

The construction of the future in popular psychological self-help books

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Introductory remarks

In the article I would like to describe some ways of understanding, defining and textually constructing the notion of the future in popular “bestselling” psychology self-help books, sometimes referred to as “therapeutic”, “motivational”, “inspirational” or “help yourself” literature. According to historians of culture, such texts are an element of a broader secular, psychologised “therapeutic culture”, which emerged in the United States in the mid-20th century as a reaction to the “culture of narcissism and consumerism”. Others see in it a continuation of the literature which originated in the late 19th century in Christian movements promoting healing with the mind (the New Thought movement: R.W. Trine, E. Hopkins, W. Wattles)¹. I will return to this idea later.

I have chosen the following works and authors: Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research To Release Your Inner Optimist And Thrive* (abbreviated as BF), Osho (i.e. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh), *Awareness. The Key to Living in Balance* (abbreviated as O) and Deepak Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* (abbreviated as DCh). In my analysis I use Polish translations of these English-language books. All three works have been translated into many languages and have been published in millions of copies².

¹ A. Harrington, *Wewnętrzna siła. Umysł — ciało — medycyna*, tansl. P.J. Sz wajcer, A.E. Eichler, Warszawa 2008, pp. 315-316.

² Fredrickson’s books: *Love 2.0* (to be published in 2013) and *Positivity* (2009) — the latter has been published in fourteen countries and translated into thirteen languages, including German, Japanese and Spanish. Osho left numerous lectures in Hindi and English; they were written down by his disciples and are still published (650 books translated into thirty-two languages). Chopra has

They differ in terms of their content and style, but the purpose of all of them is to improve the quality of life of their potential readers. I have chosen these authors, because in many respects they are typical of this type of writing (there are many similar titles and authors), but at the same time they differ when read “superficially” in the origins of their thought and ways of explaining it as well as suggested therapeutic methods. The term “psychological self-help book” is very much appropriate with regard to Fredrickson’s book.

I will describe and contrast three constructs of the future and then will briefly examine the intellectual background of their authors, because it explains to a large extent the differences in their understanding the future. Finally, I will demonstrate what they have in common despite these clear differences, what constitutes their “common denominator”³. Thus, the article is a study of three cases as well as an attempt to interpret them and extrapolate conclusions to the entire literature of this kind.

I am interested primarily in content elements which make up the notion of the future in those works, the ways in which it is defined and valued. What also matters in my opinion are references to the present and the past, a general concept of time presented in the books. In addition, I would like to show how this discourse is formulated as a result of the authors’ choices of appropriate stylistic-textual means, specific linguistic mechanisms, what type of narrative accompanies it. Of course, the grammatical-linguistic mechanisms will be less important, especially given the fact that my analysis is based on the Polish translations. What will be much more important is discovering some general textual, discursive mechanisms which – I assume – are the same in the English-language originals and in their Polish translations.

A reconstruction of the model of the past will, I hope, make it possible to consider the function of such texts in contemporary culture. Why are they so popular today? Perhaps it will also be possible to show a certain common feature of today’s mentality, human sensibility or a type of common sense of today’s culture.

Textual analysis

1) Fredrickson’s concept: If you want – change your future (for the better) now

Such a succinct formula may sum up a vision of the future as imagined by Barbara Fredrickson, an American psychologist.

written over sixty-five books, nineteen of which have been *New York Times* bestsellers. His books have been translated into thirty-five languages and published in a total of over 20 million copies.

³ In any case, there are some similarities between the authors themselves: two of them are Americans (Fredrickson, Chopra), while the third lived in America for a long time, founding a community in Oregon in the 1980s (Osho). Two (Osho, Chopra) are of Indian origin. This mixture of Western and Eastern culture is not without significance in the case of these authors. In addition, they comment on each other, are, in a way, reflected in their texts like in “mirrors” – the cover of Osho’s book features a short review by Chopra, while *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* contains references to Osho’s texts. These are only superficial signs of more profound links.

Among the six most important facts concerning positivity listed by her we find: “Positivity transforms your future; positivity changes the future for the better”⁴, sometimes acquiring an imperative form: “Transform your future”, “Build your best future”. What is put to the fore is a future not determined genetically or environmentally, but created actively, built, constructed in the present by an individual.

