

# Editorial: the power and danger of pluralism in psychotherapy

HEWARD WILKINSON

*Minster Centre, London/Scarborough Psychotherapy Training Institute, UK*

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**Abstract** Taken together the papers in this issue offer various slants upon what amounts to a pluralistic radicalism. This is directly expressed in the papers of Heath, which addresses the implication of philosophical examination of psychotherapy assumptions, and Wilkinson, who explores Nietzsche's purported posthumous writing, *My Sister and I* in this light. It is expressed more by implication in those of Toronto, a courageous paper about using touch in psychoanalysis, and Guilfoyle, a Foucauldian paper examining psychotherapists' power assumptions about their entitlement to interpret resistance, and the context of that. There is also the fascinating address by the EAP President Cornelia Krause-Girth upon the balance of power and aptitude between men and women in Psychotherapy. The rest of the Editorial explores the potentially radical political, social, and cultural implications of psychotherapeutically informed pluralism, if it were developed over a long period of time.

## The papers

Taken together, the papers in this issue have radical implications.

## Heath

In this highly readable paper drawn from his teaching work, Geoff Heath offers us a wide survey, and radical scrutiny, of our assumptions as psychotherapists, from the point of view of a philosophical stance which is broadly Kantian in its position of cautious enquiry. The fundamental tendency of this line of reasoning is not to rubbish psychotherapy but to disturb the complacency of an *unexamined* psychotherapy, of psychotherapy positions which hold they can just be taught as certain, as established, and that critique can come later, when one has 'mastered the art'. A model of *psychotherapy as enquiry*, or of *psychotherapy as practical philosophy*, if sufficiently seriously envisaged, would accordingly be immune to this critique; but it would have to be enquiry which also enquired into *itself*. Heath makes a fundamental case for philosophy's being placed at the centre of psychotherapy training. In respect of his own core position he offers a possible view of psychotherapy as offering creative and useful narrative myths, not 'truths', quoting Nietzsche's famous 'post-modern' comment: *Facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations*.

## Wilkinson

My own paper tackles once more the question of the authenticity of Nietzsche's *My sister and I*, in order to reclaim, as a debt to the dead, the last writings of the grandfather of

psychotherapy. This paper suggests how all sorts of aspects of the questions of the content, and of the authenticity, of Nietzsche's purported asylum writings open up for us the disturbing realities of the limits of our thinking as psychotherapists, of our compassion, and of our pluralism. Again, it puts forward as implicit in this late Nietzsche communication a position analogous to that offered by Heath, that is, of psychotherapy as offering creative and useful narrative myths, not 'truths', but it further envisages psychotherapy also as enabling us to radically get within *existing* belief positions, such as those of the major religions and ideologies implicit in science, suspending their concrete 'truth' and envisaging them as existential possibilities.

This would indeed be a concept of psychotherapy as *practical philosophy*, and this extraordinary and terrible and poignant work in a way pioneers it. And, if we also think in Freudian terms that emphasise the psyche as a field of *reminiscences*, one of the significant arguments for this work as both authentic, and highly relevant to us psychotherapists, is that, in relation to Nietzsche's earlier works, it is a veritable mass of reminiscences of them. And this is in a very post-modern Joycean/Borgesian way, in which there can be reminiscences, and reminiscences of reminiscences, and so *ad infinitum*. 'Its turtles all the way down.'

### Toronto

Ellen Toronto also offers us a deep challenge, in that she argues, carefully, patiently, and undogmatically and unaggressively, on grounds of therapeutic practice that, in certain circumstances (not in the least invariably, she mainly accepts the orthodox position), the orthodox psychoanalytic veto on touch is countertherapeutic, and shows in detailed terms of practice how touch is and can be therapeutic. This is such a courageous and unusual position to take in the psychoanalytic community (cf. Totton, 1998; Wilkinson, 2000) that it implicitly amounts to a relativisation or pluralisation of the psychoanalytic position. For it embodies a living critique of its own theory, in the way implicitly advocated by Heath; it frees from dogma.

The argument is put forward from within more fundamental elements of psychoanalytic theory, namely, the psychoanalytic view (or should it be 'feel'?! of the body, but this in turn implies a view of psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic theory as *evolving* and dialectical in an Hegelian sense, and hence as *pluralistic*, which in its innermost tendency it always was (Wilkinson, *op. cit.*), but which was also lost sight of in the search for positions which would be axiomatic and foundational. In the end Toronto also is not saying her position is 'right' either, simply asking for openness about this 'silenced' issue within the psychoanalytic community.

