

# Inner Cosmos as a Resource for Psychological Stabilisation: The Therapeutic Potential of Cosmological Imagination

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*The study explores the therapeutic value of “inner cosmos” and “cosmological imagination” by applying philosophical and psychological methods to analyze these concepts. Modern psychiatric treatments in today’s society focus on managing symptoms while attempting to restore personal integrity, especially in light of global events like armed conflicts and ecological disasters. The research combines phenomenological, archetypal, historical-medical, and neuropsychological approaches to demonstrate the healing benefits of cosmological imagination.*

*The theoretical framework merges historical microcosm-macrocosm ideas with current phenomenological theories, starting with Husserl’s concept of intentionality and progressing through Merleau-Ponty’s embodied perception to reach modern cosmopsychism. The spontaneous appearance of archetypal cosmological symbols, such as mandalas, is viewed through Jungian theory as a response to psychological fragmentation, which helps create order and wholeness. Historical evidence shows that cosmic imagery has remained a core element in medical thought from Paracelsus through Renaissance traditions.*

*Neuropsychological studies indicate that cosmological imagination activates three key brain networks, including the medial prefrontal cortex and the default mode network, as well as regions involved in self-awareness and emotional regulation. Functional MRI scans demonstrate that mental imagery stimulates brain pathways similar to those used in direct perception, supporting the biological effectiveness of therapy.*

*The clinical applications reveal that guided imagery, mindfulness meditation, and therapeutic work for depression, anxiety, and trauma are effective. This approach holds promise for developing new therapies that integrate philosophical insights with scientific research. Using cosmological images*

*helps individuals establish order and predictability, while connecting to higher realities, which assists in coping with the large-scale traumatic effects of current conflicts.*

*Keywords: inner cosmos, cosmological imagination, phenomenology, collective traumatic experience*

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## Introduction

Modern psychiatry practices have shifted their focus from symptom management to complete patient treatment according to contemporary medical standards. The method acknowledges mental health exists as a changing state of wellness which affects emotional and psychological and social aspects of human life. In the context of the growing instability of the modern world, from global conflicts to environmental crises, it is important to find new sources of mental stability that go beyond traditional therapeutic approaches.

One of these potential resources is the phenomenon of “inner space”. This is a specific modus operandi of human experience, characterised by the experience of a deep inner space, a sense of boundlessness, orderliness and connection with the universal order. This phenomenon is not an accidental psychological curiosity but has deep philosophical roots that go back to the oldest cosmological traditions of mankind.

The connection between cosmological thinking and mental health has a thousand-year history. From the Vedic formula “tat tvam asi” (you are this), which postulates the identity of individual consciousness (Atman) and cosmic reality (Brahman), to the hermetic principle “what is above is below”, human consciousness has always sought in cosmological images not only an explanation of the universe, but also resources for internal stabilisation and integration.

This trend is not only historical but also deeply anthropological (Korkh & Khmil, 2024; Malivskiy & Kolesnikova, 2022). Cosmological thinking, according to the research of cognitive anthropology, is a fundamental way of organising human experience, which allows us to integrate fragmented experiences into a coherent picture of the world. In this context, cosmological images function not just as abstract concepts, but as “existential landmarks” that give meaning and structure to human existence.

Modern research confirms the therapeutic potential of cosmologically oriented approaches. The “overview effect” which astronauts describe as a life-changing experience of seeing Earth from space shows how gazing at our planet from space transforms human mental processes (Yaden et al., 2016). People experience unity through this experience which simultaneously reduces their anxiety levels and helps them recognize their connection to a larger whole beyond their personal selves.

Modern therapy has observed an increasing number of patients who create their own cosmological images through meditation and guided imagery practice (a mind-body technique which enables patients to relax and reduce stress while enhancing their well-being through focused imagination).

Images from the experience of “starry space inside” to the feeling of “inner galaxies” are not random manifestations of fantasy but systematically appear in different cultural contexts and therapeutic modalities.

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The relevance of the study of the “inner space” as a therapeutic resource is growing significantly in the context of current global challenges. Traumatic events of a massive nature, from armed conflicts to pandemics, generate not only individual psychological trauma, but also collective crises of meaning, characterised by a loss of connection with broader cosmological narratives.

Studies conducted in the context of a full-scale war in Ukraine show a high level of psychological distress among the population. More than half of the respondents show clinically significant symptoms of depression or anxiety, and one in five is at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (Vintilă et al., 2023). The collected data shows that people require new methods of mental support which should treat both symptoms and help individuals regain their fundamental sense of purpose.

Phenomenological psychopathology provides an alternative method to study war trauma and collective distress because it focuses on personal experiences of mental suffering rather than traditional symptom-based diagnosis. Research conducted by multiple disciplines demonstrates that using phenomenological interviews together with conventional methods enables better comprehension of PTSD and anxiety-depressive disorders through their effects on experienced time and space and body perception and personal identity (Rudenko & Tasenko, 2024). The situation needs therapeutic resources that aim to rebuild overall perception rather than just managing symptoms. The healing process requires cosmology-based therapeutic methods that address both personal issues and social integration problems.

The ability of cosmological imagery to provide a sense of order, predictability, and connection to something larger than individual suffering may be critical to overcoming mass traumatic experiences.

The purpose of this article is a philosophical and psychological analysis of the phenomenon of “inner space” and “cosmological imagination” as therapeutic resources, which involves a critical reflection on their ontological status, epistemological foundations and practical possibilities of application in contemporary therapeutic discourse.

## **1. Phenomenological foundations of the cosmic experience**

The connection between human experience and the cosmic order has a deep philosophical basis in the concept of microcosm-macrocosm, which was developed by ancient Greek philosophers to explain man and his place in the universe. They viewed man as a “little world” (mikros kosmos) whose composition and structure correspond to the structure of the universe – the “big world” (makros kosmos). In this context, kosmos meant not only the universe, but first of all “order” in the general sense, i.e. a harmonious, aesthetically pleasing combination of parts. The concept also encompassed order in human societies, including political governance and the ethical organisation of life. Comparisons between society, man, and the cosmos were characteristic manifestations of microcosmic theory.