Two key words constitute the pillars of Fredrickson’s concept: change (transformation) and choice.

A change of lifestyle, mentality, habits is possible – according to her – provided the right choice is made in the present. Changing oneself is a possibility and a task. Thus, in her view the future is a result of conscious human activity:

Seeing yourself and your cells in this way, every three months you get a whole new you. Perhaps it’s no coincidence that it takes around three months to learn a new habit or make a lifestyle change. Perhaps we can’t teach an old cell new tricks. Perhaps our best hope lies in teaching our new cells. (BF, p. 74-75)

Your life is a complex tapestry of your psychological strengths, mental habits, social connections, physical health and more. In the span of three months positivity [...] changes who you are. (BF, p. 96)

This means that, quite literally, you get to choose. No matter where your river of emotions flows today, over time and with continued effort and attention, you can change its course and location. (BF, p. 155)

A change (positive change) is a result of choosing one of two options either / or. Giving up choice, trying to avoid it is also a choice in itself – but of a “poorer quality” future:

By making more moments glisten with positivity, you make the choice of a lifetime: you choose the upward spiral that leads to your best future – and to our best world. (BF, p. 231)

Put simply, if your heart is moved with positivity, you are moving toward growth. You’re building a better life. (BF, p. 90)

Thus: stagnation or flourishing (which is sometimes translated in the Polish literature dealing with positive psychology as “prospering”). There is no other way. We can survive, vegetate or flourish, prosper.

In Fredrickson’s view changing the future is not only volitional or a matter of wishing, but takes place also through effort and training. Thus, the future is positively valorised provided the present is changed:

Although changing your entrenched emotional habits is possible, it’s no easy feat. Think of it as moving a river. [...] Such neuroplasticity, as it’s called, means that moving the riverbed to higher

⁴ The others are: “Positivity feels good”, “Positivity changes how your mind works”, “Positivity puts the brakes on negativity”, “Positivity obeys a tipping point”, “You can increase your positivity”. (We are reminded here about Aristotelian eudaimonia, i.e. “being the best oneself” as the ideal of a happy life). See also <http://zwierciadlo.pl/2012/psychologia/relacje-spoeczne/pozytywna-emocjonalnosc-czyli-pozytywnie-o-emocjach>.

ground is far from futile. Rewiring your brain reinforces and fortifies the new location you choose for your riverbed. (BF, pp. 154-155)

Time in this concept is linear. Hence the frequent use of the metaphor of a road, of going forward. But the choice of the way of moving along this time line is unequivocally valorised: the quality of the present forecasts the future:

[...] time moves on. How you'll move with it is up to you. What I can tell you is that your positivity ratio [P/N] makes a big difference. It forecasts whether your life trajectory is leading you to languish or flourish. (BF, p. 17)

Downward spiral or upward spiral. As I see it, that's your choice. However much we resist acknowledging it, we humans are not static. We're either on a positive trajectory or a negative one. Either we're growing in goodness, becoming more creative and resilient, or we're solidifying our bad habits, becoming more stagnant and rigid. (BF, pp. 16-17)

In some sense the future is also a therapeutic method. Or, to be more precise, its visualisation. Fredrickson proposes a list of twelve tools to increase positivity, one of which is: "Visualise your future"⁵:

Imagine yourself ten years from now, after everything has gone as well as it possibly could. Draw out from your dreams a life mission. Now create a ten-year plan to help you meet your mission. (BF, pp. 212-213)

Another simple way to boost your positivity is to dream more frequently about your future. Conjure up the best possible outcomes for yourself. Visualise your future successes in great detail. (BF, p. 189)

Fredrickson's concept of the future is thus a deontic concept – of a duty of the right, conscious choice and change. These are obligatory elements not in the sense of a duty imposed from outside, but, rather, in a paradoxically egoistic, "commonsensical" perspective: who, having a choice, would choose the "worse" for themselves? This entanglement between a possibility and a duty, not imposed but stemming from one's own need is very well conveyed by the structure of the Polish translation: sentences with the modal verbs *móc* [*be able to*] and *musieć* [*have to*], creating a deontic modality (between permission and imperative),⁶ are mingled with conditional clauses and imperative forms. A commissive nature (of a promise) of an utterance is combined with overt directiveness.