### Guilfoyle

Michael Guilfoyle's paper is the second we have published (Derek Hook's, 2001, was the first) from the perspective of a Foucauldian critique of the unquestioning invasiveness, and self-maintaining characteristics, of psychotherapy and psychotherapy discourse. Guilfoyle argues that we have not only to take account of the intentional dimension of discourse but its materiality, i.e. the context and function of the discourse. This invoking of the frame enormously complexifies the issues of whether there is an inherent unremediable imbalance of power in the therapeutic relationship. Guilfoyle brings this out through an extremely and delightfully simple research device, the use of the same (verbally the same) sample protocol of an interaction about someone's lateness, which is then appraised by research subjects (practitioners) first, as if it were a therapeutic interaction, and second, as if it were a business and colleague interaction. What is immediately apparent is that there is a tendency to perceive enquiry about resistance as *legitimate*, and as explained by various therapeutic

hypotheses, in the ‘therapeutic interaction’ version, as against an absolute dismissal of it as irrelevant and out of order in the ‘business’ version.

Whether or not the inferences Guilfoyle begins to draw from this are legitimate, or whether the assumptions are watertight (e.g. a Derridean analysis, attentive to context in the most comprehensive way, would question whether the same *words* on the page mean ‘the same’ discourse; cf. Derrida, 1988), the questions he raises are fundamental. For one could ask whether, even on a model that respects resistance, and eschews the challenging analysis of it—for example,—the outcome would not be an even more subtly totalitarian model of work, for example, in person-centred therapy, the most benign of all approaches on the face of it. Oscar Wilde’s question (1992) about whether the good slave owners were not more harmful for the cause of abolition than the wicked ones is apposite here! Once more, the questions raised pluralistically face us with those of the very foundations of psychotherapy itself.

### **Krause-Girth**

We are also publishing in this issue the address which Cornelia Krause-Girth, the President (and first woman president) of the European Association for Psychotherapy, gave to FFdP, the French national umbrella organisation, in 2001, in which she graphically and lucidly draws our attention to research on various issues about the respective impact, and power situation, of men and women in psychotherapy and the politics of psychotherapy. Whilst there are no direct links between this and the themes of the main papers, the recognition of the issues of *gender pluralism* in relation to power issues, with which she challenges us, forms part of the ongoing dialogue this issue is emphasising about the supersession of dominant discourses by plural understandings of our discourses.

### **Implications of a pluralistic position in psychotherapy**

The net effect of all these papers is anti-reductionistic and anti-absolutistic, and, positively, in the direction of pluralism, and of the foundationlessness of our beliefs. In their light we ask, is it now time to see whether pluralism gives us a new way of viewing the whole field, and to ask this question comprehensively? If we do this many awkward questions about the status of what we do have to be considered.

### **The problem of the trans-moral potential of empathy**

Thus, take empathy. Imagine we could be completely empathic. Imagine an empathy truly carried to its logical conclusion.

Then we would, for instance, have, on occasion, to identify with the racial supremacist, with the paedophile, with the saint and the universal sage, with the pacifist and the militant, the saint and the warlord, with the celibate and the participant in orgies, with the thoroughgoing sceptic, with the thoroughgoing materialist, and with the most florid believer in any creed one would care to name. One would have to identify with both the adulterer and the wronged spouse. One would identify with both victim and abuser. Or with both the perhaps narcissistic persecutor, and the wounded and missed partner whose experience of belittlement and humiliation is so profound.

And, indeed, in some measure we do now do this. We do find ourselves empathising alternately with the wronged and betrayed partner, where they are our client, and again, in another instance, with the radical need, in the betrayer, for their partner to change. We find ourselves understanding both the traditional parent, struggling to maintain an established and threatened way of life, and with the rebellious child who does not ‘give a fig’, as we say, for

the older customs. We realise that, in other circumstances, if it had fallen out differently, and we had the other party as our client, our sympathies would have gone diametrically the other way. In the position of advocate we can find ourselves in either corner.

We might call this ‘trans-moral empathy’. Great novel or dramatic writing such as Dostoevski’s or Shakespeare’s is profoundly, though not exclusively, based upon this human potential, as is our participatory appreciation of it, and—carried further, or less far, according to practitioners, and their temperament and gift—it is an essential element in the work we psychotherapists do. It, of course, goes beyond advocacy to understanding; it is the capacity to empathise with the evil, with those who fill us with repugnance, as well as those we admire. As the poet John Keats wrote in a letter, the ‘chameleon poet—has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen’ (Keats, letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, quoted in Bate, 1967).

