

EVOLVE OR DIE!

BY DAVID ENGLAND

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AIM AND SCOPE OF THE ARTICLE

The aim of this article is to offer a psychological response to the threat of human extinction, an evolved psychology, the synthesis of heart and mind.

From the second millennium BCE, natural disasters, mass migrations, and the emergence of ferocious warfare brought about disruption, dislocation, and discontinuity in human affairs. Julian Jaynes (1976) presents evidence that the human race only survived then by evolving a more robust psychology, namely the conscious mind, over a period of about 600 years. Jaynes calls the earlier psychology the 'bicameral mind'.

In today's world, the human race faces: a climate emergency that could result in the extinction of the human race and many other species; devastating wars and well-financed terrorism causing mass migrations; and human encroachment on the natural world cultivating pandemics. The human race is facing worldwide disruption, dislocation, and discontinuity on an unprecedented scale.

The outlook for humanity is much as it was 3000 years ago, either extinction or an evolution in psychology. What saved humanity from extinction then was the evolution of consciousness. What can save humanity from extinction now, and secure a future for the human race, is the evolution of what we might call a "beyond-conscious mind".

Jaynes' 'Bicameral Mind'

In the pre-conscious era, society was strictly hierarchal, each person receiving instructions from childhood about what to do in any situation: when it was right to plant crops, when right to harvest. These instructions were held in the right hemisphere as part of the organisation of the central nervous system. Faced with a given situation, the right hemisphere provided volition and empowerment, telling the left hemisphere what to do. This was experienced by the person as the voice of their god, according to their place in the social hierarchy.

THEN AND NOW

When we skip from the second millennium BCE to the present, we see millennia of conflict, slaughter, heartless cruelty, mass migrations, burgeoning cities, as well as the flowering of philosophy, literature, art, architecture, science, and engineering, all the products of the conscious mind. Added to which are plagues and natural disasters.

There is a parallel between the challenge faced by the second millenniums BCE and the challenge we face now. They faced the growth of cities. We face population growth: the world population increased from 1 billion in 1800 to 7.7 billion today, putting pressure on water and other finite resources. They suffered Assyrian invasion and wholesale butchery. We have known dehumanised cruelty and production-line extermination of millions of men, women, and children,

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and devastating wars, as well as the actual use of nuclear weapons and the ongoing threat of nuclear conflict. They faced mass migrations as a result of natural disasters and armed conflict. We face massive migrations: of a pre-war Syrian population of 22 million, 5.6 million have fled the country, 6.6 million are displaced, and 2.98 million are in besieged or hard-to-reach areas, totalling about 70% of the population (Figures from UNHCR).

They faced natural disasters. We face extinction. Extinction! Yet, there are powerful people and organisations who deny there is a climate emergency and choose to maintain the status quo.

There have been plagues throughout history. In the 14th Century the Great Bubonic Plague reduced the world population by about a quarter, from 475 million to 350–375 million. The influenza pandemic of 1918 infected 500 million people, about one third of the then world's population. The death toll was estimated to have been between 17 million and 50 million. Though the coronavirus Covid-19 is nothing like so deadly as the plague or the 'Spanish flu', the Covid-19 pandemic has brought disruption of communities worldwide and has exposed the fragility of the world's financial and commercial systems. What will the next pandemic bring?

This is now: uncontrolled population growth with finite natural resources, devastating wars, the threat of nuclear conflict, dehumanised cruelty and disregard for human life, uprooting and migration of large populations, the fragility of the world economic order, threats to and actual destruction of the natural world, the well-attested prospect of human extinction, and the prospect of a pandemic with a high mortality (See the Guardian Weekly Special Report by John Vidal on planetary health, 27 March 2020, *Ebola, Bird Flu, Sars, Mers, Covid-19*). This is an existential threat that is at least comparable with that faced by humanity 3000 years ago. The Covid-19 virus has had acute consequences for the world order. Covid-19 is the catalyst that has exposed the existential threat of total discontinuity in human affairs.

REFLECTION ON THE EVOLUTION OF BEYOND-CONSCIOUSNESS

The human race could not have survived then without the evolution of a more robust psychology, a paradigm shift to a conscious, subjective, wilful mind. I suggest, the human race cannot expect to survive now without evolving a more robust psychology. We cannot predict what that paradigm shift might be, evolution follows its own course, but we can give a name to this development in human psychology, "beyond-conscious mind". We may not be able to predict what a beyond-conscious mind might be, yet, unlike with the bicameral mind, we have the benefit of consciousness to help us chart the path. The human species needs a "consciousness pandemic" (from the Greek pan, meaning "all" + démios, meaning "people").

Societies based on the conscious mind are characterised by power, ambition, competition, greed, deception, repression, and conflict to varying degrees. We can speculate, societies based on a beyond-conscious mind will choose parity over power, conciliation over ambition, cooperation over competition, honesty over duplicity, toleration over repression, generosity over greed, self-interest modulated by the needs of others. Conflict will be resolved through goodwill, mutual respect, and a commitment to work towards transformation, to search for an outcome that honours the values of both parts of any conflict.

