

Jung and Christ

Robbie Tulip, Canberra Jung Society, April 2022

A core question in the psychology of Carl Jung is the relationship between the ego and the self. The ego is who we think we are, while the self is who we really are. The ego can live effectively in a secular materialist world, but the self occupies a psychic reality that has as much validity and reality as the scientific world of matter. We experience the world through our minds, combining our conscious perceptions with unconscious intuitions and influences that shape our personality and culture. The totality of the self can also be referred to as the soul.

Jung interpreted Jesus Christ as the archetype of the self, the ideal of human personality integrating the conscious and unconscious realms. In this talk I will study these questions by drawing on a book by Wallace B. Clift titled *Jung and Christianity – The Challenge of Reconciliation*, and then share some of my own reflections arising from this rich material, looking at how the collective unconscious can be grounded in astronomy, and concluding with some suggestions about climate change.

Jung discussed God in terms of what he called autonomous psychic complexes, not to suggest that divinity is merely a subjective construction of the mind but to explore how our language about religion reflects universal psychological structures that include unconscious and unknown elements as well as conscious rational understanding. The complexes of the soul contain features that are universally shared, with numinous clusters of associations and meanings. This is what Jung means by his idea of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, with the spiritual heritage of human evolution born anew in the brain structure of every individual. Tuning in to these archetypal patterns of experience enables us to find meaning and spiritual healing in images of wholeness welling up from the unconscious, finding a path to repair the loss of meaning that pervades modern life. Opening up to the unconscious can dissolve blockages and allow meaning to emerge into awareness, helping to explain and treat the trauma caused by delusional religion.

From his collaboration with the renowned physicist Wolfgang Pauli, Jung contended that just as physics is discovering the unknown side of matter, so too complex psychology is pushing forward into the unknown side of the psyche. This analogy between mind and matter points to an integrated and systematic approach to reality, recognising the transcendental background of empirical reality in a unified theory of being. Looking at how these two sides are related to each other, Jung argued the spiritual and the biological must be integrated to overcome the materialistic reduction favoured by modern secular philosophy. His psychology sought a practical meaning of truth, assessing the phenomena of spirit together with the objective findings of scientific method.

Basic concepts in Jung's psychology emphasise the central role of spirituality. Wallace Clift explores Jung's description of a psychologist as a 'pastor of souls' who helps people to find meaning in life. The psyche needs to find an equilibrium between the conscious and the unconscious, emerging in psychological energies such as libido and the shadow. These are more than instinctive drives, revealing a spiritual life-force. Our personal unconscious can be studied through Jung's typology of the rational axis of thinking and feeling and the perceptual axis of sensation and intuition. The strongest and weakest of these four elements in our personal identity reveal our conscious and unconscious areas of emphasis, while their integration constitutes wisdom.

Jung explored how people have found meaning in the durable shared stories found in mythology. He defined myth as the stories that give us our sense of meaning, critiquing the popular modern view that rejects myth as false belief. Myth is a product of the unconscious, a window on the soul, serving to reveal life energies that are otherwise hidden.

One theme Jung uses to explore the relation between ego and self is energy. In the psychic realms of human culture, energy manifests in myth and story and symbol, in values and ethics. Psychic energy is a construction of the evolution of the mind, both deliberate and accidental, channelled

through symbols that connect the conscious and unconscious. Symbols participate in what they point to, bridging mind and world to express a correspondence between seen and unseen. The energy of symbols is a key part of religious psychology, providing a sense of meaning extending beyond our rational understanding to connect with numinous mystery. In his 1912 book *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung defined symbols as “images of content which transcend consciousness.”

The connection to the unknown provided by symbols thereby opens a psychological path to interpret unconscious material that otherwise provides little trace of its existence. My own interpretation of Christian symbols, aligned to Jung’s analysis, is that they contain abundant and essential information about visual astronomy, with archetypal material that has been repressed into the collective unconscious of humanity and that has high explanatory power if brought back into conscious awareness. The loss of the ancient religious connection to astronomy, seeing human existence against the visual framework of the cosmos, is an aspect of modern culture that helps to explain Jung’s concern about a loss of shared meaning and soul in our societies.