There is also the paradox to be considered, that this would be a God’s-eye apprehension of the human (and animal, and non-living) universe. So God’s empathy would also be non-moral empathy, or else God would *not* understand the creation from within, which would be contrary to omniscience.

It is not merely different moral stances which are amenable to this, but profoundly different *belief* structures and assumptions. The deep divide between Islam, one of the least ‘updated’ or ‘modernised’ of the great mediaeval religions, and modern American belief and value systems (belief and value are inextricably entangled here), is an up to the minute case in point. Here it comes out that *historical* thinking is also involved, the ability to put ourselves in the shoes of different times, epochs, and indeed different concepts and senses of time. Empathy which is not historically minded is either parochial or else merely ‘empathy by rote’.

### Attempts to escape the implications

If we seek to avoid the apparent amorality, ethical promiscuity, and the identifications with opposed value and belief systems, of the psychotherapist’s potential subjection to the fate of trans-moral empathy, we may either, first, appeal to some value system, some core moral bottom line. This we may identify more or less closely with the boundaries and the principles of psychotherapy, and the profession on the whole is confused about this, because little thought is given to its relation to traditional ethical, moral, and metaphysical conceptions, or about the implications of the fact or possibility that its own ethical principles are to a considerable extent *neutral* in respect of specific moral–ethical systems (though there may of course be some outer limits here, but establishing what they are is more than a little tricky). This position, then, is subject to all the disputability and contentiousness which besets any specific value system, and might itself indeed become subject to trans-moral empathy!

Or, second, we may seek to attain some stance of absolute neutrality.

The latter is expressed in its classical forms of the supposed neutrality of the full thoroughgoing interpretative psychoanalytic position, or its pure Rogerian person-centred form. There are other less pronounced variants, seeking to establish an independent position for psychotherapy. These all may have their own integrity, but they are almost certainly not defensible as genuinely *neutral* in the required sense. Thus, if we look at psychoanalysis from any degree of distance, as opposed to from within it, or alongside it, as its courtiers, it is only on a very strained or blinkered interpretation that this complex and very powerful mixture of metapsychology and theology, which has dominated the ideologies of the talking classes (the age of psychoanalysis, Derrida calls ours; cf. Derrida, 1998, writing about Foucault, pp. 70 ff.), could be regarded as remotely neutral. And the Rogerian stance, if not held in its all too prevalent blandest form, which is a kind of abdication from personal authenticity, embodies a partly secret spirituality, of which the cat is interestingly let out of the bag in Brian Thorne’s

new book (Thorne, 2002), reviewed in this issue. These supposedly neutral positions, then, are not neutral, indeed may require an advocacy of their own, and are not opposed to 'advocacy empathy'.

So the possibility of in depth trans-moral empathy, which would also encompass the range of possible beliefs and belief systems, remains as not ruled out by our presuppositions.

### **The wide positive implications of pluralism**

But far from being a negative conclusion, on this basis there is a dramatically positive future for psychotherapy, if this is once grasped. It can become a laboratory for the recapitulation, and reworking, of core belief and value systems.

Now, as Goffman (1974) and others have shown, the nature of frame relativity limits the 'laboratory simulation' aspect of psychotherapy, since the 'as if' differs in certain fundamental respects from the actual. The frame aspect accounts for the eternal unreality of psychotherapy and also the theatre, in even their most authentic expressions.

But this also in fact makes the work we do more 'relevant' because it is indeed potentially microcosmic; it potentially reworks situations and beliefs in their relevant features, eliminating redundancy and being selective; it is a discipline of relevance, as well as of liberation from too close immersion in the concrete and actual, like literary criticism.

And now, since the moment when William James coined the word 'pluralism' (cf. e.g. MacIntyre, 1990; Samuels, 1989; Slunecko, 1999; Wilkinson, 1999), there is a meta-analysis to integrate this.

### **The implications of pluralism about beliefs**

For the implication of certain philosophical psychotherapists or of psychotherapeutically inclined philosophers and theologians, such as of the later Nietzsche, of Derrida, of Jung and Hillman, upon certain interpretations, of the later Wittgenstein, of Donald Cupitt, and of the pragmatism of William James, is that *there is a way of recognising the spiritual identity of humanity which is not tied to specific beliefs, dogmas, and cosmologies*, though it can draw upon them. Rather, it is open-endedly able to use a multiplicity of myths, metaphors, and narratives to manifest itself. This way is therefore post 'Death of God', in Nietzsche's sense, taking as read the breakdown of the literal interpretation of Christian and similar cosmologies, and therefore also it does not have any intrinsic difficulty with science, Darwinian biological science, for instance.

