

Psychotherapy and Philosophy

Psychotherapy and Philosophy! Ha! Professor Peter Fonagy from time to time refers to Hegel, and Daniel Stern invoked Husserl. This is so much the exception that it stands out.

Psychotherapy virtually does not do philosophy as enquiry, as epistemology, theory of knowledge - not even philosophy of the frame of the work, for which we have to turn to the sociologist Erving Goffman. To ascertain what unifies the field is obviously a philosophical enquiry. Why is there so little interest in this, when we so badly need an understanding of the whole field in the public realm?

[For instance, The Austrian Ministry has recently published guidelines, based on a deep misunderstanding of Psychotherapy Frame, which are being seriously considered by the European Association for Psychotherapy:

There is a clear and distinct difference between psychotherapy and all kinds of esoteric, spiritual and religious methods, such as human energetics, spiritual healing, shamanism and many others. These methods do not form part of psychotherapy.

The provision of any kind of esoteric content, spiritual rituals or religious healing doctrine is strictly prohibited in all psychotherapeutic education and training.]

Psychotherapy as Miracle and Urban Legend

Well now, nearly all psychotherapists have had moments when they realise that what they do *works*, that it is amazing, even a sort of miracle, which changes people's lives. These are the moments (the stuff of psychotherapy urban legends) when a psychotherapist feels that *no justification at all is needed for psychotherapy*. Therefore, we, myself included, are very much inclined to think it is self-justifying. If we do worry further, as I do, about this question, then we/I might be inclined to take refuge in the thought that mechanistic techno-scientific materialistic trends are the culprit which prevents thinking, - even, to be sure, in some creative benign forms such as relational neuroscience.

However, remarks by a colleague have opened my thinking to another possibility, very obvious once seen - but I never noticed it! - which connects with the thought that psychotherapy seems to need no justification.

'Meta-' and 'Cata-'

The Greek word or prefix we use for conceptual analysis is 'meta-' ((μετά-): 'meta'-thinking, 'meta'-reflection, 'meta'-analysis, 'meta'-physics, etc. It indicates 'beyond', 'outwith', and so on. This is the language of philosophy and of literary thought.

But, in the light of my colleague's remarks, I looked for the Greek prefix for 'below' instead, and I found it. Perhaps, then, the word or prefix for psychotherapy is that one: 'kata-', Κάτω, 'under', 'down', 'below', and so on.

English Words from the Greek 'Cata-'

Sounds unfamiliar! But if we replace 'k' by hard 'c' we get many English words from the Greek which give the flavour: 'cataclysm', 'catastrophe', 'catatonia', 'cataract', 'catacomb', 'catalysis' (catalyst), 'catapult', 'catalepsy', 'category', 'catachumen', even 'catalogue', and so on. All these in one way or another have something to do with going down, taking down, going under, coming from below, and so on. Even 'catalogue' means 'list the whole of' ie right *down* to the beginning.

The immediate pre-psychotherapy pioneers, Dostoievsky, and Nietzsche, are preoccupied with 'over' and 'under', Übermensch, Untermensch, Untergehen, and so on. Likewise, Freud's epigraph, from Virgil's *Aeneid*, for his greatest, and truly inaugural, work, at the very entrance to modern psychotherapy, *Interpretation of Dreams*, says:

Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo : "If I cannot bend the Higher Powers, I will move the Infernal Regions"

Psychotherapy as Parasite and Drama as Parasite

A second way to think about psychotherapy, closely related to this, is that it is a *parasite*, a replicant, in rather the way that drama and theatre, and of course philosophy, are parasites and replicants. In his fractious discussion with John R Searle, Derrida noted that it is indeed part of the human condition to be subject to *parasites* in this way.

Parasitism is always a possibility. Drama is a parasite in that it is a simulation, a mimesis, a replication, an 'as if', of actuality, one which seems to presuppose an actuality to simulate, thus, famously, for instance:

'O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?'

In other words, a play is a kind of shadow commentary, a mimesis, a replication, upon an actuality, and ‘mimesis’ is one of the great watchwords of western art and anthropology. ‘Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his time upon the stage And then is heard no more; it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury Signifying nothing.’