Jung contended that the careful elaboration of symbols described by sceptics can engage with the sense of mystery in divine revelation. Clift writes that in his last book *Man and His Symbols*, Jung said the role of religious symbols is to give meaning to our lives, meaning the living truth of psychic reality in myth has power through symbolic language, connecting the ultimate and infinite to the limited and finite to express eternal truth. This sense of connection is expressed in the Christian vision of Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humanity, through the metaphysical theology of the cross as the source of peace and reconciliation.

Humans have evolved genetically to dominate our planet, and also memetically, through social and cultural memes embodied in our shared frameworks of meaning, seen in both ancient and modern myths and symbols. Memes are orderly structures of cultural meaning, both conscious and unconscious, evolving in ways akin to natural selection, giving energy and impetus to the stories that provide our social cohesion and direction and values. The symbols and myths of religion evolve memetically through the causal evolutionary processes of precedent and cumulative adaptation, providing a major location of archetypal meaning in culture and psychology.

The deliberate use of energy in culture is a function of rational ego awareness. Yet our lives are also determined by types of energy that are not seen by the conscious ego. Unseen manifestations of energy appear in what Jung called the archetypes of the collective unconscious, most notably in the symbols and stories of religion that have historically provided the source of ultimate meaning. The irrational dimension in religion appears in beliefs and ritual practices that on the surface seem to make no sense. Yet the insight of depth psychology is its recognition of archetypal forms of energy that reveal our collective unconscious, the unseen order of our world that gives durable shape to human identity, showing how symbols have hidden meaning.

My view is that a key to this hidden symbolic meaning in Christianity can be found through study of the cosmology of the Bible, primarily through the direct correspondence between the cosmic vision of the New Testament and visual observation of patterns in the stars that change over time. Restoring this cosmology, looking to Jung as a guide, offers a way to see the original intent of the Gospel authors, opening psychological questions of how and why this material has been so thoroughly repressed into the unconscious and suppressed from view.

Jung saw the decline of religion as a result of two main factors - the failure of religion to value its symbolic meaning, and also the growing secular view that dogma is empty, that modern ethics can get by with no reference to religion. Jung looked to solve this loss of spiritual vitality through the construction of new forms of religion that could reconcile traditional faith with scientific reason. This ambition made him a pariah in conventional religious and scientific circles, where such a reconciliation of faith and reason confronts deeply held prejudices. His view was that the ideas that dominate our mainstream communities have major unconscious and therefore unseen assumptions, meaning these ideas function as myths. The intuitive shared beliefs expressed as myth make it hard

for their adherents to enter into dialogue with people who question them. The religious often experience the questioning of literal traditions of faith as an attack on their identity. Equally, Jung observed that scientific and scholarly communities often reject on principle the psychic construction of reality that he saw as the power and grace of religion.

His efforts to take a systematic logical approach to such deep questions of psychology mean Carl Jung can be considered among the greatest Christian theologians of recent centuries, despite, or perhaps because of, his deeply critical and ambivalent relationship to Christian faith. Looking at Christian origins in terms of psychic construction, Jung suggests in his *Answer to Job* that Jesus Christ was an ordinary person with an extraordinary messianic calling. This calling led Christ to imagine his historic role against ancient prophecies of a saviour, and deliberately to live out those prophecies to achieve an authentic and mature individuation, showing how to become a whole person. A key element of messianic prophecy was the perfect innocence of the saviour, most clearly stated in Isaiah 53, the prophecy of the suffering servant. In confrontation with the evil of the world, the pure innocence of Christ, whether real or imaginary, generated a durable psychic energy within the church through the archetypal myth of the resurrection. Jung suggested that by intentionally constructing his life and values against a messianic framework, Christ created the opportunity for the church to build myths around him. A problem with these myths of Christendom was they enabled protection of institutions rather than understanding the mystery of symbols.