There is, however, therefore, on the other hand, no reason why the full power of the narratives and metaphors *as* narratives and metaphors cannot be drawn upon, as manifestations of the evolution of souls, of spiritual identity. They therefore do not have to be diluted in content; this is the beauty of this concept. This may be designated 'phenomenological spirituality', in virtue of its being held in the mode of the primacy of the *intentional*, of intentionality, the phenomenological realm which abstracts from physical and actual social facts.

### **Some religious traditions have tendencies towards pluralism**

Now, some religious traditions already have tendencies towards pluralism. Hinduism and Buddhism (and the mystical traditions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) both in different ways already treat the visible universe and manifestations of deity and the divine, as figures or symbolic manifestations of the invisible *but indeterminate* or hugely multiplex divine, a divinity which is intimately connected with human subjectivity and phenomenological reality,

and which, therefore, has an intrinsic correlation with its human manifestation, and is not a totally independent cosmological fact on the Western monotheistic model. However, even Hinduism and Buddhism are not entirely free of elements of revelationist cosmology, although they (and the Western mystical traditions) do lend themselves more readily to the phenomenological spirituality project.

### **Psychotherapy and pluralism**

This project reaches one of its greatest potentials (though this is not yet much if at all explored within the tradition) in psychotherapy. Psychotherapy becomes a laboratory of belief frames and narratives. *This is why the multiplicity of methods and orientations is not foreign but intrinsic to psychotherapy*, and why the simplistic models of scientific validation are not congruent with this generative capacity of psychotherapy, to access all manner of human potentials in many interrelations. But this has not yet much been tapped. Even the Buddhist based approaches, such as Core Process Psychotherapy, Maura Sills' innovation at the Karuna Institute's, still in part adhere hesitantly to Buddhism as an independent cosmology and belief system, which is not to be assimilated to the transformatory process of psychotherapy as laboratory of belief and narrative transformations, although there are elements within the Karuna culture which are near to the vision I am putting forward here.

Stephen Batchelor's *Buddhism without beliefs* (1998) may be a move in that direction, though I have not read it, unless it is more a 'pruning away of concrete belief' endeavour analogous to 'demythologising' in Christianity (Bultmann, John Robinson, *et al.*), and therefore not the same as this line of thinking. (The general issues of this editorial are also being addressed in Ian Parker, 1999, which we hope to review later.)

### **Fundamentalism and the difficult question**

What of the religions which lend themselves most emphatically to fundamentalist interpretations? Can psychotherapy 'process' the 'factual event and revelation' monotheistic religions in the same way? (There are no Moses, Jesus, Paul, Mohammed, Luther, in Hinduism, and the importance of Gautama Buddha in Buddhism is—in some measure—about the introduction of a *method*, not a *revelation*.) I believe there is no reason why this should not be done, and when I work with modern Christians whose Christianity is deep I often find that they are living the Christly way of life, for example, penitentially, without the kind of central concern for cosmological 'truths' which are manifested by, for instance, the anti-Darwinian revisionism of the creationist fundamentalist Christians. I believe this concept, and related ones, have not been taken forward, because

- (a) it has not been seriously imagined,
- (b) if it were imagined it would be felt to be an act of blasphemy, or irreverent attack on people's existing religion.

Jung is an exception, but his assimilation wavers between neutral phenomenology and the endeavour to put forward an alternative, Gnostic, Christian model, and he was indeed also fiercely attacked by orthodox Christian theologians. I do not think he is entirely clear about this (or indeed about many related things).

### **Can pluralism itself become the dominant discourse?**

If this concept were to emerge and be envisaged on the larger scale, the question arises, could a thoroughgoing phenomenological spiritual pluralism assisted by psychotherapeutic mod-

elling become the dominant discourse? Could the higher meta-level discourse in our culture globally, over, say, two centuries, address the standing of religion by absorbing it in this way? This would have elements of a Hindu solution, with a minority for whom belief systems had a symbolic status, and a majority for whom they were literal. Hinduism has historically been too tied to tribal and national realities to generalise to other traditions in this way, nor does it satisfy the aspects of human existence and consciousness the monotheistic traditions do. But there is a sense in which this proposal is offering a 'Hindu' solution, but one which is not tied, for instance, to the polytheistic vision of Hinduism; it is pluralistic not polytheistic. It is neutral as between polytheism, monotheism, and atheism, etc.

Could it, then, assimilate traditional religion within itself? Whilst dissolving the science religion conflict as in creationism versus Darwinism, not by an attack on religion as in Freud, nor by a new transpersonal religious vision, as in e.g., Ken Wilber? There seems no reason why it should not, because it would provide room in which those who adhered to a traditional cosmology could still continue to uphold it. It would offer a vision in which those who held to a traditional religious perspective, or a Darwinian one, could all be accommodated, and in a way which does not dilute the power of the narratives.

