The need not to need 'the unconscious':

Prerequisite for person-centred/psychodynamic integration, and beyond

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For those, like myself, with faith in the largely unconscious workings of an integrative creative principle pervading the universe—Carl Rogers' notion of 'a formative tendency in the universe as a whole' (Rogers, 1980, p. 114)—the present multiplicity of theoretical approaches within the field of psychotherapy represents a disintegrative phase prior to eventual integration—prior, that is, to emergence of a unitary theory or paradigm (see Ellingham, 1995). Such faith in future integration cold shoulders the cosy comfort currently afforded by the porridge of ideas known as postmodernism, the proponents of which proclaim the illogical gospel that we must not privilege one theory above another except the theory that we must not privilege one theory above another—a gospel that sanctifies the status quo and allows every counsellor/psychotherapist to feel 'OK' about espousing the particular theory that guides their practice, even though that practice might be anathema to practitioners who espouse an alternative theory. 'Nihilistic relativism' is the technical term for such an 'I'm OK-You're OK' state of affairs.

While no adequate theory of psychotherapy currently exists, the truth is that certain theories are more adequate than others, adequate in the sense that they accord with the fundamental shift occurring in our most advanced understanding of the nature of reality: the shift from a worldview dominated by the thought of Descartes and Newton (with its dichotomy between mind/consciousness and unchanging/unconscious material 'things'), to a worldview variously labelled *holistic, organismic, process*, in which what exists is construed as an expression of process, of

patterned activity creatively actualizing within a field of such activity (see Capra, 1982). It is a shift from comparing reality to a machine to comparing it to a living organism.

Person-centred (formerly 'client-centred') therapy, founded by Rogers and the therapeutic approach to which I own allegiance, represents an approach whose underlying theory is at heart an expression of the emerging organismic paradigm; and, it is on the basis of person-centred theory's organismic pedigree that I believe integration with other theoretical approaches to psychotherapy can be achieved—not only with Gestalt therapy, person-centred therapy's nearest neighbour in theory terms, but more significantly with the psychodynamic approach, the approach founded by Freud and the dominant one within the field. It is this last issue, the matter of person-centred/psychodynamic integration on the basis of an organismic worldview, that I here briefly discuss.

Points of concordance

In contemplating the organismic integration of the person-centred and psychodynamic approaches, I have no qualms, from a person-centred point of view, in acknowledging (a) that compared to psychodynamic theory, person-centred theory is pretty threadbare apropos child development and so-called 'psychopathology', and (b) that not much may divide person-centred and psychodynamic therapists as practitioners.

Regarding the further development of person-centred theory in relation to child development and 'psychopathology', I have myself suggested (Ellingham, 2001, 2002) that a multi-level theory of child development, together with a related theory of 'psychopathology'—conceived as a lack of congruence between such levels—

represents an authentic extension of current person-centred theory, an extension grounded upon Rogers' notion of the 'formative'/'formative actualizing tendency' as the hypothesis that 'forms a base for the person-centered approach' (Rogers, 1963, p. 21; 1980, p. 133). As an articulation of organismic thought, such an extension can harmoniously incorporate contributions from psychodynamic theorists whose theorizing similarly rests upon an organismic worldview, viz. John Bowlby, Robert Kegan and W. R. Fairbairn.

As to closeness of practice between person-centred and psychodynamic therapists, the findings of Rogers' student Fred Fiedler (1950) over a half-century ago demonstrated that experienced therapists from the two orientations were more similar in their practice than were experienced therapists and novices within each school. While also worth mentioning is the asseveration by leading psychodynamic author Michael Jacobs that 'in psychodynamic counselling, as much as in any other form of counselling, it is essential that the counsellor is genuine, accepting and empathic' (1999, p. 117)—noteworthy endorsement of the three crucial therapist related conditions in the six conditions that Rogers (1957) hypothesizes to be 'the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change'.

