

The Individual and the Group: The Twin Tyrannies of Internalism and Individualism

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Abstract

Individualism and internalism tend to be the norm within almost all schools of psychotherapy, be they humanistic, cognitive, or analytic. While one might expect this of the individual psychotherapies, surprisingly, it is also the norm within many forms of group psychotherapy. To these ways of thinking, the sources of all social phenomena—racism, greed, hate, violence, love, empathy, whatever—are to be found in the internal worlds of individuals. This is born of the belief that social dynamics are driven by, and are expressions of, internal psychological dynamics. Psychotherapy, then, becomes primarily a project of reading clinical phenomena (the manifest) back into the psyche (the latent). To the author, this sort of belief system is both asocial as well as apolitical, which legitimates forms of practice that are also asocial and apolitical. He presents an alternative paradigm that takes power relations and an ethical sensibility to be central to the human condition. He does this by drawing on particular strands within philosophy, psychology, and sociology. This way of thinking leads to a reversal of individualism and the claim that the social is prior to the individual. This, in turn, has crucial consequences for how psychotherapy itself is practiced.

Keywords

individualism, internalism, racism, transactional analysis, psychoanalysis, group analysis

Autobiography

I begin with some autobiography to bring alive the reasons why my conception of the human condition ends up being at odds with much of mainstream psychotherapy, be it analytic, humanistic, or cognitivist. Although I will be saying a good deal about racism in what follows, that is not my central theme. Considerations of racism are the means by which I will arrive at my ends, these being the subjects of internalism and individualism.

My first psychotherapy training was in the humanistic traditions and consisted of a heady mix of gestalt, Rogerian, transactional analysis, bioenergetics, psychodrama, rebirthing, encounter, and the like, all mixed in with the teachings of Carl Jung, Donald Winnicott, and Frank Lake. The understanding of the human condition that I imbibed was that of a growth model, that is, we are each born innocent and unique, a seed, a pristine self. As this seed grows, it takes on values from the outside

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world that are mostly alien to the values of the true self. These internalizations and self-concepts erode its uniqueness. In this way, we lose touch with our true selves and develop a false, inauthentic self in order to fit in and be acceptable, which might mean being overly compliant, critical, fearful, and so on.

The purpose of therapy was to identify the extraneous injunctions, purge the psyche of them, and in so doing liberate the true self to live its authentic life. The growth model takes it to be the case that it is clients who know themselves best, and if a nurturing, noninterfering environment is provided, then their innate knowledge will find a way to naturally flower and express itself.

The whole training process was enormously helpful for me personally in deeply significant ways. However, on completion of the training, I started to become disenchanted with its philosophy, which I came to think of as too me-centered, its vision neatly encapsulated in Fritz Perls's (1969/1974) "Gestalt Prayer":

I do my thing, and you do your thing.
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
You are you and I am I,
and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.
If not, it can't be helped. (p. 4)

The prayer evokes a picture of differentiated individuals with encapsulated psyches who have the option of whether or not to relate to others.

The intention of humanistic philosophy was to empower. It said that you could do and be anything you wanted, if you really truly wanted it and were sincere in your efforts to manifest your desires. The philosophy is undoubtedly empowering because it encourages you not to think of yourself as a victim. On the other hand, if you do not manage to get what you want, then that also is your fault. This was extended to all levels of existence, including physical illness. I came to think that this philosophy was not only far too me-centered but also grandiose and omnipotent in its aspirations.

During this time (in the 1980s), I was a school teacher in London and becoming slowly politicized. My blundering attempts to articulate my half-formed thoughts were met with bafflement in the humanistic milieu in which I was immersed. It had no language for the political. Instead, there was the prevailing belief that individuals had the power to create the reality of their desires and were in charge of their destinies.

To this way of thinking, experiences of racism were somehow being generated by the individuals who were themselves the recipients of racism. And although the experience of being a recipient of racism was unpleasant, it was suggested that it nevertheless served some unconscious purpose for the recipient—secondary gain, as it has been called.

