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KNOWHOW> CARING FOR YOUR MIND> SHIFTING PARADIGMS

THANKS



SHIFTING
PARADIGMS
more

Caption

In every age the question arises of how the human mind can best be enhanced and cared for. One choice is to re-affirm traditional values and beliefs about the mind. But where will this lead us? With the rate of ecological damage running as fast as it is, if we maintain a world view that is based on projection, idealization, and denial, there is every chance that it will lead to global disaster. Moving toward a mindset that actively includes interpersonal, community, and planetary sustainability is an urgent priority.

[more](#)

Possibilities for change

Is there, then, any cause for optimism? One answer is, not a lot, but some. White, male dominance isn't going to go away tomorrow nor the day after. But at least the certainty that it is natural or inevitable is dissolving. Just as the idea of 'nature' is a human creation, so too is 'human nature'. And because we have made it, we can re-make it. Similarly, distressed and distorted learning, with the projection, denial, forgetting, and other ways of defending ourselves against the hurts of childhood that arise from them, are likely to be with us until more benign forms of child-care become commonplace. But the extent to which belief and attitude contribute to making the world what it seems to be need no longer be so much of a mystery.

[more](#)

Equality for women demands a change in the human psyche more profound than anything man dreamed of. It means valuing parenthood as much as we value banking.

POLLY TOYNBEE

A paradigm shift

Caring for our minds against this background involves, as we shall see in the following screens, a simple choice. It means switching—from the cluster of ideas that see caring for the mind is something we buy in, or shop for, when we need it; or that minds require no care; or that all care for the mind amounts to political oppression or brainwashing; or that others should care for our minds, since it is an abstruse matter that requires experts—to the more recent concept that caring for our minds is our own responsibility.

This implies a shift from a mind that sleep-walks, to having a mind that is able to reflect on how we are ‘doing’ ourselves (and I mean both individually, and in relation to others, and the planet). This is a task that no one else can do for us, though the emergence of this capacity can be helped or facilitated into being—in the way that a mid-wife can help a child to be born.

This change of attitude, or paradigm (pronounced ‘paradime’) shift, is an essential ingredient in the urgent re-engineering of traditional values that moving into a personal and ecologically sustainable future requires.

To paraphrase American science historian and philosopher, Thomas Kuhn, who first described paradigm shifts in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: led by a new paradigm, people adopt new methods, look in new places. Even more important, they see new and different things when looking with familiar methods in places they have looked before. It is rather as if the community had been transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well.

Examples of paradigm shifts:

earth is flat—earth is spherical

earth is centre of the universe—solar system

abolition of slavery

sexual discrimination laws

universal suffrage

racial discrimination laws

awareness of child abuse

abolition of capital punishment

abolition of corporal punishment

abortion rights

co-habitation alternative to marriage

smoking bans in public places

improved animal welfare

Taking (more) charge of your mind

On the next few screens I will outline more of what I take to be **old paradigm mindcare**, the traditional approach, and follow this with a section devoted to a **new paradigm of mindcare** which presents some of the emerging ways of sustainable caring.

Moving out of the old paradigm of relying on experts to ‘diagnose’ and ‘treat’ any ‘disorders’ that may emerge in your mind can feel frightening. You may feel that there are parts of yourself that you’d sooner not know about. Maybe there are demons or dragons lurking in the background that might take you over if you gave them half a chance, and you feel more comfortable pretending that they don’t exist. If this is where you start from, that’s fine. It’s an entirely understandable reaction. Be reassured. The old choice of assigning responsibility to others for caring for your mind hasn’t disappeared. But it is no longer the only choice available.

Waking up to the value and urgency of finding a sustainable way of caring for ourselves and the planet tends to mean that a window on daily life has opened that can no longer be closed. But this vision is not likely to be evenly distributed, co-existence of paradigms is inevitable, and we all need to be patient and tolerant with people who do not share our vision.

Also, moving to the new paradigm does not mean discarding judgement and discrimination, because the fantastic and the nonsensical are a permanent feature of humankind, threaded through paradigms new and old. Part of making a secure move to a new paradigm of caring for your mind means knowing for yourself how to navigate reliably between, and apply, the new choices of care.

more



THE OLD PARADIGM

[more](#)

Caption

At our point in history, as at any other, there is a world view, a paradigm, a list of assumptions about what seems to be natural and inevitable. From time to time there is a revolution in these attitudes and some abruptly become obsolete, or 'old paradigm'. In recent decades—fuelled in part by the Cold War stand-off, Vietnam, and more recently by the US/UK attack on Iraq, and the gathering ecological crisis—a wide range of beliefs, practices, and attitudes about the mind and caring for it have increasingly come to seem obsolete, damaging, irrelevant, or oppressive. In other words they have become old paradigm. This section provides a variety of pointers to the lengthening list of ingredients of the old paradigm of caring for the mind and why it matters.

[more](#)

...mental illness costs £77bn a year. The cost of mental health is greater than both the NHS budget and the total cost of crime in England.