INSIGHTS OF NEUROSCIENCE

FUNCTIONS OF RIGHT AND LEFT HEMISPHERES OF THE BRAIN

We cannot reflect on the evolution of a beyond-conscious mind without considering what is being learnt from neuroscience. In particular, this article draws on the writing of Iain McGilchrist (2009 pp: 25, 42, 54-57, 188, 191, 201) and Allan Schore (2012 pp: 4, 7-8, 58, 60, 83), who are agreed on the primacy of the right hemisphere of the brain rather than, as one is accustomed to think, the left hemisphere with its facility for language.

There is a marked difference in function between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, which give attention to the world around them in their different ways. The right sees the big picture. The left brings detailed, focussed attention to bear. The right sees things as a whole and in their context, a gestalt. The left sees things out of their context and broken into the parts that make up the whole. Seeing the whole of a situation in its context, the right hemisphere sees where the attention of the left hemisphere is most needed and directs the left hemisphere accordingly. In other words, the right hemisphere tells the left hemisphere when and where to take action.

THE MEANING OF CONSCIOUSNESS

McGilchrist explains, if what one means by consciousness is the part of the mind that brings the world into focus, makes it explicit, allows it to be formulated in language, and is aware of its own awareness, it is reasonable to link the conscious mind to activity almost all of which lies ultimately in the left hemisphere. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings.

Schore states clearly, the human unconscious mind is located in the right brain. What this means is, the right brain sees and processes the big picture, determining when action is needed. This processing is unconscious to the 'conscious' left hemisphere until prompted, or rather motivated, by the right. Such prompting or motivation is part of our living language; we speak of receiving a call or finding a vocation (from Latin *vocātiō*, meaning invitation, bidding).

MOTIVATION AND EMOTION

Major motivational systems—including attachment, fear, sexuality, play, shame, and disgust—are located in the right hemisphere. With its overall perspective, the right hemisphere is dominant for: the reception, expression, and communication of our emotions and passions; our ability to regulate stress; our sense of self, our relationships with others, our empathy with others, our compassion for others, our sense of morality; our understanding of metaphor and our sense of humour; our insight, intuition, and creativity. Everything, in fact, that marks the human spirit, the self-aware, living, feeling, relating, human being who is able to apprehend life in others within the context of the lived world. A world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings, but in the nature of things always in flux, never fully graspable, always imperfectly known.

In contrast, the left hemisphere is dependent upon language to name objects and understand how they are constructed. It has the clarity, focus, and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static, isolated, taken out of context, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but

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ultimately mechanical and lifeless. Everything in fact that has enabled the human species to dominate the world. McGilchrist states, “an increasingly mechanistic, fragmented, de-contextualised world, marked by unwarranted optimism mixed with paranoia and a feeling of emptiness, has come about, reflecting, I believe, the unopposed action of a dysfunctional left hemisphere.”

CREATIVITY

The flowering of philosophy, literature, art, architecture, science, and engineering, are indeed the products of the conscious mind. Yet, they rely on the creative inspiration offered by the unconscious mind, the right hemisphere.

TOWARDS THE EVOLUTION OF BEYOND-CONSCIOUSNESS

SACRED MARRIAGE - THE SYNTHESIS OF HEART AND MIND

The above words by McGilchrist underline a 3000 year old flaw in the conscious mind, which is manifest throughout the span from individual to international relations. The irony is that while the right is the primary hemisphere, the left became dominant; the mechanical triumphed over the living. The left hemisphere is dominant in so far as it fails to give *sufficient* cognisance to the promptings of the right hemisphere to act humanely, with feeling, empathy, and compassion, and instead represses these motivations.

This indicates the need for an evolutionary change of balance between the left and right hemispheres, bringing more to the fore the right hemisphere’s insight, intuition, creativity, and its capacity for empathy, compassion, relationship with living beings, and for apprehending the whole picture in relation to global issues, whilst affirming the left hemisphere’s capacity for getting done what needs to be done.

The concept of a Sacred Marriage of feminine with masculine, Goddess with King, goes back at least to the 1st Dynasty of ancient Uruk (c. 2700 BCE). Now, the Sacred Marriage is a vivid metaphor for the harmonious union of the feminine and masculine aspects of the human psyche, the right and left hemispheres, that realises a beyond-conscious mind. For simplicity, we can call this the synthesis of heart and mind.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEMININE

My professional view is that the qualities embodied in the right hemisphere, intuition, feeling, empathy, compassion, etc, tend to be more obvious and more valued by women than they are by men. At the same time, with the feminine dimension of the male, what Carl Jung called the anima—which interestingly he regarded as unconscious—a man can equally value the qualities embodied in the right hemisphere. Be that as it may, those men and women more attuned to the right hemisphere’s bidding, even by a fraction, may be better fitted to survive and be progenitors of change. Like these three courageous young women who have stood up to an overbearing prevailing worldview:



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Greta Thunberg, who challenges climate change denial, promoting the view that humanity is facing an existential crisis arising from climate change.

