



# FACING CLIMATE CHANGE

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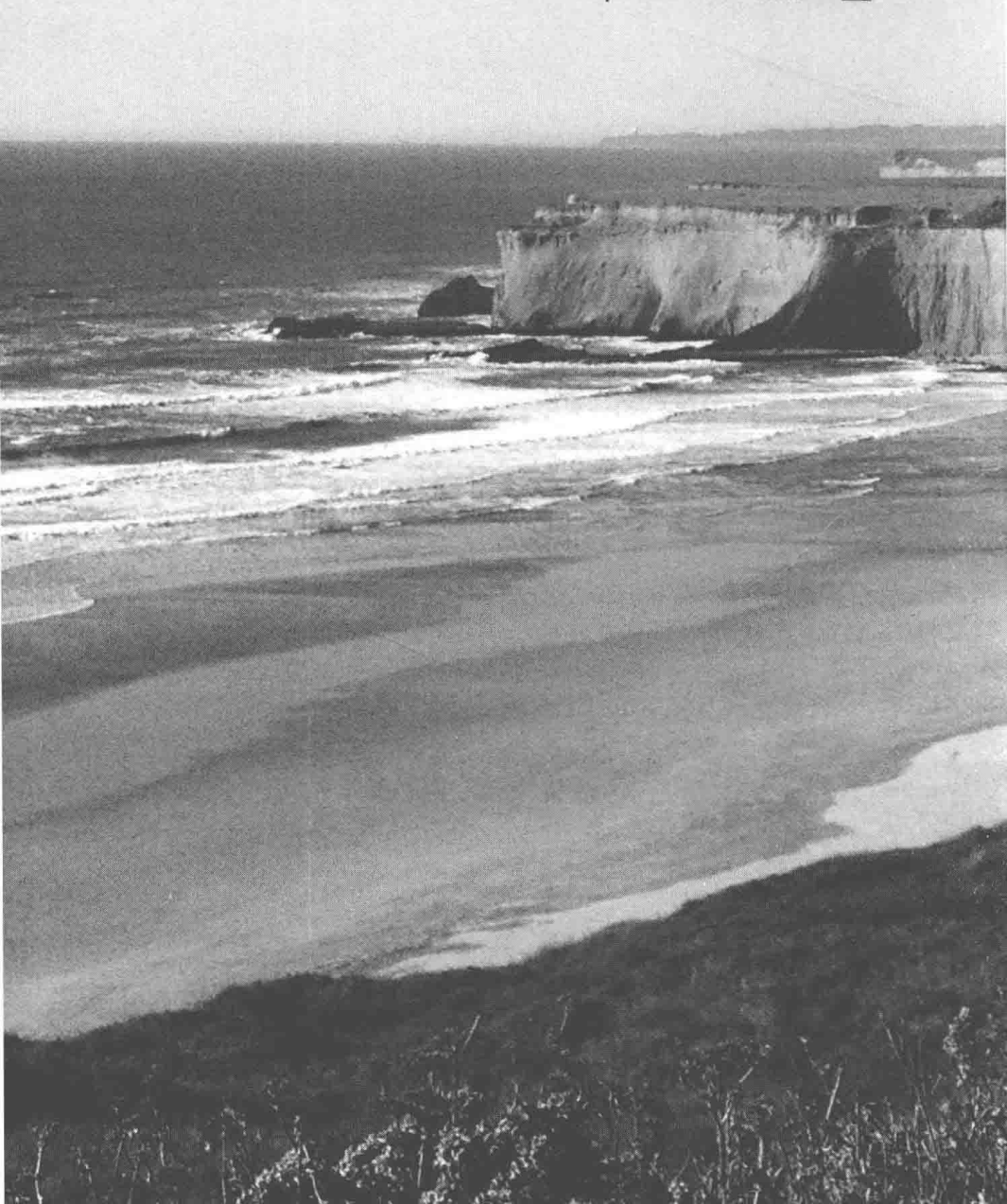
An Integrated Path  
to the Future

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JEFFREY T. KIEHL

# Facing Climate Change

Columbia University Press *New York*



Columbia University Press  
*Publishers Since 1893*  
New York Chichester, West Sussex  
cup.columbia.edu  
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Kiehl, J. T. (Jeffrey T.)  
Facing climate change : an integrated path to the future /  
Jeffrey T. Kiehl.  
New York : Columbia University Press, [2016] | Includes  
bibliographical references and index.  
LCCN 2015022596 | ISBN 9780231177184 (cloth : alk. paper) |  
ISBN 9780231541169 (e-book)  
LCSH: Climatic changes—Psychological aspects. | Global  
environmental change—Psychological aspects. | Environmental psychology. |  
Human ecology—Psychological aspects.  
LCC BF353.5.C55 K54 2016 | DDC 155. 9/15—dc23  
LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015022596>



Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable  
acid-free paper.