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COSTS OF MENTAL ILLNESS
THE SAINSBURY CENTRE FOR
MENTAL HEALTH
GUARDIAN 24.6.2003

Defining the old paradigm

Is the old paradigm of the mind a ‘thing’, something that can be exactly and reliably spelled out in a tidy logical way—with a beginning and an end, with a clear step by step analysis of the line of argument, supported by carefully marshalled evidence and facts, all thought through and with neat, clearly defined limits? The answer is No and Yes. No it can’t be tightly defined, and Yes, due to their one-sided over-use, exactly these collection of words begin to define the old paradigm. And they tend to shape our attitude to, and expectations of, mindcare as well.

[more](#)

Old paradigm mindcare: key concerns and contradictions

The next 80 screens of *The Mind Gymnasium* are devoted to bringing the old paradigm of mind in general, and mindcare in particular, out into the light of day. The value of giving this much attention to old paradigm mindcare is that it may help you re-evaluate your expectations of the help available from the mindcare system, and also direct your attention to the attitudes, beliefs, and practices you are presently committed to that might benefit from inquiry and change.

There seem to be four overall concerns:

[more](#)

Zero maintenance utility

The ‘*zero maintenance utility*’ attitude to mind—that like a car or a washing machine, it can be ignored unless and until it gives problems. This seems to derive from a folk theory of mind that it is a potentially dangerous territory—better leave well alone. In recent years the extensive range of self-help books, including *The Mind Gymnasium*, coupled with more people paying attention to diet and exercise, has begun to erode this head-in-the-sand approach to mind.

CONTRADICTION:

Regard your mind as meriting continuing care and exercise.

[more](#)

Expert driven

A second concern would point to the one-sidedness of old paradigm mindcare: it is overwhelmingly *expert-driven*. We present a symptom and from then on, with little or no negotiation, the professional exponent of mindcare gives meaning to the symptoms, prescribes treatment, or makes a referral.

CONTRADICTION:

Try to insist on understanding the reasons for a diagnosis, negotiate the length of any treatment, and discuss any potential side-effects. Join a support group.

[more](#)

Relationship poverty

A third concern is the *relationship poverty* of old paradigm mindcare. Consultations are likely to be few and brief. One or two ten-minute meetings with a patients commonly lead to months, or years, of medication. Mechanistic notions of mind give low or no priority to patient/practitioner rapport, or negotiation of meanings or options.

CONTRADICTION:

Join a support group and find out how to do your own research into your symptoms or concerns and the options for resolving them.

[more](#)

Compromised values

A fourth and, for me, overarching concern is the extent to which old-paradigm mindcare is rooted in, and severely compromised by, beliefs in the naturalness and inevitability of *domination*. In general—its medico-scientific-industrial approach to generating knowledge is highly mechanistic and fragmentary. In particular—through cascades of authority and vested interests, from consultants to registrars down to general practitioners, nurses, technicians, and patients—top-down hierarchical dominance relations shape the delivery of care.

It can be argued that this merely reflects the world around it but mindcare is not cement manufacture. Is it not reasonable to expect that it be significantly reflexive—aware of the *process*, the *how* of the ways in which mindcare is theorized and delivered? The reason for its blindness is close at hand, the *how* is an unquestioned basic assumption, a given—domination. Why does it matter? Because *a considerable amount, perhaps the majority, of the need for mindcare derives from the very dominance relations that the old-paradigm mindcare supports*, for example, bullying, abuse and coercion at home and work, and the dysfunctional strategies deployed to survive them.

CONTRADICTION:

*Begin to recognize the extent to which you and those around you tolerate or live from domination, and learn to confront it in other people. Visit the 'See also' menu opposite or **Power—a hidden presence***

more

See also ▼

The ground on which we stand

In this edition of *The Mind Gymnasium* I have devoted a lot of resource and space to the topic of power and the often hidden presence of domination. Is domination and deference natural and inevitable? Is it an essential life skill—a choice between becoming a bully or a skilled victim? Or is it an ‘unnecessary evil’?

At our point in history domination may be *the* issue that humankind has to resolve if our children are to enjoy a sustainable future. The **text essay** that follows has more on these questions.

Domination and deference are so much a part of daily life that they tend to sink into invisibility. We see or feel the damage associated with them, we don’t so easily see its origins. Victims may be ashamed of their victimhood, bullies hide their tyranny, or argue that it is for the good of others. Visit **Power—a hidden presence: contents** for a variety of screens that will help open up to the light of day the extraordinary range and extent of the cultures of domination that we inhabit, and how they shape and define our mindsets and approach to mindcare (see also **Beliefs: domination**).

You may find the prospect of this depressing, or perhaps even overwhelming. If so, please appreciate that, being realistic about what we might, create, join, or need to resist, in the name of personal, professional and spiritual development, or a new paradigm of mindcare, has seemed to me to require a thorough appraisal of the ground on which we stand.

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