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WIDER VISION: NEW PARADIGMS FOR OLD

Projection makes perception. The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. . . . It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive. Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world.

ANONYMOUS¹

Every point of view rests on certain assumptions about the nature of reality. When this is recognized, assumptions function as hypotheses; when it is forgotten, they function as beliefs. Clusters of hypotheses create models or theories, and clusters of theories constitute paradigms.

A paradigm is a kind of general theory of such scope that it is capable of encompassing or providing a context for most of the known phenomena in its field.² For example, the theory that planets revolve around the sun is an example of a paradigm that guides astronomy. Any scientific theory or paradigm is supposedly continually accessible to modification or refutation. However, when theories are successful they tend eventually to be taken for granted. These "normative paradigms"³ then become implicit unquestioned conceptual frameworks and filters that supply the "natural and sensible" way of looking at things. For example, before the Copernican revolution, the idea that the sun moved around the earth was unquestioned and was thought of as fact rather than theory or interpretation. Similarly, we tend to forget that the modern paradigm that the planets revolve around the sun is also only a theory or interpretation.

Once a paradigm becomes implicit, it acquires a tremendous yet unrecognized power over its adherents, who become believers.⁴ In

psychology this is known as a S-R (stimulus-response) bind, a condition in which the researcher is unable to admit any theory other than his or her own because it seems obvious that this is the only way it can be.⁵ This condition is called "paradigm fixation."⁶

The introduction of a new paradigm can therefore be extraordinarily difficult, and may result in what Kuhn calls a paradigm clash.² In paradigm clashes, antagonism and poor communication between factions is common and accounts for the fact that even the greatest scientific innovators have frequently been discounted initially.

If the communicating parties remain unaware that they are using different structures of reasoning, but are aware of their communication difficulties only, each party tends to perceive the communication difficulties as resulting from the other parties' illogicity, lack of intelligence, or even deceptiveness and insincerity. He may also fall into an illusion of understanding while being unaware of his misunderstandings.⁷

A paradigm may thus be viewed as a container or context for particular kinds of knowledge and investigation, thereby inevitably excluding other kinds of information. As with any theory or model, paradigms shape perception, inquiry, and interpretation in self-validating ways.^{8, 9} That is, every paradigm argues for the truth of its own assumptions. Whatever lies outside its scope will still tend to be viewed from its perspective and thus be distorted or falsified. Thus paradigms, indeed any models, perform useful and necessary organizing functions, but when their hypothetical nature is forgotten, they act as distorting perceptual filters. (See also the discussion of models in the introduction.)

Members of a group tend to share common assumptions, both because they attract like-minded people and because they provide powerful selective reinforcement for their preferred assumptions. Any questioning of these assumptions is usually discouraged or, at best, not supported. Assumptions therefore function as beliefs that determine what will enter awareness and what will remain unconscious, hence determining cultural reality.¹⁰ Seeing through one's cultural belief systems is extraordinarily difficult, but may be helped by exposure to other cultures and beliefs.

Transpersonal psychology represents a paradigm shift in Western psychology, resulting in part from exposure to cross-cultural beliefs about the nature of consciousness and reality. Guiding paradigms in Western psychology did not support the investigation of extreme psychological well-being and higher states of consciousness. In non-Western paradigms, investigators found sophisticated but radically different views of human nature and psychological potential. Once the cultural limitations of traditional Western paradigms were acknowledged, the way was open for an expanded view of psychological theory. Of course non-Western views of reality and human nature are not immune from analogous limitations, but

there is now hope of creating new paradigms that can accommodate and ultimately go beyond both Eastern and Western world views.

At this stage we will merely mention some of the major dimensions in the hope of giving a flavor of some of the shifts currently being proposed. The readings in this section will provide more detailed accounts.

In the West the primary constituent of reality is held to be matter. Consciousness is seen as a product, even an epiphenomenon, of material processes, particularly brain processes. In the East, however, the opposite view is held. Consciousness is seen as primary and matter as its product and the material world is thus accorded less significance. One currently emerging viewpoint holds that neither is primary but rather that each is an expression of a higher order reality and that they are mutually interdependent.^{11, 12, 13}

The traditional Western paradigm of the nature of the material universe has viewed it reductionistically and atomistically. That is, the fundamental nature of matter has been sought by breaking it down into its component parts and these parts have been assumed to exist as separate isolated entities. However, quantum physics is now revealing a picture that in many ways closely resembles the millennia-old descriptions of the East and of a holistic, interconnected, indivisible reality.^{13, 14}

Indeed, in a "truth is stranger than fiction" development, recent evidence suggests that not only is each part connected to every other part of the universe, but that each part of the universe, in fact the whole universe, is enfolded in every other part.¹⁵

Western psychology has long regarded the ordinary waking state of consciousness as optimal. Various other psychologies, however, claim that more adaptive "higher" states exist and that the range of potentially available states is far broader than is usually appreciated. Traditional Western psychological models cannot encompass such claims since the "usual is best" assumption automatically excludes them from consideration. Hence a shift toward broader models is underway.

As new data becomes available from both non-Western traditions and modern science, such shifts are likely to continue. As Grof notes:

The traditional paradigms have not been able to account for and accommodate a vast amount of challenging observations from many independent sources. In their totality these data . . . indicate an urgent need for a drastic revision of our fundamental concepts about the human nature and the nature of reality.¹⁶

The specific dimensions of these paradigms and the social and intellectual forces that created them are the subject of the papers in this section. In his article, "Perspectives on Psychology, Reality, and the Study of Consciousness," Daniel Goleman points out that groups filter and structure beliefs and knowledge and hence create a shared reality. In the East

the primary groups of explorers have recorded realms of psychological development that seem far beyond anything recognized as possible in the West, while Western scientists have mapped certain areas of psychopathology in great detail. Yet there are also areas of overlap recognizable to individuals with expertise in both systems.

In "Paradigms in Collision," Walsh, Elgin, Vaughan, and Wilber examine the attempts to compare and assess the consciousness disciplines and the Western behavioral sciences. Often previous assessments of the consciousness disciplines have concluded that their practitioners are suffering from various forms of psychopathology, even psychosis. "Paradigms in Collision," however, points out that these assessments have suffered from a number of methodological, conceptual, experiential, and paradigmatic errors. Failing to realize that the two systems may represent different paradigms, they have made the mistake of examining the Eastern model from within the Western one, a process certain to result in misunderstanding. Only by first becoming aware of, and taking into account, their own paradigmatic assumptions, can Western scientists avoid such pathologizing interpretations.

In "What Is a Person?" Walsh and Vaughan attempt to delineate the major dimensions of a transpersonal model of human nature. Examining the dimensions of consciousness, conditioning, personality, and identity, they point out common transpersonal assumptions about the psychological nature of humanity and contrast these with traditional Western and Eastern assumptions.

In "Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism" Fritjof Capra points out in more detail the parallels between the picture of reality presented by modern physics and that of the Eastern mystics. He suggests that mystical insight and scientific experimentation may provide complementary views, both of which are essential for a full picture of reality.

Notes

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11. Bohm, D. An interview with David Bohm. *ReVision*, 1979, 1, 10.
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