

AGAINST THE CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY

Farhad Dalal

ABSTRACT The paper enquires into the pertinence of the ‘diversity’ agenda for psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. It critically tracks how multiculturalism, anti-racism and ‘diversity’ emerge from the philosophy of liberalism. Some of the contradictions and difficulties in each of these discourses are highlighted. The paper then argues that the various schools of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis tend to be intolerant of each other’s world-views and forms of practice. And finally, the paper takes up how three different strands within the profession might view, and so respond to the theme of diversity in the clinic.

Key words: psychotherapy, liberalism, diversity, anti-racism, psychoanalysis, multiculturalism, difference.

Introduction

The increasing diversity of the mix of peoples inhabiting the UK and other ‘first world’ countries has thrown up a number of issues regarding equality and justice, which in turn have generated new legislation and procedures for dealing with them. This has taken place in most areas of public life – housing, media, education, employment prospects and so on. In these and other arenas we are increasingly being enjoined to celebrate diversity. It would appear to be the case that the injunction has become so taken for granted that the only question that seems to remain is: how best to celebrate it? More recently, the term ‘diversity’ has begun to enter conversations in the world of psychotherapy. But it is not at all clear what relevance the idea of ‘celebrating diversity’ might have for the theories and practices called psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

A version of this paper launched the lecture series *Celebrating Diversity*, organized by the London Centre for Psychotherapy in 2006. The paper functioned as a ‘scene-setter’. The first part of the paper, the discussion on liberalism, follows a similar course as the paper to be published in *Psychodynamic Practice* 14(1), ‘Thought paralysis: tolerance and the fear of Islam’ (Dalal 2008).

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As both the notions of diversity as well as psychoanalysis are grounded in, and emerge from the liberal world-view – it is there that I will begin. Following this I will engage with questions about what pertinence the diversity agenda might have for the theories and practices of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

In broadest terms, liberalism is taken to be the bedrock of the beliefs and practices of democracy – our way of life in the UK. Straightaway I have to make two addenda. First, that there are many versions and understandings of liberalism, some antithetical to each other; in other words, liberalism itself is contested and imbued with diversity. Second, there are many inhabitants of the UK (and not just immigrant others) who would not identify with the ‘our’ in the phrase ‘our way of life’. But what I have just revealed, to myself as much as the reader, is that *I do* broadly sign up in some (unreflected) way to the ethos of liberalism, that *I do* consider myself to be part of this particular ‘us’, despite being one of the immigrant others.

The phrase itself ‘our way of life’ is contentious and tendentious. Even whilst it lays claim to something, it manages somehow to exclude and de-legitimate untold others. These are the sorts of issues that the diversity agenda seeks to address.

The Liberal World-View

Blindness to Difference

We do not live in an apartheid state with signs designating some social spaces exclusively for blacks and others for whites. We do not live in a nation that proclaims a world-view that says that men are a better kind of human being than women. And yet it turns out to be the case that in many walks of life some categories of people fare better than others. And, curiously, this occurs despite the fact that we live in a liberal democracy whose watchwords are justice, equality and freedom.

The liberal world-view arose as a counter to the inequalities and inequities arising from the divisions between nobles and commoners. In contrast to the idea of one rule for the rich and another for the poor, the liberal creed says that whether one is King or cleaner, both are equal in the eyes of the law. The way that liberalism achieves this sense of equality is by stripping persons of all their *particularities* – gender, ethnicity, status, and so on. Thus the individual that liberalism addresses is universal – it is an everybody and anybody. Liberalism deliberately blinds itself to differences of ‘kind’ in order not to favour one individual over another because of some status differential. The intention of the liberal creed is to be anti-discriminatory.

Freedom

When particularities are removed from persons then what we are left with is a collection of *individuals*, each separate from the other.¹ Next, liberalism

grants these individuals the right to act as they will. In doing so, it takes individuals to be autonomous agents, each separate from the other, and each capable of making and taking rational and ethical decisions.

But as soon as individuals are left free to choose and act, they often 'choose' to behave in ways that others disapprove of. This is the first problem that liberalism had to contend with, that human beings are not just benign creatures – loving, helpful and considerate of others. They are also mean, hateful, competitive, nepotistic and only partly conscious of the reasons for their actions, thoughts and feelings.

This difficulty is initially addressed by legislation that sets out, as minimally as possible, norms of acceptability: that one should not kill or steal, and so on. And it does this 'minimally' precisely because it wants to interfere as little as possible with the freedoms of individuals.