Plato’s version of this idea, presented in the dialogue *Timaeus*, depicts the universe as a living organism with a soul – a macrocosm created by a demiurge according to the principles of numerical harmony. In this worldview, man appears as a microcosm that partially reflects the structure of the cosmic whole. When the soul contemplates the orderly movements of celestial bodies, it recognises in them a model of the harmony it seeks. Thus, the philosophical knowledge of the cosmos is also a way to cognition of oneself as a part of an ordered being. This motif was continued in the Stoic tradition, in particular in the idea of the inner order of the soul as a “citadel”. In *The Inner Citadel*, Pierre Ado shows how Marcus Aurelius

described the inner world as a space of harmony, self-control, and freedom. For the Stoics, such inner orderliness was a manifestation of living in harmony with the logos (Hadot, 1998).

In Vedic philosophy, the concept of microcosm and macrocosm is systematically outlined in the Upanishads. Man appears not only as a part of the universe, but as its internal reflection. The central doctrine is the identity of Atman (the inner self) and Brahman (the cosmic absolute), which is expressed by the formula *tat tvam asi* (“you are this”) in the Chandogya Upanishad. According to the analysis of the texts, the structure of human existence (bodily, energetic, mental, intellectual, and blissful) is presented as five shells (*koshas*) that correlate with the hierarchy of the cosmos (Jones, 1970). In the Taittiriya Upanishad, this model is described as a system that connects the individual with the universal order of existence (Radhakrishnan, 1953: 535)

Parallel motifs can be found in medieval Neoplatonism, particularly in the Arab-Jewish tradition. In his treatise *The Source of Life*, Ibn Gabirol (Avitsebron) portrays man as intrinsically interwoven into the cosmic structure of existence, where form and matter are combined into an ordered unity. From this perspective, the individual soul appears as a reflection of an ordered universal wholeness (Altmann & Stern, 1958).

In the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, space appears not only as physical space, but as a phenomenon that is constituted through acts of consciousness. In his early phenomenology, in particular, in the *Logical Investigations*, he defines intentionality as the main characteristic of experience, which implies the orientation of consciousness towards a certain object. This intentionality is relational in nature. It not only expresses the fact that the subject is directed towards the object but also shows that the object is co-existent only in relation to the act of consciousness (Marchesi, 2018). Thus, the object does not precede experience, but rather appears as an “intentional correlate”, that is, in the act of contemplation or imagination.

Particularly important for cosmological understanding is that the object, in Husserl’s terms, is not substantial or unchanging. It is always a relational signification derived from an intentional act. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl shows that “objecthood” is not a part of the thing itself (e.g., a leaf or a star) but is its function in consciousness: to be an object is not a characteristic, but a relation (Marchesi, 2018). This position questions the classical metaphysics of space as an independent world. Instead, it points to its phenomenal appearance in the horizon of human experience. When we contemplate the starry sky, we are not dealing with a “thing in itself”, but with cosmic content that is structured in our consciousness through numerous acts of perspective perception.

Cosmic experience, in this sense, is not something passively received, but an event that is constantly constituted. In his later manuscript *Universal Teleology*, Husserl develops this idea in an ontological way. The whole multiplicity of monads (human consciousnesses) is in the process of endless formation and self-clarification, which is realised through universal intentionality (Husserl, *Universal Teleology*, 1952/1961). Each monad forms its own world, but within the framework of a general teleological integrity, where all acts are aimed at realising the meaning of being through intersubjective structures. This view creates the basis for understanding the inner cosmos not as a metaphor, but as a transcendental structure in which the individual realises himself as a participant in the all-encompassing universal formation. Thus, the phenomenology of space opens up new ways for the therapeutic interpretation of inner wholeness as a process of self-constitution within a broader universal order.

With the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenon of cosmic experience takes on a new meaning not as an external observation of the world, but as a rooted, bodily

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coexistence with it. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is not an instrument of consciousness but is the very condition of perception. His concept of the flesh (*la chair*) takes us beyond the classical division between subject and object: the flesh is neither purely physical matter nor spiritual substance, but rather a primary element of being that unites the human being with the world in a single sensory field (Wang, 2025). In this field of perception, it is an immediate, bodily openness to the world, which is already the content of experience.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body also radicalises Husserl's idea of intentionality. Perception is not an act of the abstract "I", but a manifestation of embodied, subjective being. Through the concept of the "perceptual field", he describes experience not as a point fixation, but as a spatio-temporal interdependence of the body and the world, where things always appear in the horizon of the possible, not in isolation (Wang, 2025). Thus, the space in experience is not a set of objects, but an open field of bodily intentionality, an event that is re-actualised every time.

The concept of the "chair of the world" (*la chair du monde*) in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy, particularly in *Le visible et l'invisible*, expands this idea in an ontological direction. The "flesh of the world", in Merleau-Ponty's conception, can be interpreted as the way in which the world is included in the field of human bodily perception: we not only look at the stars, but also, in a certain sense, the world "responds" to us. This is a phenomenal structure of sensory interaction in which, as Moreira (1993) shows, the body appears as a means of openness to the world. In this perspective, corporeality is a condition for cosmic participation, and it is through bodily embeddedness that we are able not only to observe but also to be involved in the rhythms of the universe.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy opens up the possibility of understanding the cosmological imagination as an embodied experience that does not require detachment or logical abstraction. Cosmos appears as a field in which the subject's flesh is implanted, and therefore as a space of therapeutic reciprocity. What is experienced by the body carries the potential for existential recovery. It is through bodily interaction with the "flesh of the world" that not only cognition, but also reintegration, the restoration of connection with what Merleau-Ponty calls the "primordial horizon of being", takes place.