This book is printed on paper with recycled content.  
Printed in the United States of America

C 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

COVER IMAGE: Photo by Jeffrey T. Kiehl  
COVER DESIGN: Milenda Nan Ok Lee  
All text photos by Jeffrey T. Kiehl

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*An Integrated Path to the Future*

Jeffrey T. Kiehl



For Nancy, Kate, Alexis, and Matthew

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of *now*. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. . . . We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words:

"Too late . . ."

—Martin Luther King Jr.

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As any change must begin somewhere, it is the single individual who will experience it and carry it through. The change must indeed begin with an individual; it might be any one of us. Nobody can afford to look round and to wait for somebody else to do what he is loath to do himself. But since nobody seems to know what to do, it might be worthwhile for each of us to ask himself whether by any chance his or her unconscious may know something that will help us.

—C. G. Jung

## Preface

Our demand for energy and our consumption of Earth's natural resources have pushed the planet into a state of great peril. Becoming aware of this environmental crisis is a first step toward transformation. It is natural to experience overwhelming distress when contemplating this situation. Beneath the fear of losing things close to us is the more fundamental fear of losing the world that has given birth to life itself. I sense this deep fear whenever I talk with people about global warming. The seeds of change are embedded in this generalized anxiety. Crises often give birth to creative transformation. Opportunities to create a better world can arise from our current situation, in which we are called to participate actively in this transformation. I have explored ways to begin the journey toward a flourishing future. The paths of science, Jungian psychology, philosophy, and Buddhism provide practical tools to understand the barriers to transformation and, more importantly, the means of breaking through them.

*Science* provides us with a clear picture of how and why Earth's climate is changing. The facts, based on observations,

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lead to the conclusion that we are altering the climate. The implications for the future are also certain. We cannot continue our current behavior toward the planet's precious natural resources. We must begin to develop a more caring relationship toward the world. Although technology will play an essential role in addressing our problems, we must confront the facts of the fundamental psychological roots of this problem. Facing *psyche* is a pivotal point for our transformation. By *psyche*, I mean both the conscious and unconscious processes that make up our psychology.

*Jungian psychology* helps us understand why we fear the changes looming in our future. In gazing into the depths of the unconscious, we see how it is possible to deny the existence of threats in spite of their reality. Jung discovered that our psyche contains coherent patterns of behavior that are charged with affect. Jung called these feeling-toned structures complexes. Complexes not only occur in individuals; they appear in entire cultures. Jungian psychology helps us analyze how individual and cultural complexes contribute to the existence of our environmental situation. Awareness of these coherent emotional patterns opens us to developing a more meaningful relationship with them, allowing us to move through our habitual patterns of negativity. Breaking through the psychological barriers to change brings us to a threshold of transformation. On a deeper psychological level, Jung proposed the idea of archetypes, which are universally shared patterns of perception. Archetypes appear across cultures in the form of images and metaphors. Perhaps the most universal archetypal images are those of mother and father. Archetypes are the shared lenses through which we view the world.

*Philosophy* prompts us to ask questions concerning our way of being in the world. Throughout this work I use the



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word “world” as a signifier not of planet Earth but as the particular environment we experience. Thus, we have an inner psychological world, an outer everyday world, a social world, and a global collective world. In asking questions such as why we are here or how our being affects the world, we become aware of how we are a part of the world. In our explorations of the phenomenal world, the felt-sense world we experience in our everyday lives, we can begin to develop an ability to see deeply. This is a way of sensing the beauty and richness of things around us. We not only see the surface of things but can appreciate the inherent value of what is in the world. Sensing the world this way places us in a closer relationship to all things. This type of focusing grounds us so that we can see the world through a lens of fearlessness rather than fear.

*Buddhism* is a path that grounds us in awareness. I choose this particular path because it feels right for me. There are, however, many roads to finding inner stillness. Many religions have practices that open one to the transpersonal, and in connecting with it we awaken to our true interconnectedness with the world. Here, the word “transpersonal” means an awareness that transcends the ego’s perspective. This awareness recognizes that there is more to the world than our individual existence. What transcends the ego perspective is rooted in spiritual experience, be it God, the Tao, Buddha-nature, or nature itself. An experience of the transpersonal provides us with meaning, which seems so elusive in a world rooted in the view that we are fundamentally separate individuals. From a Buddhist perspective, our ability to experience a transpersonal dimension in life ultimately depends on how we relate to mind. By becoming more mindful, we are able to change our presence and purpose in this world, and our actions will thereby arise from a sense of compassion for all beings.

