Grand Narratives of Spirituality: Some Critical Reflections

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Abstract

Grand narratives posit spirituality as the master term undergirding human history and all its cultural and religious formations; individual human becoming in all its moral, psychological, social and transpersonal dimensions; and the therapeutic practices of caring professionals. This sets the scene for a series of isomorphic relations to crystallise between spirituality and culture, spirituality and humanity, spiritual care and holistic care. The result is that pre-existing frameworks drawn from academic disciplines and professional vocabularies can be dislodged to the bewilderment of those located outside the spirituality camp. The risk is that scholars and practitioners who take up residence inside the fortress of a grand narrative of spirituality may allow spiritual premises to prejudice their research and practice. It is argued that scholars need to preserve the epistemological priority of social scientific categories in studies of contemporary communities; that caring professionals need to reaffirm the ontological priority of humanity in their practice; and that demarcating boundaries between the secular and the spiritual could enhance spirituality scholarship and the work of caring professionals in modern post-secular societies.

Key Words: grand narratives, communities, caring professions, spirituality, humanity

Introduction

The term 'grand narratives' was coined by Lyotard (1993) to denote theories which purport

to provide a comprehensive account of human history. He critiqued them on the grounds

that they constituted closed systems of thought which had to disregard the contingency of

events and contestability of interpretations in order to squeeze all relevant phenomena into

the orbit of their own terms of reference which were taken for granted as 'Truth' (Browning

2000:31-6). Grand narratives of spirituality are those which accord priority to spirituality,

Spirit or the human spirit as the master term(s) to describe cosmic evolution and human

history (Ó Murchú 1997), contemporary communities across the globe (King 2008), human

development across the lifespan (Crisp 2010) and all quests for morality, meaning-making,

connectedness and transcendence (Swinton 2001; Craigie 2010; Crisp 2010; Rossiter 2014).

This article is a critical appraisal of the way in which spirituality is acquiring a hegemonic

status among some scholars and caring professionals in modern Western societies. The

latter have been subject to secularising processes as well as cultural and religious

diversification so that they may be characterised as both post-secular and post-Christian

(Sharpe and Nickelson 2014). The exponential growth of spirituality scholarship necessitated

a selective approach to primary sources. Authors had to be espousing a grand narrative with

a universal spirituality intended to encompass those who might define as secular, religious

or spiritual-but-not-religious; texts had to be relatively popular and accessible if they were

to be influential upon citizens and caring professionals; and publicly funded services such as education, health and social work were given preference over counselling or psychotherapy which are more likely to be offered in the private sector i.e. fee-paying clients have more scope to enlist a professional whose faith (or non-faith) resonates with their own.

Critical reflections are inevitably influenced by one's own subject-position. I adopted a secular humanist stance throughout my vocation as a child care social worker, although I have now been exploring religious and spiritual traditions in my personal life for over a decade. From this duplex position, the core questions directed at the primary sources are: Does this account enhance our understanding of human history, religions or contemporary communities? How does a spiritual approach to professional practice differ from traditional humanistic ones? If it is difficult to detect the added value of spirituality discourses, why do their protagonists continue to assert the supremacy of the spiritual? If the spiritual is of immense significance to the lives of a minority or majority of citizens in post-secular societies, can we honour it without imposing a compulsory spirituality upon everyone?

This article has a tripartite structure. First, I will consider 'the spiritualisation of cultures' with reference to the works of Ó Murchú (1997) on historical cultures and King (2008) on contemporary communities. The primacy of spirituality can be traced to the spiritual cosmologies referenced by these authors, but it is suggested that the descriptive and explanatory power of abstract metaphysical constructs is restricted, and that studies of contemporary communities may be skewed by the spiritual preoccupations of scholars.

Second, 'the spiritualisation of humanity' operates as a bridge between the theoretical work of King (2008) and its application to citizens by caring professionals. It will be demonstrated that the axiom 'spirituality = humanity' underpins the work of well-known exponents of spirituality in education, health care and social work, and that this spirituality is often Christianised, casting doubt upon its universal applicability in post-secular contexts. The third section unpackages 'the spiritualisation of care', illustrating that caring professionals are re-describing traditional predicaments and therapeutic tool-kits in a spiritual language and/or redefining the nature of their vocations. In the conclusion it is argued that installing the primacy of community and humanity along with a spiritual/non-spiritual binary might be more effective in researching and redeeming the spiritual dimension of citizens and caring professions than strategies spawned from grand narratives which universalise it.