In contemporary cosmophilosophy, there is an emerging interest in such concepts as panpsychism and, in particular, cosmopsychism, a metaphysical position according to which the universe as a whole has consciousness, and individual consciousnesses are its constituent parts. In Harvey Cawdron's (2024) work, this concept acquires a theological dimension within the eschatological model of the "new creation", where the universe as a cosmic mind is capable of suffering, decay, and renewal through interaction with human consciousness. According to constitutive cosmopsychism, individual consciousnesses are integral parts of a single cosmic entity, and thus the moral or spiritual state of humanity affects the state of the entire cosmos (Cawdron, 2024). In this context, the restoration of cosmic order is conceived as a process of re-establishing the integrity and agency of this universal subject through the joint action of human and divine forces.

This model has a philosophical and ontological basis, in particular in connection with the tradition of Neoplatonism and the idea of the "world soul". However, cosmopsychism, unlike classical pantheistic concepts, preserves the ontological distinction between God and the cosmos. Cosmic consciousness here is not seen as divine, but as a form of subjectivity created by God, which has autonomy, the ability to choose, and even the ability to influence its own ontological status through sin or overcoming it. In this aspect, cosmopsychism offers a new form of integration of cosmological imagination and theology. The universe functions

as a spiritual collaborator in historical progress which includes moral aspects that require complete redemption (Cawdron, 2024). According to Burley (2022) the human imagination functions as a phenomenological link which unites human perception with cosmic existence. Imagination, according to the phenomenological tradition, does not simply represent the world, but constitutes the experience of being in the world.

The cosmic imagination is not only a metaphorical way of depicting the universe, but also a means of engaging with the transcendent, which provides access to a deeper understanding of oneself as part of a larger whole. This imagination is not just therapeutic but also ontologically productive, as it helps restore the lost sense of unity with the cosmos.

The therapeutic potential of cosmopsychism lies in the fact that it allows a person to experience himself or herself not as an isolated subject in an indifferent universe, but as an organic part of a living cosmic whole. This experience of cosmic belonging can help overcome the existential loneliness and alienation that often underlie psychological crises. The discovery of personal inner state alignment with cosmic subject state enables people to find deeper ontological value in their experiences which leads to self-integration. Modern scholars who study phenomenology and cultural philosophy and psychopathology have proven through their research that cosmological imagination serves as a dual mechanism which creates symbolic meanings and actively constructs personal self-identity. As Rudenko et al. (2025) explain that during mental breakdowns people tend to construct their reality through concepts about space and superhuman goals and metaphysical meaning. Scientists must study cosmic events at a detailed level for research purposes because they do not match the characteristics of medical disorders.

Thus, the cosmic experience, even in its ultimate forms, appears as a key resource in the process of reconstructing inner integrity.

Thus, the phenomenological understanding of space experience shows its deep existential and therapeutic significance for humans. Space serves a purpose that extends past its function as outer space because it defines the core structure of existence which influences our comprehension of reality and our physical and mental experiences. Philosophical thought demonstrates human self-discovery through studying the universe by following the progression from ancient microcosm theory to contemporary cosmopsychism and including Husserl's intentionality and Merleau-Ponty's flesh of the world.

This understanding creates a theoretical basis for the development of therapeutic approaches that use cosmological imagination as a resource for psychic integration and restoration of inner unity.

## **2. Archetypal aspects of cosmological symbolism**

Cosmological imagination is an important form of structuring human experience. It helps to comprehend the world and the inner state of a person. In the psychoanalytic theory of Carl Gustav Jung, cosmological thinking is associated with the action of the collective unconscious. This is a deep level of the psyche that is common to all people.

In his book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959), Jung describes archetypes as innate mental structures. They have no specific content until they are filled with the experience of an individual. Jung wrote that archetypes are "forms without content" that determine the way we perceive and react (Jung, 1959/1981, para. 99). They act as internal models. People are not aware of them, but it is through them that they organise their experience.

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According to the Jungian tradition, archetypal cosmological symbols include images of the sky, stars, centre, horizon, tree, or axis of the world. They often appear in dreams and myths, acting as symbols of order, direction, and the internal connection between the conscious and the unconscious.

A special place is occupied by the mandala symbol. It is a circular structure with a centre and symmetry. In *Man and His Symbols* (1964), Jung explains that the mandala represents the archetype of the Self (the whole person). According to Jung: “The mandala serves a conservative purpose – namely, to restore a pre-existing order. But it also serves the creative purpose of giving expression and form to something that does not yet exist, something new and unique...” (Jung, 1964: 225).

Jung noticed that mandalas often arise during periods of mental disorientation, panic or inner fragmentation, often without any conscious intention on the part of the individual. In his book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, he writes: “That is why mandalas mostly appear in connection with chaotic psychic states of disorientation or panic. They then have the purpose of reducing the confusion to order, though this is never the conscious intention of the patient. At all events they express order, balance, and wholeness. Patients themselves often emphasise the beneficial or soothing effect of such pictures.” (Jung, 1959/1981, para. 645).

Here, the mandala appears not as a decorative form, but as a spontaneous symbolic structure emerging from the unconscious. It compensates for fragmentation by projecting a symbolic image of unity. The circular geometry, symmetrical design and the presence of a centre are not accidental. They reflect an archetypal example of an ordered cosmos. Just as ancient cosmological diagrams sought to depict the structure of the universe, the mandala reflects the inner psychic space – what might be called the inner cosmos. Thus, it offers a visual expression of the Self as a totalising, balancing principle.

Within this symbolic structure, space appears not just as a physical aggregate of bodies and forces, but as a deeply meaningful archetypal field. As Aniela Jaffe notes in the final chapter of *Man and His Symbols*: “the whole cosmos is a potential symbol” (Jung, 1964: 232). Any natural phenomenon can acquire a symbolic meaning, reflecting deep mental processes. The cosmos here acts as a mirror of the unconscious. It projects both images of integrity and ideas of boundaries, centre, rhythm or dynamics.