Psychotherapy Playing with Reality

Now, likewise, in one sense, a psychotherapy relationship *parodies* or *plays with*, parasites, a real relationship. This is not of course to deny that psychotherapy relationships may be of huge importance to both parties. But within the frame! Psychotherapy is constantly, and essentially, *playing with the faultlines of the actual* by translating it into the as-if, into its partly depriving frame, organised around the power of the therapist, exploring both its hidden sources, and its hidden possibilities. It presupposes the actual which it subverts and transforms, as a parasite upon it, analogously to the way drama and fiction and philosophy do.

Prior in Time is not Ontologically Prior

In this connection we may note that something which is prior in time may be not ontologically prior. Thus, Kant famously remarks that, though all our knowledge *begins* with experience, it does not follow that it all *arises out of* experience. Similarly with the relation between the real and the possible or counter-factual. Psychotherapy also does overlap with actuality, too, in many ways. So it is a merely partial parasite, as indeed also are fiction and drama, driven by their relation to transformed memories of the actual. Actual parasites, after all, do exist, and are in the business of preying on their actual hosts.

Parasitic Mode and ‘Cata-’ Core to Psychotherapy

So the psychotherapist is always working on the parasitic *underside*, the *κατάβασις* (catabasis, the going down) of the actual. This is closely connected with the ‘as if’ frame of psychotherapy, and is essential to understanding the process.

This applies *across the board* in psychotherapy; it is its medium, whether in cognitively based approaches, or depth psychology or humanistic approaches, or systemic, inductive, constructivist approaches. Even cognitively based approaches are about opening up the mental and inductive mechanisms, in the sense of self-suggestion, of depression and anxiety.

Mimetic Transference Process

The parasitic elements selected in psychotherapy are those which, in one way or another, have been found to effect change not normally effected in conscious commonsense living, through a mimetic transference, and which are accessed through consciousness, even if in a way subversive of consciousness. All psychotherapy indices its parasitic relation to actual encountering, by means of a rite or power play which subverts the ordinary commonsense expectations of the client or patient, whether by suggestion, by way of directed or evoked exercises/experiments the client or patient is instructed in, or in the leaving of a conversational void for the unknown to emerge from it. This implies a most peculiar and unanalysed -

generically transference - state of affairs, which is a profound invitation to philosophical enquiry.

Psychotherapy's Retreat from its Non-Actual Frame

Unfortunately, missing its huge opportunity, psychotherapy theory has, again and again, sought to construe the terms of its parasitic reductions *as themselves actualities*. The classic instance is Freud, but the rehearsal methodologies of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), or Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), also relentlessly construe the rational as the real, and the real as the rational. In Humanistic and Integrative contexts we have the insistence on the Real Relationship. Here also lurks the massive current temptation of Neural Reductionism.

Neural Transmissions Linked with a Machine?

Thus, if, in current circumstances, there were developed a method of accessing neural transmissions directly with a machine, in a way which would produce considerable psychic change, that would not be considered psychotherapy, but if it was linked up systematically with conscious feedback processes, that estimate might change. This is already beginning to happen in the 'happiness' research that is going on, aided by computerisations in many cases, for example, in the 'mappiness' App., developed by George MacKerron under the auspices of the LSE 'happiness' project led by Lord Layard, to which my attention was recently drawn at the UKCP Research Faculty. Psychotherapy is becoming a Technology.

Understanding Modalities in Terms of Parasitism

This limitation both to what is parasitic, - as derivative from, and mimetic of, consciousness in some way, - and in some way also found to be effective of psychic change, enables us to understand the range of modalities. But because 'happiness', defined with suitably non-reductive subtlety to overlap with well-being, is seemingly so real and in the sunlight, we forget that this enquiry, too, is 'cata', and replicative! Hardly knowing it, we are creating a generation of mimetic replicators whose whole life is replication. This, of course, connects very closely with social media and the decline of individual privacy.