The Spiritualisation of Cultures

The grand narratives propounded by Ó Murchú (1997) and King (2008) throw the spirituality blanket over all historical cultures and contemporary communities respectively, entraining a twofold predicament. On the one hand, the conceptual schema derived from other disciplines which pre-date spirituality discourses, along with the self-understandings of individuals and communities, can be sidelined and even supplanted. On the other hand, readers may be left with the illusion that they now understand myriad cultural and religious forms, when in fact they have only acquired a new word in their vocabulary, a word which

can seemingly be applied to everything whilst grafting little concrete content onto anything (Bregman 2006).

The merits of invoking a panhuman, transhistorical and transcultural spirituality may hinge upon the symbolic value of illuminating the common ground of our species and the practical virtue of facilitating intercultural dialogues. The question is whether spirituality is a better common denominator than humanity or culture? Given that the genealogy of spirit terms is rooted in Christianity (Sheldrake 2013:2), and that spirituality is a Western construct with no counterpart in many Eastern languages (Chatterjee 1989:19), it can be surmised that it is more culturally biased than such alternatives.

The ascendency of spirituality in relation to culture hails from the ontologically privileged position of Spirit in relation to the cosmos. It is beyond the scope of this article to dissect the spiritual cosmologies undergirding the works of Ó Murchú (1997:86-99) and King (2008:152-8). To oversimplify matters on pragmatic grounds, it can be stated that a Cosmic-Creative Spirit is the source of evolution in spiritual cosmologies, giving birth to space-time, energy-matter and eventually life-consciousness on planet earth, and engendering the tautology that everything that exists must be inherently spiritual by dint of its origins in Spirit. An anthropomorphic rendering of teleology and eschatology then ensues insofar as human beings are destined to become conscious of their spiritual foundations and capable of co-creating with Spirit, and only the spiritualisation of the human species in the shape of recognising the interconnectedness and sacredness of all life-forms can safeguard

the planet from human desecration. The Cosmic-Creative Spirit is known as God in theistic traditions, but of course in secular and scientific circles this kind of speculation leaves us stranded on the island of non-verifiable and non-falsifiable hypotheses (Birx 1997).

It is now easier to understand why Ó Murchú (1997) construes human history as the unfolding of Spirit and all cultures and religions as manifestations of a universal spirituality. He infers spiritual beliefs and behaviours from the existence of ancient burial sites, cave art in Europe and totems in Australia (pp. 55-6), claiming that "Our prehistoric ancestors behaved spiritually because they remained connected to the cosmic womb of life, which itself is innately spiritual" (p. 60) and that "In practically every dimension of their lives our ancestors lived in a transcendent mode" (p. 63). On the one hand, the provenance of all cultural and religious forms in the Cosmic-Creative Spirit enables him to treat diverse spiritualities as equivalent, so that pagan worship of a Great Mother Goddess is deemed to be evidence that the Trinitarian Christian God was at work in the world thousands of years prior to its incarnation in Christ (p. 67). On the other hand, world religions have divided people from each other and from the one Spirit, so he advocates a return to spirituality and presages the end of all religions (p. 34).

It is doubtful whether ancient ruins testify in any transparent manner to human consciousness of and connectedness to Spirit, and it is impossible to know whether or not our ancestors' sense of a spiritual world had anything in common with modern quests for spiritual renewal. The presumption that pagans and Christians are worshipping the same Spirit would be disputed in both camps, as the mediating role of cultural-linguistic contexts

in shaping religious life-worlds has been sundered by this grand narrative (cf. Chatterjee 1989). Academic disciplines such as anthropology and theology proffer more accurate and adequate accounts of ancient cultures and world religions respectively, and a grand narrative of spirituality must engage with these if it is to enhance rather than detract from our understanding. When it is predicated upon the superiority of spirituality (*qua* universal human essence) over religions (*qua* particular cultural expressions) it can be offensive to religious communities (Wong and Vinsky 2009). When it is purveyed to the brigade of the spiritual-but-not-religious, it may reinforce the delusion of the availability of all spiritual and religious traditions to any modern spiritual seeker (Carrette and King 2005:88-121).

