

# **The power of individual and sociocultural narratives**

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How are our **Selves** presently structured?

What kind of **construction of experience do** we have?

What kind of **narratives do** we create?

What kind of **consequences do** we bring upon ourselves and the planet?



Our identities are shaped by the accounts of our lives found in our stories or narratives.

The term “narrative” reflects the multi-storied nature of our identities and related meanings.

Our narratives are shaped by the dominant culture. Some narrative may be particularly limiting or even damaging to communities and individuals and often they are for disempowered groups of people such as women, gay and lesbians, immigrants, and other minority or other challenged groups.

To promote change, cultures and persons need to become conscious of the narrative they live by, identify dysfunctional narratives and rewrite better suited ones.



## Some narratives

We have lived for thousands of years with the *Genesis* story: a man and a woman are created by an all-powerful God, and then (in a development that owes a lot to the Prometheus myth) thrown out of the garden for seeking knowledge.

Now – slowly – we awaken to a new creation story, in which we find that we are still in the garden. In fact, we are an inseparable part of it, one with the process that created the beasts and flowers.

**And, in the most surprising development of all,  
we are also the gardeners.**

Walter Truett Anderson



***We are in the garden  
called planet Earth but our  
garden is in a mess!***

**And....**



*We can't solve problems  
by using the same kind of  
thinking we used when  
we created them.*

**Albert Einstein**



## Changes of narratives

**In the late 20's the discoveries in the “hard sciences” sprung from the work of Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg and others which generated a new, integrated view of the universe based on relationships. This new narrative revolutionized the old narrative which was based on an orderly mechanistic universe.**



## Narrative changes

**In the 1960s, Lynn Margulis discovered that eukaryotic cells (the kind found in nearly all animals, plants and fungi) contain smaller entities, the mitochondria, that were once separate organisms, and bacteria which invaded ancestral one-celled creatures and stayed on. The parasitic relationship evolved into a symbiotic one.**

**The mitochondria regulate the metabolism of the cell and process energy. These symbiotic cells evolved, creating the incredible variety of life forms we see today. Each of us carries millions if not billions of mitochondria, unsuspected microscopic cousins.**





Differing narratives, values, concepts of reality, of human nature, generate different relationships, priorities, goals & actions based on strategies of:

## **Empowerment**

- Democratic Relationship
- Equal rights & opportunities
- Promotes responsibility
- Bio-psycho-social Paradigm
- Health Promotion
- Patient Centered Medicine
- Biofeedback , neurofeedback
- Transparency, shared knowledge
- People Centered
- Capacity for deep contact, Empathy  
& Respect for all the life forms
- Microcredit

## **Disempowerment**

- Authoritarian Relationship
- Oppression
- Promotes passivity
- Mechanistic- reductionist Paradigm
- Reductionist Medicine
- Disease Centered Medicine
- Electroshock
- Manipulation of Information
- Racism, sexism, bigotry etc.
- Alienation from self, others, depletion of natural  
& human resources
- Profit to all cost, Subprime caper



# Disease mongering

is the selling of sickness that widens the boundaries of illness in order to grow markets for those who sell and deliver treatments.

It is a process that turns healthy people into patients, causes iatrogenic harm, and wastes precious resources

**Moynihan R, Henry D (2006)** The fight against disease mongering: Generating knowledge for action.  
*PLoS Med* 3: e191. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0030191



Exploring the existing evidence of the impact of disease awareness campaigns on the consumption of medicines, on public health and on consumers. And addressing the consumer's right to know who is providing the information and for what purposes.

Can systems be redesigned in order to better reward trustworthy communication and avoid unwanted side-effects of disease mongering?

What can insurance companies do to facilitate necessary attention for diseases or reduce unnecessary promotion of diseases?



Some forms of “medicalisation” may now be better described as “disease mongering”—  
extending the boundaries of treatable illness to expand markets for new products.

Alliances of pharmaceutical manufacturers, doctors, and patients groups use the media to frame conditions as being widespread and severe disease mongering can include turning ordinary ailments into medical problems, seeing mild symptoms as serious, treating personal problems as medical, seeing risks as diseases, and framing prevalence estimates to maximize potential markets. Corporate funded information about disease should be replaced by independent information.

Ray Moynihan, Iona Heath, David Henry (2002) **Selling sickness: the pharmaceutical industry and disease mongering**  
*BMJ* 2002; 324 : 886 doi: 10.1136/bmj.324.7342.886



Improving health by reducing harm from inappropriate, misleading or unethical marketing of health products or services, especially misleading pharmaceutical promotion.