Philosophy and Literature have Appropriated the True Psychotherapy Dimension

Because psychotherapy has had this parasitic relationship with consciousness since its inception, it has had profound, subversive, and only seemingly indirect, relationships with philosophy: the post-modern philosophy of deconstruction, with the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, subverting and dissolving all sorts of neat categorial oppositions, - and arguably also existential-phenomenological philosophy, taking off from Husserl and Heidegger, which constantly searches for foundational subjective modes as windows into being, - are deeply modelled upon psychotherapy as a parasite, particularly drawing upon psychoanalysis. The same applies to masses of modern literature, particularly the most philosophical parts, for instance, Joyce, and Proust, Kafka and Beckett, Eliot, Mann, and Lawrence. Indeed both literature and philosophy have been much more gripped by psychotherapy, and its philosophical implications and problematic, than the psychotherapists themselves have, with one or two noble exceptions, such as Lacan, Bion, Matte Blanco, and James Grotstein. Why is this? Why is this movement, which sheds such huge light upon philosophy and literature, and is in the vanguard of a more

general anthropological-philosophical-historical search for foundations and the structural underside of human reality, from the Romantic period and Nineteenth Century, from Hegel and Sir James Fraser, onwards, so unaware of its *own place* in the *Zeitgeist*?

While we Psychotherapists are Locked Inside the Womb of Our Metaphors

It is important to remember that both ‘meta’ and ‘cata’ are metaphors, ways of thinking, not realities, always assuming there *are* realities. Nevertheless, such metaphors implicitly govern all our thinking.

While other disciplines drew particularly from psychotherapy to make sense of their own Hadean and subversive enterprises, psychotherapy fled from itself and, ever more fully, sought refuge in positivistic, commonsense, actualistic hankerings for an unequivocal reality, sought escape from the essential parasitism of its own identity, even conceiving itself as founded in real relationship. It actually *WAS* and is the parasite the other disciplines merely dreamed about. It hated, and avoided, its own unreality. Rather than attend to its own essence and mystery as a parasite, it joined the positivist Car Boot Sale, and turned to outcomes, efficacy, effectiveness, relationality, a veritable Grand Prix of successful interventions, and then, after it all, the recognition that the whole race was a Dodo Race where all have won and all must have prizes.

Inside the Womb of Psychotherapy

If you are operating within this fundamental metaphoric situation, where you are the ‘below’ of an ‘above’, or the parasite of an actual - and these are only two of the holographic metaphors at work here (‘process’/‘content’ is another major one, or ‘developmental’ versus ‘transformational’, and ‘concrete’/‘metaphoric’ itself), - then *you are exceptionally likely to assume that you are operating within a medium which is itself real, your only reality*. Indeed, for you, this becomes the measure of truth and reality, a kind of psychic Protogoreanism (‘man is the measure of all things’), a Kantian critique of rationality as a measuring of ordinary thought and experience. Psychotherapy is your womb, of which you can only talk to fellow initiates, fellow converts. That it is a replicative mimetic existence, based in ritual and frame, strangely without outward reality, is forgotten in the power and hypnotic compellingness of the mode of initiation.

Psychotherapists don’t Analyse these Categories

It never occurs to you to submit to analysis these categories themselves, at the other end of the rainbow, at the ‘meta’, rather than the ‘cata’ level; (of course, though, the ‘meta’, too, is another parasite, only apparently a more Olympian, less Hadean, one, which Nietzsche combined in his ‘Apollinian’ and ‘Dionysian’ dialectic). So, essentially, nearly all psychotherapists, immersed in their reality which is also their unreality, reluctant to press too hard the mystery they embody, by their ethos *have no fundamental interest in the level of the ‘meta’, of the conceptual analysis of what they do*. Their interest is profoundly caught up in the praxis, the doing, and the outcome, and in what serves those.

I Myself too Locked into an Adversarial Antithesis

And I myself, too, struggling over twenty five years with finding a paradigm for the distinction of the manualisable or programmatic versus the improvisatory emergent - the ‘Bentham’ versus the ‘Coleridge’ in psychotherapy - and wondering why it meant so little to all but a few

psychotherapists, got immersed and locked adversarially into *my* special paradigm, Enactment and Improvisation, versus Manual and Programme, and lost touch with the obvious reality. It was a reality which was far too close in front of my nose to be seen, that, within psychotherapy, *all of this is 'kata'*, whether for Psychoanalyst or for Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, indifferently, across the board, and therefore psychotherapy is immersed in it and *simply does not look up from its task*.