Applying the concepts of psychology to explain the Gospel story offers a path toward recognition of its ethical meaning, looking beyond the literal traditions of the church to explore the psychic content of the myths as symbolic bridges to the unconscious. At the same time, applying psychology to the church can see how theology involves unconscious projection and distortion, for example in the projection of God as Father by analogy to the paternal role of human fathers. A comforting reading of scripture constructs an emotionally satisfying fantasy for believers, but represses content that challenges the accepted story. This whole process builds up problems in the unconscious shadow that is produced by the distortions and errors in conscious belief.

The gender types known as the anima or female and the animus or male are a major area of the psychological shadow in religion. The conscious exclusion of the feminine in religion produced an unconscious compensation for the sake of psychological equilibrium, as seen in the Catholic adoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Bringing such unconscious factors into consideration can help to analyse the psychology of religious belief, offering a constructive path to respect the received story while also asking what the religious message might really mean in terms of symbolic power and psychotherapy.

Recognition of the major role of unconscious factors in the construction of shared beliefs is an essential insight that Jung brought into psychology. This analysis is not welcomed by those who promulgate myths, helping to explain why churches tend to find such discussion difficult. The question of the actual historical events that gave rise to the New Testament is a primary example of this problem.

It would have been a miracle if Jesus really lived. Considered by dispassionate scientific standards, the evidence for the historical Jesus all derives from the Gospel of Mark, a single literary source whose purpose was to record a sacred allegory. The Epistles of Paul have no dependence on anything in the Gospels, which were written later. A plausible memetic evolution of the story is that an earlier cosmic Christ was gradually brought down to earth in the story of Jesus of Nazareth, like the flesh added to the dry bones described by the prophet Ezekiel. The memetic mythological roots of the Jesus story begin with the Old Testament and extend, consciously and unconsciously, across the whole region of the earth from India to Greece, including Egypt, Babylon and Assyria.

Buddhist roots of Christianity are particularly interesting. The Buddhist monastery of Lake Mareotis in Egypt was home to the Therapeut community that may have produced Mark's Gospel. Key factors demonstrating Buddhist influence include the moral similarities with the Gospels, and the presence

of monasticism in India well before its emergence in the Mediterranean region. It is interesting to suggest that Christian rejection of Indian influence reflects unconscious historical prejudices within the psychology of European dominance built upon the Christendom model of church and state. The Christian ego is affronted by its shadow, seen in the eyes of victims of imperial oppression. Allowing Buddhism into the historical conversation about Christian origins has high therapeutic value, expanding the horizon we apply to understand Christian origins.

The story in Genesis of the angels with flaming swords standing outside the garden of Eden seems to symbolise a barrier between east and west, reflecting the distinct fallen state of the west. The Biblical myth of the fall from divine grace points to the scale of delusion in western historical thinking. Taking such stories literally results in a failure to see their symbolic meaning. In fundamentalist religion this syndrome can reasonably be considered to go beyond neurosis and enter the condition of psychosis, clinging to fantasy stories that are empty shells. The Buddhist view that delusion is the cause of suffering has much to offer in the psychoanalysis of Christianity. Delusion arises when we block material from conscious awareness, consigning significant facts to the unconscious and constructing an imaginative rationalisation of our situation. Identifying these blockages can open up paths to enable our ego consciousness to better integrate with our unconscious self in an understanding of the whole. This vision of the integration of the soul appears in the story of Christ as liberator and redeemer.

There is abundant unconscious symbolism within Christianity. For example Jesus serves as a personification of the Sun, providing light and life and order to the world. Placing this cosmic vision of the Sun into human myth had strong continuity with early sun worship mythologies, while bringing the innovation of placing the saviour figure in the historical context of the Roman Empire.

