is painfully evident that the attributes of wisdom and humility are scarce in public discourse. It is painful to witness the dualistic "othering" of people based upon difference; migrants, people of colour, gender, religion and so on, or the "safe" certainty (Mason 1993) of pundits who seek to blame others for complex and nuanced issues. This othering is particularly evident on social media (particularly Twitter) and in the national press in the United Kingdom, with what appears to be a broad attack on "the woke agenda". Here is a recent example from April 2022 by a Twitter user who has over 15,000 followers, commenting upon an article in the Independent newspaper about the UK Home Secretary's plan to criminalise English Channel refugees being at risk after peers rejected the legislation for a second time:

> The Lords & @Independent are traitors & need to be removed from our lives These callous Woke bastards fail to understand or don't care it's Britons like the wigan rape victim who should be protected from the k's of illegal parasites crossing the Channel
>
> @LittleBoats2020, 2022

It is worth remembering that the wokeness criticised above is about alertness to social injustice, particularly racial, and Ashlee, Zamora and Karikari define it as "…critical consciousness to intersecting systems of oppression" (2017, p.90).

Our culture of consumerism and the acquisition of possessions, often disposable or with built-in obsolescence, our focus on the individual rather than communities, our overuse of the planet's limited resources for profit and the accumulation of wealth are all symptomatic of the thinking about which Bateson warned us. Globally, we do not relate or connect with others in ways that enable all to flourish. Instead, we engage in the oppression and exploitation of humans and non-humans alike.

I believe that capitalism, particularly the version known as "neoliberalism", that sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations, is a destructive and toxic extension of dualistic thinking and conscious purpose. Neoliberalism is not easy to define, but Brown (2018, para 7) suggests that the term "…designates something very specific. It represents a distinctive kind of valorization and liberation of capital. It makes economics the model of everything [including the] economization of democracy." Our collective lack of systemic wisdom has brought us to a situation that is desperately dangerous and divisive. Apart from the risk to the Earth's climate, I wish to consider inequality of wealth and the current pandemic to illustrate Bateson's thinking regarding a concept that he termed "schismogenesis", as both of these issues are directly linked to hubristic thinking.

## Schismogenesis as a symptom

When I first began writing this paper, two white male billionaire members of the public (Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos) had financed trips for themselves to go into space. That a few humans with unbelievable wealth choose to visit space rather than care about Earth and its inhabitants - particularly during a pandemic that is costing the lives and health of so many people, especially those from Black and Asian populations and those living below the poverty line - suggests that we are getting closer to "schismogenesis", another term coined by Gregory Bateson (1935). While I am not suggesting that redistributing the combined wealth of these two men would solve the problems of global poverty, their projects illustrate the massive divide between the rich and the poor, and schismogenesis describes a situation where a relationship breaks down, sometimes with lethal results. When "complementary" and "symmetrical" relationships are left unchecked, the pattern of relating will escalate, leading to conflict and ultimately the breakdown of the relationship and even death.

A symmetrical relationship is one where two groups compete using similar behaviour. Examples might include boxers who are matched for weight, or in another context, the arms race of the last century where the US and USSR were heading to "mutually assured destruction" by matching or surpassing each other's weaponry. Symmetrical relationships escalate with "more of the same" from each side — hitting harder, building more and more missiles, and so on until the relationship becomes unsustainable and one of the participants either changes behaviour or is annihilated. In contrast, a complementary relationship is where the two behaviours are not the same but complement each other. A crude example is a relationship between a sadist and a masochist, where escalating behaviours of both parties can ultimately lead to relationship breakdown or even death. Bateson proposed that most relationships maintain long term sustainability and prevent schismogenesis by correction — flipping between symmetry and complementarity — before escalation becomes too intense. It is important to note that the term correction in this sense is not about "right" or "wrong" but rather about *restabilising* a pattern oscillating dangerously.

A complementary relationship that has become unsustainable to the point of schismogenesis is the drastically widening gap between the rich and the poor.

According to the World Inequality Report 2022 (Chancel et al., 2022), "The poorest half of the global population barely owns any wealth at all, possessing just 2% of the total. In contrast, the richest 10% of the global population own 76% of all wealth", and they add: "Since 1995, the share of global wealth possessed by billionaires has risen from 1% to over 3%. This increase was exacerbated during the COVID pandemic. In fact, 2020 marked the steepest increase in global billionaires' share of wealth on record."

Poverty is in this era not only experienced by "others" in distant countries. Despite being one of the wealthiest nations, food banks are commonplace here in the UK. A recent UK report notes that poverty and economic inequality are closely linked problems that must be tackled together (Duque, McKnight, and Rucci 2021).

