

ERLING ENG

## PSYCHOTHERAPY AS PHILOSOPHY?

«All men – Aristotle tells us – by nature desire to know» (Ar. 980 a21). This diaphora (Ar. 1018a) of the knower and his nature (*phusei*) marks the beginning. In the philosopher's desire of knowledge he has already been endowed – by nature – to know. Knowledge of the latter assumes the form of what may be termed “acknowledge.” This is developed within a partnership, a process of diaphoric exchanges.

The latency characteristic of nature means that it is always to be still further realized through the forms of knowledge. Insofar as philosophy is pursued in the light of nature it aspires to be radical. When it is pursued with a diminishing sense of nature it becomes trivial. I take the question “Philosophy as psychotherapy?” to suggest that insofar as psychotherapy serves to disclose an individual nature (acknowledge), it is also philosophical, however ignored today. So a counter-question “Psychotherapy as philosophy?” is also implied.

The relationship between nature and philosophy in the development of a radical psychotherapy may be seen in the development of Freud's “psychoanalysis”.

In Freud's New Year's Day letter of 1896 to his friend Fliess he defined his aim:

*«I see how, via the detour of medical practice, you are reaching your first ideal of understanding human beings as a physiologist, just as I most secretly nourish the hope of arriving, via these same paths, at my initial goal of philosophy. For that is what I originally wanted, when it was not yet clear to me what I was in the world for»* (Freud, 1985, p. 159).

Several months later he reiterated this commitment:

*«If both of us are still granted a few more years quiet work, we shall certainly leave behind something which can justify our existence. Knowing this, I feel strong in the face of all daily cares and worries. As a young man I knew no other longing than for philosophical knowledge, and I am now about to realize it in moving from medicine to psychology. I became a therapist against my will; I am convinced that, given certain conditions in regard to the person and the case, I can definitely cure hysteria and obsessional neurosis»* (Freud, 1985, p. 180).

His new “psychology”, later “psychoanalysis”, is developed through his exchanges with patients, in the time and place of his movement away from philosophy toward medicine, and again away from medicine and toward philosophy. As a name for the collective doctrines that emerge from this position facing in both directions he proposes “metapsychology.” “Meta” here has the sense of between in the original Greek.

Freud's philosophic attitude of amazement pervades his encounters with patients. In a sense, he is practising philosophy in a novel way in his work with patients. He opens up to the suffering of his patients, and with his experience of his own responses to their situation, is able to better understand and acknowledge his own distress:

«I can only analyze myself with the objectively secured knowledge (like a stranger); actual self-knowledge is impossible, otherwise there would be no illness. Since I still have some kind of riddle in my cases, this must also hold me up in the self-analysis» (Freud, 1985, p. 281).

The patient's distress is inseparable from a failure to realize the nature of her desire. Yet her ignorance becomes a resource for Freud in his quest for knowledge, one which entails an increase of self knowledge on his part. The patient's wish to be freed of her distress through psychotherapy cooperated with the doctor's wish for increased philosophic understanding. The patient's wish to get well interfered with her recognition of her self-ignorance, while the doctor's desire for knowledge also turned out to have a surprising potential for making him feel ill!

If all men by nature desire knowledge, the fulfillment of such desire turns back upon the desire and is realized as increase of self knowledge. Increments of this are inseparable from growth of a sense of personal identity. This is an acknowledge (like the German *Bekanntnis*). Achievement of personality is the human way of realizing nature. Psychotherapy stands in need of philosophy to be reminded of this, otherwise it suffers loss of orientation.

In this collection of papers the individuality of the psychotherapist is not viewed as compromising the scientific character of his practice, but as indispensable in the disclosure of the other's individuality. Philosophy is vital for making clear this *ethos* for psychotherapy.

## I. TRUTH, EXPERIENCE, AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

It is significant that editor Rolf Kühn's writings should have focussed on those of Simone Weil and Michel Henry, both of whom represent the intimate tie between philosophy and singular human experience. The same holds true for editor Hilarion Petzholdt, whose degree in philosophy was with Gabriel Marcel, and whose Düsseldorf Institute is named after Fritz Perls, the father of Gestalt Therapy.

The ampersand between psychotherapy and philosophy in the ride of this volume may, interestingly enough, be read as an image of the movement of nature understood in terms of reason. The movement of “&” ascends to a peak and then descends toward its point of origin only to end just above and apart from it. Such a figure is like that of the “*hen diapheromenon heauto*” of the *Symposium* of Plato and from the Heraclitean “way up and way down” as “one and the same.” Indeed, Hilarion Petzoldt expounds an elaboration of this figure for describing movement in psychotherapy. Because «understanding is not merely reproductive but also productive activity» and because «surplus meanings are repeatedly realized, the *circle* is able to open up and assume the form of a spiral which I term “heraclitic” (...) goal of such a flowing heraclitean spiral movement of knowledge in the therapeutic hermeneusis is the exegesis of the vital process of phenomenal reality (...) which is extremely useful in the psychotherapeutic process of understanding» (Kühn and Petzoldt, 1992, p. 511).

