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The Mythical Story of Our Planet and the Role of Therapy

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Introduction

Myths are stories humans have always told themselves to provide a worldview that gives meaning and purpose, both about themselves and their society and culture. Yet at a time of global crisis when the whole future of our planet is in jeopardy, there is an urgent need to consider the dominant myths of our current time, and from this understanding to develop a new mythical story that not only harnesses the scientific and technical knowledge to resolve our global crisis, but also enables the development of sufficient moral, political and, above all, spiritual will to do so. In essence, what is required is a new mythical story to address what may be called a 'crisis of soul', and so provide us with hope rather than resignation or despair. Karen Armstrong puts it like this:

> We need myths that help us to venerate the earth as sacred again instead of merely using it as a 'resource'. This is crucial, because unless there is some kind of spiritual revolution that is able to keep abreast of our technical genius, we will not save our planet. (Armstrong, 2005, p. 143)

And more recently, following in this vein, she adds: '...whatever our "beliefs", it is essential for human survival that we find a way to rediscover the sacrality of each human being and resacralise our world' (Armstrong, 2019, p. 429).

Given this imperative, how might therapy, and particularly the creative possibilities and potentialities of the humanistic, existential and transpersonal traditions, contribute to the ongoing task of taking forward the creation of a new mythical story? How might we combine the scientific, material and technical (or outer aspect) with the moral, spiritual and religious (or inner aspect)? These are the questions this article aims to explore. It compares the dominant Western culture and worldview, underpinned by the dualism of scientism[1] and materialism,[2] with the emerging counter-culture, underpinned by a non-dualistic, holistic and spiritual (or reverential) sensibility. In so doing, we seek to integrate what could also be viewed as the left-brain and right-brain ways of attending to reality. We identify what we believe are the key elements needed for a new mythical story, in particular the development of consciousness and a religious and spiritual outlook. We then consider the relevance of these for the therapy world.

The ideas we are exploring are not in themselves new. We are aware that we are tapping into the thinking and vision of many others who have trod, and are treading, similar paths of enquiry. However, we offer our own overview and particular synthesis with the aim and hope of stimulating discussion, debate and a more detailed elaboration and exploration.

Two Contrasting Mythical Stories

In his seminal work Iain McGilchrist shows how over several centuries, the Western world has become increasingly in thrall to the analytical, logical, rational and target-driven left

hemisphere of the brain, which grabs on to factual detail and seeks to categorise, plan and control. This has been at the expense of the right hemisphere, with its propensity for imagination, intuition, a sense of the sacred, transcendence and willingness to surrender to the mysterious, the ineffable and the unknown. While the left brain tends to utilise knowledge, the right brain seeks to understand. Furthermore, according to McGilchrist, the left brain

> ...pays attention to the virtual world that it has created, which is self-consistent but self-contained, ultimately disconnected from the Other, making it powerful – but also curiously impotent, because it is ultimately only able to operate on, and to know itself. (McGilchrist, 2019, p. 23)

As a result, what has generally emerged is a Western culture dominated by scientific reductionism, and what philosopher Tim Freke describes as 'scientific objectivism' (Freke, 2017), where only what can be measured and defined is regarded as having 'real' existence. When combined with neoliberal capitalism, and in Northern Europe atheistic humanism (of which more later), it leads to a worldview which assumes that never-ending material progress must be the best way forward. It favours a notion of absolute and potentially knowable truth in a world it regards as accidental and without ultimate meaning.

The paradox here is that this culture is founded on a mythical story which denies the very idea of myth precisely because it cannot be measured or claim to be the truth. However, it is only one story which contrasts with another counter-cultural story in which the balance between left and right brain is restored to how it had been in pre-modern times. McGilchrist explains the role of the right hemisphere of the brain as that which

> pays attention to the Other: to whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves, with which it sees itself in profound relation. It is deeply attracted to, and given life by, the relationship, the betweenness, that exists with the Other. (McGilchrist, 2019, p. 23)

In the counter-cultural mythical story the right brain is also the locus of wisdom and discernment, and is rightfully in charge of its integrated relationship with the left brain. Together they give rise to a holistic view which dispels the dualisms of mind and body, mythos and logos, and the intuitive and rational. This is a story of ambiguity, mystery and doubt, with a need to constantly revise knowledge (indeed, engage with the question of what is knowledge – epistemology), seeing it as multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and full of paradox. This therefore means rejecting material progress as a prized and inevitable goal. It embodies a less hubristic spiritual or reverential approach. It is capable of addressing both the nature of our being as creatures with soul, *and* the material global problems facing us all. It provides a mythical story for our times which gives meaning, purpose and hope. However, there is a serious challenge in promoting this new mythical story, and we will consider this next.