So, all this begins to give me a clue *why psychotherapists mostly simply don't do the meta-conceptual game, in the way the philosophers and literary thinkers do*. This does not mean psychotherapists should not and cannot change this. But we must recognise that, in a very deep sense indeed, it is against its grain.

The Attempt to Define Psychotherapy 'Beyond Modality'?

In the light of all this, what about 'going beyond Modality'?

I had proposed that psychotherapy is primarily concerned with (though not as such confined to) the exploration and enhancement of the emotional or passion process of **Personhood**. But we tend to look at Personhood from above, from 'meta', as Rogers and Buber classically do, for instance, as primary actuality, and this assimilates it to the general existential, commonsense, or empiricist concepts of personhood. It therefore does not *differentiate* psychotherapy in this way.

What, then, does 'Person' look like from the 'cata-' vantage point?

When we ask this question we realise how completely in fact, implicitly, psychotherapy categories have taken over the major disciplines. All the disciplines view themselves as essentially underside disciplines and it is a rare figure, like John Lukacs the philosophical historian, who, partially, stands against this trend. What we have to grasp is that the 'cata-' perspective makes clear that Psychotherapy is an intrinsically *invasive* process, like surgery, and that all the Regulatory endeavours, like that of the Austrian Ministry, are attempts to avoid and refuse, *vermeiden*, this reality.

Psychotherapy as 'Double Agent'

Psychotherapy, in the concept of a colleague, is a 'double agent', an inverter of personhood concepts, one which creatively and subversively places power issues and mimesis at the centre of a universal transferential process, which all the approaches share, whether or not by that name. Through the dimension and discovery of Psychotherapy, the Psychotherapist and the Client reveal to us that the human person inhabits two worlds, one a world or a theatre of unrealities, alienations, transferential power plays, transformations, and critique of the actual, and the other the ordinary world, where mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers, and we eat when we are hungry, and sleep when we are tired, as Zen puts it.

But psychotherapy has sought as fast as possible to disown its second world and yet, as fast as it did so, Surrealism, Existentialism, Theatre of the Absurd, Conceptual Art, and Post-Modernism, all came and gratefully took the gift that was offered.

Shouldn't we face up to who we are and take it back?

Final Thoughts: Attempt at a Definition Despite of This

Could we, nevertheless, combine both worlds, in an inclusive generic definition or understanding that will yet enable us to speak about what we do in public? It needs to be crisp yet inclusive. The following is therefore an attempt, which I offer as a stimulus to thought and discussion.

Psychotherapy: Generic Definition

Psychotherapies are methods of working with Persons, primarily (but not solely) through their emotions, to assist them with psychological healing and personal development. These methods draw from various modes of human personality, beneath the level of commonsense, upon a basis of experiment within a professional frame, using simulation and reflexivity as common elements.

APPENDIX: LINKS

‘Cata’

<http://lyricstranslate.com/en/under-%CE%BA%CE%AC%CF%84%CF%89.html>

‘Catabasis’

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katabasis>

‘Parasites’ - Derrida/Searle

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/burt/inc.pdf>

‘Mimesis’

<http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/i50.html>

Kant ‘Critique of Pure Reason’: ‘Introduction, On the Difference between Pure and Empirical Knowledge’

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4280/4280-h/4280-h.htm>

Discussion of the Normative Character of REBT

<http://hewardwilkinson.co.uk/docs/AutonomyofPsychotherapy.pdf>

The ‘Mappiness’ App.

<http://www.mappiness.org.uk/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/feb/13/bright-idea-mappiness-happiness-app>

John Stuart Mill on Bentham

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Bentham-John-Stuart-Mill-ebook/dp/B00M8U47OA/ref=sr_1_2?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1414188217&sr=1-2&keywords=Mill+Bentham

And Coleridge

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Essay-Samuel-Taylor-Coleridge-Illustrated-ebook/dp/B00IJ1U1LU/ref=sr_1_3?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1414188271&sr=1-3&keywords=Mill+Coleridge