Turning to King's (2008) account of spirituality in relation to contemporary cultures, she resists an overarching definition on the grounds that what it 'does' is more important than what it 'is' (p.3). If we apply this logic to her own text, what spirituality seems to do here is to stand in for humanity, with the adjective 'spiritual' attributed to all facets of human life. Although she is highly cognizant of the pivotal role of transcendence in spirituality (p. 14) and provides several examples of religious and spiritual movements oriented towards this, she also relocates spirituality to the earth plane so that every human life is a spiritual journey. Earthly transcendences involve struggles to survive, to make sense of the world, to relate to others and to create and sustain whatever is significant to us, whether a family, community, career or hobby, and such basic human activities are dignified with the spiritual nomenclature (p. 41).

The isomorphism of spirituality and humanity is dilemmatic. On the one hand, the distinctiveness of a spiritual life or a spiritual worldview is eliminated when all human beings are engaged in a spiritual journey, and there seems to be no way of differentiating the spirituality of women in impoverished countries who are struggling to feed their families from that of Wiccans in the West who are dedicated to the Goddess (King 2008:134-5, 178). On the other hand, the distinctiveness of a secular identity which refuses the global quest for spirituality is also denied, which unveils an internal contradiction insofar as it is also acknowledged that spiritual questing is the exception rather than the rule in modern societies (p. 23). This is resolved by imputing an implicit or unconscious spirituality to the recalcitrant, so that social movement activists working for justice or peace are said to adhere to spiritual values even if they explicitly reject the language of spirituality (p. 111). Whilst the unconscious should not be disavowed, nor should conscientious objections. It is instructive to recall Rowe's (2001) disgruntlement about the way in which people who self-define as spiritual or religious fail to respect her self-definition as a secular person-professional, assuming that her vocation as a clinical psychologist means that she must be 'devout' (religious), that her love of trees amounts to a spiritual (Pagan) practice, and that her writings on the social construction of knowledge are testimony to spiritual (Buddhist) enlightenment.

Discourses about contemporary spirituality need to be informed by the disciplines of sociology and psychology if they are to reflect the actual self-understandings of individuals and communities rather than the spiritual predilections of their authors. Strangely, it may be beneficial to bracket the privileged status of the spiritual *even and especially* when

researching the life-worlds of others. Erricker (2001) decided to examine the 'street spirituality' where she lived by visiting her neighbours and asking them to tell her about life in the street. Spirituality was initially defined as "the connection with the transcendent, a feeling of union with something beyond our earthly, mundane existence... a sense of meaning and purpose" (pp. 224-5). When no transcendent connectedness or spiritual concepts transpired from lay narratives, her spirituality discourse remained intact. Street spirituality was identified with the morality of neighbourliness – "It is .. a cup of coffee and someone to listen, a hug when you need it" (p. 226) – which in turn was treated as the secular analogue of the spiritual communion between a religious believer and God i.e. "the spiritual solace given by knowing that somebody cares can be compared with the solace of knowing that God cares... [Neighbours] know all your secrets just as God might know all your secrets" (p. 234). Here, the premises of a grand narrative have been smuggled into a mini-narrative about street spirituality. We may wonder whether anything could vitiate the thesis of the inherent spirituality of all human and communal life for spirituality subscribers?

The Spiritualisation of Humanity

Caring professionals who cleave to a grand narrative also treat spirituality and humanity as synonymous, but there are weightier repercussions here as they work with children and vulnerable citizens, educate the next generation of teachers, nurses and social workers and undertake research on the lives of service users and carers.

Educators, social workers and health care professionals have legitimately highlighted the atrophy of attention to the spiritual in their respective fields. If they were only recovering a neglected dimension, as indicated in the subtitle of Swinton's (2001) text *Spirituality and Mental Health Care. Recovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension*, and if this could be sequestered at least in principle or in part from other dimensions of the personhood of citizens and the practice of caring professionals, this would be a positive contribution to public sector service provision in post-secular countries. Lamentably, it has proved notoriously difficult to delineate clear and consensual boundaries around the spiritual – whilst it must include religious reverence towards a Creator and novel modes of spiritual questing for transcendence, and whilst all forms of transcendence can encompass the immanence-in-the-world of the transcendent, secular lifestyles and worldviews may not be overtly or self-consciously spiritual in this way. When the Education Reform Act 1988 stipulated that teachers in Britain should attend to the 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' of pupils, the impossibility of disentangling the spiritual from the moral, cultural and social paved the way for sceptics to adduce that once the sibling terms had been subtracted, the spiritual was an empty category (Lambourn 1996).