Don't [worry]. You can build your own resilience levels. Perhaps you've already guessed how: by raising your positivity ratio. (BF, p. 110)

You need to be able to spot the damaging cycle of rumination when it's happening. [...] Do something that literally takes your mind off your troubles. Go for a jog. Swim in the ocean. Fix

⁵ The remaining eleven read as follows: Be open. Create high-quality connections. Cultivate kindness. Develop distractions. Dispute negative thinking. Find nearby nature. Learn and apply your strengths. Meditate mindfully. Loving kindness meditation. Ritualise gratitude. Savour positivity.

⁶ See H. Wróbel, *Gramatyka języka polskiego*, Kraków 2001, p. 317.

your bike. Lift weights at the gym. Meditate or do yoga. Whatever it is, find an activity that totally absorbs you. (BF, p. 165)

2) Osho's concept: The future does not exist. Remain in the present. In the concept developed by Osho, an Indian teacher and founder of the Neo-Sannyas religious movement, the future appears as non-existent, unreal, being only a product of a discursive mind. In this approach, time is also a product of the mind. The only thing we can do, according to Osho, is to remain mentally here and now:

The mind is always either in the past or in the future. It cannot be in the present, it is absolutely impossible for the mind to be in the present. [...] Mind can do two things. Either it can move into the past – there is space enough to move, the vast space of the past; you can go on and on and on – or the mind can move into the future; again vast space, no end to it, you can image and imagine and dream. [...] The present is just a dividing line, that's all. (O, p. 27)

Bring your total being into the moment. [...] The future is not yet – what are you doing thinking about the future? That which is not yet, how can you think about it? What can you plan about it? Whatsoever you do about it is not going to happen, and then you will be frustrated, because the whole has its own plan. Why do you try to have your own plans against it? The existence has its own plans, it is wiser than you. (O, p. 31)

For Osho, time has a linear dimension, both horizontal and vertical. One, this “ordinary” dimension in which we live mentally, transfers us from the past through the gate of the present to the future. We can “escape” from thinking about the past/future, get out of this mental impasse thanks to an awareness of the now, thanks to being a witness, an observer, thanks to being “alert” with regard to what is happening now. In the language of modern psychology, we can call it permanent introspective attention (i.e. an awareness of our own mental states), combined with permanent perceptive awareness (i.e. being aware of what is going on in our environment, also in our bodies)⁷:

There are two types of movement. One movement is linear: you move in a line, from one thing to another, from one thought to another. From one dream to another dream – from A you move to B, from B you move to C, from C you move to D. This way you move, in a line, horizontal. This is the movement of time; this is the movement of one who is fast asleep. You can go like a shuttle, back and forth – the line is there. You can come from B to A, or you can go from A to B – the line is there. If you move from one thought to another, you remain in the world of time. If you move into the moment – not into thought – you move into eternity. (O, pp. 29-30)

We always live in the tomorrow, which never comes and which cannot come; it is impossible. That which comes is always today, and we go on sacrificing today for tomorrow, which is nowhere. The mind goes on thinking about the past, which you have destroyed, which you have sacrificed for something that has not come. And then it goes on postponing for further tomorrows. This constant tension between past and future, this constant mission of the present, is the inner noise. Unless it stops, you cannot fall into silence. So the first thing: try to be total in every moment. (O, p. 148)

⁷ *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. J. Strelau, D. Doliński, Gdańsk 2008, vol. 1, p. 446.

An awareness of the inevitability and unpredictability of death should be the element that anchors our attention in our present existence.

This intellectual or visual non-escaping towards the past, this non-planning, non-dreaming is regarded by Osho as a spiritual, religious state. According to him, it is a state of awakening, enlightenment. Moments of being in non-discursive time signify being, existing in the time of “eternity”:

When you are in the present without thinking, you are for the first time spiritual. A new dimension opens – that dimension is awareness. Awareness means to be in the moment so totally that there is no movement toward the past, no movement toward the future – all movement stops. That doesn’t mean that you become static. A new movement starts, a movement in depth. (O, p. 29)

For a buddha-consciousness, for an awakened being, only the present is existential. For ordinary consciousness, unaware, sleepy like a somnambulist, the past and future are real, the present is unreal. Awakening makes the present real and the past and future unreal. (O, p. 116)