### **Does positive science have a privileged standing in this?**

Would this not, however, accord scientific Darwinism a privileged standing? Would it not be more 'true' than the Christian or Islamic 'story', i.e. not neutral? Scientific narratives, governed broadly by falsifiability in Popper's sense, have 'story' and 'model' aspects, just as the inhabiting of human symbolic narratives has 'real' elements (studied e.g. by the neurologists). There is an unresolved Cartesian dualism here, surely? Or a hidden Kantianism? Well, there is no doubt the scientific-mathematical narrative has indeed added a huge dimension to our world, but it is not clear that at the level of social-political and human phenomenological thought it entirely supersedes other previous ones; rather in the pluralistic framework there will be a great deal of complex dialogue between narratives, in a way which is inherently unforeseeable. Dogmatic scientific positivism would be likely to be superseded by a scientific outlook which was more open, e.g. to the paranormal let alone radical quantum physics models, without ceasing to be scientific in its method. A new synthesis may emerge, and the phase of pluralism be a transitional phase though, I believe, a long one. Psychotherapy, conceived of as *the laboratory of belief transformations*, would have a major part to play in all of this process.

### **Anti-utopia: a caution**

But I end with a caveat, a serious caution. Would there not be the danger of this being a new mediaevalism? What are the totalitarian dangers of a unified world framework like this, as opposed to the unresolved conflict network of capital, science, religion, media, tribe and nationhood, the conflict we now have? Would it be an anti-fundamentalist fundamentalism? An intolerance of intolerance? An attenuating emasculation of all the individuality of the different traditions in the name of pluralistic tolerance? Any universal synthesis, however wide, is dangerous but so equally is ongoing conflict. I think within the pluralism of this framework there would be more space for constitutional arrangements which were relatively libertarian and tolerant, though I cannot write about that here.

But it would be still at best a very partial attempt at 'utopia', and the dangers would still be enormous, as in any 'world synthesis', any model which might venture on an imperialism—even an anti-imperialist and pluralistic one!

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**Résumé** Une vue d'ensemble des articles de ce numéro indique qu'ils offrent des biais différents sur ce qui équivaut à un radicalisme pluraliste. L'article de Heath adresse les conséquences de l'examen philosophique des hypothèses de la psychothérapie et celui de Wilkinson explore les écrits attribués de façon posthume à Nietzsche *Ma Sœur et Moi*; ils reflètent directement ce radicalisme pluraliste. Il est exprimé implicitement dans la contribution de Toronto, un article courageux qui concerne l'utilisation du toucher en psychanalyse ainsi que dans celui de Guilfoye, un article qui se situe dans la tradition de Foucault et qui examine une présomption de pouvoir chez les psychothérapeutes au sujet de leur droit présumé d'interpréter une résistance et le contexte dans lequel ceci se situe.

Nous avons aussi la contribution fascinante du président de l'EAP, Cornelia Krause-Girth, sur la balance de pouvoir et l'aptitude différente des hommes et des femmes en psychothérapie.

Le reste de cet éditorial explore le potentiel radical d'un pluralisme informé par la psychothérapie, du point de vue politique, social et culturel, si celui-ci pouvait être développé à long terme.

**Zusammenfassung** Alle Beiträge dieser Ausgabe bieten verschiedene Tendenzen zu pluralistischem Radikalismus. Dies wird direkt ausgedrückt in den Beiträgen von Heath, der die Implikation von philosophischer Untersuchung von psychotherapeutischen Annahmen anspricht, und von Wilkinson, der Nietzsches vermutliche posthume Schrift *Meine Schwester und Ich* in diesem Lichte untersucht. Implizit wird dies in den Beiträgen von Toronto, eine couragierte Schrift über Berührung in der Psychoanalyse, und Guilfoye, ein Foucauldischer Aufsatz, der die Macht der Annahme von Psychotherapeuten über deren Anspruch, Widerstand zu interpretieren, untersucht und deren Kontext. Ausserdem ist die faszinierende Ansprache der EAP Präsidentin Cornelia Krause-Girth über die Balance von Macht und Begabung zwischen Männern und Frauen in der Psychotherapie enthalten. Der Rest des Editorials untersucht die potentiell radikalen politischen, sozialen und kulturellen Implikationen von psychotherapeutisch informiertem Pluralismus, wenn entwickelt über einen langen Zeitraum.