A New Universal Mythical Story

The counter-culture has gained ground over the past 60 years or so, during which time a wide range of authors and reports have spelt out in detail the scientific, technical and economic issues which need to be considered and critiqued. However, much less attention has been paid to the overarching mythical story required to match and underpin this body of work if it is to take hold in practice.

What is needed is no less than a paradigm shift, which was first described by Thomas Kuhn specifically in relation to science, described by the physicist John Polkinghorne as a 'radical revision of our understanding of the physical world' (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 11). Furthermore, Kuhn viewed this shift as coming about rapidly over a few years (Kuhn, 1962). We argue, though, that science *and culture* will be involved simultaneously, and will require a different magnitude of paradigm shift (perhaps better described as a change of cosmology), which in the past has only taken place over a prolonged period. The challenge and question, then, is whether such a shift can occur in the relatively few years we may have left to address the current global crisis. We believe that although difficult to envisage at present, we are at a

pivotal stage where this is not impossible; and our contention is that the development of a new mythical story is now what urgently requires most attention.

The Nature and Role of Myth

So what is the nature and role of myth, and why is it such a crucial factor in inaugurating a new counter-culture? In *A Short History of Myth*, Karen Armstrong began with a helpful definition: 'Myths are universal and timeless stories that reflect and shape our lives – they explore our desires, our fears, our longings, and provide narratives that remind us what it means to be human' (Armstrong, 2005, p. 143).

The Challenge

The challenge, though, is that creating a new mythical story goes against the grain of the dominant culture, which views myths themselves as a historic aberration and false, thereby dispensing with them altogether. In these times it is commonly believed that scientific rationalism and objectivism are all that is required, and this idea has become so embedded in public consciousness that looking for a new mythical story is not merely misleading, but incomprehensible. This problem can be seen clearly when applied to the global crisis – indeed, the global crisis has perhaps compounded it. Global warming and climate change are so emotive that many people either deny or ignore them, despite all the evidence that has accumulated. All in all, there is great resistance still in place from the mainstream established culture. So where can we look to engender hope?

Mary Midgley was a remarkable philosopher who, in her book *The Myths We Live By*, points to the direction we need to go in relation to the ecological crisis. She saw the rise in acceptance of James Lovelock's Gaia theory on the evolution of the earth (Lovelock, 2016) as an instructive example of the difficulties that have to be overcome for a paradigm shift to occur. For this to gain acceptance, Midgley sees the process as follows:

> I think it is perhaps somewhat like the trouble that we often have in responding to an unfamiliar kind of music or architecture. At first the patterns presented seem meaningless, indeed, they don't seem to be patterns at all. Then, rather mysteriously, given time and good will, their order seems to make sense to us. (Midgley, 2003, p. 133)

Midgley then identifies a particular symbolic moment that made all the difference to public acceptance of the leap that scientists had already made in their understanding of the universe. She puts it as follows:

> ...the leap was, rather surprisingly, helped by the twentieth century's experiments with space. Astronauts who were trying to move away from our planet could no longer think of it simply as a background, a boring, dark, indefinite stuff that was always under their feet. Instead, they were forced to visualise it as a whole, as a planet moving through the sky – in effect, as one of the heavenly bodies.
>
> They reported that seeing the earth from a distance in this way is a quite astonishing experience, and the photos they took of it have to some extent conveyed that experience to the rest of us. They have deeply changed our response to the planet. (ibid., pp. 133–4)

One aspect of this is that because the images were so widely seen across the world, it enabled the global population to understand themselves as a collective whole, and adopt a broader gaze from a different perspective. So we can see how, although originally based on a novel scientific theory, the myth of Gaia goes beyond infiltrating our collective unconscious. It is the evolution and transformation of consciousness that constitute one of the key elements in the development of a new mythical story, intertwined with the development of a spiritual and religious sensibility. These two elements will now be explored further, although their importance has been acknowledged many times already over at least the past century by numerous thinkers from a wide range of disciplines – philosophy, psychology, theology and physics, to name just a few.

The Key Elements of a New Mythical Story

In what follows we outline what we regard as two fundamental and interrelated elements underpinning the new mythical story we are exploring and advocating – the evolution of consciousness and the role of spirituality and religion.