While the book's title emphasizes the value of philosophy as psychotherapy, the possibility of psychotherapy as a weak form of philosophy is also implied. The psychotherapist may well serve as the subject in Wittgenstein's observation that «Only when one thinks even crazier than the philosophers can one solve their problems» (Wittgenstein, 1984, p. 577).

Years ago a veteran who had become psychotic as an aftermath of prolonged participation in combat was referred to me for treatment. He had been diagnosed as “paranoid schizophrenic with religious delusions”. For the longest time this man kept insisting that I read certain parts of the *Bible* – which he seemed to know by heart – and I kept resisting. Although he was illiterate, he had learned much of the *Bible* from having heard it read; his interest centered on the visionary verses of *Daniel* and *Revelations*. When I finally relented and read the verses to which he had been directing me, with images like «the blood came up to the horses' bridles», I slowly began to realize the kind of world in which he had been existing. It was some time after that when out of the blue one day he

delivered this pronouncement: «First comes safety, then comes truth». I knew at once what he meant.

His words invite philosophic reflection. What kind of safety can there be without truth? Of course the safety here might be only to immediate or reflexive safety, for the time being, while unnecessary and or inadequate over a longer time span. But when it continues to be cultivated in remembrance of the earlier relief it afforded, then it can become an encumbrance. Safety without regard for truth becomes a handicap, even a source of danger, insofar as safety is experienced as exclusive of truth. Now truth in turn is capable of becoming experienced as dangerous. Not only that, but what is dangerous can become invested with the significance of truth. This can be seen in those combat veterans who have a special penchant for dangerous situations in which they feel closer to reality. I see their attraction to danger as an outcome of combat encounters in which safety was so exorbitantly wished for and denied that danger has come to stand for a reality absent from both past combat and present life. This same paradoxical counterphobia may also be seen in combat, where the desire for an impossible safety can reverse into a heedlessness which may be rewarded as heroism. The arena of psychotherapy provides the veteran with the possibility of learning something of the missing truth as well as of the danger in the veteran's reflex kind of safety. The task is «out of this nettle danger, to pluck the flower safety».

Needless to say, such a safety is consonant with the discovery of truth. What this entails is a capacity for *selbstdenken*, for which there is no English equivalent, unless it be “thinking for one's self”

It is worth considering the tie between Aristotle's opening statement of the *Metaphysics* and the pronouncement of my patient. Aristotle's “nature”, like the latter's “safety”, comes first; “knowledge”, like “truth” arrives later. But safety for my patient is presumed to be known, while for the philosopher nature remains indefinite. And while the patient suffers from a constricted sense of nature, nature for the philosopher remains a resource. It is this latter knowledge which the philosopher can convey to the psychotherapist.

While it is not considered in this volume, the “severing logos” (*logos tomeus*) of Philo, is implicit in an unusual paper on what has been called – since the latter half of the nineteenth century only! – “traumatic neurosis”. “Experience of trauma as wonder – a psychotherapeutic perspective after Franz Rosenzweig” is by Gerda Elata-Alster and Benjamin Maos (117-137). Here the wound (*thauma*) is understood as a violent access to nature as primordial, chaotic. Ineffable nature, *natura naturans*, can only be known through the ruination of manifested nature, *natura naturata*. Thus wound (*trauma*) becomes productive of wonder (*thauma*). Here wonder is of the world as primordial creation “out of which” as the poet Grabbe, cited by Freud, put it «we shall not fall. We are in it for good» (Freud, 1961, p. 65, n. 2). This original contribution, indebted to the thought of Franz Rosenzweig, attests to the tie between philosophy and psychotherapy.

## II. INTERFERENCES OF PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Hans Saner's inaugural paper “The limits of the unbearable – on the phenomenology of chronic pains” elaborates the critical distinction of an individual logos around which the activity of the therapist centers.

Peter Hofstatter's “The primacy of action in the philosophy of Seneca” shows how many of the moves in contemporary behavior modification were anticipated in the therapeutic philosophy of this Roman Stoic.

Rolf Kühn points up the value for psychotherapists of the “dereflexive” theme in the philosophic tradition. The various ways in which philosophers have sought immediacy in experiencing through dereflexion are a resource for the psychotherapist.

Heinz Schott reflects on “Self-analysis as a practical method in Freud”. Remarking on its neglect in psychoanalytic literature, he seems not to recognize the way in which Freud’s “self-analysis” was merely a portion of the way to his “psychoanalysis”, and that the former remains suspended in the latter. This however is acknowledged in his use of Goethe’s words in closing: «The human being only becomes familiar to himself to the extent he becomes familiar with the world, of which he only becomes aware in himself and of himself only within it» (Kühn and Petzoldt, 1992, p. 101).

Walter Seitter’s “Analysis according to Jacques Lacan” is a brief introduction to Lacan, with a survey of his German reception. Opening with Lacan’s view of analysis as a «proposal of the shock effects of reason as a corrective of civilization» he closes with Lacan’s «What finally is analysis? *An ethic, not a psychology*» (italics in original).