And then again, there is Rogers' personal avowal of a specific similarity between 'the work of the client-centered therapist' and a 'skillful Freudian interpreter', i.e. the psychoanalyst, the psychodynamic practitioner *par excellence* (Rogers, 1966, pp. 21 & 22). To buttress this claim, Rogers cites psychoanalytic authority Otto Fenichel. 'Since interpretation', declares Fenichel, 'means something unconscious become conscious by naming it at the moment it is striving to break through, effective interpretations can be given only at one specific point, namely, where the patient's immediate interest is momentarily centered' (in Rogers, 1966, p.

22). Psychoanalytic author Phil Mollon has recently reaffirmed the same point. 'A psychoanalytic interpretation that went beyond the patient's potential awareness', informs Mollon, 'would be quite useless' (2000, p. 6).

As Rogers himself interprets, therefore, both the psychoanalyst and the client-centred therapist work in a similar fashion, insofar as they work 'at the edge' of the client's 'focused awareness' (Rogers, 1966, p. 22). In this respect, says Rogers, the therapist 'seeks for the meaning implicit in the present inner experiencing toward which the client's words or concepts point'. To clarify what this means in terms of an actual therapeutic response, Rogers draws upon the following statement of his then colleague Eugene Gendlin. According to Gendlin (1961),

> The client-centered response at its best formulates something which is not yet fully formulated or conceptualized….It formulates the meaning which the client has not yet symbolized explicitly but which he does now feel and which is implied in what he says. Sometimes it formulates the felt whole which the client has been trying to get at by various verbalizations. (Gendlin, 1961, p. 242)

A point for resolution

Despite such seeming harmony between the person-centred and psychodynamic approaches in conceiving psychotherapeutic change (as what was previously unconscious or implicit being consciously named and explicitly symbolized), one significant barrier to the two approaches moving towards a common organismic conception of this change process is ongoing attachment (principally by

psychodynamic practitioners, but also by some of their person-centred counterparts) to Freud's Cartesian-Newtonian notion of the dynamic unconscious.

Due to his immersion in the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview Freud tended to think of ideas and other mental phenomena as unchanging 'things' dynamically active within particular 'chambers' of the mind (see MacIntyre, 1958)—similar, that is, to electrically charged particles whose quantity of charge represents the force propelling them in a certain direction and accounts for the size of the counterforce needed to bar their entry into forbidden territory. Thus, an energy packed idea lodged in 'the unconscious' and propelled to enter consciousness is deemed inadmissible and so forced back and barricaded in 'the unconscious'. Magnitudinous ideas so 'repressed' are the 'universal ideas' formed in childhood of copulating with mother and murdering father. On such a *quantitative* scheme, though, fundamental problems surround the issue of who or what acts as censor in exercising the *qualitative* judgment that a certain idea is inadmissible to consciousness? For it can't be consciousness itself as then the idea would already be present in the conscious domain; neither can it be 'the unconscious' since its forces motivate ideas towards consciousness. (Note that Freud's later attempt to resolve this problem with his tripartite 'id-ego-superego' model likewise founders on the same conceptual difficulty (see Mitchell, 1988, pp. 260-2)).

Charles Rycroft, a psychoanalyst himself, is prominent among commentators who have pointed up how Freud's determination to make sense of unconscious psychological activity in causal, mechanistic, Newtonian terms leads to such insoluble conceptual problems. Rycroft focuses especially on Freud's assignation of different types of mental activity (the primary and secondary processes) to 'the unconscious' and consciousness, respectively. As Rycroft recounts, therefore, 'Freud's concept of

the unconscious or id [the equivalent of 'the unconscious' in Freud's later writings] is part and parcel of a mechanistic model of the mind which places various kinds of mental activity in various positions inside a fictive apparatus' (1979, pp. 18-19). On such a scenario, elaborates Rycroft, primary process mental activity is governed 'by a set of rules by which images, not words, are fused with one another (condensation), replace one another (displacement), symbolize one another (symbolization) in a context that disregards the categories of space and time' (p. 18). Mental activity intrinsic to consciousness on the other hand, secondary process, is characterized by 'the arrangement of words sequentially with respect to syntax, logic and the categories of space and time'. Secondary process thinking therefore finds its home in the waking consciousness of the rational adult; whereas primary process thought is exhibited in the mentality of the infant, in dreams and in cultural myths, as well as in the 'symptoms' of neurosis and psychosis.