Unconvinced by this way of approaching racism, I looked first to Jung to help me give voice to my growing preoccupations because he had been venerated on my humanistic training. But it quickly became clear that Jung was a part of the problem rather than the solution to it (Dalal, 1988). He naturalized racism rather than problematizing it. For example, he wrote this:

The European, however highly developed, cannot live with impunity among the Negroes of Africa; their psychology goes into him unnoticed and unconsciously he becomes a Negro. There is no fighting against it. In Africa there is a well-known technical expression for this: "going black." *It is no mere snobbery that the English should consider anyone born in the colonies, even though the best blood may run in his veins, "slightly inferior."* There are facts to support this view. (Jung, 1928/1970, p. 121; italics added)

Group Analysis

I started a second training at the Institute of Group Analysis in London, assuming that it would address some of my issues with the individualistic humanistic psychotherapies. This it did do to some degree. But there, too, I was disappointed by its apolitical philosophy. And although I could not have articulated it clearly at that time, the ethos of this institution was also individualistic.

For example, I recall a fellow trainee saying that the sign of a successful group therapy was when patients were able to be themselves and not be overly influenced by the wishes and desires of others. I knew what the person meant, but even then it seemed to me that there was something wrong with this way of putting things, particularly in a training that promoted the group.

Next I started a formal study of racism. My first hope was psychoanalysis, but I was disappointed to find a mindset very similar to that of the humanistic traditions. I should not have been surprised, of course, because the fathers of the humanistic schools of psychotherapy (and they were all fathers rather than mothers) were in their first incarnation psychoanalysts and in their second incarnation disappointed psychoanalysts. Even as they distanced themselves from the conventions of classical psychoanalysis, they took with them much of its metapsychology. Disappointingly, this was also true to some degree of the progenitor of group analysis, S. H. Foulkes (1948/1983, 1964, 1990). To make use of Foulkesian theory for my purposes, I ended up distinguishing between a radical Foulkes, who drew heavily on the sociology of Norbert Elias (1970/1978, 1976/1994b, 1989/1991, 1994a), and an orthodox Foulkes, who drew his inspiration from Freud.

It is through this trajectory that I became preoccupied with the themes of this paper, that is, psychology's myopic focus not just on the individual, but on the individual's internal world. All this will become a bit clearer as I go on, as will the reason that I think of them as tyrannies.

Three Answers to One Question

How does psychology understand the source of social difficulties such as racism? There are three strands to this understanding, each with its own philosophy: the instinctivists, the developmentalists, and the cognitivists.

The instinctivists are Hobbesian and of the view that humans are born with aggressive and hateful instincts. These natural destructive impulses are said to become ameliorated, to some degree, over time through the developmental processes. Here we find Klein and the later Freud. This is a conflict model in more ways than one. Not only is there conflict within the psyche between the instincts of life and death but also the conflict between the individual's wish to be unfettered and the constraints imposed on the individual by society.

The developmentalists, meanwhile, are more with Rousseau and think that we are born good but then damaged and made bad through upbringing and unfortunate life events. Here we find the growth model I alluded to earlier, in which the inherent goodness of the seed is contaminated by toxic processes intruding from the environment.

The cognitivists conceive of the difficulties of human life in rationalist terms. They think that these difficulties are due to habituated errors of thinking that, when understood, free the person to think and feel differently.

I think that the transactional analysis conceptualization of the human condition straddles the second and third strands, that is, the developmentalists and the rationalists.

In what follows I will speak mainly to the psychoanalytic version of things rather than the humanistic or cognitive, in part because of time, in part because this is the stream that I have studied most deeply (Dalal, 2002), but also because, in part, recognizable versions of the same issues are echoed in the other schools of therapy.

So, I begin with the classical psychoanalysts and my dispute with their version of things.

The Psychoanalysts

Here are some of the things that the progenitors of psychoanalysis have said:

- “The understanding of [the individual’s] personality is the foundation for the understanding of social life” (Klein, 1959/1988, p. 247).
- “All sociological problems are ultimately reducible to problems of individual psychology” (Fairbairn, 1952/1994, p. 241).
- “The clue to social and group psychology is the psychology of the individual” (Winnicott, 1958/1982, p. 15).

According to this view, although racism might manifest as a sociological problem in the external world, its source is to be found in some difficulty in the internal world of individuals, an internal difficulty that has been externalized.

Broadly, there are three sorts of explanations provided by the psychoanalysts, versions of which are found in the humanistic therapies: the mechanism of projection, early developmental malfunctions, and recapitulation.

Projection

The idea of projection is at the root of almost all psychoanalytic explanations of interpersonal and societal problems. Difficulties arising in the internal world of an individual that cannot be managed, for whatever reason (say aggressive impulses), are split off from consciousness, repressed, and projected into some object in the external world. The individual now comes to experience this object as expressing this difficulty (in this instance, aggression).