This symbolism takes a special form in the image of the Cosmic Man. In the mythologies of many cultures, this figure embodies the unity of the microcosm (human) and the macrocosm (the Universe). For example, in the tradition of Indian philosophy, Purusha is a primordial man who lives within the heart of every individual, and yet at the same time he fills the entire cosmos (Jung, 1964: 202). This image represents the Self as a totality that unites all polarities and returns the individual to a holistic state.

This symbolism is also present in spatial structures, from temples to cities. According to a description based on Plutarch’s account, the founding of Rome was accompanied by the ritual of creating a sacred pit (*mundus*), which also meant the cosmos (Jung, 1964: 242). This suggests that the archetype of the cosmos not only appears in the imagination but also materialises in forms of communal life as a way of structuring space, time and identity.

Jung points out that in the modern world, the connection with this symbolic cosmos is being lost. People no longer perceive natural phenomena as living, endowed with meaning. As he writes: “Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional ‘unconscious identity’ with natural phenomena” (Jung, 1964: 95). The separation from natural unity leads to fragmented life experiences and

disorientation and eliminates all meaning from existence. The study of archetypal cosmic symbols through Jungian analysis shows that we should understand the universe as an active symbolic system which connects to human psychological processes.

The archetype of space forms the basis for understanding orientation in existence, functioning as a model of the connection between the visible and the invisible, the physical and the spiritual.

Within this archetype, the cosmological imagination is able to restore mental stability. It not only represents an ordered world but also gives the internal structure forms that can support the self in the face of an existential crisis.

Thus, space is conceived as a structured space where conditions for psychic renewal, integration, and meaningful experience are preserved. This is its deep therapeutic potential not as an abstract idea, but as a living symbolism that is constantly reproduced in dreams, myths, art, and individual symbolisation.

### **3. Cosmological thinking in the history of medicine**

One of the deeply rooted ideas in European philosophy, medicine and anthropology is the concept of macrocosm and microcosm. From ancient sources to the Renaissance, it shaped not only the metaphysical vision of the world, but also the paradigm of understanding man as a being who embodies the universe. This idea is also a cornerstone of the modern view of imagination as a space for stabilising the psyche. In this context, it is advisable to refer to Zofia Kalemba's work "Wpływ koncepcji makro- i mikrokosmosu na pojmowanie choroby i człowieka chorego" (1998), which traces how these ideas influenced the formation of medical thought and the image of illness in European culture.

In her work, Kalemba emphasises that the concept of the microcosm was more than a metaphor. It was a philosophical and medical structure that determined the way the human body was understood, its relationship with the world, and the interpretation of pathological conditions. In this worldview, man was not opposed to the world but rather reflected and personified the cosmos. The harmony of the microcosm and macrocosm determined the normal state, while imbalance was understood as the cause of disease. Thus, health acquired not only a physiological but also an ontological meaning: to be healthy meant to be in harmony with the universal order.

A special place in the formation of this approach belongs to Paracelsus. He interpreted man as an active projection of the cosmos, believing that everything that exists in the big world has its counterpart in the human body. His famous statement "homo omnis creatura" ("man is the whole creation in miniature") became the philosophical basis for both medicine and metaphysics. According to his doctrine, illness is a violation of the harmony between the inner and outer worlds, and treatment is to restore this correspondence. The method shows how imagination operates in health understanding and explains how the cosmological imagination works as a psychological tool to transform symbolic structures.

Marsilio Ficino developed the concept of spiritus which describes a refined substance that links human bodies to their souls and the surrounding world (Kalemba, 1998: 32). The system operates as an internal mediator which enables the flow of energy and meaning between various levels of existence.

Spiritus is not just an "inner ether" but a metaphysical bridge between the macrocosm and the microcosm. If interpreted in a modern context, this concept opens the way to understanding the imagination as a psychological mediator that allows us to integrate the experience of the body, emotions and the world into a unified structure – the inner cosmos.

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The role of space as a source of symbolic order is equally fascinating. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, belief in cosmic order coexisted with a strong sense of reliance on it. This experience created two conflicting effects: it made people feel powerless against cosmic forces, yet it also inspired them to develop autonomy through ritual practices, magical beliefs, and imaginative activities. In this context, the popularity of astrological medicine and alchemical practices should be understood. Scientists studied the universe's structure through their research while also devising systems to control its behavior. Through imagination, people could actively explore symbols in the world, allowing them to see cosmic forces as partners rather than just objects.

Thus, the concept of macrocosm and microcosm, which served as an ontological model in the history of medicine, can now be reinterpreted as the basis for the idea of inner space. Research into cosmic order outside the universe and human mental space reveals how imagination functions as a tool for mental stability maintenance in addition to its established functions in aesthetics and culture. Zofia Kalemba establishes through her research that the concept of man as microcosm represents an enduring anthropological framework which unites physical and mental and spiritual aspects of human nature. Such a model has significant therapeutic potential: it helps a person to rethink illness not as a mechanical breakdown, but as a challenge to symbolically restore integrity. It is through the imagination, which activates archetypal images of space, that it is possible to turn traumatic experience into a path of self-healing and restoration of meaning.

#### **4. Neuropsychological mechanisms of cosmological imagination**

Before turning to the neurophysiological justification of imagination as a mental function, it is advisable to outline its philosophical basis. In this context, the analytical approach of Noah Latham (2015) is valuable, as he views meditation as a form of mental self-control in terms of awareness and attention.

Latham distinguishes between two levels of mental self-control: directed concentration on an object and meta-awareness of the process of this concentration. According to the author, the essence of meditation is not to achieve perfect concentration, but to be able to gently and systematically return attention to the chosen object. This forms an attitude of inner order, a certain mental disposition that is similar to the archetypal orientation towards the centre or cosmos.