We could imagine that the Jesus figure was authored by a man who projected his identity upon the messianic traditions of the world and shared this imaginative literary vision with Mark. The story was framed around the guiding question of what a messiah would have been like had he existed. The mythological fantasy of the perfect man described by Mark and the later evangelists reflects a social and psychological need to imagine a world saviour, connecting and redeeming our fallen state of depravity through a sacred allegory of divine grace. The French enlightenment philosopher Voltaire said that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him. The same necessity applies to the social and psychological function of the story of Jesus in Christianity, enabling a shared messianic interpretation of history through the vision of a world saviour.

Rather than seeing such psychological analysis as a critique of the Gospels, it can instead be used to unlock hidden meaning that the church has relegated to the collective unconscious. Suppression of heresy over the long period of Christendom created social conditions in which open discussion of the allegorical meaning in the Bible was not possible. Escaping from this intimidating context of insistence on orthodoxy, we can now read the Gospels as a sublime literary fiction whose premise is that the events described actually occurred in history, opening a vista of interpretation of how the collective unconscious has influenced religious psychology. The theme of incarnation is an interesting example, looking at what it means to say God is present on earth. Popular faith sees this as far better explained by an actual incarnation of God in Christ than an imaginary one, creating a strong memetic drive to believe the imaginary events actually happened. It is like Anselm's fallacy in his proof of the existence of God, the claim that a real God is better than an imaginary one and therefore must really exist. This claim makes no logical sense, but it has the powerful psychological functions of providing emotional comfort and justifying the institutional structures of the church. So too the belief in the historical Jesus finds psychological justification in the faith that the redemption offered in the Bible arises from the real presence of God in history.

The ethical power of Jesus Christ as a symbol of the triumph of good over evil remains just as vital and valid whether the Gospel story is historical or allegorical. However, the claim that Jesus was historical lent itself far more easily to mobilising a mass movement, motivated by mysterious

mythological meaning. The growth of the church required a simple shared story, something far more easily achieved by treating the Gospels as history than through the complex psychology of symbol and myth. When Christianity became the Roman state religion, a lowest common denominator of literal belief was enforced to support imperial security and stability. The Christendom millennium after the fall of Rome made this assumption of Gospel Truth seem obvious and unquestionable, relegating any doubts to the collective unconscious.

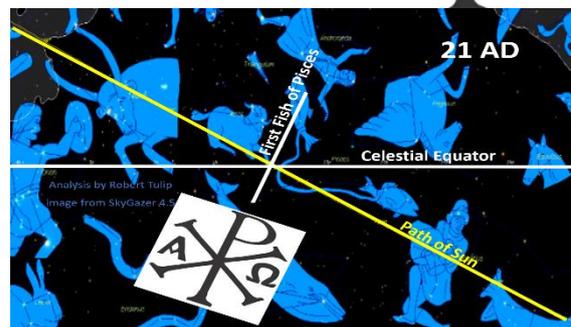
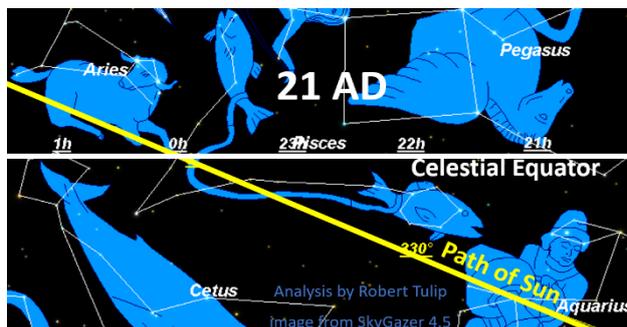
Looking at how the Christian creed has emphasised Gospel Truth as its paradigm of reliable fact, there is an immediate contrast to the standards of normal historical inquiry. A number of serious scholars are now open to the suggestion that the Jesus of the Gospels was invented as an entirely fictional character. This idea continues to be despised and rejected, but it presents a paradigm shift that could resolve the many anomalies in conventional faith while opening the path to a new shared sense of the holy in numinous encounter with God. Insistence on the historical existence of Jesus places believers within an imperial political tradition, in view of how the dogma of Gospel Truth was used to support social cohesion in Christian nations and empires. The scientific method of radical doubt applied to the Bible can look below the surface of faith to explore its unconscious motives.

