

# Editorial: Psychotherapy and its cultural base

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**Abstract** *The Editorial draws out the cultural-human basis of the main papers by Goldberg and Crespo, Hyams, Heru, and Leite, drawing attention to the common thread of ‘human agency’ they imply, as opposed to any objectivizing model of persons. It concludes once again that doing our work in the light or human values remains at the heart of psychotherapy.*

## Introduction

The main papers in this issue all have a marked ‘cultural’ lie. Together they raise by implication the question of psychotherapy’s relation to culture as opposed to science. On the spectrum of science and culture which has often been addressed in this journal they all undoubtedly lie at the end of ‘culture’.

In many ways we might substitute for the word ‘cultural’ the word ‘human’.

## Goldberg and Crespo

Carl Goldberg and Virginia Crespo bring out the human aspect of moral choices in their discussion of the contrast between the facing of suffering and death by Tolstoy’s Ivan Ilyich and by the biblical Job. Unlike Ivan, Job is able to make meaning of his suffering through personal agency, protest, giving a voice to feelings and by refusing to accept the invalidation of his own perceptions. ‘Instead of protesting and constructively defining himself, Ilyich excommunicates himself from human company’. Whereas Job uses his suffering to claim and reclaim his personal agency, which Goldberg and Crespo indicate is the key to all of this.

But to have personal agency is of course to identify our humanness, not with any set of properties which science might define, but through decision and deed, agency, the capacity for action.

## Hyams

Hanna Hyams, by connecting Vincent Van Gogh’s predicament with post traumatic stress disorder rather than schizophrenia—the usual catch all and unreflecting ‘diagnosis’ of Van Gogh—humanizes his life, and makes his predicament intelligible. Despite the element of ‘diagnosis’ in this, it in fact enables her to tell Van Gogh’s story in the way we would

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experience the story of one of our own clients—as a gradually unfolding reality, pervaded with his humanness, fraught with the struggle to make meaning of his predicament and the burden of replacing his dead brother, and making the fragmentation of both his life and art intelligible in this process which mirrors his own through his art. This paper is itself an act of witness, a human act.

### **Heru**

Alison Heru broadens out her discussion of the implications of psychotherapeutic work with someone in an harassment situation, into one which invokes the entire cultural dimension of ‘the gaze’ (commonly construed in terms of a male paradigm of the gaze) in our culture, thereby bringing its human context alive, freeing the situation from the immediate abstractness of its specific focus, and finding a new way to explore the human implications of being a woman in our world. ‘In working with the victim or the depressed woman in this case, Irigaray would advocate, “turning the You into an I”, to help to identify a sense of self and self-agency. This means turning the woman’s sense of herself from object to subject—The gaze is a rich phenomenon that touches the core of our being and highlights many of our behaviours that have hitherto been acceptable but undermining of women’. Once again—agency! Humanness!

### **Leite**

Finally Teresa Leite’s careful exploration of how music as therapy can be used with a group of clients designated psychotic brings, not primarily to ‘facilitate free expression’, but to strengthen boundaries and human connectedness in these clients, is a model of a non-dogmatic and human use of a culturally based therapy based on sensitivity to actual need. It steers, as she indicates, a middle way between the classical psychoanalytic verbally based individual session, and the completely expressive music therapy session by using music as a co-operative and disciplined means through which the acute psychotic clients may find ways to identify their humanity, through creative agency.

### **Ginger**

Serge Ginger’s two addresses, including his delicious comparison of the ‘neurological’ value systems of the two genders, also underline the point we have been making—the humanness of psychotherapy.

### **Culture, agency and human values**

Once again we reach the point we have reached here many times before, by many routes, that psychotherapy is an humane science, art, and praxis. It is itself a manifestation, at its best, of human agency. This may seem a banally simple conclusion to reach after much ado. But our profession, at its heart, is indeed very simple!

**Résumé** *L’éditorial met l’accent sur la trame culturelle et humaine des principaux articles de Goldberg et Crespo, Hyams, Heru et Leite, en attirant l’attention sur les implications que ces articles ont en commun quant à la “gestion humaine”, en opposition à tout modèle d’objectivisation des personnes. Une fois de plus, il conclut que l’accomplissement de notre travail à la lumière des valeurs humaines demeure au cœur de la psychothérapie.*

**Zusammenfassung** *Das Editorial bezieht sich auf die kulturell-humanistische Grundlage der Beiträge von Goldberg und Crespo, Hyams, Heru, und Leite, und betont den "menschlichen Aspekt" als deren Gemeinsamkeit, im Gegensatz zu objektivierenden Menschenbildern. Das Editorial zeigt erneut auf, dass unsere Arbeit im Lichte menschlicher Werte zu verrichten, das Herz der Psychotherapie bleibt.*

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