Alongside this disparity in wealth, we are also being led to schismogenesis by Covid-19, a virus so tiny that millions can fit on the head of a pin. A virus, an entity that is debatably not even "living", unable to multiply unless it is inside the cells of living things, has opened wide the cracks in our social, economic and political structures. The pandemic has also highlighted our reliance upon technological solutions to complex problems, as Braidotti notes:

> The COVID-19 pandemic is a man-made disaster, caused by undue interference in the ecological balance and the lives of multiple species. Paradoxically, the contagion has resulted in increased use of technology and digital mediation, as well as enhanced hopes for vaccines and biomedical solutions. It has thereby intensified humans' reliance on the very high-tech economy of cognitive capitalism that caused the problems in the first place. (Braidotti, 2020, p. 465)

While the origins of Covid-19 are still unclear, what is known is that it, along with other viruses, was being studied at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, but it is also possible that the virus emerged due to human interference in natural habitats. Nevertheless, both the origins and development of the pandemic are arguably due to a lack of systemic wisdom.

The pandemic has highlighted that those with fewer resources are more likely to be impacted, and according to Whitehead, Taylor-Robinson, and Barr (2021, p. 372):

> Covid-19 does not strike at random—mortality is much higher in elderly people, poorer groups, and ethnic minorities, and its economic effect is also unevenly distributed across the population… Exposure to infection is unequal. People in precarious, low paid, manual jobs in the caring, retail, and service sectors have been more exposed to covid-19 as their face-to-face jobs cannot be done from home. Overcrowded, poor quality housing in densely populated areas have often added to their increased risk. Poorer communities have also been more vulnerable to severe disease once infected because of higher levels of pre-existing illness. Increased rates of infection have led to greater loss of income linked to disruptions to work and job loss, but the immediate financial pressure of covid-19 has gone far beyond this.

These discrepancies are particularly evident in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, where government policies continue to give tax breaks to the wealthy while severely cutting public services. Many believe that the immediate responses of both the UK and US governments' administrations were to take actions that allowed the virus to spread to "weed out" older, ill and disabled people who require costly health and social care. If true, this must surely be as clear an example as any of the necropolitics that Mbembe (2003) describes.

I would argue that mortality and morbidity might have been considerably reduced in Europe and the United States had Western governments acted decisively in early 2020 and, like New Zealand, learned from countries in the East that had previously dealt with SARS outbreaks. In fairness, no Western countries had needed to confront a SARS outbreak, although this is precisely because of the efficient handling and limitation of previous viral outbreaks in the Far East.

## Dishonesty in public discourse as a symptom

I have become alarmed about the rise of misinformation regarding the use of vaccines and the wearing of face masks as being restrictions on individual freedoms that appear to emanate from broadly right-wing, libertarian sources. There are parallels with Donald Trump's use of the term "fake news" to discredit sources he didn't agree with and also the rise of conspiracy groups such as QAnon. Bateson (1972) identified one possible origin for the turn towards this type of dishonesty in his paper "From Versailles to Cybernetics", where he explains that the Treaty of Versailles was an attitudinal turning

point because those that drew up the Treaty at the end of World War One were dishonest. The peace terms were far more punitive towards Germany than initially indicated in those set out in the Armistice. Bateson tells us that:

> It's not only that World War II was the appropriate response of a nation which had been treated in this particular way; what is more important is the fact that the demoralization of that nation was expectable from this sort of treatment. From the demoralization of Germany, we, too, became demoralized.
>
> Bateson, 1972, p.478

Bateson went on to suggest that later conflicts were also a direct result of this dishonesty in making peace, citing the Korean and Vietnam Wars as examples. It is likely that more recent conflicts, for instance, in the Middle East, have some roots leading back to Versailles, and I would argue that in these times of turmoil and chaos, we have seen something sinister emerging; outright lies and deception from political leaders. Deceit was evident in the presidency of Donald Trump and is apparent in the United Kingdom now, with the current Conservative administration. As I write today, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has prompted much more dishonesty and disinformation; for example, the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Antonov said to the Russian state-run TASS news agency that reports of Russian atrocities in Bucha are "false accusations," claiming that Ukrainian forces launched artillery fire on Bucha following the withdrawal of Russian forces (Kalatur, 2022).