In an ironical twist, the spiritual dimension has instead come to colonise personhood itself, and it is worthwhile re-tracing this trajectory in detail. Caring professionals start with a twofold definition of spirituality whereby spirituality-as-essence refers to the life-force at the core of a person whilst spirituality-as-one-dimension pertains to an orientation towards a transcendent reality (Carroll 1998:5). Since spirituality-as-essence pervades the entirety of personhood as well as the entirety of human becoming which depends upon the life-force,

it transmutes into a conception of spirituality-as-whole (Swinton 2001:16), carving out an aperture for all lived experience to be spiritualised across every stage and sphere of life (Crisp 2010).

In health and social care, the life-force is translated as the human spirit, with spirituality constituting the way in which we experience and express our human spirit, so that a living human being without a spirituality is a logical impossibility (Swinton 2001:14; Crisp 2010: 7-12). A nursing commentator who created a hypothetical contrary case as part of her concept analysis of spirituality could only envisage a man-made robot as being non-spiritual (Tanyi 2002:505). Of course the human spirit is an amorphous notion akin to that of Cosmic Spirit, and to make the invisible and intangible the bedrock of modern professions whose state sponsors have pledged them to evidence-based practice is an act of great courage and conviction, perhaps bordering on folly. In educational circles the human spirit is often transliterated as the capacity for human consciousness to discern mystery and meaning in the world, so its ontological ascendency is secured by an appeal to the biology of consciousness or a naturalised religion (Hay and Nye 1998:145-9; Hyde 2008:31-5).

Simultaneously, the spiritual dimension of humanity is inflated. Paley (2008:5) dubs this 'the stretch dynamic', and it may become a metaphorical black hole engulfing most or all of our humanness. In an educational context, Rossiter (2014:141) avers that we are genetically endowed with a 'basic human spirituality' which can don religious or secular costumes; it is religious when conjoined with a faith tradition via prayer, liturgy, scriptures, mysticism, evangelism and metanoia; it is secular when expressed through morality, identity,

meaning-making, emotional processing, story-telling, philosophy, citizenship and experiences of wonder and awe. It is arguable that only the final item on this secular-spiritual inventory could be classified as indubitably spiritual insofar as it opens the door to a mysterious and metaphysical experiencing of the cosmos (cf. Comte-Sponville 2008:144-57).

In health care, the spiritual dimension has been enlarged into a multi-dimensional domain. In Swinton's (2001:36) diagram of the person, the spiritual dimension includes phenomena which have traditionally been subsumed under other headings such as existential (meaning-making), moral (our sense of values), psychological (our relationship with ourselves) and social (relationships with others). In Craigie's (2010:33-44) CAMPS framework, spirituality envelops belonging to a Community, participating in Activities which promote growth, making life Meaningful, being Passionate about projects and relating to a divine Spirit, so that "You can't *not* have it… *You really can't not have a spiritual dimension to life*" (Craigie 2010:31). Some social work scholars have asseverated that "Spiritual development is not one aspect of life. Rather, spiritual development *is* everyday life" (Canda and Furman 1999:217).

The co-terminosity of humanity and spirituality is problematic from the standpoints of citizens who do not identify as spiritual beings and codes of ethics which mandate respect for clients' self-definitions as intrinsic to their autonomy and integrity (e.g. IFSW and IASSS 2004). In fairness, service users have been at the forefront of the movement to incorporate a spiritual dimension to practice in mental health settings (e.g. Foskett and Roberts 2007),

although not everyone wants their spirituality to feature on an official agenda (Starino et al. 2012). Spiritually inclined caring professionals genuinely strive to respect the worldviews and linguistic preferences of adult clients (Swinton 2001:136-7; Craigie 2010:22), but when spirituality becomes the overarching construct of a professional discourse, it will encroach upon interpretations of clients' narratives even if neither party explicitly mentions the word.