Meditative concentration exists as an independent value system which extends past its practical uses. The process of concentration appears to have inherent value in itself. The method follows the concept of an imaginary cosmos because the selected symbols possess dual significance that affects both psychological and existential aspects.

Latham also points out that with experience, meditation becomes less effortful and moves into a deeper state, which corresponds to the phenomenon of integrating the fragmented self through repeated interaction with an ordered inner image.

Imagination in a meditative way appears as a special form of self-regulation aimed at creating a stable configuration of the inner space. This configuration, in the philosophical sense, is a mental "space": a structured, symbolic and stabilising space of consciousness that enables both self-reflection and existential integration. It is from this perspective that the consideration of imagination as a neuropsychological process, not only cognitive but also therapeutic, acquires special significance.

The neurobiological basis of cosmological imagination develops through multiple neural systems that integrate sensory information with spatial cognition and internal perception. The brain regions that process external sensory information become active when people create mental images, according to functional magnetic resonance imaging studies (Kosslyn et al. 2001). The key structures of this network are the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), posterior cingulate cortex (PCC), anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), insular cortex, hippocampus, and areas of the default mode network (DMN). The prefrontal cortex performs the function of prefrontal synthesis, coordinating the simultaneous activation of several neural ensembles (objectNEs) and integrating several mental representations into a new, symbolically rich representation. Meditation practice and cosmological imagination modify the activity of these structures: the reactivity of the DMN decreases, which reduces rumination and mental wandering, while functional connectivity between self-awareness and cognitive control networks increases (Brewer et al., 2011; Boccia et al., 2015). It is this neural convergence of perception and imagination that allows images to have an emotional and physiological effect comparable to that of real stimuli, creating a biological basis for emotional stabilisation, metacognitive regulation, and the formation of a holistic sense of inner order through archetypal images of space.

The very fact that imagery activates the same neural networks as real perception explains the therapeutic potential of mandala, guided imagery and archetypal practices. They activate archetypal images of the centre, cosmos, or architecture of the Symbolic Person, which creates a mental shift towards inner order and peace (Kosslyn et al., 2001; Agnati et al., 2013).

The neuropsychological processes operate through the S-ART model (Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Self-Transcendence), which Vago and Silbersweig (2012) developed. The model explains how internal stability develops through three mechanisms, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, and transcendence of egocentric thinking. According to this model, the processes of self-transcendence that occur in a meditative state or under the influence of symbolic representation contribute to a reduction in emotional reactivity and the formation of a deeper existential meaning. Research studies through meta-analysis demonstrate that meditation activates specific brain areas, including the precuneus, anterior cingulate cortex, insula, hippocampus, and medial frontal gyrus, which manage introspection, affective regulation, and integrity (Boccia et al. 2015).

The key element here is meta-awareness – the ability to be aware not only of the content of thoughts, but also of the thought process itself. This allows a person to reflexively monitor the state of fragmentation, recognise archetypal patterns and purposefully integrate them into a new cognitive and emotional structure. Thus, the regulation of attention and meta-awareness act not only as mechanisms of meditation, but also as a neuropsychological basis for the therapeutic effect of cosmological imagination.

In this context, the practice of mindfulness meditation, which is widely used in clinical and psychotherapeutic practice, deserves special attention. Mindfulness meditation involves focused attention on the present moment with acceptance, without judgement, focusing on breathing, bodily sensations, thoughts or emotions. In combination with imagination, it helps to develop resilience to stress, reduce affective dysregulation, and foster greater self-reflection. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Pascoe et al. (2017) confirmed that such practices reduce cortisol levels, improve cardiovascular health and reduce inflammatory markers. This confirms their effectiveness as a bodily and mental stabilisation mechanism,

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which is consistent with the action of imagination as a regulatory resource associated with images of inner space.

The neuropsychological model proposed by Fred H. Previc (2009) extends the understanding of brain functions related to religious and transcendental experiences through the concept of extra-personal thinking. Peripersonal space is associated with objects that are in the immediate reach of the body. Whereas extrapersonal systems are focused on processing information outside the body: the stars, the sky, abstract ideas about the divine or the infinite. In this sense, they directly resonate with the concept of “inner space” as a neuropsychological structure that forms a stabilising space through symbolic images of space.

Previc highlights the dominant role of the right brain hemisphere in processing symbolic, spatial, and introspective images. It is crucial in creating a sense of wholeness, merging with the absolute, and developing religious ideas. These functions are also engaged during guided imagery, meditation, and when working with archetypal images representing the cosmos, mandalas, or symbolic figures. Notably, activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, precuneus, inferior parietal lobule, and TPJ is linked to introspection, imagining oneself in an abstract space, and experiencing self-transcendence.

Previc separately identifies the phenomenon of upper visual field bias, a neuroanatomical tendency of humans to form sacred images in the upper part of visual space. In traditional cultures, the sky is associated with order, transcendence, and meaning. This property has a neurophysiological basis: the upper field is processed by neural networks associated with the left hemisphere and extra-personal coordinates.

Such data allows us to better understand why the imagery of a mandala, light, starry sky, or the centre of space has a stabilising and therapeutic effect. They involve the same extrapersonal systems as religious experiences, but in a secularised way: not as a belief in a transcendent being, but as a neuropsychological form of experience integration.

Inner space functions as a dual concept that combines its cultural and symbolic value with its direct neuropsychological mechanisms. The brain activates its spatial orientation, self-reflection centers, and systems for existential integration through guided imagery, archetypal symbolism, and meditative imagination in this specific space. The cosmological imagination serves as a tool that enables both mental control and self-identity transformation when people experience loss, trauma, or face existential confusion.