Astronomy in Biblical Symbols

Carl Jung argued a major unconscious motivation for Christian faith can be seen in the exact correspondence observed in the ancient world between Christian cosmology and the astronomy of precession of the equinox. The New Zodiac Age of Pisces dawned at the time of Christ, as the position of the Sun at the spring equinox shifted from the constellation of Aries into Pisces, where it has remained ever since. My interest is to explore how the symbolism of this observable shift of the stars found its way into the theories of time in the New Testament. The intimate connection in the ancient world between astronomy and religion dated from before the rise of writing, as communities used observation of the Sun and the stars to govern their calendar and the timing of religious rituals. The connection of religion to astronomy was largely severed by Christianity, and then abandoned by modern science, but the idea that precession structured the original Christian cosmology suggests a blueprint in the stars for the Christian story.

Jung emphasised the centrality of precession to the role of Christ as Fisher of Men, seeing Christ as avatar of the Zodiac Age of Pisces the Fish. Such analysis can be extended to numerous Biblical symbols, such as the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the alpha and omega, and the allegorical language of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse. This line of analysis is supported by the observation that the early church had both a secret and a public teaching, with the argument that when the public teaching won out it sought to eliminate the secret mystery ideas that gave it birth. But these original ideas did not simply disappear entirely, they remained in place in the collective unconscious through the symbols and texts based on them. We can now seek to bring these unconscious influences into conscious awareness.

One Christian symbol that appears to have a powerful unconscious astronomical meaning is the Chi Rho Cross. The X or Chi matches to the great circles formed by the celestial equator and the path of the Sun at the equinox, while the P or rho matches to the line of stars known as the first fish of Pisces. The X, described



by Plato in terms of the moving image of eternity, crossed this line of stars at the time of Christ, as shown in these diagrams. Modern astronomy calculates that this event occurred on 15 September 21 AD. The direct correlation connects an astronomical observation that could readily have been understood for centuries before the time of Christ with the meaning of the Christian story as bringing a new covenant of love and grace.

These Russian icons of the resurrection use this Easter symbol of the Chi Rho Cross.



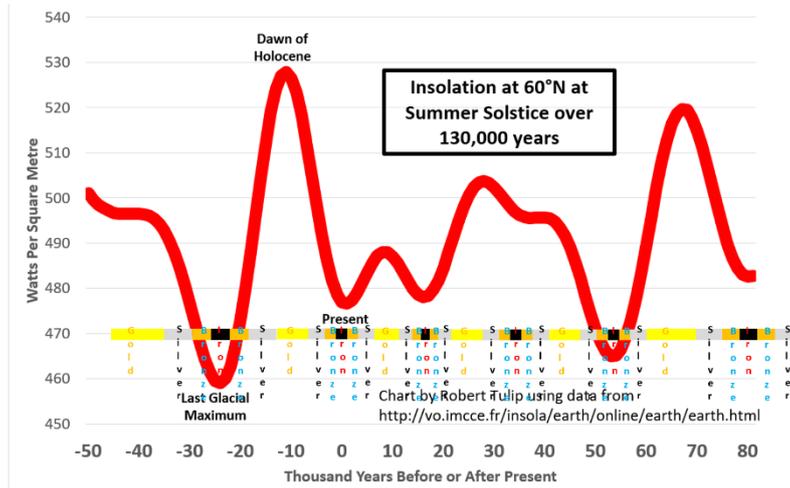
The letters alpha and omega shown in the traditional Chi Rho symbol start and end the Greek alphabet, symbolising the beginning and end of time, matching directly to the observable movement of the equinox out of Aries, the first sign of the Zodiac, and into Pisces, the last sign. On this model the incarnation of Jesus symbolises the visible shift of the Zodiac Ages, as the stable and eternal cycle of time. If this was the original meaning of the Chi Rho symbol, its loss from awareness can be explained by the tension it has against the literal story of the Gospel. The view that Jesus only seemed to be incarnate was condemned as the heresy of Docetism, and for a thousand years the church sought to destroy writings that supported this view. Yet if this astronomy was central to the original construction of Christianity, its suppression into the collective unconscious is something that can be studied by analysis of its traces in symbols such as the Chi Rho Cross.