There is another movement, which is in a totally different dimension. That movement is not horizontal, it is vertical. You don’t go from A to B, from B to C; you go from A to a deeper A: from A1 to A2, A3, A4, in depth – or in height. When thinking stops, the new movement starts. (O, p. 29)

If the future is only a projection of a discursive mind, a result of the present thought processes, then all kinds of forecasts and prophecies, any cultural practices to discern the future are – according to Osho – futile, fruitless, insignificant, pointless, are, paradoxically, a “waste of time”:

And the second impossible idea that has always dominated the human mind is to establish the future – which, again, cannot be done. Future means that which is not yet; you cannot establish it. Future remains unestablished, future remains open. Future is pure potentiality; unless it happens, you cannot be certain about it. Man [...] wants to make everything certain about the future [...]: it cannot be done. Don’t waste your present moment trying to make the future certain. The future is uncertainty; that is the very quality of the future. (O, pp. 62-63)

He wants to be certain about the future, so he goes to the astrologer, he consults the I Ching, he goes to a tarot reader, and there are a thousand and one ways to fool oneself. [...] Once these two things are dropped, you become free of all sorts of foolishness. Then you know [...] the future has not happened. Whenever it happens, we will see – nothing can be done about it right now. You can only destroy the present moment, which is the only moment available, real. (O, p. 63)

What is also criticised is hope – as a Christian virtue but also as an important element of motivation of human actions in modern medicine and psychology. According to Osho, hope deprives humans of the present, it is a manipulation:

Hope is always for the future, and the reality is always in the present. Hope deprives you of the present, and the present is the only moment you can explore your reality, your beauty, your truth, your divineness. Hope is a very cunning strategy.

Again, hope is not a contribution to humanity’s progress. It prevents progress. It makes people believe in dreams⁸.

⁸ Cf. Osho, *Chrześcijaństwo. Najbardziej śmiertelna ze wszystkich trucizn*, <http://www.himavanti.org/pl/c/artykularnia/osho-rajneesh-chrzescijanstwo-najbardziej-smiertelna-truczna> (access: 30 January 2012).

However, Osho's concept of time and future, though anti-Christian, is thoroughly religious in his terminology. For there is room in it for sin and salvation, though they are understood differently from their Christian equivalents:

And if it becomes a habit [...], then when the future comes, you will be missing it, because it will not be a future when it comes, it will be a present. Yesterday you were thinking about today, because then it was tomorrow; now it is today and you are thinking about tomorrow, and when the tomorrow comes, it will become today – because anything that exists, exists here and now, and cannot exist otherwise. And if you have a fixed mode of functioning such that your mind always looks at tomorrow, then when will you live? Tomorrow never comes. Then you will go on missing – and this is sin. This is the meaning of the Hebrew root of *to sin*. (O, p. 32)

The moment the future enters, time enters. You have sinned against existence, you have missed. And this has become a fixed pattern: robotlike, you go on missing. (O, p. 32)

Osho refers all types of thinking, discursive, analytical practices to culture of the West, while awareness, being alert and all types of meditation techniques are attributed by him to culture of the East:

The whole Western methodology can be reduced to one thing: analyzing. Analyzing, you go round and round. The whole Eastern methodology can be reduced to one word: witnessing. Witnessing, you simply get out of the circle. (Osho, p. 68)

3) Chopra's concept: Deny the future. The future is reversible. Stop time

The concept of Deepak Chopra, an American doctor of Indian origin, is best conveyed by the Polish title of his book: "Stop time". Chopra argues that all biological processes can be stopped or completely reversed.

We will explore a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply. These rules explicitly state that to grow old, become frail and die is the ultimate destiny of all. [...] I want you to suspend your assumptions about what we call reality so that we can become pioneers in a land where youthful vigour, renewal, creativity, joy, fulfilment and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life, where old age, senility, infirmity and death do not exist, and are not even entertained as a possibility (DCh, p. 1)

He calls this vision of man a "new paradigm" – as opposed to the "old" one dominated as it is by the opinion that old age, sickness and death are inevitable. We have become victims of sickness, old age and death because – according to Chopra – of the tyranny of the senses (it seems to us that what we experience through them is real) and gaps in our self-knowledge:

Everything that happens to you is a result of how you see yourself. (DCh, p. 35)

Your body is the material result of all the intentions you have ever had. (DCh, p. 106)