The study by Brewer et al. (2011) confirms the neurofunctional basis of the therapeutic effect of cosmological imagination by analysing changes in the brain networks of experienced meditation practitioners. The key findings are a significant decrease in the activity of the default brain network (DMN), especially in the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) and posterior cingulate cortex (PCC), which correlates with a decrease in self-referential thinking and rumination. At the same time, there is an increased functional connectivity between the DMN and cognitive control networks (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex), which provides enhanced metacognitive regulation. This neuroplastic reorganisation creates a biological basis for reducing the symptoms of anxiety and depression, creating a state of holistic perception and emotional balance.

Modern research confirms that the experience of contemplating space, even in simulated conditions, can cause profound neuropsychological shifts. The study by van Limpt-Broers et al. (2024) demonstrated that immersion in a virtual space journey with a view of the Earth can induce an experience similar to the overview effect described by astronauts.

This experience was accompanied by a subjective sense of wholeness, aesthetic delight, and transformation of self-perception. Neurophysiologically, this was manifested in a

decrease in activity in the beta and gamma bands of the EEG, indicating a disruption of habitual cognitive patterns and a change in the perceptual frame. These data shows that the cosmological imagination can function as a tool for deep mental reorganisation, providing access to transcendental experience with therapeutic potential.

## **5. The therapeutic application of cosmological imagination**

The transition from neuropsychological mechanisms to clinical applications of the cosmological imagination needs evaluation of particular therapeutic methods alongside their established scientific evidence base. The research in this chapter examines modern meditation techniques which use cosmic imagery to help patients and explores their effects on emotional control and treatment of traumatic events and existential confusion.

The research examines how symbolic space representations serve as neuropsychological tools that help maintain mental balance.

Kaley Cho (2024) identifies mindful meditation as an effective practice that he views as a therapeutic method with clinical benefits, based on his research. According to the author, mindful meditation activates neural processes that promote emotional regulation, self-awareness, and stress resistance. It increases activity in brain structures involved in attention, decision-making, and internal self-observation, while also affecting biochemical markers of emotional state. These effects create a positive environment that allows people to become deeply engaged in virtual fictional settings.

Through the combination of cosmological imagination with meditation practice therapists can improve therapeutic value of conscious presence by strengthening sensory and affective and existential dimensions. The practice shifts its attention from abstract concentration and bodily anchoring to mental visualization of starry skies and intergalactic space and universal cycles and rhythms.

Such immersion can activate a deep sense of connection to a greater wholeness that transcends personal experience. This forms a resource for stabilising the psyche on not only an affective but also an ontological level.

Although mindfulness meditation has already become a part of clinical practice in the treatment of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic disorders and addictions, it is not a universal panacea. According to a review by Wielgosz et al. (2019), the effectiveness of meditation depends largely on the context in which it is practiced, as well as on the presence of a deeper framework for making sense of the experience.

Training in mindfulness or emotional acceptance alone does not guarantee a positive therapeutic effect. For some patients, especially those with a history of trauma or deep existential disorientation, mindfulness practice without the support of a meaningful, cultural or symbolic space can lead to increased symptoms or disorganisation.

This prompts a rethinking of the very nature of therapeutic meditation as not just a technique, but as a structured experience in which narrative, imagination, and meaning play an important role. The frame, i.e. the structure within which experience becomes ordered, plays a key role in redirecting attention from traumatic contents to a transformative vision. In this context, the cosmological imagination emerges as one of the most promising frames, not only creating a sense of space and stability, but also introducing the individual to a broader horizon of meaning that goes beyond personal pain.

Instead of focusing on symptoms or internal conflicts, attention is directed to interconnectedness, rhythm, and repetition, which allow for the restoration of a broken sense of wholeness. Meditation practice in clinical settings needs cosmological imagination to

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function as a vital therapeutic framework which stops patients from becoming detached and losing touch with their emotions and information while protecting vulnerable patients.

Gečaitė and Musneckis (2023) performed a systematic review of modern meditation techniques which shows that meditation functions as a multifaceted psychophysiological treatment that modifies various biological and psychological indicators.

The authors outline the main types of meditative activities: from mindfulness approaches to concentrative and affective practices, including compassion and loving-kindness meditation, pointing out their ability not only to reduce anxiety and depression but also to positively modulate neurochemical processes related to emotional regulation. At the same time, the authors take a critical approach to the existing evidence base, pointing out its fragmentation, methodological limitations, and insufficient typology of practices.

This approach allows us to consider meditation not only as a psychotechnical tool, but also as a flexible, context-dependent form of inner work that can combine bodily, emotional, cognitive, and symbolic experiences. This opens up the prospect of developing new forms of meditative imagination based not only on neurophysiological mechanisms, but also on the deep structures of meaning, imagination, and cultural symbolism.

The clinical application of meditative practices demonstrates their effectiveness in a wide range of affective and cognitive disorders. Rubia (2009) summarises the positive effects of meditation in depression, generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and as an adjunctive method for psychotic disorders. The results are especially important in neurocognitive disorders: meditation improves concentration in ADHD and reduces affective instability in schizophrenia. Research by Basso and Suzuki (2017) confirms that meditation practices cause structural changes in the brain: increased cortical thickness, improved neural connectivity, and decreased activity of fear centres. These anatomical changes provide a stable basis for therapeutic effects, which is especially important for understanding the long-term effects of cosmological imagination as a tool for neuroplastic reorganisation.

Research evidence demonstrates that mental images possess special emotional access which exceeds the impact of verbal thinking methods. According to Holmes and Mathews (2005), even a short-term visualisation of disturbing content causes an increase in anxiety and bodily reactivity much more intensely than thinking about the same situations in verbal form. A mental image extends past the limits of human imagination. The experience generates deep psychological effects by triggering sensory responses and emotional reactions and physical body responses.

These findings are fundamentally important for the development of new therapeutic tools, where imagination is viewed not as an auxiliary mechanism of cognitive restructuring, but as an independent channel of influence on affect, behaviour, and bodily self-regulation. The conscious use of mental imagery in a clinical context opens up opportunities for the formation of integrative visualisation practices that can rebuild affective patterns and restructure bodily interaction with the inner space of consciousness.