**Are we going to witness a new  
wave of human evolution or be  
flooded by self destructive  
narratives and learned  
helplessness??**



**Narratives can be life affirming and facilitating our full development of our potentialities or vice versa.**



## **Some dysfunctional personal narratives:**

**I am suffering because I am a victim.**

**I'm feeling miserable and this is all the fault of my parents who did not raise me well...**

**I want to be perfect in everything I do.**

**I have to be useful to people around me in order to gain their love and respect.**

**If nothing terrible has happened yet it probably will pretty soon...**





## **Some examples of functional personal narratives**

**I have the right to exist.**

**I can learn what I do not know yet.**

**I do not have to be perfect but I can learn from my mistakes.**

**I cannot do everything by myself but when in need I can ask for help.**

**I am often afraid but fears do not necessarily stop me from being courageous.**

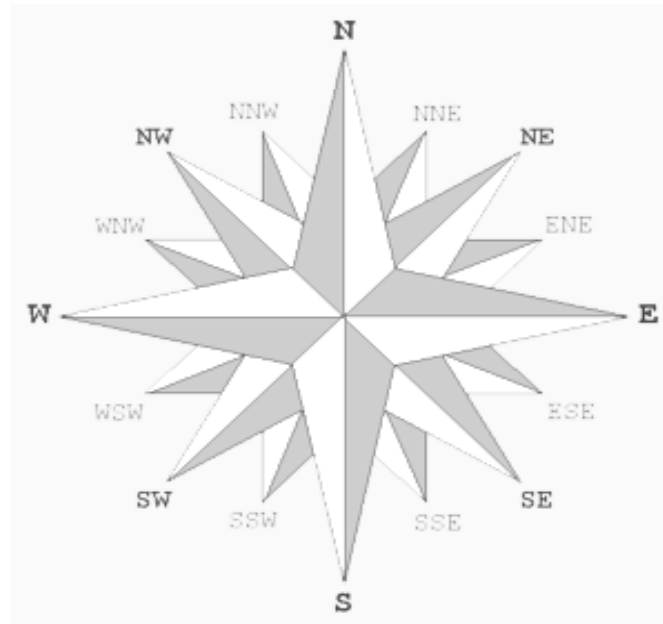


**Profound differences and results are created by different narratives.**

**Do we work to support narratives of hope and liberation or narratives of oppression, reification and compliance with dysfunctional status quo?**



**A compass for scientists and professionals of the *Anthropocene Era* is needed.**



*...at the basis of anything that a scientist undertakes is, first of all, an ethical and moral value judgment that he makes.*

Carl Rogers



**Today in the Anthropocene Era another  
requirement is urgently needed:**

***Values* plus *Capacity of Contact***

**An effective capacity of contact  
with myself, others and the world**



A few years ago the term *Anthropocene* was introduced by the Nobel laureate and World Academy of Art and Science Fellow Paul Crutzen, underlining that **there's really no separation any more between human activities and what we used to call nature.**



**In the *Anthropocene Era* the concept of health has to be refined: I propose that a healthy human being should be in line with the World Health Organization's focus of not just of preventing illness but promoting health:**

*Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. ... Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being”.*

**World Health Organization, Ottawa Charter ( 1986)**



**We are the only species that creates artificial intelligence, and fills the skies with artificial satellites. We are the species that impacts all other life on Earth, and has begun to know it, and to contemplate the possibility that we have placed it in grave jeopardy.**

Walt Truett Anderson



It's not too hard, most of the time, to **sleepwalk along through life** without being disturbed by the cumulative **knowledge of our own enormous weight on the planet**, knowledge now coming at us from all directions. But once in a while, especially when we look hard at the evidence of global climate change – spreading deserts, raging storms, suffering wildlife – we find the aspect of *Earth-humanity-evolving-accelerating* painful to contemplate.

Walt Truett Anderson





**WE live in a period of globalization  
and of growing complexity.**

**To meet our present and future  
challenges we need new and  
effective ways to cope.**

**New capacities for new ways of  
knowing are required.**



We need to foster a new  
*psychological literacy* for  
billions of people, a sort of  
*psychological compass*,  
a needed systemic way of being  
able to navigate in the rippling  
currents of change.