Evolution of Consciousness

Two Models of Consciousness

Two models of consciousness have been described which relate to and form part of the two contrasting mythical stories that we compared earlier. Schwartz (2018) describes these as the 'physicalist/materialist model' and the 'interdependent inter-connected model', and delineates their characteristics as follows:

The physicalist/materialist model

1 The mind is solely the result of physiologic processes.
2 Each consciousness is a discreet entity.
3 No communication is possible except through the defined physiologic senses.
4 Consciousness dwells entirely within the time/space continuum.

The interdependent inter-connected model

1 Only certain aspects of the mind are the result of physiologic processes.
2 Consciousness is caused, and physical reality is its manifestations.
3 All consciousness, regardless of the physical manifestations, is part of a network of life which they both inform and influence and are informed and influenced by; there is a passage back and forth between the individual and the collective.
4 Some aspects of consciousness are not limited by the space–time continuum.

(Schwartz, 2018, p. 667)

Acceptance of the interdependent inter-connected model seems to us essential to the creative process in bringing a new mythical story into being. In *The Visionary Spirit*, Mick Collins sees this as central to the emergence of a new era which he called the 'Transformocene', providing the following description: '...an attitudinal and behavioural shift that brings forth a new consciousness, which is committed to revising and re-animating a sacred connection to the Earth' (Collins, 2018, p. 3).

Collins goes on to suggest that it

> ...is a dynamic response to planetary conditions, where humanity is called upon to take part in a process of individual, collective and planetary healing. Yet, in order to embrace such a transformational shift, we will need a new myth to galvanise this shared response to change. (ibid., p. 3)

Thus he reinforces the point that the interdependent inter-connected model of consciousness and the new mythical story are inevitably intertwined.

Universal Consciousness

Another facet of this set of ideas is the notion of universal consciousness – that consciousness permeates the whole of the natural world, both animate and inanimate. This is an ancient idea that would have been unquestioned in premodern times, and more generally in other cultures which have not been contaminated by modern, Western patterns of thought. In *Why Genes Are Not Selfish and People Are Nice*, Colin Tudge takes this further by suggesting that

> ...the idea of universal consciousness is perfectly reasonable – not particularly counter-intuitive and arrived at by various independent routes including that of modern physics; and so is the notion that thinking creatures partake of universal consciousness. So the idea that the unconscious mind tries purposefully to tap in to universal consciousness may be seen as a reasonable extrapolation, and not a particularly bold one. I am sure that this is what mystics aspire to do: to by-pass normal ratiocentive processes and tap in directly to universal consciousness. If we accept Peter Russell's suggestion that universal consciousness in effect means 'God', then to fuse the mind with universal consciousness is indeed to meet God. (Tudge, 2013, p. 228)

Spirituality and Religion

Surveys reveal that about half the British people currently describe themselves as non-religious, and this trend away from religion has been gradually unfolding for more than 150 years, although quite recently a small minority of young adults have been returning to their traditional faiths in what is increasingly a multicultural society. Also, since the 1960s there has been a more general spirituality revolution, but this is quite different from more traditional religious revivals. What this revolution involves, instead, is a turn towards a range of disparate practices such as mindfulness. This is largely an individualistic response which may or may not feed into the new mythical story we are championing.

This is the diverse background against which we will be making what may seem to be the contradictory claim that humans are essentially religious animals, who have been described as 'homo religiosus'. In an attempt to disentangle and throw light on this, our approach will be to compare and contrast the mainstream culture and the counter-culture and their corresponding mythical stories in the same manner as previously.

The Mainstream Culture

We distinguish broadly two different types of people, although both exhibit features of what we see as the mainstream culture. First there are those who describe themselves as religious in a traditional, conservative and fundamentalist way, e.g. those Christians who view the bible as the literal and infallible word of God. Second are those who describe themselves as non-religious, and in rejecting religion are either atheistic or agnostic humanists. It is this latter group which has arisen so dramatically at the expense of the religious group, especially since the Second World War. What is important for our purposes, though, is that they are united in mirroring one another, and so are both equally dogmatic, one side accepting institutionalised religion as natural and given, and the other rejecting it. (A distinction also needs to be made between those hardline materialist atheists who completely reject spirituality and religion, often vehemently, and agnostics who frequently reject religion as a collective endeavour, but accept individually inspired spirituality.)

Some of the features which are held in common are that

1. they are driven by the dominance of the left brain over the right, which resonates with dualism, reductionism and dogmatic certainties;
2. this creates rigid divisions between 'them' and 'us' on religious grounds, and between science and religion;
3. science is viewed as providing the ground for true knowledge (though for those who are religious it may be only in the public rather than personal sphere);
4. religion, if it is accepted at all, is seen as part of the arts / humanities;
5. all of these features align with the biomedical model which has as its focus disease and curing.