In this context, the cosmological imagination appears as a specific form of mental imagery that has deeply rooted cultural, archetypal, and ontological levels of meaning. The inclusion of cosmological imagery in the therapeutic process allows us to move from interpretation to the experience of stability, where imagination becomes not a fugitive from reality, but its transformative complement.

In the context of neuropsychological mechanisms of self-regulation, meditative practices open up new ways to stabilise the psyche not only through emotional and regulatory influences, but also through the ability to change the functional state of the brain as an integral system.

One of these practices is integrative body-mind training (IBMT), which is based on Eastern meditation traditions and has clearly proven neuropsychological effectiveness.

Studies conducted by Y.-Y. Tang et al. (2013) demonstrate that even short-term IBMT practice causes significant changes in the central and autonomic nervous systems. The peculiarity of IBMT is the emphasis not on cognitive control or deliberate concentration, but on entering a state of calm concentration. This state creates an open space of inner receptivity, where the cosmological imagination can be integrated as a visual, symbolic and affective layer of experience. In this sense, meditative practice becomes a kind of “framework” within which it is possible to activate imaginary cosmic structures as resources of inner support.

Thus, meditative practice based on a body-conscious attunement, supplemented by cosmological images, appears not only as a psychotechnique, but also as an ontological experience of inner composure. This practice is not limited to neurophysiological modulation but opens the way to restoring the connection between the mind, body, and the universe, which, in turn, is the basis for existential healing.

## **6. Mental imagery as a means of restoring wholeness**

Mental imagery is a set of mental representations or a type of imagination specific to a particular person, such as visual imagination (American Psychological Association, 2018). Expanding on this understanding, mental imagery can be interpreted as the ability to mentally recreate sensory experiences (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or gustatory) without a direct external stimulus. Such imagination is often vivid and emotionally intense, which makes it particularly effective in modelling imaginary experiences that are close to the real thing.

The study of the emotional impact of mental images in the virtual environment demonstrates their high efficiency as a means of emotional self-regulation. In the study by Zhiyong Xiong et al. (2022), an extended emotion measurement technique (E-PrEmo) was proposed, which allowed to quantify users’ emotional reactions to various visual stimuli. In particular, among the five factors experimentally studied (text, interactive visualisation, emotional stickers, geometric images, and virtual scenes), it was virtual spatial visualisations that evoked the highest level of positive emotions, such as relaxation, dreaminess, hope, and love. This effect significantly exceeded the emotional reactions associated with textual or abstract geometric stimuli.

The research shows that detailed visual iconic images create intense emotional responses when they show real locations or represent symbolic meanings. Cosmological mental imagery which includes images of boundless space and starry skies and orderly cosmic arrangements shows promise as a method to manage anxiety and emotional overload and restore inner equilibrium.

Their therapeutic power may be due to their ability to activate positive emotional states associated with inspiration, wonder, and a sense of safe distance from traumatic experiences.

One of the ways this influence works is by temporarily “switching off” or weakening harmful cognitive schemas. These dysfunctional schemas are deep-seated beliefs about oneself and the world, formed during prolonged stress or depression, such as “I will never recover” or “I am doomed to be alone.” These attitudes are neurophysiologically embedded in top-down cortical rhythms and can become rigid, self-sustaining structures. The experience of imaginary or virtual movement into outer space, which is unrelated to the “spatially contiguous” daily life, temporarily “untethers” the mind from these destructive thinking patterns, creating a state similar to self-transcendence – the feeling of surpassing the usual self with its pain, fears, and harmful beliefs.

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In this sense, cosmological mental imagery can act not just as a means of relaxation, but as an active therapeutic technology capable of changing patterns of consciousness, destabilising harmful cognitive loops. Jerath and Beveridge (2021) emphasise that the combination of visual cosmic imagery, biofeedback, and breathing techniques (slow breathing, resonant breathing) creates a synergistic effect: the parasympathetic system is activated, rumination decreases, and consciousness moves to a new “assembly vector”, i.e. an alternative spatial formation that is not contaminated by the usual patterns of suffering.

Thus, mental images of a cosmological scale (both in the imagination and in a virtual environment) can be used as a tool for short-term breaking the pathological cycle that maintains anxiety, insomnia, and depression. Even if the pathological attitudes partially return after the practice, the experience creates a window of plasticity that facilitates the formation of new, more adaptive cognitive and affective patterns. This is their therapeutic potential as a means of gently transforming the neuropsychological basis of suffering.

The use of mental imagery has demonstrated convincing effectiveness in reducing symptoms of acute depression and improving self-regulatory functions. A randomised trial by Costa and Barnhofer (2016) compared the effects of a short-term (one week) practice of mindfulness meditation and guided imagery relaxation in patients with acute depression. Both practices proved to be effective: there was a significant reduction in depression symptoms (BDI-II scale), improvement in emotional regulation (DERS), increased ability to decenter (EQ) and general level of awareness (FFMQ).

It is particularly significant that changes in the ability to consciously observe one’s own thoughts (decentering) were a predictor of a decrease in depressive symptoms, regardless of the type of intervention. This suggests that mental imagery, even if it is not focused on working with negative content, can activate a cognitive metapositional mode in which emotional distress does not fully capture the subject. Thus, guided imagination is not only a way of distraction, but also a tool of cognitive restructuring that works gently but deeply.

In the context of cosmological imagination, this takes on a special therapeutic perspective. If even neutral or natural images (as used in the study) lead to a significant improvement in self-regulatory functions, then the cosmological images offered in guided imagery practice can have an even more powerful impact. They activate not only the mechanisms of detachment from pain, but also the phenomena of self-transcendence and spacious affective security, which are fundamental to the stabilisation of the affective system.