This theory does work, although in a limited way, at the level of a particular individual. This theory would explain why it is that this or that individual has hateful feelings toward blacks or some other group of people. What it does not explain is how and why it is that a whole group of people should simultaneously come to hold hateful feelings toward certain other groups. Nor is it clear why in one context black people come to be these receptacles, in another context Protestants, and in another context psychoanalysts.

One sort of answer put forward in the psychoanalytic literature to these sorts of challenges is that these groupings have previously been socially sanctioned as deserving of these projections and so are already denigrated. While this is true, that answer actually avoids the central issue, which is how and why do these groupings come to be socially sanctioned in the first place?

In sum, what projection theory says is that the psychological mechanisms of individuals exploit preexisting social conditions to manage internal psychological difficulties. It does not engage with the problem of how and why those social conditions, specifically racism, come to be generated in the first place. As Littlewood and Lipsedge (1989) said a long time ago, “Projection is a mechanism not an explanation” (p. 29).

If projection is the mechanism, then what are the sources of the internal tensions that require their ejection from the psyche? One source of tension is the conflict between the instincts. The other source is articulated by the stream that includes psychoanalysts such as Winnicott and Bowlby, as well as some of the humanistic traditions, and it is to this that I turn next.

Developmental Malfunctions

This line of thinking suggests that rather than the instincts, it is the child’s early nurturing environment that plays a key role in the kind of person that the child grows up into. Broadly, loving homes

are more likely to cultivate loving adults, whereas harmful environments damage children and produce adults who have difficulties in life.

Even while this way of thinking makes a good deal of sense and accords closely with my way of approaching things, this too is an explanation at the level of individuals. It might tell us how this or that person's developmental history has given rise to his or her attitudes toward some out-group. But for the explanation to work at a societal level, it would have to be the case that the developmental malfunctions of large numbers of people in societies would have to be closely synchronized. Surely this is unlikely to be the case. Nor does this way of thinking account for how those who, despite having grown up in good-enough environments, go on to develop and hold negative attitudes toward out-groups.

Mostly, when psychology troubles itself to look at the issue of racism, it tends to keep its focus on the mindset of the racist; rarely does it give attention to the recipients of these dynamics, and when it does, then there too it tends to locate the cause of the recipient's experience of racism in the recipient and as due to some developmental malfunction.

For example, the Swedish psychoanalyst Basch-Kahre (1984) thought that her African patient's "deep feeling of being worthless whenever the theme of the stranger was brought up, [was to be found in] . . . his experience of weaning and with his oedipal conflict" (p. 65). The fact that he was unable to advance in his job was explained in terms of the state of his internal world. No space was given to the possibility that components of his worthlessness might have had to do with particular experiences of living as a black man in Sweden.

I have an allied, more recent example regarding a trainee in the group analytic training in London. A British-born United Kingdom (UK) citizen, Anglo-Indian, he was being constantly stopped on both borders as he traveled between the UK and his holiday property in France. His group analyst thought that as he worked through his childhood issues, this was less likely to happen.

Recapitulation

There is one other reason proposed by psychoanalysis as to why we behave in these problematic ways toward out-groups. In this scenario nothing needs to have gone wrong in childhood. Instead, it is said that normal childhood developmental stages become inappropriately reactivated in adulthood. One such instance is the stranger anxiety that all infants go through at around the age of 6 months. Some think that on meeting strangers in adult life, this infantile constellation is reactivated, which is why we end up fearing strangers in adulthood. All I have to say to this is that we do not react with fear to all forms of strangeness per se. And not all adults react in this way to strangers, which we would expect to be the case because we have all gone through this developmental stage in infancy.

As I conclude this section, I should flag up a caveat. My intention is not to dismiss all psychoanalytic accounts of social phenomena out of hand but to point out their limitations. I find notions of projection and so on useful and essential to my clinical work. However, when they are put forward as the only explanations and pose as complete explanations, then they lose what value they have and become dangerously reductive, in which case they do not so much explain as explain away.