Orbital Cycles as the Structure of the Collective Unconscious

This Biblical analysis suggests that natural cycles of time are central to the archetypes of the collective unconscious. We can readily see this in the cycles of the day, the week, the month and the year. Our blood chemistry [changes](#) with the daily cycle of activity and rest, affecting our conscious awareness in ways that are entirely unconscious. Ocean tides follow a [weekly pattern](#) driven by the orbit of the moon, which also creates the monthly cycle of light and dark nights. The annual cycle of the seasons also follows this same pattern of activity in spring and summer and rest in autumn and winter.

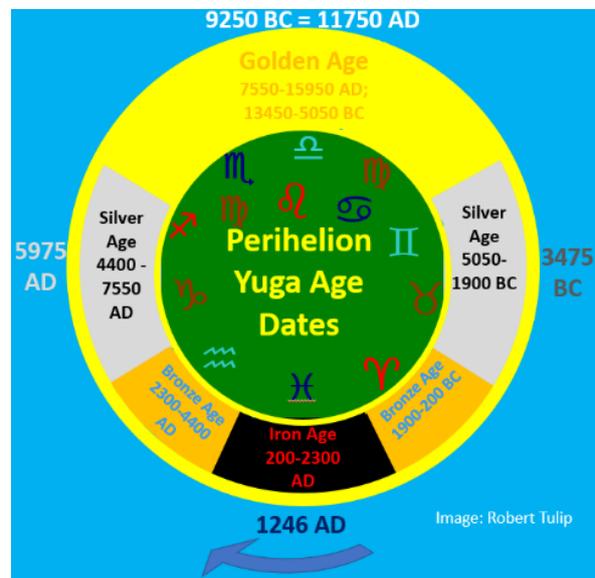
The slow cycle of precession of the equinox causes natural climate change with a cycle of ice age advance and retreat over about twenty thousand years. The suggestion that this slow cycle could have unconscious effects on biological evolution can be analysed by setting mythology against the orbital cycle of light and dark. The astronomer Milutin Milankovitch showed that the key marker of the orbital climate cycle is the amount of sunlight at the summer solstice in the northern temperate latitudes.

Setting this against history, we see in this next diagram that this measure reached a low point over the last two thousand years, falling from a high point at the Dawn of the Holocene about ten thousand years ago and before that rising from a low point at the Last Glacial Maximum about twenty thousand years ago.



This cycle is largely defined by the annual date of the perihelion, when Earth is closest to the Sun, an event that occurs now about 3 January. The perihelion advances by about one day every 58 years, and will reach the June solstice in about ten thousand years from now. In this diagram of insolation at the summer solstice at 60° north over 130,000 years, we can readily see this pattern.

The mythological cycle that most exactly matches this orbital pattern is the Vedic myth of the Yuga, described as a cycle of light and dark over 24,000 years, extended in its popular form to billions of years. On this model, the earth is now emerging from the Kali Yuga, the Iron Age of darkness and ignorance, moving over the next twelve thousand years to a new Golden Age, the Satya Yuga of light and wisdom. Setting Christianity against this model of time can see Jesus Christ as the spirit of the Golden Age in the midst of the Iron Age. The Iron Age is symbolised by the Zodiac Age of Pisces. The Second Coming of Christ represents the upward movement toward light and wisdom symbolised by the now dawning Zodiac Age of Aquarius. The overlay of the Yuga cycle on the precession wave diagram shows their correlation.