Anti-discriminatory Legislation

Now, this model has no difficulty in accounting for why it is that some *individuals* are more successful than others; it locates the cause of the differentials in achievement in the differences in the *abilities* between the individuals.² What liberalism finds more difficult to answer, given that it deliberately blinds itself to categorical differences, is why it is that some *types of people* fare better than other types – men more than women, and so on. This kind of patterning is found across all kinds of regions from crime statistics to types of treatments offered to people suffering mental and emotional distress (talking therapies versus medication, for example).

The view taken is that some kind of discriminatory process must be at work – either overtly or covertly, perhaps unconsciously, and often enough systemically. This then calls for a new sort of legislation, anti-discriminatory legislation that speaks to *categories of personhood* – it requires Protestants not to discriminate against Catholics, whites against blacks, and so on. It is important to note that, however worthy this kind of group legislation is, by taking account of the particularities of belonging, it goes against the fundamental principle of liberalism which seeks to concern itself only with the universal individual. This kind of anti-discriminatory legislation, aimed at groups of individuals, although driven by liberal sympathies, is in contradiction with liberalism *per se*.

Privacy

As much as possible liberalism seeks to avoid legislating and regulating the private sphere. Here one is free to think, believe, feel and act according to one's will and desire; now the caveat: so long as one does not impede another's freedom to do so similarly.

Implicit in this model is the view that the internal life of individuals is divorced from the world and that it is internally generated in some way. This then is a model of encapsulated individuals, each living a psychological life

separate from others. This private space is where freedom resides in the liberal schema. From the Romantics came the further idea that, in order to find fulfilment, each individual not only has a *right*, but also a *duty* to express their unique inner selves in a way that is authentic to each of them.

But the issue of whether something is private or public is continually being contested. For example, the likes of Mary Whitehouse would seek to regulate what goes on in the *privacy* of the bedroom. Is abortion a private matter, or is it a matter of public concern? What about the issue of how families treat their children in the privacy of their homes? How are these matters to be negotiated?

There is a more critical problem with the idea of privacy *per se*. For example, although we can say that the transactions between family members take place in the privacy of the 'home', they nevertheless take place 'in front' of the people in that home. Therefore they are public to the inhabitants of that home. We can see that the experience of privacy depends on where one is located on the grid of inclusion and exclusion.

Ownership

The third critical component of liberalism is the principle of ownership, according to which one has a *right* to do as one wills and desires with one's property. Once again, there are all kinds of disputes as to what constitutes ownership, and on what matters the legislature may or may not speak. You might grant that the thoughts, feelings and beliefs, taking place in the privacy of my mind, are my property. The body is more problematic: think of abortion, for example. What of the claim that my dog, my children and my wife are also my property? On the whole, society has been operating as though they are in fact property. It was not so long ago that the police in this country were extremely reluctant to take any action in cases when husbands were violent to their spouses and children, precisely because of these two liberal principles: first, it was taking place in the privacy of the home, and second, the tacit assumption that, fundamentally, the wife is the property of the husband – and so he has 'rights' over her (poignantly expressed in Tracy Chapman's song 'Behind the Wall' (1988)).

Multiculturalism

There now follows a move which is at the heart of most critiques of multiculturalism, and it is this: the ethos of *rights* is transposed from the domain of *individuals* to the domain of *cultures*. Cultures come to be treated as entities, as person-like, with boundaries and internal spaces. The internal space, being internal to the culture, is taken to be the property of that culture, as are the things that take place there – the beliefs and practices of that culture. The previous rule is now applied to cultures: in the same way that the legislature should meddle as little as possible in the private lives of individuals, it should do similarly with the private lives of cultures. It also

follows that those outside the bounds of that culture have no right to comment on the proclivities of that culture, because they are not part of it.

Here is an interesting anomaly: although the practices of these cultures are deemed private (because they 'belong' to that culture), they are nevertheless very visible to others – they are public. There are any number of such beliefs and practices – dietary restrictions, clothing, philosophies, customs, and so on. Indeed their purpose is to *signal* difference in order to sustain differentiations. The Romantic injunction that individuals are obliged to express their inner selves is also appropriated, so now cultures are duty bound to express 'their ways' publicly, or else they would not be living their culture 'authentically'. So we are now faced with an interesting situation – cultures are duty bound to express their private ways publicly, while those designated as outside that culture have no right of comment, as they do not 'own' those practices and beliefs.