There is a tightrope to be walked between drawing attention to a spiritual dimension which would otherwise be overlooked, and drawing on a spiritual palette to paint the picture of all lives. If secular professionals have suppressed the spiritual, their spiritual counterparts are more likely to superimpose it – or at least their own version of it. Dyson et al. (1997:1185) cite the work of Stoll who claims that "whatever a person takes to be the highest value in life can be regarded as his 'God'… the God around whom his life revolves may be his work, physical activity or even himself". Since atheists have rejected the concept of God, and since egotists and workaholics have shunned a religious or spiritual pathway, how can this religious analogy be respectful of their worldviews and lifestyles?

Spiritual and religious terminology embellishes the self-understandings of secular citizens and their secular life-worlds, although whether this is for better or for worse is a moot point. Swinton (2001:160-2) provides a case example of a patient who felt that her extramarital affairs had let her family down and whose hope that a change in medication might improve her life had been dashed. He overlays her secular commentary with his own religious terminology so that the extramarital affairs are analysed in terms of transgression,

guilt and the need for forgiveness, and the failure of pharmaceuticals to deliver an improvement is transcribed as a crisis of faith. When researchers are dealing with observational data, their hermeneutics is more susceptible to spiritual embellishment. Hyde (2008) defined spirituality as the movement of Self towards union with the transcendent Other or God (p. 44), but he discovered it when children were immersed in ordinary tasks such as doing jigsaw puzzles and planting seeds, so the union between self and object inherent in such a total absorption became tantamount to an experience of oneness between Self and Other/God (p. 90). This is more reminiscent of Yoga than Christianity, but is it true to the subjective experiences and understandings of the children themselves?

The Spiritualisation of Care

Once human beings have been reconstructed as spiritual beings, a plethora of human predicaments can be re-interpreted as spiritual ones and an array of therapeutic practices can be enlisted in the service of spiritual growth. This can herald a re-birthing of the caring professions themselves from the womb of Spirit.

Let us begin by examining how the spiritual has become prefixed to a range of conditions and caring responses. In social work, when identities are deemed to be 'innately spiritual' (Crisp 2010:9) and when the quest to make sense of our past, present and future is essentially a 'spiritual quest' (Holloway and Moss 2010:110), any client who is questioning their identity or struggling to make meaning out of their life situation can be regarded as

presenting a spiritual need. Some teachers have argued that pupils who have been abused suffer 'spiritual deprivation' engendering 'special spiritual needs' (Kirkland 1996:262, 266). Attempting to disentangle these 'new' spiritual needs from their predecessors – i.e. emotional, psychosocial, ethical and existential needs – plunges us into an *aporetic* abyss. The rationale behind the spiritual may be that it takes us beyond other categories, as suggested by Holloway and Moss (2010:50) in relation to spiritual distress, envisaged as a disconnectedness from one's own spirit and/or Spirit. Such a phenomenon clearly exists among chronically depressed patients who adhere to a spiritual language or religious worldview (Swinton 2001:113-120). The questions are whether a spiritual language should be generalised beyond manifestly spiritual phenomena, and who retains the power of naming if a client and their professional carer disagree on substance or semantics?

A spiritual apparatus around assessment and intervention has materialised in recent years, and it would be impossible to do it justice in this paper. Suffice it to say that instruments which specifically address spiritual or religious events or meanings (e.g. Hodge 2005) and therapies which draw upon spiritual or religious concepts or resources (e.g. Tonigan et al. 1999) are to be welcomed insofar as they complete the jigsaw of holistic care for service users who apprehend a spiritual or religious foundation to their struggles and wish to access spiritual or religious remedies. But this still leaves the conundrum intact for the majority of caring professionals in modern societies whose education has typically left them bereft of any specifically spiritual and religious tool-kit.