Research shows [...] that the major biomarkers of aging are all reversible. This means aging is reversible. I'm convinced that if you do the exercises in this book, you will dramatically slow down and even reverse the aging process. (DCh, pp. 137-138)

Aging is reversible. Biological age does not correspond to chronological age. (DCh, p. 138)

Thus, we can reverse degenerative processes and in doing so interfere with the future, stop it, as it were, mainly by rejecting the "collective illusion" in which we

all live – “collective determination”. What we call linear time is for Chopra only a reflection of our erroneous, false way of seeing changes. We will get old, because we think that we must get old. If we want to change the future, we first need to change our awareness.

As part of the “new thinking”, Chopra claims that the mind and the body are one inseparable whole, that biochemistry is a product of awareness, which in turn significantly influences ageing. Time is eternity divided into sections, “timelessness” cut into pieces. Each of us lives in a reality that is beyond any change:

A body is: flowing, flexible, quantum, dynamic, composed of information and energy, a network of intelligence, fresh and ever-renewing, timeless. (DCh, p. 40)

The biochemistry of the body is a product of awareness. (DCh, p. 14)

Impulses of intelligence create your body in new forms every second. (DCh, p. 15)

We are not victims of aging, sickness and death. These are part of the scenery, not the seer, who is immune to any form of change. This seer is the spirit, the expression of eternal being. (DCh, p. 16)

Chopra’s “spiritual” man breaks the time barrier, crosses it. “Getting out” of the inevitable future occurs through the appropriate modelling of one’s life attitude. The set of techniques proposed by Chopra is relatively heterogeneous, eclectic. On the one hand, we have there spiritual recommendations:

[...] the most important thing that you can do to change your life is to practise the following principles:

Have your attention on the timeless, the eternal, the infinite.

Get your ego out of the way.

Surrender to the mystery of the universe.

Have a sense of communion with Spirit or Divinity.

Be defenceless, relinquishing the need to defend your point of view. (DCh, pp. 139-140)

On the other – pieces of purely practical advice. They make up a syncretic whole:

Eat frugally.

Exercise and get plenty of fresh air.

Rest.

Enjoy reasonable sex life. (DCh, p. 210)

Summing up

The analysis of three books presented here leads to a conclusion that we are dealing here with three constructs of the future:

1) Fredrickson’s concept: The future exists, but now you can/should change it (for the better).

2) Osho's concept: The future does not exist. Remain only in the present.

3) Chopra's concept: The future exists but is reversible. Stop time.

The causes of the differences between them can be found in their authors intellectual background and worldviews. However, I believe that what is more important is to find points in common. These points and not individual differences determine the nature of contemporary self-help literature of this type. Can we notice any feature of contemporary culture in these constructs of the future?

Such books characteristically make use of the thought deposit of various religions and various areas of scientific knowledge. Each of the three narratives of the future is an amalgamation of scientific elements (psychoanalysis, Gestalt theory, behavioural psychology, positive psychology as well as quantum physics or biochemistry) and religious elements (Christian, Buddhist), and various meditating, healing and therapeutic techniques, though the proportions of these components are not identical.

The origins of Fredrickson's concept of the future are fairly uniform and easily traceable. Her views explicate the theses of one of the branches of modern psychology, namely positive psychology⁹. This branch in turn is regarded as an heir of humanistic psychology of the 1970s, the exponents of which included A. Maslow and C. Rogers.

The task of positive psychology is to create a positive model of the human being (unlike traditional psychology focused on deficits and pathologies)¹⁰. It can be said to come down to three elements: positive diagnosis, positive prevention, positive psychotherapy. The overriding goal of this subdiscipline is to improve the quality of life of people who are not fully satisfied with it¹¹. This is done through identification and definition of a set of human forces, assets and virtues as well as actions seeking a meaningful life and involved life. What is also sought is a practical, therapeutic aspect¹².

The clear, optimistic, uplifting, hopeful vision of the future and the way it is talked about in Fredrickson's book are obviously linked both to the concepts of positive psychology and the author's own concept presented in the book. The

⁹ In addition to Fredrickson, other American scholars named as associated with this branch are: Martin Seligman, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, Sonia Lubomirsky, Chris Peterson. In Poland: Ewa Trzebińska and Janusz Czapiński. This branch of psychology emerged in the late 1990s and in 2000 was officially proclaimed by Seligman.

