

Letter to the Editor

From **Rachel Freeth**

Dear Editor,

I want to thank you for the long interview with Vincent Di Stefano (*AHP Magazine for Self and Society*, No.8, Winter 2022). I found it so refreshing and encouraging reading about his experience and thinking which, like increasing numbers of enlightened individuals, challenges the currently dominant, hubristic biomedical paradigm. I am in no doubt that a paradigm change is urgently needed, and I am grateful to people who, like Vincent, are mapping out what this might look like and involve.

In particular, I appreciated his articulation of the elements of biomedicine – its ‘materialist and reductionistic ethos’, the ways in which it represents the wider cultural pursuit of certainty and control, and how this manifests as a deep-rooted, unthinking paternalism and particular power dynamic within helping activities of many kinds (which, I believe, includes those of therapists as well as medical practitioners). Having previously been a psychiatrist for many years, I have long lamented the absence of a holistic gaze and focus on ‘transformational encounter’ within the psychiatric profession, in contrast to the limited and frequently impersonal application of mechanistic, technical interventions. In my experience, psychiatric practice is as biomedical as other medical specialties, despite claims that it adopts a so-called ‘biopsychosocial model’.

Furthermore, as Vincent points out, attention to the meaning of illness is not part of biomedicine, which instead isolates individuals from their context and resists that which is unknown and mysterious. If only we, both

individually and as a culture, had the courage to probe the ‘deeper roots of suffering’ Vincent referred to, and what this may tell us about both our limitations and strengths, as well as confronting us with the questions of ‘who we are’, how to live and our own mortality. This interview for me went straight to the heart of the matter.

Rather than simply condemning biomedicine, which I confess at times I have been tempted to do, Vincent suggests that it may be possible to incorporate it within the wider holistic paradigm. This challenges me to find ways of making space for biomedicine, of expanding my gaze and learning to relate and to dialogue with it, with the humility this necessarily involves.

Self and Society is to be congratulated for shining a spotlight on issues that are, I believe, as relevant for therapists as they are to medical practitioners. May we hear more voices like those of Vincent, offering hope for what may be possible towards our collective task of healing, however daunting this seems and however marginalised we may feel in our efforts. The seeds of change have been planted, and it is up to us to water them.

Rachel Freeth
Counsellor & writer
March 2022