**It is as if man has been suddenly appointed director of the biggest business of all, **the business of evolution** – appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning and preparation. What is more, **he can't refuse the job.****

**Whether he wants it or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth.**

**This is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner he realizes it and starts believing in it, **the better for all concerned....****

Julian Huxley



***“Within an international community based upon the rule of law and universal values of equality, human rights, and dignity, it is surely wrong for small, vulnerable communities to suffer because of the actions of other more powerful resource-rich countries, actions over which they have no control, and little or no protection.”***

Past President Gayoom, Republic of the Maldives



**When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up in 1948, its authors could not have imagined the complex global interconnectedness that climate change would lead to today.**

**But now it is clear that the devastating international impacts of greenhouse-gas emissions give countries undeniable international responsibility for the human-rights consequences of their policies.**

**Human-rights laws and institutions need to evolve fast to rise to this unprecedented challenge.**

**Creative human-rights lawyers could push to have courts recognize future injury.**

**Raworth, K. (2008), Oxfam Report on Climate Wrongs and Human Rights: Putting people at the heart of climate-change policy**



## **The growing evidence of climate wrongs**

Climate change is set to undermine human rights on a massive scale. International human-rights law states that, ‘In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.’ But – as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has documented in detail, excessive greenhouse-gas emissions, primarily from rich countries, are depriving millions of people of the very water, food, soil, and land on which they subsist.

**Raworth, K. (2008), Oxfam Report on Climate Wrongs and Human Rights: Putting people at the heart of climate change policy**



**...“Research in the social sciences will lead us to better understand how we can change our attitudes and thus insure a healthy future for our planet.**

**The goal to raise the awareness of all people is key to making lasting changes to help our environment.”...**

Neal Pargman



We need to promote functional narratives at every level:

- Socio cultural
- Environmental
- Scientific
- Economic
- Psychological





**We need a new and effective way of coping with changing realities.**

**A way to become aware of how we construe our experiences or our narratives of what we call reality: the relationship with ourselves, the others, the world.**

**We need to foster at every level of society awareness of our narratives, of our power and responsibilities for the present – a future of humankind & the whole planet.**



**We need to promote a new socially compelling, forward-looking vision of evolution that brings together the worlds of science and spirit, evolutionary theory and developmental psychology.**

**Need for an updated recipe for resilience, on how to think, feel and act outside the present obsolete mechanistic box, to become aware of the fact that **we live in a complex web of relationships.****

**Being blind to the world of relationships brings us dire consequences.**



It is estimated that there are around 100 million tons of garbage in the world's oceans. There are five identifiable garbage patches—in the North and South Pacific, the North and South Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean.

The Garbage Patches are poisoning the ocean food chain, says its discoverer Captain Charles Moore, the founder of the Algalita Marine Research Foundation.



**“..one thing really bothered me during my bicycling journey across America: we’ve turned this once pristine continent with all its inherent beauty, wildlife and treasures—into a giant garbage dump. At 15 miles per hour, a person really ‘sees’ what happened to this country.**

**Black, brown, red and white Americans toss their trash EVERYWHERE!**

**They toss it into rivers, lakes, streams and along every road. They leave vehicles, trailers, couches and cans of oil by the hundreds of thousands if not millions EVERYWHERE in the woods, on abandoned lots and without rhyme or reason. They toss cans, plastic containers and bottles, and soiled baby diapers into the prettiest mountain streams and along hiking paths. Not just a little, but into the millions!”...**

**Frosty Wooldridge**



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**Julian Huxley**



**Now and then there is a sudden and rapid passage to a totally new and more comprehensive type of order or organization, with quite new emergent properties, and involving quite new methods of further evolution.**

**Julian Huxley**



In the age of globalization and of growing complexity to meet the challenges of our present and future, new and effective ways to facilitate the capacity of integration of our ways of knowing are required. We need to foster a new psychological literacy for billions of people; that which I call the **psychological compass**, a needed systemic way of being in relationship with ourselves, others and the planet to navigate in the rippling currents of change.



*“in every act of love and will – and in the long run they are both present in each genuine act – we mold ourselves and our world simultaneously.*

*This is what it means to embrace the future.”*

Rollo May, *Love and Will* (1969)







## We need life affirming narratives

Today, in order to assure a tomorrow, our science and our conscience, our feelings, our thinking and our actions need to be grounded in the awareness of the inextricable bond we have with each other and with every life form...

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*We are the earth....*

*We are the people....*





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