This kind of dishonesty will have the effect of further diminishing public trust in political processes, leading to even more disengagement that will inevitably encourage and legitimise extreme and dangerous voices. Ted Gioia (2020, para 30) links this sort of dishonesty to Bateson's Double Bind Theory, asking "Why do politicians or shyster lawyers or spokespersons for big corporations say things they know aren't true? Well, the answer is obvious: these individuals are embedded in a larger structure that demands falsehood and, even worse, rewards liars for assimilating the party line with total conviction." Gioia goes on to argue that these binds are pervasive and almost beyond anyone's ability to counter, and I would contend that this further diminishes public trust and engagement in discourse. We are passively "living with" covid, climate change, corruption and conflict.

Cartesian dualism is found in the polarisation of views becoming increasingly apparent in current discourses. There are often parallels between issues; on the one hand, right-leaning commentators are more likely to support individual freedoms, for example, not wearing a mask to protect themselves or others from Covid-19 and, in the United Kingdom, to support Brexit (that was framed as primarily preventing migrants from entering the United Kingdom). In contrast, more left-leaning commentators emphasise collectivism, taking responsibility to protect others and tend to want a return of the United Kingdom to the European Union. Exchanges on social media can be extremely toxic from both sides. Perhaps having an adversarial form of government is yet another symptom of dualism. The "cut and thrust" of scoring points over opponents is valued more than collaboration and dialogue, both of which are painfully absent in many countries.

## Capitalism as a (pathological) symptom

Political and social structures, particularly those in the West, have developed and thrived because of the way we think. There have been considerable benefits to this, including technological advances that have made life easier and healthier for many of us. As a species, we are skilled at getting things

done, but we are less adept at understanding the ecological and social consequences of our advances and actions. The concentration of wealth with the resulting concentration of influence and control to a tiny number of our species has become unsustainable, especially since the requisites to be a billionaire preclude any systemic wisdom. Simply increasing taxes on the super-rich won't make a difference to the kind of thinking that led to this mess, as it is an intervention that comes out of the same faulty epistemology as is offering anxiety treatments to young people worried about the climate crisis (Baudon and Jachens, 2021). In terms of global equality, implementing a global living wage system and a global system of environmental regulations might help, but as Hickel, Dorninger, Wieland and Suwandi tell us:

> Such reforms are unlikely to be handed down from above, however, as they would run against the interests of geopolitical factions that benefit prodigiously from the present structure of the global economy. Structural transformation will only be achieved through political struggle from below, including by the anti-colonial and environmental justice movements that continue to fight against imperialism today.
>
> Hickel et al., 2022, p.10

Political struggle and activism are indeed required to achieve the changes that are requisite to our survival, but so too is a change in the thinking that has contributed to the multiple crises that we face.

Capitalism - or perhaps more accurately, what Donna Haraway calls "White Capitalist Patriarchy (how may we name this scandalous Thing?)" (1988, p.592) - is a pathological result of thinking that affects all of us; the suffering may be disproportionate now, yet the wealthy will not be able to insulate themselves from the devastating impact of climate change. They may simply be the last human inhabitants on a planet that no longer can sustain us.

A cybernetic correction is bound to happen, but it might not be what we expect or want; the Earth will continue to orbit the sun regardless of whether or not humans or kin species exist upon it. If we are to survive, we must make a corrective shift from a predominantly lineal and purposive way of thinking to a more monistic and relational way. This shift might make the Earth a sustainable place for us all to live in peace.

## Immanent mind: Towards posthumanism

Unlike many other ecological writers, Bateson was clear that "mind" is not limited to humans and that Cartesian duality has not only disconnected us from understanding this, but set us against the environment and each other:

> If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore as not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will be yours to exploit . . . If this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or, simply, of over population and over-grazing.
>
> Gregory Bateson, 1972, p. 468

He goes on to elaborate that the larger mind – the ecology of which we are part - can be driven insane by our own insanity (hubristic, lineal thinking) and use of technology:

> St. Paul (Galatians VI) said that "God is not mocked," and immanent mind similarly is neither vengeful nor forgiving. It is of no use to make excuses; the immanent mind is not "mocked."
>
> But since our minds – and this includes our tools and actions – are only parts of the larger mind, its computations can be confused by our contradictions and confusions. Since it contains our insanity, the immanent mind is inevitably subject to possible insanity. It is in our power, with our technology, to create insanity in the larger system of which we are parts.
>
> Gregory Bateson, 1972, p. 473

A colony of ants, the forest in which the colony lives, the continent they exist upon, and the Earth itself are all mental systems containing individual minds within them. Bateson defines mind as "an aggregate of interacting parts or components" (Bateson, 1979, p. 92) which is immanent to a system. Therefore mind emerges from the communication of information across systems, and Bateson applies this definition of mind to practices of information processing that take place outside of the body. The concept of a bounded mind in the human, or even the notion that "mind" is solely a human feature, is thus flawed:

> The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This larger Mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by "God," but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology
>
> Gregory Bateson, 1972, p. 468

Rosi Braidotti, a posthumanist thinker influenced by Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari, echoes Bateson's view of mind in her suggestion that:

> …it is important to remember that this "Life" that the posthuman subject is immanent to, is no longer "bios", but "zoe". Where bios is anthropocentric, zoe is non-anthropocentric and even non-anthropomorphic. Moreover, in the posthuman convergence, zoe embraces geologically and technologically bound egalitarianism, acknowledging that thinking and the capacity to produce knowledge is not the exclusive prerogative of humans alone, but is distributed across all living matter and throughout self-organizing technological networks
>
> Braidotti, 2019, pp. 50-51

The idea of immanence is central to posthumanism, which emerged from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy as "a multiplicity of immanent ideas that seek to reset our perspectives in order for us to come to terms with our relations and our interconnections and thereby be more humble about ourselves" (Daigle and McDonald, 2022, p.1).

## Think different: Systemic wisdom and posthumanism

Bateson said, "I think that cybernetics is the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years" (1972, p. 481), and Steve Jobs, influenced by Bateson (via Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth Catalog), used this idea to create the famous Apple logo. Apple also used the term "Think different" as an advertising slogan. How ironic that Apple became linked to pollution in China, poor working conditions and that their technology became known for built-in obsolescence, although the company is now making efforts to become more sustainable and eco-friendly. Perhaps they really are beginning to "think different", but this is only a start in the changes we need to see.


Despite being an atheist, Bateson believed that religion was a symbolic way in which we could interact with the complexity and vast systems of the world in better ways. We could be humble, appreciating that we cannot know everything. We could be in awe of the wonder of the natural world and marvel at how "mind" is apparent in the systems that comprise the world, and this is sacred. As Charlton notes:

> The central concept originated by Gregory Bateson is his understanding of all the systems of the living world as being mental in kind. Each system, claims Bateson, is a mind. Such systems vary from the very small, perhaps bacterial, genetic, or cellular, to the very large: a coral reef and its inhabitants, a forest ecosystem, the mind of a nation, or the whole process of biological evolution. All these systems are interrelated and nested within larger mental systems so that there is an ultimate interconnected whole, which is "the sacred."
>
> Charlton, 2008, p.29

Bateson's notion of the sacred here does not simply refer to physical nature, e.g., mountains, forests, seas and animals. Instead, it is "the integrated fabric of mental process that envelopes all our lives" (Bateson & Bateson, 1987, p. 200).

To begin to perceive the ultimate, interconnected whole is to appreciate what Bateson started to understand as sacred, not something with which to tinker. He asked us to have the humility to know that we never will be able to fully comprehend the totality of the universe, of the complex relationships between living and non-living entities. We are part of a sacred whole; we are part of the environment, and what we do to the environment will also impact upon us, sometimes in ways we could never have predicted. This is not just systemic thinking; it also very much aligns with posthumanist thought, as Karen Barad tells us:

> Posthumanism, as I intend it here, is not calibrated to the human; on the contrary, it is about taking issue with human exceptionalism while being accountable for the role we play in the differential constitution and differential positioning of the human among other creatures (both living and nonliving). […] Posthumanism doesn't presume the separateness of any-'thing,' let alone the alleged spatial, ontological, and epistemological distinction that sets humans apart.
>
> Barad, 2007, p. 139

Posthumanism challenges the same assumption that somehow humanity is separate from the rest of the universe as did Bateson; however, posthumanism also considers of how human technological advances might bypass Darwinian natural selection as the prime driver of genesis. I think that Bateson would struggle with this aspect of posthumanism, as he argued that technological advances (that emerge from our dualistic thinking) along with our hubris create problems rather than solutions, although Thomsen and Wamberg (2020) do suggest that there is a something of a split in posthuman thought between a focus upon technological, body-centred optimism and environment-directed pessimism:

> Indeed, one of the most divisive questions in this expanded field of posthumanism has emerged between the "properly" posthuman—that is, the possibility of technology-aided development that would result in cyborgs, genetically altered humans, or even an artificial intelligence that wholly outstrips humans—and, on the other hand, a less specific post-anthropocentric understanding of the world that stretches from theorizing on the Anthropocene to diverse branches of new materialism, such as speculative realism and a generalized vitalism.
>
> Thomsen & Wamberg, 2020, p. 2