¹⁰ *Doceń to, co masz! Warto dostrzec małe radości w codzienności*, Grzegorz Sroczyński interviews Prof. Ewa Trzebińska, <http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/2029020,53664,11878804.html> (access: 30 December 2012).

¹¹ Humanistic psychologists talked about this already in the 1970s, but the theory lacked empirical verification then.

¹² This is done in individual counselling, work psychology and human resources management psychology, in clinical practice: treatment of depression, schizophrenia, behavioural disorders and somatic illnesses; see B. Gulla, K. Tucholska, *Psychologia pozytywna: cele naukowo- badawcze oraz aplikacyjne oraz sposób ich realizacji*, *Studia z Psychologii KUL* 14, 2007, pp. 133-152.

book is, in fact, a popular explanation of positive psychology itself and of the author's original concept based on her twenty-year-long research.

According to her, positivity is not carefreeness or a fleeting state; it encompasses a range of positive emotions – from approval to love, from amusement to joy, from hope to gratitude. The author points to their long-term impact on the character of human beings, on their relations, bonds and milieu, on the state of their physical and mental health. What is recommended is reaching for one's signature strengths, sources of positivity¹³. She believes that a future sense of happiness is not a result of present success in life, but on the contrary – future success in life is a result of the present sense of happiness¹⁴. Her most original contribution is the so-called positivity ratio denoting "frequency of positivity over any given time span, divided by your negativity over that same time span". A proportion of 3 to 1 of positive to negative emotions enables you to flourish in life. People whose positivity ratio has exceeded "3 to 1" are described as mentally resilient. They do not dwell on disasters, failures and bad moments, i.e. do not ruminate; their style of explanation is optimistic.

Fredrickson's narrative about the future is heterogeneous content-wise and style-wise: expressiveness of discourse, attempts to visualise a "bright future" are combined with a scientific, rational discourse, arguments based on empiricism, research, facts, experiments. However, in terms of its general, linguistic expression and its intellectual background, the book adopts a scientific position. Yet even here religious elements appear, though rather as a type of allegorical or metaphorical way of thinking.

Osho's concept of the future is clearly linked to the religious traditions of the Orient, especially Buddhism. The concept of *mai* (illusion), evident in his texts, is typical of the philosophical background of Buddhism (nothing exists of itself, thus the future, too, is a product of the mind). In his lectures, Osho combines eastern meditation techniques and contemporary psychology and psychotherapy. He brings together many incompatible elements: for instance, tai-chi, yoga, Zen, psychodrama, bioenergy, psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology. Interestingly, although he uses them in a syncretic and sometimes eclectic manner, at the same time he calls on his readers (listeners) to negate them:

Drop all doctrines, dogmas, beliefs, "isms". Be clean of them – young, fresh. Then you will be intelligent. (Osho)

¹³ *Signature strengths* — is a term by M. Seligman, translated in Polish publications as "signature assets", "behavioural signatures" or "personal authorisation".

¹⁴ According to Janusz Czapiński, "with her theory, Fredrickson has broken out of the traditional pattern of thinking about psychological well-being as only an effect and barometer of success in life. She claims that a sense of happiness not only results from success in life, but also (perhaps primarily) builds this success; we could say seemingly tautologically: *happiness is the main author of happiness*". See <http://www.literaturajestsexy.pl/szczescie-jest-autorem-szczescia-teoria-i-praktyka-pozytywnosci-barbara-l-fredrickson-%E2%80%9Epozytywnosc%E2%80%99D/> (access: 30 December 2012).

Chopra, on the other hand, draws in his reflections on biochemistry, genetics, cell biology and, above all, quantum physics. His ideas of the quantum nature of the world assume the form of poetic prose. We can spot here a type of stylistic mannerism diverging from the accepted style of popular science books:

Now you start sinking even deeper into quantum space. All light disappears, replaced by yawning chasms of black emptiness. Far away on the horizon of your vision, you see a last flash, like the farthest, faintest star visible in the night sky. Hold that flash in your mind, for it is the last remnant of matter or energy detectable by any scientific instrument. The blackness closes in, and you are in a place where not just matter and energy are gone, but space and time as well. [...] you have arrived at the womb of the universe, the pre-quantum region that has no dimensions and all dimensions. You are everywhere and nowhere. (DCh, p. 41)