Transactional Analysis and Humanistic Traditions

On the whole, the humanistic traditions do not have much to say about processes of marginalization, and when they do, they tend to individualize them and put forward some version of contamination as the cause. Transactional analysis theory has defined racism as an example of the Adult being contaminated by elements from the Parent or Child or both at the same time. This is how one author put it:

Contamination from the Parent is typically manifested through prejudiced ideas and attitudes; contamination from the Child involves distorted perceptions of reality. When contamination of the Adult by the Parent, the Child, or both exists, “boundary work” is called for so that the demarcation of each ego state can be clearly drawn. When the ego-state boundaries are realigned, the person understands his or her Child and Parent rather than being contaminated by them. (Corey, 2009, p. 23)

There seems to be a consensus in the transactional analysis literature that racialized ideations reside in the Parent, and the emotional charge of, say, repulsion resides in the Child. As one researcher put it, “Prejudice is a Parent Contamination, and delusions are Child Contaminations” (Lerikkanen, 1994, p. 193).

I find this kind of explanation somewhat simplistic as well as implausible, not a popular thing to say in the *Transactional Analysis Journal*, I might imagine. Even if the psyche operated in this discontinuous way, the explanation for how these states of mind arise is individualistic. Notice also that the focus is on *the state of mind*, not the lived reality. It is a description of how this particular individual comes to hold these attitudes by something leaking into his or her Adult via his or her Parent. We are told that these ways of thinking come to reside in the Parent through the attitudes emanating from the actual parents. But if we asked, “How did those attitudes come to reside in the parents in the first place?” we would find ourselves trapped in an infinite regress. We are mired in a difficulty similar to the one we came across with the theme of psychoanalytic projection. This might possibly be an explanation of how racism is transmitted between the generations, but even if it were, it says nothing about why it arises in the first place or how it comes to reside in society at large.

The (So-Called) Relational

These days, almost all schools of psychotherapy have awakened to the reality that Rousseau’s Noble Savage—a solitary individual living in blissful union with nature—has never existed. They declare themselves *relational*, and many claim that they were the first to make the relational turn. In doing so, they reveal and declare that in their earlier manifestation, they were nonrelational, that is, individualistic. But in most cases, despite the alleged turn, mostly relational is taken to mean individuals in relation to other individuals. In other words, it is a picture of a preexisting individual relating to another preexisting individual. This is the lesser or weaker meaning of relational, and it is still individualistic.

The transactional analysis take on relationality seems to me to be of this kind: preexisting distinct individuals engaged in a series of transactions between each other.

Those who hold this view are likely to take umbrage at my portrayal and say that their theory is deeply psychosocial because, of course, the psyche is influenced by society, and so, of course, societal norms influence the individual. Well, yes and no, and no for the following reason. Most psychological theories make a tacit distinction between the processes of development and the processes of socialization. The processes of development are talked about as though they were natural psychobiological processes taking place between carers and infants. Socialization, meanwhile, is thought to occur later, when this partially developed child starts to absorb societal norms. Many theories that would characterize themselves as psychosocial are of this kind.

This is most clearly seen in Freud. Before the oedipal stage, the child is embroiled in its developmental process, and then, at about the age of 5, this already formed psychobiological individual takes in societal norms that form the superego. Two things here: First, the social, residing within the superego, remains distinct from the biological residing in the id; second, the individual and the social remain distinct entities. Note that the social is *entering* the individual.

The humanistic traditions, too, have their versions of this distinction. An example of this is the distinction between the self-concept and the organismic self in person-centered theorizations. One’s

self-concept—consisting of injunctions and attitudes taken in from the outside—is thought to be at odds with the natural values of the organismic self.

There are two points that I want to underline here. First, all of these ways of thinking are descriptions of individuals in society, suggesting that the individual and the social are different levels of existence. Second, to one degree or another, they all infer that there exists some kind of a presocial, natural self that is thought to become corrupted by the social.

What I am going to do next is to build a deeper reading of *the relational*.

Placing the Individual Before the Social

Common sense presents existence to us in this sort of way:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{the world} & \rightarrow & \text{the individual} & \rightarrow & \text{individual} + \text{individual} & = & \text{society} \\ & & \text{science} & & \text{politics} & & \end{array}$$

It seems to us that obviously the material world exists first; after all, the earth existed before people. An individual is born into this world. Later, this individual joins other individuals to create society.