The Counter-culture

Some of the features which are held in common are that

1. spirituality and religion are seen as universal, not only in humans but in everything animate and inanimate;
2. humans are 'hard-wired' for transcendence, and have a sense of the sacred expressed as awe, reverence and wonder;
3. this is first manifest experientially as a mystical (inner) sensibility, which is more clearly evident in those who are described as 'mystics', but is latent in everyone; and what follows seamlessly is practical action in the world (outer). The clearest demonstration of this practical action is in the principles and values which inform the 'Golden Rule', which is found in all the major religions and overarching systems of thought (spelt out in Christianity, for example, as 'Love thy neighbour as thyself');
4. the left and right brain are harmonised with the right brain taking precedence, which provides wisdom and encompasses uncertainty, ambiguity and doubt, thus

requiring a never-ending process of discernment;

5 there is an integration of science and religion, and true knowledge is holistic, incorporating both the arts and sciences;

6 all these features align with a holistic model of medicine which has as its focus healing and caring, without precluding curing.

In outlining these features it should immediately be apparent that there are obvious contrasts between the mainstream and counter-cultural perspectives on religion and spirituality, although in day-to-day life, many of these features and their implications may or may not be readily apparent.

Albert Einstein was in tune with the counter-cultural perspective, particularly his sense of the mysterious, of wonder and a religious 'feeling' that can arise from both art and science. He captures this most eloquently in what is referred to as his 'Credo', as follows:

> The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed. It was the experience of mystery – even if mixed with fear – that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perception of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds – it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitutes true religiosity; in this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man. (Originally from an essay entitled 'What I believe' (1930), cited in Jammer, 1999.)

However, whether we are deeply religious or not, we contend that we all have access to this type of understanding and a sense of wonder at various times in our lives, and so might be called 'everyday mystics' (Greaves, 2017); and although rarely articulated, this has a profound influence on who we are, individually and collectively.

Another way of approaching this is through the notion of the 'Perennial Philosophy' of underlying religion. In his novel *The Cunning Man*, Robertson Davies puts it like this: 'There is that within us which partakes of the Divine Reality, which is immanent, immemorial, and universal… It doesn't accommodate itself to systems or religions, but it may be approached through them.' (Davies, 1995, p. 272)

And elsewhere he shows what this entails:

> The religious man is the man who tries, in so far as he can, to see everything as clearly as he can, even when what he is observing is shrouded in ambiguities. He understands that he cannot expect to understand everything, but dare not ignore anything that lies within the scope of his vision, or that rises from the realm of the Unconscious. (Davies, 1998, p. 350)

To conclude this section, it seems that we are left with a choice between two mythical stories. There is the one which underpins the mainstream culture, which as explained earlier relies on a myth that denies the existence of myth, which continues to be dominant, and has led to what has often been referred to as a 'crisis of soul'. This has not only impoverished our sense of self but has also fuelled the global crisis now engulfing us, wherever we are in the world. The alternative mythical story underpins the counter-culture, but this is only in the process of evolution. It must, though, form the bedrock of a new paradigm and its associated worldview, and we are now at a critical and transformational stage. What is required for this to take hold is the understanding, involvement and at least tacit approval of a greater collective of world citizenry joined together so as to enable it to emerge as the new mainstream.

Our task so far has been to analyse and describe the stage we have reached, and to point in the direction of a new paradigm, or cosmology, spelling out in a general way the counter-cultural mythical story underpinning it. In the remainder of this article, we will concentrate on the application of some of these ideas in the field of therapy. We would like to suggest that this area of activity (or certain manifestations of it) could have a key foundational role in the creation and promotion of this new paradigm.

The Role of Therapy

In considering therapy's potential contribution to the emergence of a new paradigm, we only have space to pick up on just some of the ideas so far discussed. Nevertheless, we hope that this discussion, adding to the work of others, may prompt or feed into further explorations in both theory and practice.

Reclaiming the Soul

An important first task is to consider what therapy actually is, and the very nature and meaning of therapy itself. The obvious challenge here is that the term 'therapy' is now applied to a huge array of different activities. Therapy, or psychological therapy (an umbrella term for both psychotherapy and counselling), is not a unified profession. It spawns a disparate collection of many types of activity that have developed from a diverse range of philosophical perspectives, values and principles, theory and practice. Some types of therapy practice may seem to have next to nothing in common with others.