Taking dreams as a stereotypical expression of primary process thought, Freud considered 'the interpretation of dreams…[to be] the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind' (Freud, 1900, p. 608). For, with ideas viewed as already formed 'things', dreams and primary process mental activity in general, said Freud, serve to disguise the true nature of the underlying obnoxious idea, only ever allowing an encrypted, distorted version to enter consciousness. Endowed, though, with expert knowledge of the workings of the unconscious primary process as displayed in dreams, the psychoanalyst is able to interpret the true nature of an unconscious idea, to remove its disguise and make it consciously known to the analysand.

Aside from conceptual problems already mentioned, what Freud's scheme presupposes is that the verbally articulated idea that the psychoanalyst makes known

to the neurotic adult analysand is that formed in early childhood. It is a scheme that jars with the contemporary perspective on the nature of human cognitive development as inspired in particular by Jean Piaget, a perspective wherein my idea of my mother or father varies according to the stage I have reached in developing my intellectual and symbolizing abilities. Accordingly, the preverbal manner in which the infant 'processes information' and constructs 'ideas' is deemed to be episodic, global and undifferentiated (thought, affect and bodily activity as one; sensations from different senses fused together); whereas the ideas of the mature adult are considered qualitatively different, a product of more complex processes of symbolization, most notably of discursive language.

When ideas are viewed from a developmental perspective in this way and not considered unchanging 'things', we cannot read backwards and say that the analysand's idea of having sex with the analyst is exactly that which they held as a child in relation to their mother. For Rycroft, it therefore becomes more fruitful to make 'use of Susanne Langer's terms non-discursive and discursive symbolism to make distinctions between different types of thinking which orthodox Freudian analysts make by referring to the primary and secondary processes' (1979, pp. 13-14).

Langer bases her conception of non-discursive ideation upon Ernst Cassirer's elucidation of the principles governing 'mythic thought' (Cassirer, 1955), she herself reinforcing Rycroft's view that Freud's primary process thought is better conceived as non-discursive mentality. For, in her words,

> the 'dream work' of Freud's 'unconscious' mental mechanism is almost exactly the 'mythic mode' which Cassirer describes as the primitive form of ideation….The *morphology* of the 'mythic mode'….this non-discursive mode of thought….is essentially that of dream, phantasy, infantile thinking, and

'unconscious' ideation which he [Freud] himself discovered and described. (1949, pp. 395 & 398)

It is a 'primitive form of ideation', relates Langer, whose 'products are images charged with meanings, but the meanings remain implicit'; images in which 'many meanings may be concentrated, many ideas telescoped and interfused and incompatible emotions simultaneously expressed' (pp. 395-6). Intrinsic to such ideation, she enlarges, are 'the primary forms of conception which underlie the achievement of discursive reason' (p. 398).

So conceived, non-discursive ideation (Freud's primary process) constitutes a stage of sense-making prior to that of the discursive, secondary process. It is a stage in which diffuse sensorimotor, bodily sense-making of a situation becomes enshrined in a visual or auditory image. Resolution of my present psychological difficulties deriving from childhood thus stereotypically involves evoking the bodily and non-discursive modes of sense-making of past situations—facilitating their rise to awareness—and thereafter differentially transforming such experiencing into discursive, language-formed awareness. It is a matter, as Gendlin puts it, of 'carrying forward' and further symbolizing any unfinished business in the developmental process of self-actualization, of further processing relatively raw data and differentiating out discursive meaning.

Whether non-discursively or discursively symbolized, consciously apprehended or not, person-centred theory construes such creation of ever more complex and differentiated processes of self-formation as the working of the formative actualizing tendency. With conscious and unconscious processes so constituting explicit and implicit vicissitudes of such a tendency, the watchword for person-centred/psychodynamic integration and for the development of an organismic

psychotherapeutic paradigm thus becomes: 'Where the unconscious was, there the formative actualizing tendency shall be!'

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