When autonomous rational individuals explore the world of things (the left-hand side), it is called *science*. They find that they are able to control the world in relatively predictable ways. But when these individuals get together with other individuals (the right-hand side), then things become uncontrollable, unpredictable, and often behave in seemingly irrational and destructive ways. The right-hand side of the picture is decreed to be the region of *politics*, and the left-hand side the region of science. In this schema, the activity of science (which is said to be value free) is distinct from that of politics (which is value laden). In this sort of picture, it is possible to say “keep politics out of sport (or science)” or “politics has no place in the activity called psychotherapy.”

It is notoriously difficult to control social life, be it in the workplace, politics, recreational activities, or personal relationships. Rationally plan to do one kind of thing, and no matter how hard we try, something unruly almost always seems to take place.

Why is social life so unpredictable and seemingly irrational? Freud (1921/1955) famously suggested that this was because our conscious rational intentions are being driven and disrupted by unconscious intentions and desires: “When individuals come together in a group all their individual inhibitions fall away and all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts, which lie dormant in individuals as relics of a primitive epoch, are stirred up to find free gratification” (p. 79).

Before we leave this picture, there are a few things worth underlining. First, in this sort of schema, society is optional. Individuals have a choice whether or not to interact with others. Second, it would appear that the interests of society are in conflict with the interests of individuals. Third, although this way of thinking allows the social and the cultural to influence the individual, ultimately the individual and the social remain distinct from each other, with society as something beyond and outside the individual.

And finally, another question in passing: Where is the therapist located in this picture, and where is the client?

The Social Before the Individual

What if we redraw the picture, beginning not with the material world or the individual but with the social:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{the social} & \rightarrow & \text{the individual} & \rightarrow & \text{the world} \\ & & \text{power and politics} & & \text{science} \end{array}$$

This sequence, starting with the social, reflects the reality that each of us is born into a preexisting society.

The social is the domain of power relations and the conflictual political. If we begin there, as I think we must, then all that follows from it will, of necessity, be permeated by power relations and politics. This is not just so for the individual psyche but for all human activity, including science and psychotherapy.

As the infant develops, it cannot help but imbibe the discourses that it is born into, discourses that come to constitute the self. Note, it is not the case that a preexisting self internalizes the social. Rather, the self comes to be constituted through recursive internalization/externalization processes. The fabric of the self is social, and one cannot be abstracted from the other without rendering both meaningless. There is no part of the psyche that is prior to, or outside of, the social. This is what Foulkes (1964) was alluding to when he said, "This social influence is not added to the individual in a superficial or secondary way, but thrusts down to his roots" (p. 50). Linear language cannot capture the complexity of the recursive nonlinear processes that we call infant development.

This, then, is the deeper, stronger meaning of *the relational*. In terms of development, it is not the case that preexisting selves relate to each other; rather, these selves are constituted out of these relationships—relationships, we should add, that are already politicized. To put it most strongly and counterintuitively: The relationship is prior to that which relates.

Selves are precipitates of social relationships. Just as the milieu that the infant imbibes is politicized, the psyche will also be politicized from the first moments. Therefore, in my view, there is no possibility of getting back to an apolitical pristine natural self, or apolitical Adult, because there is no such entity in the first place.

Conflict

The situation is even more complex because the infant is not born into just one discourse but into multiple, overlapping, and conflicting discourses. We are each born into milieus that are constituted by a range of "we's," each with its own way of being and its own ethical sensibility. The infant, therefore, is subjected to a variety of gazes, each of which positions him or her differently.

The discourses themselves, as well as the relationships among them, are constituted by power relationships. As each of us grows, we imbibe the conflictual mix of cultural norms that we are born into and that come to form the self. Most importantly, what this means is that the self is not a sublime homogeneity but a conflicted unity always in a state of tension arising out of the conflictual claims of the varieties of "we's" one is born into. Further, because the relationships between the varieties of "we" are, of necessity, power relationships, then we can say that the "I," the "me," is constituted at the deepest levels by and through the power relationships that are part of the social fabric into which the person is born.

If I were forced to use the language of the true self, then I would have to say that there are a number of true selves, many of which are in conflict with each other. In allying oneself with one kind of "we," one is inevitably betraying another aspect of the self that is allied to another "we." There is no restful, comforting singularity to retreat to as many humanistic traditions imagine to be the case. We have never lived in the Garden of Eden.

Let me summarize where I have gotten to so far:

- The "we" is prior to the "I."
- The "I" is constituted by the mix of "we's" into which one is born.
- The [social] relationship is prior to that which relates.
- The self is precipitated out of relationships.
- The self is a conflicted entity and constituted by diversity.