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These are the threads that I believe are critical for weaving our new tapestry of creative transformation. I feel that by bringing head and heart together we will be able to create a sustainable, flourishing future. History shows that humanity can rise to meet great challenges and overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. There is no question that the world is mired in continual conflict, from the local to global scales. It is difficult to see how we can transcend this state of turmoil. However, our basic nature of empathic, compassionate being can unite us in the creation of a new world of cooperation, creativity, and connectedness. I invite you to join me in weaving this tapestry of a flourishing future.

## Acknowledgments

My journey in writing this book began over ten years ago, in planning a workshop for the Aspen Global Change Institute called “Exploring Boundaries of Nature: A Reflective Dialogue on the Environment.” My involvement in AGCI workshops continues to evoke reveries about our deep connections to Earth. I thank John Katzenberger, the director of AGCI, for his years of interest in my work. I thank Steven Bennett of Regis University for introducing me to phenomenology. I thank the Jungian analysts Bernice Hill, Jerry Wright, David Schoen, and Susan Olsen for heartfelt support. I thank James Hurrell and William Large of the National Center for Atmospheric Research for their support over the years. I thank the Advanced Studies Program of NCAR and Lisa Sloan for making my year visit to UC Santa Cruz possible. My visit to Santa Cruz allowed me to open up to the writing process. I thank Bill Herr at Esalen, who awakened me to the power of sharing one’s writing with others. I am indebted to Andy Couturier of The Opening in Santa Cruz for allowing me to find my true voice. I thank fellow members of Andy’s Book Completion Group,

## *Acknowledgments*

who provided so much encouragement. I thank John Laue, poet extraordinaire, for his guidance. I am deeply thankful for John Cunningham's editorial assistance and friendship. John's patience and tender care made the book what it is. I thank Peter Jones of the Trident Café for his constructive comments. I offer tremendous gratitude to the dharma teachers and the sangha members I have known over the past forty years and give a deep bow to the Boulder Zen Center, the Cambridge Buddhist Association, and the Boulder Shambhala Center. I thank Patrick Fitzgerald of Columbia University Press for his support and belief in my work. The staff at Columbia University Press, including Kathryn Schell and Michael Haskell, were wonderful to work with. I also thank Robert Fellman for his excellent editing of the manuscript. I deeply appreciate the comments from Ben Santer, a scientist of tremendous integrity. Much of this book was written in the early mornings, sitting at the Trident Café in Boulder, Colorado, and at Verve Coffee in Santa Cruz, California. I thank the staff of these two soulful places for providing an inviting writing environment. This work was finished during a personal retreat at Esalen Institute in Big Sur; the quiet, sacred space of Esalen is a constant reminder of why we need to preserve the beauty of this world. My writing was supported in part by funds received from the AGU Climate Communication Prize. I thank my parents, Bob and Alma, for their faith in me. I am forever thankful for the unwavering support of my wife, Nancy, and my daughters, Katelyn and Alexis. I am thankful for Matthew, my son-in-law. Ultimately, this work is for Kate, Lexi, Matthew, and future generations; may we all walk the Blessing Way into a flourishing future.

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# I

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## Changes



## A Journey from Climate Science to Psychology

The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of  
the universe, to match your nature with Nature.

—Joseph Campbell

My wife and I walk up a trail in the foothills, a trail I first traversed some forty years ago, when I arrived in Boulder. I have walked this path many times since. The contour of the trail is familiar, as is the vegetation bordering it. I have been away from this particular trail for a few years, and as we walk I am struck by the radical changes that have taken place. Large boulders lie strewn across a flat streambed. The trees that once grew on either side of the narrow stream have fallen on their sides. Recently, Boulder endured extreme flooding, altering its landscape in many places. The flood was caused by a record amount of rainfall over a few days. I am struck by the formidable effect that the floodwaters have had on this once-familiar terrain. The place I have known for so many years is now changed.

Life is full of change, twists and turns, ascents and descents; my life is no exception. I remember the day when my professional trajectory changed significantly. Sitting in my office, I was looking at the carbon dioxide levels projected to occur by the end of the twenty-first century, assuming we continue on