Thomas Moore, a psychotherapist who draws on Jungian and archetypal psychology, reminds us that the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, when using the word therapy (*therapeia* in Greek), was referring to the act of 'service' (Moore, 2021). Similar meanings include to 'care for' or 'attend to'. The term 'psychotherapy', therefore, originally described the activity of caring for, or attending to, the soul ('psyche' meaning soul and not mind, although in Greek it can also mean breath). The soul is often regarded as our deepest essence or nature, however ineffable and mysterious, and it also implies to many people a dimension that we might also call 'spiritual', i.e. non-material and transcendent. Thus, for Moore, psychotherapy is being orientated to 'soul care' and not simply 'life management', the latter being what it seems to have been reduced to in many quarters, particularly within healthcare systems.

What is evident today is that while for some therapy modalities, there is either an implicit or explicit reference to the soul or spiritual dimension in their underpinning theoretical and philosophical frameworks, most modalities are not conceptualised as soul care or make any reference to soul. This divergence very much relates to the two contrasting mythical stories referred to earlier, and we will now highlight in more detail some of the other major areas of difference among the array of therapies available today. Awareness of these differences may make it easier to outline a vision for the role of therapy in the creation and establishment of a new paradigm, as well as appreciate in more detail the barriers and the challenges.

The Mythical Stories Underpinning Therapy

In comparing and contrasting different therapy modalities, a common approach is to focus on differences in theory and in practice. Less attention is given to teasing out their fundamental philosophical underpinnings. There is an understandable reason for this, since philosophy is more than a matter of theory and belief. It involves values, assumptions and feelings (or perhaps we might say mindset), and the challenge here is that we may not always be aware of these, let alone able to articulate them. (Such articulation may rely on conceptual thought and language, involving to a considerable degree engagement with a left brain, rational approach. This, of course, is not to be rejected, but in keeping with our argument needs to be held in balance with a right brain, intuitive and non-rational way of knowing or attending to reality.) In the rest of this section we highlight some of the key features of the two mythical stories as they relate to therapy. From this overarching framework, it may be possible to locate the particular mythical story underpinning a particular therapy modality, or rather, which mythical story has the dominant influence on a particular modality and actual practice.

Therapy and the Mainstream Culture

Many of the differences between therapy modalities (and indeed the main therapy 'schools' within which individual modalities are traditionally situated) may become apparent

through an understanding of the nature and role of biomedicine and its approach to health, illness, disease and suffering more generally. Key features of biomedicine, which is deeply embedded within the mainstream Western cultural mythical story, includes its rootedness in reductionist science, the preference for (or reliance on) objective and rational forms of knowledge, with quantification and measurement deemed the markers of progress and laying claims to be evidence-based (which is, of course, largely quantitative evidence). Particularly significant is biomedicine's pursuit of technical mastery and control. This leads to linear, cause-and-effect explanatory theories and the establishment of knowledge that can be held with a sense of certainty. These are all left-brain ways of attending.

Another feature of biomedicine is its orientation to *pathology*, i.e. to seeing disturbance as a defect, deficiency or problem that needs to be remedied (or treated, in the sense of curing). Further, biomedicine relies on professionally trained experts with a body of specialist knowledge and technical ability to achieve its aims.

While biomedicine is most often thought about in relation to bodily disease, based on an understanding of biological structures and physiological processes, its values and principles clearly also operate within the world of therapy. For example, many therapies are based on rationally developed explanatory theories of pathology. Forms of pathology are often categorised, with reliance on the psychiatric classifications systems DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and ICD-11 (World Health Organisation, 2019/2021). Many therapies have developed specific techniques and methods applied by experts to the markers of pathology – symptoms and signs – in order to achieve some measure of control, either in the form of modifying or eradicating such symptoms. There is a clear focus on isolating then correcting the 'pathological' mental functions and behaviour (within mental health services, identifying the diagnosis in order to apply the correct treatment). The theoretical knowledge and technical expertise of the therapist are highly prized in such a situation, with obvious implications for the dynamics of power in the therapeutic relationship. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and some of its variants, constitute a good example of many of these features, but other examples include Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) and other currently in-vogue therapies for trauma.