It is commonly held that posthumanism emerged from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, for example, Braidotti (2022, p. 23) states her conviction that "both Deleuze and Guattari, as profoundly anti-humanist and post-anthropocentric thinkers, offer a significant new approach to the discussions on naturalism, the environment, ecological justice and the posthuman". However, it is implausible that they would or could have developed many of their ideas without Bateson. Shaw (2015) has gone so far as to argue that Bateson was not just a productive source of concepts but was also a significant influence on the pair's writing, and notes that this impact is barely acknowledged by Deleuze and Guattari, and I would add, nor by subsequent thinkers, too. Without any doubt, Bateson was a crucial precursor to posthumanism, and as I have argued, his thinking is still acutely relevant to us in these uncertain times. At this point, it is worth remembering Bateson was not alone in his revolutionary ecological thinking in the mid-20$^{th}$ century. Influenced by Gandhi and Spinoza, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss felt that there must be a shift away from human-centred anthropocentrism to an ecocentrism, a "Deep Ecology" in which every living thing is seen as having inherent value. He argued that humans are part of nature rather than superior and apart from it and, therefore, must protect all life on Earth as they would protect their family or self (Næss, 2008). Naess contrasted Deep Ecology with Shallow Ecology, which centres human beings as somehow more important than any other creatures or entities. Electric cars, greenwashing and so on might be thought of as Shallow Ecology. Another important contribution of Næss (1989) was the concept of Ecosophy, which (in my understanding) is an ecologically aware personal epistemology that sees all living creatures and entities as being of value. In effect, Ecosophy is Deep Ecology articulated in our thoughts and behaviour and is remarkably similar to Bateson's cybernetic epistemology. It is interesting to note that Guattari (2000) also used the term "ecosophy" to link environmental ecology to social ecology and to mental ecology.

## Concluding thoughts

I have argued that dualistic, purposive thinking has led humanity to multiple crises. To live sustainably, to survive, we need to adopt a more cybernetic or systemic way of thinking about ourselves, others

and the world. At the same time, I am mindful of Bateson's ethical position, best illustrated by Jay Haley, who wrote in a personal letter to David Lipsett, one of Bateson's biographers that:

> [Bateson] didn't like power. He didn't even like the word ... anybody who said, "I'm going to change this person". If they said, "I will offer this person some ideas, and if they change, it's up to them," then Gregory would have no trouble with them. But if you take responsibility for changing people, then you would have a problem ... Any influence outside the person's range is odious to him. Any indirect manipulation is [also] out of the question.
>
> Lipset, 1982, p. 226

Any thought of manipulating people to think differently, to embrace a non-dualistic epistemology - even to save lives - would be antithetical to the kind of epistemology Bateson proposed. This leaves us with the problem of identifying how we might invite, rather than coerce, others to think differently and thus promote cybernetic thinking that might lead to actions that help avert catastrophe. There are no easy answers to this problem. However, there are some promising beginnings, for example, the Bateson Institute's work in promoting Warm Data Labs (https://batesoninstitute.org/warm-data-labs/), Gail Simon's work in developing Lenticular Futures (https://lenticularfutures.com/) and Game B (https://www.game-b.org/), all of which are promoting systemic thinking and change.

Following a tweet of mine going viral (Palmer, 2022) with over 32,000 likes, nearly 6,000 retweets and lots of engagement, including TV interviews, I am currently exploring the use of Twitter as a platform for activism and finding myself part of a growing community of sorts; a collective that includes therapists, healthcare professionals, leadership consultants, climate scientists and activists and artists. I've found that adding photographs to posts increases engagement, and I try to use messages that invite others to think systemically.

It has been heartening to see others engaging with my tweets, but the reality is that, so far, my efforts probably have had little impact. I have also been engaging with people in other ways, offering webinars and workshops to systemic colleagues in the UK and abroad, and I am an active member of an ecosystemic psychotherapy group that has proved to be an inspiring and validating community that is now affiliated with Lenticular Futures (see the link above). In terms of my practice, I tend to think of clients and colleagues in the same way as I think of all living creatures and entities; as kin. We are all connected, a family of sorts, and to treat others as kin is to treat them with kindness.

However, the urgency of the societal changes required to prevent catastrophe leaves me with more questions. To engender systemic change in a congruently systemic way (non-coercive, neutral and so on) will require time, and little time is left. Is it enough to educate others, or could we think about implementing ecological, non-dualistic epistemology locally in our own lives and practices? Following in Bateson's footsteps and considering his view of the immanence of mind, perhaps it is through both our thoughts and actions that we can make a difference. I hope so.

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