Empirical evidence on the impact of visual images on the emotional state of psychiatric patients confirms the high efficiency of visual communication methods as an intervention tool. In the study by Jing Luo (2023), 40 people with psychotic disorders participated in a six-month programme that involved twice-weekly interactive interaction with a designer who used dynamic, graphically rich visual compositions as a means of non-verbal emotional processing. According to the evaluation, after the first month, there was a significant decrease in emotional dysregulation scores (DERS), and in the fourth and sixth months, there was a statistically significant improvement in all key variables. In particular, the level of emotional dysregulation in the experimental group decreased from 68.2 to 48.5 points. At the same time, there was a decrease in anxiety (SAS) and depressive symptoms (SDS), as well as a significant increase in the overall emotional intelligence score (EIS), including the ability to recognise and interpret emotions. The results demonstrate that interventions using multicomponent visual imagery have significant potential to improve affective regulation and psychoemotional functioning in people with mental disorders.

Loft and Cameron's (2013) study shows that the use of mental imagery based on the principle of implementation intentions is an effective method of improving sleep among adults with poor sleep hygiene. In contrast to imagery aimed at reducing arousal, visualising specific sequences of actions before bedtime not only improved sleep quality and shortened falling asleep time, but also formed sustainable positive routines. This confirms the potential of mental visualisation as a self-regulation tool that activates not only emotional but also cognitive and behavioural mechanisms of sleep transformation.

An important aspect of the therapeutic potential of mental imagery is its ability to integrate the affective and cognitive components of self-regulation. In a study by Blouin-Hudon and Pychyl (2016), it was empirically proven that vivid and positively coloured representations of the future self help reduce the tendency to procrastination. Participants who could clearly visualise themselves in the future demonstrated higher levels of motivation, better internal organisation and a lower tendency to procrastinate. The key mechanism that mediated this effect was an increased sense of continuity between the present and future self, i.e. the ability to perceive one's future as a real continuation of personal identity rather than an abstract perspective. In addition, the participants' positive affective state correlated with more emotionally rich and motivationally effective mental images, which confirms the involvement of the emotional sphere in self-regulation processes. Thus, visualisation of the future self is not only a tool of imagination, but also an effective therapeutic method that can increase motivation to act, support long-term goal-setting, and reduce emotional avoidance that accompanies destructive behavioural patterns.

The study also highlights the wide range of therapeutic effects of mental imagery: increased motivation to act, reduced procrastination, development of long-term planning ability, and improved self-regulation. It is especially important that mental visualisation of the future self can have a calming and restorative effect in cases of internal pain, emotional confusion, or identity fragmentation. Images of the future self that are warm, supportive, and emotionally rich can provide a sense of security, hope, and connection with both the self and others.

The perspective of mental imagery is of critical therapeutic importance. First-person imagery enhances emotional immersion and the phenomenal uniqueness of experience, while third-person imagery facilitates distance, conceptualisation of life events, and deeper integration of the future self into the personality structure. The combination of both approaches can effectively maintain a sense of continuity of identity and inner integrity, making mental images not only a motivational tool but also a means of emotional integration with the potential for therapeutic impact in conditions of existential disorientation.

## Conclusions

The conducted philosophical and psychological analysis of the phenomenon of "inner space" and "cosmological imagination" as therapeutic resources demonstrates the multidimensionality and conceptual productivity of this approach. The integration of phenomenological, archetypal, historical, medical and neuropsychological perspectives has revealed convergent evidence in favour of the therapeutic potential of the cosmological imagination and substantiated it as a promising area of psychotherapeutic practice.

Further research perspectives open up a number of areas that require systematic study. First of all, empirical studies, in particular, randomised controlled trials, are critically important to assess the effectiveness of cosmologically oriented therapeutic interventions for various mental disorders. A comparative analysis of the effectiveness of cosmological

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imagination with traditional forms of guided imagery and mindfulness practices seems particularly appropriate. In this context, neuroimaging studies using functional MRI are also promising, as they would allow us to identify specific neural correlates of cosmological mental images and find out whether they activate unique brain networks that differ from other types of visualisations.

Research needs to explore cross-cultural studies that demonstrate how different societies use their cosmological beliefs to develop therapeutic practices and influence neuropsychological outcomes. The study should examine how cosmological imagination impacts patients with PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders, and those receiving palliative care. The approach requires healthcare providers to develop standardized treatment plans that include specific therapeutic steps and assessment criteria to measure treatment effectiveness.

Technological innovations deserve attention: the integration of cosmological imagination with virtual reality capabilities can create immersive therapeutic spaces capable of modelling deep space experiences.

The phenomenon of inner space as a therapeutic resource is a complex interdisciplinary problem that requires the integration of philosophical, psychological and neuroscientific approaches. Although the theoretical foundations of such integration seem convincing, empirical validation of these ideas remains an important task for future research.

The development of cosmological therapy methods becomes essential because modern worldwide challenges create personal distress and social crises which affect multiple community groups.

Modern people need the cosmological imagination because it generates mental health advantages by creating order and linking human existence to universal unity and life purpose.

The research results provide essential information which explains the best methods to help trauma victims in modern Ukrainian society. The psychological distress of Ukrainians intensifies because of ongoing war so cosmologically-oriented therapy provides suitable cultural methods for treating people while creating shared meaning. Cosmological imagination enables people to establish universal order and experience transcendent forces which surpass their present suffering according to essential cultural practices of meaning-making found in traditional societies including Ukrainian culture.

The archetypal nature of cosmic symbolism enables universal understanding because it crosses cultural limits yet allows different cultural readings which makes it effective for treating collective trauma that affects individual and group belief systems. The research demonstrates that cosmological imagination connects evidence-based treatments to traditional Ukrainian healing practices which would boost both cultural acceptance and post-conflict recovery treatment success rates.

At the same time, it is important to maintain a critical approach to these perspectives, avoiding both reductionist simplifications and pseudo-scientific interpretations. The exploration of inner space requires scientific research to establish its therapeutic value through the combination of philosophical knowledge with empirical data and clinical safety measures.

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