Science (of the modernist kind, as opposed to post-modern science, although this distinction is often not appreciated) is actually held as a core principle in academic and clinical psychology as taught on most undergraduate and postgraduate courses. In other words, mental functions and human behaviour are explicitly understood through a positivist scientific method rooted in objectivity and reductionism. While many therapy modalities are not so explicit about the role of science and do not necessarily seek to assign scientific status to their work, many principles of biomedicine may still nevertheless extend a powerful influence on theory and practice. This is seen not least in the ways so-called pathology (for example, 'neurotic defences' or 'cognitive errors') is viewed as residing *in* the individual. Put another way, many forms of therapy encourage us to look inside ourselves – to develop *in*sight – as opposed to focussing on what is influencing and impacting on us from our environments, i.e. developing what has been termed 'outsight' (Midlands Psychology Group, 2022).

The obvious implication here is that biomedicine is thoroughly individualistic, and problems tend to be divorced from their socio-cultural context. Socio-cultural or environmental factors, if not ignored, play a subordinate role, or their significance is noted only in relation to how the *individual* responds to or interprets their external circumstances, seeing these responses as flawed or pathological. For therapies informed by biomedicine, help therefore tends to be orientated to achieving self-mastery or management of 'problems' through behavioural change (for example, developing resilience or greater personal efficiency), which leads to avoidance of questioning and addressing social, political or economic realities. The assertion that

individuals should take personal responsibility for addressing their distress (rather than forming collective notions of responsibility) is one of the manifestations of neoliberalism.

Finally, where therapy is prescribed and delivered within healthcare systems, it is often seen through the lenses of markets and business, in keeping with the trend towards the commodification of health and healthcare within Western capitalist, consumerist culture. Therapy that is delivered through systems of 'Managed Care' also panders to the powerful societal impulses towards conformity and control.

Therapy and the Counter-culture

While the elements of biomedicine described above are features of many (arguably most) therapy modalities today, particularly those practised within healthcare organisational settings such as the NHS, and while this represents the current mainstream approach to therapy in the Western world, a number of other therapy modalities adhere to more ancient forms of knowledge and wisdom, that chimes with the mythical story underpinning the counter-culture described earlier. The influence of right-brain ways of attending can be clearly seen here.

Unlike those therapy modalities that explicitly claim a scientific status, in contrast counter-cultural therapies regard the activity they are engaged in more akin to an art or craft that cannot be quantified. They do not emphasise or rely upon objective knowledge that can be categorised, but instead focus more on subjective human experience which, by its nature, is never fixed, and is always in process. They embrace a holistic gaze that is equally interested in all dimensions of being human – body, mind and soul – without separating them, situating these within their unique socio-cultural context. Counter-cultural therapies, in approaching knowledge, will welcome the imagination, symbol, metaphor and intuition, i.e. non-rational ways of knowing and attending to reality. Understanding will derive from meaning rather than explanation. Therapy will therefore more likely involve story, with meaning (sense-making) emerging from the telling of stories, our own and those handed down to us through, for example, fairy tales and folklore. In the words of psychologist and mythologist Sharon Blackie, 'stories help us to unravel who we are and to work out who we want to become' (Blackie, 2018, p. 134). Counter-cultural therapies are also more likely to be embodied rather than conceptual.

Embracing the above, the role of a therapist is not one of treating the client's problems, but more akin to being a midwife to a process of growth or emergence. The process cannot be pre-determined and is inevitably unpredictable. In the counter-cultural mythical story, therapy is viewed as a process of healing as it makes room for and engages with suffering and vulnerability, rather than seeing these as 'enemies' to be dispensed with. Therapist and client are collaborators, and the therapeutic relationship becomes a powerful vehicle for change. Finally, many of these therapies may recognise and explicitly refer to the dimension of soul or spirit (Jungian therapy, psychosynthesis and biographical counselling are examples), with additional recognition of the interdependent and interconnected model of consciousness which we referred to earlier.

Of course, the above descriptions of how the range of therapy modalities maps on to the two mythical stories we have been outlining are only an overview. We are aware of the tendency to present them as polar opposites, suggesting a false separation, with a particular therapy modality sitting neatly in either one mythical camp or the other. In reality, many modalities or individual styles of actual practice have incorporated aspects of both mythical stories with varying degrees of internal coherence and alignment. Examples of misalignment might include some varieties of integrative therapy, or therapists describing themselves as person-centred while incorporating cognitive behavioural techniques, or therapeutic practice that claims to be prioritising the therapeutic relationship, but only as an instrument for addressing some form of psychopathology (a more utilitarian approach). Nevertheless, it should be possible to see what the dominant cultural and brain hemispheric influences are on

the theory and practice of a particular therapy modality, usually revealed through its characteristic language and discourse, and its particular aims or goals. This awareness is important – vital, even – since working towards a new paradigm requires, in the first instance, knowing where we start from.