Seeing this orbital structure as providing an unconscious governing pattern for consciousness means we can interpret the last ten thousand years as a period of growing separation of human culture from our cosmic context, producing the myth of fall, and the coming ten thousand years as a period of gradual reintegration into spiritual wholeness. Despite its extremely slow operation against historical time scales, this model offers the optimistic hope of the development of a stable planetary civilization. It also suggests that we are at a turning point, with the old paradigm of descent still dominating culture while the new paradigm of ascent seeks to break through into consciousness. Seen against the archetypes of the collective unconscious, we can interpret the Christian myth of crucifixion against the motif of cosmic descent, and the myth of resurrection against the motif of ascent.

The rising and falling cycle of light over the precession period is now just past its low point, like the annual winter at 3 January in the north, two weeks after the solstice. The precession cycle can be defined in terms of four cosmic seasons, like the four annual seasons. These cosmic climate seasons are defined by the date of the perihelion, which was in the northern summer months ten thousand

years ago and has slowly advanced through autumn and into winter. The perihelion crossed the December solstice almost eight centuries ago in 1246 AD.

There is a direct correlation between the cosmic season of fall and the period imagined in Christianity as the fall from grace into corruption described in the Bible. My view is that this correlation reflects an unconscious forcing of cultural trends as part of a rising and falling millennial trajectory with orbital drivers. Humanity is part of this natural planetary cycle, which is reflected in our mythological imagination. By grounding the collective unconscious in astronomy in this way, we can place Jung's pioneering analysis of archetypes into an objective empirical framework.

Climate Change

To conclude, I will draw this together with our world situation by examining unconscious influences upon our understanding of climate change, which is the greatest security peril for our planet. The science of climate change is clear, but unconscious factors prevent dialogue about what to do about it. The mainstream policy of cutting emissions by decarbonising the economy will do nothing to prevent extreme weather in this decade. The only solution is to shift into a new planetary paradigm, recognising that direct measures to cool the planet are urgently needed. My view is that marine cloud brightening in the Southern Ocean should be a first major global initiative to mitigate the dangers of warming. Brighter clouds would create a cooling shield for Antarctica, freezing the sea ice, slowing the glacial loss in Antarctica and increasing regional reflection of sunlight to space. This would protect biodiversity and cool ocean currents that are a main contribution to extreme weather.

A strong psychological blockage in climate policy has prevented public awareness of the potential of such measures, with marine cloud brightening excluded from discussion in the IPCC because it conflicts with the dominant narrative around decarbonisation. My view is that this blockage can be analysed against currents of the collective unconscious, primarily in the prevailing assumptions about how to achieve political change. Scientific knowledge tends to have strong alignment to left wing politics. It appears that this partisan alignment has enabled the assumption that only the political left is able to take real climate action, with the idea that a rapid shift away from fossil fuels is the main task. The problem with this theory of decarbonisation is that it can at best prevent only a tiny fraction of warming. To keep the planet stable, we need instead to implement direct cooling measures.

It appears that the left wing model of politics as class conflict has created an irrational assumption that closing fossil fuel industries is the only climate agenda. The political model has direct memetic continuity with the historical theory that only a popular front of progressive forces can achieve change, a polarising view that excludes discussion of immediate measures to mitigate climate change. The problem is that ending emissions is not enough to stop climate change. New emissions are marginal against the primary role of committed warming from past emissions, which by the end of this century will total a trillion tonnes of carbon, about sixty times bigger than our annual emissions. Converting this large stock of carbon into useful forms should be the main climate agenda, building upon immediate action to brighten the planet. Against that agenda, it does not matter if emissions continue, as net zero and net negative emissions have to be achieved primarily by removing carbon dioxide from the air, on much larger scale than annual emissions. The goal should be to stabilise the climate and achieve a return toward Holocene conditions, preventing sea level rise and dangerous warming.

Jung showed that it is entirely possible to detect unconscious influences upon our life. This observation remains controversial for the simple reason that unconscious influences are outside our conscious awareness. In politics and religion, and in our personal lives, considering the function of unconscious factors can help to explain motives and beliefs, helping us to see how worthy goals might actually be achieved.