If we follow this way of thinking, then the previous utterances of the classical psychoanalysts are reversed:

- “The understanding of social life is the foundation for the understanding of [the individual’s] personality.” (Klein reversed)
- “All problems of individual psychology are ultimately reducible to sociological problems.” (Fairbairn reversed)
- “The clue to the psychology of the individual is social and group psychology.” (Winnicott reversed)

In making these reversals, I do not want to replace internalism with externalism, which would be the opposite error. What I am trying to point to is difficult to see because this very way of speaking has already bought into the internal/external dichotomy as well as the psychology/sociology dichotomy. Reality and lived experiences are not linear, but our representations of them (couched in linear language) make it appear that they are.

Apolitical individualism continues to hold sway in the world of psychotherapy, despite the fact that much before Marx, even someone such as Thomas Aquinas (hardly a revolutionary, left-wing radical) had already said that man is by nature political, that is, social.

Power Relations

The sociologist Norbert Elias dissolved the individual/social dichotomy: “Human society is a level of nature” (Elias, 1989/1991, p. 85). He continued, “Humans are *by their nature made* for a life with each other, *a life which . . . includes* interpersonal and inter-group struggles and their management” (p. 91, italics added). Elias told us that power relations are an aspect of all relationships, and this is so because we are interdependent on each other.

Interdependence is another name for *function* or *need*. To say that person A has a function for person B is to say that B needs A. If B needs A, then in a sense we can say that A has power over B. However, the reverse will also be true, but not in the same way. Hegel famously showed that the slave was not entirely powerless; the master needed the slave, even if only in the minimal sense of needing the slave to continue to exist in order to be exploited. One can see, then, that the relationship between A and B is interdependent even while it is bound to be asymmetrical. Power is first and last a relational attribute. Thus we can say that power permeates all aspects of human relationships, thereby politicizing the relational.

On the basis of this sort of account, not only have I come to think that the practice of psychotherapy is an intrinsically politicized activity, I have also come to think that it is a work in ethics.

Consequences for Practice

It is a truism to say that all human life takes place in groups. However, we also know that to live and work in groups (which we do continuously) is fraught with difficulty and sometimes impossibility. It is this reality that has misled many to think that the difficulties arise because the social is antagonistic to the essence of the individual.

In contrast, in the company of Foulkes, Elias, and others, I am putting forward the view that this individual is intrinsically social in his or her being—social to the core. This does not mean that the social stamps individuals to create clones. We are each unique. But as the biologist Cronin has said, “There is nothing unique about being unique” (as cited in Ridley, 1996, p. 156).

Nevertheless, we are still left with this question: If our nature is social, then why do we have such difficulties with others as well as with ourselves in relation to others?

I will come at this question through the Foulkesian notion of *belonging*. Foulkes said that a sense of belonging is intrinsic and necessary to psychological well-being. The opposite of belonging is alienation. And in between the two are all the difficulties of human existence. But belonging is not straightforward, nor is it a guarantor of well-being. We all belong to families, and yet for almost all of us, our families of origin were also, to some degree, the source of profound unhappiness.

Our natural tendency is to group. But this tendency is patterned by the power relations one is mired in and in a myriad of complex ways. First, whether we recognize it or not, whether we can admit to it or not, it is the case that we are drawn to the more powerful, and our unconscious inclination is to group with them, the in-group. Power is charismatic.

Second, the notion of belonging requires that its negations also be potential realities, that in belonging to one thing there is another thing to which I do not and cannot belong. Further, only some are allowed to belong. Without these two conditions, belonging becomes all inclusive and thus meaningless. In other words, the sense of belonging arises in and through intersecting processes of inclusion and exclusion. Belonging is not a state but a moment in an ongoing process. It is also the case that we cannot not belong.

One could say that the purpose of group therapy is to generate a sense of a particular kind of belonging for the group members. This struggle, to belong and/or the struggle not to belong, is of itself the process of therapy.

But if I cannot mold and direct the power of the group to this end, if group processes are uncontrollable and unpredictable, then what on earth is it that I am being paid to do as a group therapist? Kierkegaard was helpful here. He famously said, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards" (Kierkegaard, 1843).