Towards a New Paradigm

Facilitating the emergence of a new paradigm may seem, to say the least, ambitious. It may even seem hopelessly naive. However, we contend that no less than the future of our planet depends on it, which therefore requires us to try. In this final section we offer some thoughts on working for change and transformation, while not underestimating the challenges and potential barriers. In our vision of a new paradigm, one that builds on the values of the counter-cultural mythical story, we suggest that therapy modalities particularly aligned with these values play a crucially important role.

In the first instance we need to be as clear as possible about the nature of the tasks involved. This means being clear about what it is we are interested in achieving (the specific aims and objectives) and also the means (the how). In terms of a broad outline of aims, we refer back to our earlier discussion of the two key elements of the new mythical story – the development of a model of consciousness, and attending to the religious and spiritual dimension (or soul) of human being and becoming.

Boldly and simply stated, the aim is for these two interconnected elements to become the theoretical and philosophical bedrock of therapeutic practice, and therefore become central to general discourse and practice within the therapy field. These elements are already clearly incorporated in many counter-cultural therapy modalities, but what is needed is for them to be far less on the periphery and to exert more of an influence on the therapy field as a whole. This is a tall order since, as has already been noted, much of therapy practice in the Western world operates from the mainstream mythical story, allied to biomedicine, particularly those embedded within institutions and systems of healthcare. Admittedly, at the current time it is very hard to see biomedicine loosening its grip, and for there to be a weakening of a whole range of powerful vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

However, we want to suggest some areas in which we may consciously work towards paradigmatic change, drawing on some of our reading of the literature. These areas may be at the level of individual therapeutic practice, i.e. actual work with clients, or through inter-professional dialogue (both within the therapy world and also with other types of helping activities), or they may involve wider engagement within society as a whole. We will mainly focus on areas of influence outside the consulting room, although there is clearly much to be considered about actual work with clients and the many ways therapists can tap into key elements of the new mythical story and, in the words of Thomas Moore, ‘listens for the rumble of myth deep within the simple stories of life’ (Moore, 2021, p. 11).

Engagement within the Therapy World

We will touch on just three potential areas of focus.

1 Engaging with theory

Here attention may be focussed on where the growing edges in our theorising are located, and what follows are a few suggestions. One is how the monumental work of Iain McGilchrist concerning the left- and right-brain ways of attending to reality might be taken forward and shape our understanding of both theory and practice. Could we further develop a theory and practice involving ‘all that can be learnt from science and reason at their best, in combination with intuition and imagination at theirs’? (McGilchrist, 2021, p. 1306). There may be scope for further developing theories of process, for example drawing on the work of process philosophers such as A.N. Whitehead. Holism is another potential area of ongoing development, at the same time exploring ways in which we may become more alert to dualistic habits of thinking and how to challenge these, in other

words. This forms part of engaging with the territory of consciousness.

In developing theory it may also be necessary to spell out clearly and powerfully the limits and iatrogenic potential of scientific orthodoxy, biomedicine and its 'de-souling' of therapy. This may involve deconstructing mainstream theoretical models, discourse and language. There is also a need in our theorising to re-interpret psyche as soul (the original understanding) rather than the modern understanding as mind, with all its materialistic and scientistic implications. We concur with William Bento that 'the soul is the realm wherein our interior life unfolds' (Bento, 2016, p. 45). How might our understanding change if we were to take this assertion seriously? However, in challenging the prevailing mechanistic, materialistic and dehumanising view of human beings and spurious notions of normality and mental health, we also need to be aware of the danger of new theory becoming its own 'regime of truth' (a term coined by philosopher Michel Foucault) which may constrain rather than liberate (House, 2003). We must remember that theory is just a theory and not objective truth.

2 Research

There has for some time already been development of research that draws on counter-cultural values, where intuition, subtlety and not knowing are not only allowed for but celebrated. It will be important to build on these innovations. Notable examples of such so-called qualitative approaches are reflexive research, narrative enquiry, autoethnography and transformational research. However, quantitative approaches to research are currently the mainstream, and have a very tight grip on the overall research field. Huge effort and perseverance will be required to gain a stronger influence on research culture.