Universal narratives of spirituality in the caring professions have camouflaged over the educational deficit by equating traditional good practice with spiritual care. According to Swinton (2001), spiritual care or spiritual healing is synonymous with holistic care, and the core ingredients such as empathy and interpathy are already cultivated in nursing training (pp. 140-2, 168-71). If we wonder why holistic care should be dubbed 'spiritual care' rather than 'humanistic care', we need to recall the maxims that spirit = essence and spirituality = whole. In education and social work, therapeutic techniques based upon art, music, meditation, relaxation, reading poetry and writing journals have been hailed as progenitors of spiritual growth (Kirkland 1996; Canda and Furman 1999). This is plausible but it can be over-stretched. According to Canda and Furman (1999:216), mundane tasks which consume a great deal of social workers' time and energy are also spiritually oriented i.e. providing shelter to homeless people launches them onto the path of spiritual development since once basic needs have been addressed, people can devote themselves to higher needs. It may be more humanistic to adopt an intrinsic orientation to service provision rather than to feed, clothe and shelter people for the sake of an extrinsic or distant goal such as furthering their spiritual development which may or may not be congruent with the client's wishes.

There is a Janus-faced character to this spiritualisation of care, encapsulated in the two answers we can give to the question 'What difference does it make?'. The first answer is a negative one i.e. it makes virtually no difference to traditional practice. Some champions of spirituality are primarily engaged in a re-description of the secular lives of citizens and psychosocial labour of professionals in a spiritual language, interspersed with valuable commentaries on the ongoing importance of religion in some mainstream and minority

ethnic communities. At the conclusion of her book on *Spirituality and Social Work,* Crisp (2010:141) confesses that this may not have been a book about 'spirituality' at all, but rather about good social work practice which engages with what really matters to service users at any given stage and in any given sphere of their lives.

The stumbling-block here is that universal narratives of spirituality do not offer a clear theoretical edifice or distinctive tool-kit for the everyday working life of caring professionals. For example, child care social workers need access to the theory and research around attachments in order to work with children in birth families or substitute care; secure attachments may enhance spiritual well-being whilst insecure attachments may signal spiritual deprivation, but the language of spirituality is not essential to therapeutic work around attachments. Likewise, clinical work with adults in mental health settings presupposes a working knowledge of the theory and techniques of one or more traditions which were not designed to deal with spiritual quandaries (Young-Eisendrath 2000). Even therapies catering to spiritual experiences and emergencies have been incubated within the language of transpersonal theory which is more precise than the language of spirituality (Rowan 2005:11). Spirituality then becomes a homeless and rootless concept to be supervened upon a plethora of traditional discourses, and the occasions when it enriches their substance can be offset by a more general obfuscation of all relevant signifiers.

The second answer is that it makes all the difference in the world, symbolising a seismic shift in the foundations of the caring professions. Dyson et al. (1992:1184) cite Reed's claim

that "spirituality in its broadest sense is part of the ontological foundation of nursing". This is an opaque statement, but it often solidifies into a Christianisation of care. In Swinton's (2001:168-73) schema, the resurrection of personhood and the language of humanness in health care are inseparable from the resurrection of the human spirit and the language of Christianity, so that even the non-Christian carer who adopts a holistic approach is said to model God to the patient (pp. 127-8). It is not surprising that the resurrection of the soul is also on the horizon. Whilst this resonates with some clients (e.g. Foskett and Roberts 2007), it may have transgressed its legitimate boundaries when applied to collectivities, particularly those with a multi-cultural constituency. Craigie (2010:107) invites us to attend to the spirit-*qua*-soul of our workplaces on the grounds that "Organisations have souls in the same way that individuals have souls", and Dallaire (2014:229-30) proposes that education in Canada should reflect the values of 'the national soul'. When diversity is acclaimed as the lynchpin of spirituality, there is still a re-birthing of the caring professions from a spiritual womb, so that Canda and Furman (1999) construe social work as a 'spiritual vocation' (p. 9) with social workers participating in a 'spiritual community' (p. 5).

This is both profound and provocative. Caring professionals are being invited if not instructed to subscribe to metaphysical notions of spirit and soul as the cornerstones of their profession, notions which are typically steeped in the spiritual tradition of Christianity. Whilst this is an honourable tradition with a venerable place in the history of the caring professions (e.g. Woodroofe 1961), to universalise its precepts across the public sector in the twenty first century is to transgress against alterity. It can transfigure our self-concepts, worldviews and relationships with clients and colleagues in ways which could be alien or

anathema to those from non-Christian backgrounds. For example, Thorne's (1998) Christian counselling involves both counsellor and client seeking and finding God in each other until both are closer to the goal of becoming Christ-like (pp. 34-5), and even the counsellor as social critic becomes the modern incarnation of an Old Testament prophet (pp. 90-1). When the spiritualisation of care jettisons its Christian legacy, it still imparts a strident message, and those who do not identify as spiritual persons or practitioners may feel as if they are being ousted from their professional home.