“The commonsense teaching of Alfred Adler” is historically surveyed by Ronald Wiegand in “On meaning and common meaning.”

Issues of the norm in everyday life, development, culture, and psychopathology are taken up by Michael Titze in “On the intersubjective determination of normality”.

Kurt Röttgers explores the intertwining of story and history in the life-world in “The story character of life”.

Thomas Luckman and Angela Keppler trace the transmission of commonplace truths in everyday life through a microanalysis of several recorded conversations.

Heidegger’s impact on psychotherapy, in particular *Daseinsanalysis*, is described by Helmut Vetter. Critical of Heidegger’s invocation of community and “folk” in the anticipation of death, he considers Heidegger’s political allegiance in 1933 a «fatal consequence» of his «historicization of the concept of truth».

“Love and knowledge” by Gerhard Arlt and Tadeusz Zenka is a reflective review of the *opus* of Ludwig Binswanger, testimony of the value of philosophy for the psychotherapist.

Reiner Wimmer is a “*Selbstdenker*” who praises Wittgenstein’s conception of «the therapeutic function of philosophy» far dispelling «objectivistic misunderstandings of the religious mode of life». His autobiographical account makes his account of Wittgenstein’s views very live and real.

The founder of “philosophical praxis”, Gerd Achenbach, expounds «the “basic rule” of philosophical praxis». This begins with the questions and problems submitted to it. In terms of chess, the first move is that of the client, the philosopher plays black.

Also a “philosophic practitioner”, Ralph Driever surveys the plethora of contemporary psychotherapies with a jaundiced eye. Citing Hegel’s «But philosophy must keep from wanting to be edifying» his remarks are outstanding far their relevance to the present day situation in psychotherapy.

Wolfgang Blankenburg’s “Psychiatry and philosophy” ignores psychotherapy for

an elaborate conceptual analysis of the interrelations of “describing-explaining-understanding” based on the writings of Dilthey and Jaspers.

Ottfried Höffe, in “The personal conditions of a meaningful life, an ethical-philosophic inquiry”, reflects on the need for “the great composure” (*gelassenheit*) in achieving meaning in an age in which its possibility is in a crisis.

“Meaning and counter-meaning” by Gernot Bohme argues that in the wake of «the Freudian deconstruction of dream stories» philosophy must practice a «psychoanalytic deconstruction of history».

“Proflexion – a path for psychotherapy” by Franz Fischer and Anne Fischer-Buck reviews the issue of conscience by way of a comparison with Freud’s superego for a «dialogical philosophy which includes a societal ethic».

Hilarion Petzoldt’s contribution is the most ambitious and widely-ranging of all those here surveyed. “Hermeneutic”, “heuristic”, and “integrative” are the recurrent terms in his elaboration of a «polyperspectivity of the hermeneutic of nonverbal expression». The Gestalt Therapy of Frederick Perls to which Petzoldt is indebted has here «suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange».

Hermann Schmidt, well known for the industry with which he has promoted an «empirically sobered phenomenology» presents his “Theses on the phenomenological-philosophical grounding of psychotherapy”.

“Indications: on the grounding of therapeutic intervention” by Joachim Widder draws on the resources of ontology, epistemology, and ethics in order to establish criteria for the prescription of appropriate therapy.

### III. TRUTH AND NATURE AS EXPERIENCE

The issue of death is one that psychotherapy is powerless to deal with. Here it must turn to philosophy where it has often been seen to stand at the beginning.

The attempt to understand ourselves from nature is bound to involve us in an endless regress which can only be figured as death. Hence the need for Freud of a *Todestrieb* (death instinct). Conversely, death means nature (paradoxically birth!), as in Shakespeare’s «We owe nature a death», also cited by Freud. Isn’t the presentday preoccupation with planetary death a way of continuing to experience the meaning of nature? For ephemerality is also a quality of nature. Isn’t our melancholy that of an awareness of the moment of self-destruction intrinsic to nature, in which life is self-constituted through vanquishing the resistance of its antecedent forms?

Our preoccupation with melancholy may also be understood from its presence in the background of our experiencing of the new. The most irrevocable melancholy derives not from our losses alone, but from our part in having found them acceptable, i.e. in having abandoned them! This accounts for the tie, from Aristotle on, of genius and melancholy. Mourning is morning – and the converse. This consequence is entailed in Aristotle’s «All men by nature desire knowledge», i.e. to leave nature in realizing nature!

Nature in its unrelenting repetition, like that of sexual reproduction, constantly reminds us of the knowledge which nature in our – or its! – insufficiency, leads us to seek from it. It is the melancholy which attends this perennial discovery which evokes psychotherapy as supplement of and for philosophy. It is the light in the shadow of the light. This allomorph of philosophy affords the moment of lightening which follows the darkness of realized loss: «Philosophy is for learning to transform the lightening of death into the most gentle and most powerful light» (Friedlaender, 1926, p. 293). Psychotherapy is the name we give to such philosophy.

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