3 Challenging professionalisation

The professionalisation of the therapy field is another area where the mainstream culture (and left-brain dominance) is having a particularly strong influence at present. Much has now been written about this, especially the need to challenge the powerful forces that are currently shaping therapy culture (for example, House & Totton, 1997; House, 2003). Such forces include the preoccupation with standardisation (leading to formulaic, manualised and protocol-driven practice), surveillance through accountability and audit processes, systems of regulation, and managerial thinking and bureaucratic practice more generally. All of these result in rigid behaviours and commodified institutional practices, with subsequent loss of creativity and diversity, as well as freedom of thought. Indeed, it may be that there is a need to fundamentally change how we view therapy, i.e. to see it as more a spiritual or political practice than akin to a medical treatment (Totton, 2006). This involves critiquing the very role and function of therapy within society (does it even have an important function?) and perhaps not even seeing it as a job or profession (Totton, 1997).

All this will clearly involve calling out the many vested interests fuelling the drive towards professionalisation – status, control and economic advantage being the obvious ones. Addressing existing power structures and challenging how the therapy field is currently organised (its institutions) will be a formidable but necessary challenge here. In short, this could be described as the shift from 'profession-centred therapy' towards a 'post-professional ethos' (House, 2003).

In all the above areas, however, there is a need to beware of the tendency to rivalry, competition and condemnation. Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels points out that the therapy world is extremely prone to the development of factions and divisions (Samuels, 2006). Developing the capacity for genuine dialogue with those inhabiting a different frame of reference and who may be hard to understand, as well as finding ways of meeting those adopting an authoritarian stance, will therefore be crucial.

Wider Engagement within Society

While clinical practice, and engaging with theory, research and inter-professional dialogue, are all areas in which therapy may bring about a

new mythical story and work towards paradigm change, there are many other ways in which therapists may play important roles. Therapy is, after all, just one social phenomenon. One particular area of engagement may be in politics, either at a local or national level, attending to, for example, issues of social justice and ecological and environmental sustainability. Many therapists have already been involved in such political work for a long time, drawing on what Samuels refers to as 'political energy' in the absence of obvious political power (Samuels, 2006, p. 7). Organisations already exist, such as Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility (or PCSR) (see www.pcsr.org.uk), where therapists are 'working the borders between psychotherapy and society' (Samuels, 2006, p. 9). A new mythical story may also emerge through engagement with the Arts and Humanities in attempts to redress the dominance of modern science and technology within our culture. There are of course many other examples of therapists working towards change and transformation.

What Personal Qualities We Might Need

Bringing about a new mythical story towards paradigm change is an awesome task. It therefore seems to us that as well as considering how we might go about this and working out effective strategies, we also need to consider what we might need in terms of personal qualities. Self-awareness through personal development is certainly crucial. This involves being aware of how our life histories and socio-cultural conditioning have shaped our thinking, beliefs and values (and biases), so that we may work with congruence and authenticity. Courage is another necessary quality, since challenging the mainstream culture may mean being prepared to stand at the margins and face misunderstanding and potential hostility. Backlash from the mainstream culture is inevitable as it tries to hang on. Taking the risk of challenging the status quo therefore means being prepared to be vulnerable.

We must also be able to embrace complexity, given a culture of myriad influences, agendas and diverse streams of theory, philosophy and worldviews. We need to develop our capacities for dialogue, which will involve being able to listen with empathy, openness and humility towards those with whom we disagree. We must guard against hubris, the use of defensive tactics and the need to assert superiority, reminding ourselves also of our fundamental interconnectedness with everyone we encounter. Finally, we also need to develop and maintain hope in the face of uncertainty and no known outcome.

Conclusion

It seems to us that in working towards change and transformation – facilitating the emergence of a new paradigm – we are doing the work of healing. We think Guy Dargert puts this well when he refers to 'essentially the work of attending to the mystery of the soul in order to bring about healing' (Dargert, 2016, p. xix). This work is already happening. Humanistic, existential and transpersonal psychologies have always been counter-cultural and helped to point the way. But we also need to recognise that every individual has the potential to make their own small contribution in their day-to-day lives and in every field of activity. Everyone can practise *therapeia* in the Greek understanding of the term, whether therapists or not. That said, we believe that therapists may play a particularly important part because, as Dargert puts it, 'the work of psychotherapy touches the soul of the world' (ibid., p. xix).

There is so much still to do if we are to 'resacralise' and save our planet. Can we imagine our way into a new mythical story before it is too late?

Notes

1 Scientism is the proclamation that science is the *only* true or real knowledge, one that does not acknowledge its limitations in comprehending the nature of reality.
2 Materialism (sometimes also called physicalism) is the philosophical belief that matter is the fundamental substance of nature, which includes our consciousness and all mental activity.

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