Beyond the quantum, your body exists as pure creative potential, a multilayered process controlled by intelligence. (DCh, p. 42)

No matter how separate anything appears to the senses, nothing is separate at the quantum level. (DCh, p. 37)

The quantum field transcends everyday reality. (DCh, p. 38)

Reestablishing the memory of your connection with the quantum field will awaken the memory of renewal in your body. (DCh, p. 39)

However, it is worth adding at this point that Chopra was criticised by numerous opponents for his frequent, illegitimate and arbitrary combinations of elements of quantum physics and life processes. In 1998 he received the Ig-Nobel Prize in physics “for his unique interpretation of quantum physics as it applies to life, liberty, and the pursuit of economic happiness”. In defending his theses, he claimed that he treated the quantum theory as a kind of metaphor.

Conclusions

What elements do these three constructs of the future have in common, despite the fact that the ways of defining and valuating it are different, and the palette of therapeutic possibilities and mental techniques is relatively broad? I believe that these are two notions.

The first is change (or renewal), i.e. emphasis on a type of creation, construction of the future, active (though achieved by means of different techniques) resistance to time determinism and those changes that are not by humans. The individual is a creative subject. Creativity, subjectivity, self-determination, autotelicity – all these elements could be, in fact, regarded as obligatory in the analysed self-help books. In addition, we can spot here a certain individualism of Western culture.

It is worth combining it, however, with another common element, namely the present – the future, irrespective of how it is understood, takes place, exists in the present. The key to the future in the mind-body narratives is the present. The futu-

re, its quality are determined in the present. This element can be seen as a textual symptom of Orientalisation of the content of the self-help books. After all, in all its varieties Buddhism tells us: be alert, live consciously.

Thus, the vision of the future promoted by these books brings together individualism and individual creativity, characteristic of Western culture, and the way of thinking, seeing the world characteristic of the East. The modern “spiritual man” is characterised by considerable self-awareness, autonomy of choices and individualism, dislike of solutions imposed from the outside.

However, let me note that this “religious thinking” or spiritual thinking refers us not to the eschatological dimension of the future, afterlife, but to the present, earthly life, *hic et nunc*. This can be described as “small soteriology of everyday life”:

You can generate positivity anytime, anywhere. You reap what you sow, that’s the biblical scripture. Eastern traditions refer to this same idea about cause and effect as *karma*. [...] Viewed in this way, there needn’t be any score-keeping deity up in the sky drawing up a list of who’s naughty and nice. Positive consequences emerge from positive emotions simply as the unfolding of a natural process. (BF, p. 230)

And to live life in its totality, and to live it with such passion and intensity that each moment becomes a moment of eternity – that should be the goal of a religion. I don’t say anything about heaven or hell, punishment or reward. I simply say to you: go on dying to the past so it is not a burden on your head. And do not live in the future, which is not yet. Concentrate your whole energy here now. Pour it in this moment, with totality, with as much intensity as you can manage. And that moment you will feel life. To me that life is equivalent to God. There is no other God than this life. (O, p. 120)

All these religions are based on this assumption that there is a life after death; sacrifice this for that. And I am saying, “Sacrifice that for this!” – because this is all that you have got: herenow. (O, p. 193)

Two more general conclusions can be drawn here. Such therapeutic self-help books, regardless of how and to what extent they have been “clothed” in science, are very close to the “new spirituality” / New Age texts or stem from them. Modern psychology, at least popular psychology, self-help psychology, sometimes described as *light*, is strikingly similar to new spirituality. Its nature is also close to that of the old wisdom literature.

The second conclusion is historical. This type of literature, with its origins in early 20th century religious texts, became secularised in a way in the mid-20th century: science (especially psychology) legitimised such stories, gave them its *imprimatur*, as it were. This made them credible. However, it seems that at the beginning of the 21st century its clear New Age element has enabled it to regain its lost “spiritual element”. Self-help literature today is syncretic, it is an amalgamation of science and religion (or perhaps sometimes quasi-science and quasi-religion). In a way, it is a manifestation of an idea that is by no means new: for science to be one with faith. It is an attempt to merge the sphere of *ratio* with the sphere of *fides*.