I think all therapy, including group therapy, is like this. One could characterize the group as a space in which things need to be allowed to happen, and they need to happen in order that they may be understood, but they can only be understood retrospectively.

Group processes—by which I mean interactions between individuals—produce continual novelty. When we see something new and surprising we ask, where did this novel thing come from? We are inclined to think that it has to have come from somewhere, and mostly we think that this somewhere is the internal psychological world of the individual. No doubt there is some truth to this, but it is not the only truth, nor is it the complete truth. The notion of *emergence* stands in contrast to this convention to say that elements of the novel need not have come from somewhere, because a moment ago it had no existence, it was nowhere. It was literally created by and through the interactions.

But it is also true that individuals and group dynamics reproduce the same scenarios over and over again. Freud (1914/1958) spoke of this conservative inclination that reproduces the habituated as "repeating instead of remembering" (p. 151), which is recast in transactional analysis language as the games people play.

We can characterize the process of group therapy as facilitating a movement from the stuck and habituated toward the novel. But this entails a movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the known into the unknown, and it therefore creates anxiety. Here is the thing: I think it creates anxiety in the therapist as much as the client, precisely because it is unknown and unknowable to both therapist and client. This further underlines why the idea of mastery is bankrupt. Mastery entails directing the process toward a preconceived end, in other words, toward something that is already known, whereas therapy is a journey into the unknown. The unknown is frightening precisely because there is no guarantee that what emerges will be benign rather than malign.

My role as a group therapist is improvisational rather than technique driven. Even though group processes are unpredictable, I engage and improvise with intentionality. Increasingly, my intention is merely to notice and to name what I notice. However, what I notice is not by any means a neutral, detached, value-free activity. Nevertheless, more and more my intention is *to be*, rather than *to do*, and *to be with* rather than *to do to*.

The democratic ideal that I aspire to was captured in Foulkes's (1975) statement that group analysis is "a form of psychotherapy by the group, of the group, including its conductor" (p. 3). This requires that I be transparent in my interactions and with what is arising in me in relation to those who come for help. It requires that I do not conceive of myself as the detached therapist who is giving some form of treatment to the client but as a responsive participant in the process. I must, therefore, engage in the process as an ethical being rather than as a scientific practitioner.

If one error is for therapists to think of themselves as experts, the other error is to think that it is the client who is the expert. While I do not have privileged access to objective reality or subjective reality, neither does the client. It is in the interaction between the mix of perceptions that sometimes something magical takes place. I say magical because we would be hard put to say with any confidence why something has occurred. All we are able to do is marvel and create post hoc rationales and rationalizations.

But within these democratic aspirations there remain critical asymmetries born of the fact that I am the one who is being paid to help. I am there in the service of others rather than myself.

Tyranny

Let me conclude by attending briefly to the term *tyranny*. The belief that the internal psychological world is the source of our experiential world has a tyrannical grip on our mindset in this profession—in all schools, analytic, humanistic, and cognitivist. While the belief is presented as science, it is, in fact, an ideology.

It is the fact that the dominant discourses determine not only what we are able to see but also what we think about it that makes it a tyranny. Ruling paradigms bind us to the normative unconscious and blind us to the existence of alternative possibilities. As ever, observation is theory laden. Our trainings teach us to read everything back into the psyche. And when we do not, then the orthodoxy in our profession thinks it to be an error, an acting out, on the part of the therapist.

Tyrants decree how the world is and brook no alternative. Voice something that goes against the ruling paradigm, and the tyrant's response is likely to be punitive. One of the most feared of punitive gestures is being made an outcast and being cast out beyond the pale, no longer allowed to belong. For example, the response of some colleagues (thankfully not all) to my first book, *Taking the Group Seriously* (Dalal, 1998), was to dismiss the work as not psychoanalytic and in so doing cast me out of that territory. What they actually meant was that the work did not accord with their individualistic and internalist conception of the psychoanalytic. We are then embroiled in a power struggle regarding the psychoanalytic: What does it mean, who claims it, who is allowed to belong? This is also the case for the term *psychotherapeutic*.

Conclusion

Today, everywhere in the world, the baleful forces of neoliberalism are feeding on the individualism already present in the zeitgeist, further atomizing our already broken world. That is the thing about individualism and internalism: They depoliticize existence itself.

For me, this power struggle is deeply ideological, deeply passionate, and deeply meaningful precisely because it is a power struggle for what it is to be human.

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