Conclusion

There may be a positive role for grand narratives in relation to the cosmos, human history, cultures and caring professions insofar as they shed light upon an entire trajectory or tapestry, weaving together themes or threads which might otherwise have dissipated or disappeared. But how we construe and convey grand narratives is vital, since a grand narrative is one story, one way of viewing a trajectory or tapestry, rather than the final truth of any given phenomenon. A grand narrative of spirituality may be a salugenic mythology for a post-secular era (Hollick 2006:363), but it would be disingenuous to expect consensus on metaphysical premises in such an era. Moreover, there is an omnipresent risk that spiritual frames of reference will prejudice scholarship just as much as secular ones. Empirical researchers would be advised to revert to the epistemological priority of social scientific categories such as cultures and communities rather than spiritual categories such as spirit or soul so that they are in a better position to detect the presence or absence of the

spiritual within the interstices of the social and to disclose its operations and impacts (cf.

Heelas 1996).

This is not to relegate spirituality to the margins of life, care or scholarship. On the contrary,

the reinvigoration of religion and spirituality is a significant counterweight to materialistic

lifestyles and worldviews (cf. Tacey 2003:21-5; Hyde 2008:141-53). The paradox is that we

can only appreciate spiritual choices and commitments when we can contrast them with

their non-spiritual counterparts (Chatterjee 1989:17). Here it is incumbent upon us to

reaffirm the ontological priority of humanity and individuality so that we are in a position to

investigate the extent to which modern citizens are wedded to spiritual or non-spiritual

lifestyles and worldviews and the repercussions of diverse modes of being (non-) spiritual. In

the caring professions, a humanistic-holistic conception of care which accommodates the

spiritual and the religious where appropriate would be more versatile and less contentious

than insisting upon universal spiritual care. In other words, the spiritual is one dimension of

our humanness, and although the most spiritually elevated may experience an

interimbrication of spirituality and humanity, these may not be co-terminous for many

people in modern societies. Furthermore, a secular-but-not-spiritual orientation warrants as

much respect as any other on an *a priori* basis, and this is not consistent with the premises

of a universal spirituality.

The reclaiming of a spiritual *versus* non-spiritual binary is central to these endeavours. It

would be more accurate to say that there is a spiritual potential latent in all human beings

which may be expressed and cherished or repressed and repudiated so that not everyone is actually a spiritual being. Furthermore, spirituality can be distorted so that not everyone who sets out on a spiritual path emerges with a life-enhancing spirituality. Grand narratives of spirituality have emphasised the spirituality of everyone in everyday life, but according to transpersonal theories of psycho-spiritual development (Rowan 2005: 59-81), the ego predominates in everyday life in modern societies, colouring meanings and relationships with an instrumental and self-interested hue, and in accordance with a 'consensus reality' which can countenance neither the transpersonal nor the transcendent. Spirituality presupposes that the boundaries around the ego are permeable and that consensus reality can be suspended, so spiritual experiences are typically associated with the pre-personal realm of childhood prior to the consolidation of the ego and the transpersonal realm of self-conscious spiritual questing after the attainment of an authentic selfhood which has adopted a critical standpoint on consensus reality. Existential forms of meaning-making are significant in the development of spirituality, since when ultimate meanings around (human) existence come to the foreground, often triggered by major life crises and the contemplation of death, the strands suturing up the ego and consensus reality start to dissolve, although they may be restored when the crisis has passed. A sense of spiritual connectedness is also vital to spirituality, and may unfurl in relation to our 'Higher Self', a significant other, a community, the cosmos or the Creator, although it may be evanescent unless harnessed in a dedicated manner to a spiritual or religious pathway, community and worldview. In sum, the spirituality of modern citizens is likely to be far more precarious than envisaged by the authors of grand narratives.

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