Malala Yousafzai, who campaigns to give back to girls what poverty, war, and discrimination has tried to take away from them, the right to education.

Olga Misik (pictured holding a copy of the constitution from which she read to the riot police), who campaigns for democracy against oppressive state power.

THE CREATIVE MIND

The right hemisphere is the source of our insight, intuition, and creativity. The feminine side of the human mind provides the inspiration and impulse towards the realisation of philosophy, literature, art, architecture, science, and engineering. These are the products of the union of the feminine and masculine sides of the human mind.

VOLITION AND EMPOWERMENT : THE WILL TO LOVE

As to volition and empowerment, I suggest that the exercise of will shall be motivated by love. Love is hardly a new idea; acting humanely, with feeling, empathy, and compassion are expressions of love. Love is present in diverse religious texts: you shall love the lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself; none of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself; do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself; love is a gift of one's innermost soul to another so both can be whole.

Jalaluddin Rumi wrote, "Love is the remedy of our pride and self-conceit, the physician of all our infirmities. Only he whose garment is rent by love becomes entirely unselfish."

Apostle Paul wrote, "Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance." (1 Corinthians 13, New English Bible)

Nothing love cannot face! No limit to its faith, hope, endurance! Love is not simply a feeling. Love is an act of Will. A sustained act of Will! Love is a tough call. Love has not, so far, been the guiding principle in human affairs. Yet it remains a demanding and radical foundation for human conduct.

A BEYOND-CONSCIOUS WORLDVIEW

In the development of beyond-consciousness, facing profound global and individual challenges, we the human race need to see the big picture, and being motivated by Love to have the Will to act. These profound global and individual challenges are set out in detail by the United Nations as the Sustainable Development Goals (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>)

A FUTURE FOR THE HUMAN RACE

A CONSCIOUSNESS PANDEMIC

The human race could not have survived disruption, dislocation, and discontinuity in the second to first millennium BCE without the evolution of a more robust psychology. Consciousness! I suggest, the human race cannot expect to survive now without evolving a new psychology, dubbed the beyond-conscious mind in recognition that the 'conscious' cannot survive without honouring the 'unconscious'.

We cannot predict what course the evolution of a beyond-conscious mind will take; evolution follows its own path. Nevertheless, every man and woman can choose to employ their conscious mind in the service of human evolution, can be part of a consciousness pandemic.

On present showing, we can hardly expect a human species driven by power and pride, ambition and rivalry, intolerance and xenophobia, fear and repression, greed and self-interest, obfuscation and denial, to be capable of the degree of clarity and conciliation necessary to avoid its own extinction. Fiddling while Rome burns is an apt metaphor.

However, there may already be early signs of a consciousness pandemic in the service of human evolution: a groundswell of popular conviction that the human species can and will move to a new attitude, a new psychology founded upon mutual respect, honesty and clarity, fairness and generosity, cooperation and conciliation. This can happen. It can happen when enough plucky men and women are willing to commit to the Sacred Union, the synthesis of the feminine and masculine sides of the human mind, the union of heart and mind.

TOWARDS A FUTURE FOR THE HUMAN RACE

In moving towards a future for the human race, we can begin by recognising that our feminine and masculine sides, heart and mind, have equal weight and are complementary in their function, the one seeing the whole picture and recognising what needs to be realised and the other having the focus, detailed planning, and marshalling of resources necessary to achieve it. As the picture is forever in flux, so the needs are ever changing. Moving forward is thus a cycle, a perpetual dance between heart and mind.

With a commitment to the synthesis of heart and mind, cultivated and spread by a consciousness pandemic, we can begin to move forward as a species, consciously seeking to correct the 3000 year old flaw in the conscious mind. The human mind, graced with the facility to conceive philosophy, literature, art, architecture, science, and engineering, actually possesses the creativity and ingenuity to bear down on the ills that beset the human race, when motivated by Love to act humanely, with feeling, empathy, compassion, imagination, and wit. Love as a moral imperative guiding human decisions and actions. Love as an act of Will.

CONCLUDING

It will not be an easy journey, this evolutionary transition from conscious mind to beyond-conscious mind. The evolutionary transition from bicameral mind to conscious mind took 600 arduous years. Even with the benefit of consciousness, the creativity and ingenuity of the human

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mind, even knowing how much is at stake, the transition might be expected to engage many generations in hardship, struggle, and bloodshed.

Much will depend on the numerical strength, commitment, and determination of those men and women comprising the groundswell of popular conviction that the human species can and will move forward—the proto-beyond-conscious minded—and on the other hand the power of the resolutely conscious minded who would choose to protect the status quo.

During the evolutionary transition to conscious mind, those clinging to their bicameral psychology were excluded and marginalised. The proto-beyond-conscious minded face a critical dilemma: holding fast to their commitment and determination, and at the same time, in relation to the resolutely conscious minded, holding fast to their guiding principle of Love.

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