But there is much to be said for multiculturalism. It arose as a counter to the forces of the particular forms of Imperialism that the world has been (and continues to be) in the grip of for some hundreds of years. As possessor of the world, the imperialist has felt duty bound to replace 'their ways' with 'our ways'. Multiculturalism is a form of resistance to this imperialistic tendency. It reminds us that the other's culture has its own legitimacy, its own way of thinking about and ordering the world, and that these other ways should not be dismissed but should be respected. Multiculturalism's watchword is 'tolerance', and its motto is encapsulated in the adage 'Different but equal'.

One could say that all multiculturalism is doing is to reproduce the liberalist ethos as applied to individuals in the terrain of cultures; just as individuals are duty bound to treat other individuals with respect, so are cultures. But respect can be taken to mean 'no contact'. In its most extreme form any expression of a view about the other's culture, any stance short of complete acceptance, is construed as an act of imperialism. This is what multiculturalism has come to mean in some quarters. Something has clearly gone awry, and in part this has to do with the way that the idea of culture is conceived – as unitary, consensual and homogeneous.

Cultures are not the unitary homogeneous entities that the cultural spokesperson would have us believe. They are riven with differences of opinion and conflict. There are any number of alternative claims as to the true nature of a culture, belief system, theory or practice, be it Islam, Christianity, Britishness, or psychoanalysis. I have argued elsewhere (Dalal 2002), that the sense of identity as something that is unitary is in fact illusory, and that when one probes any one of these entities, they immediately disintegrate into any number of alternative identities – British culture fragmenting into northerner, squire, metropolitan, working-class and so on. It is also the case that cultures are not homogeneous unities but organizations of power relationships which are constantly being contested from within and without.

What needs to be remembered then is that when any self-proclaimed spokesperson claims to speak for a culture, they are only giving voice to a particular interest group's view of how things should be. Thus in respecting and tolerating that particular voice we are of necessity taking a side, a side against a host of other voices from within that very community. Or, put another way, in tolerating one position we are *of necessity* being intolerant of other positions from within that same culture.

And to go even further, it is also the case that each of us is *simultaneously* a part of a great many cultures – the ethos of one often in conflict with that of another. If cultures are conflictual and divided, then so are the individuals that both inhabit and constitute them. There can therefore be no 'authentic' belonging – no straightforward claim to ownership that cannot be contested.

But, most importantly, cultures make claim to a particular way of organizing the world into the desirable versus the disagreeable, into good and bad. The rationales for the manner of distribution are those of morality. To put it even more strongly, *the forms of discrimination practised by a culture are integral to the identity of that culture, and are the essence of that culture.*

Now, when a member of culture A meets a member of culture B in some way, what the multiculturalist ethos demands is for each to restrain themselves from making judgements of each other's way of proceeding. They are enjoined to tolerate their differences so that each may be allowed an *authentic*³ expression of their cultural identity. But the only way in which this is possible is for each of the individuals to disengage and subjugate their own discriminatory processes. In other words, for each to suspend living according to the claims of their own 'culture' – but in so doing they would no longer be being 'authentic'. It would seem then that the price for allowing the other their authenticity is being paid by abandoning one's own 'authenticity'. This is a critical problem. The problem is compounded when we also take into account that there are a number of claims to authenticity from within a culture. In brief, we cannot help but take sides.

Anti-racism

One shortcoming of multiculturalism is that it renders the world more benign than it actually is by not taking sufficient account of the workings of power; in so doing it makes things appear more equal than they actually are. The more naïve versions of multiculturalism assume that difficulties between (say) black and white are due to misunderstandings. Therefore (they might continue), if we got to know their culture and their ways, we would be less likely to respond negatively to them. Whilst there is considerable truth in this, it is not the whole story.

In the UK in the 1970s, the anti-racist movement arose to address this very issue. Its primary purpose was to address power differentials. The anti-racist

movement declared (rightly, I think) that it was not so much cultural difference that was the problem as racism. And I would add to that colour racism. The now old-fashioned term 'colour prejudice' is still extremely relevant. Anti-racists sought to distinguish racism from prejudice. It was said that prejudice was something that every human was prone to; however, to be racist one had to have the power to act and institutionalize one's prejudices. You might recall the formula: racism = power + prejudice. Whilst the anti-racist movement was successful in a great many ways by taking on the issue of power, sections of it oversimplified the situation in saying that only whites had power, and so only they could be racist. This view of power, although Marxist in its origins, is in fact individualistic. It says that one person or group has power and another does not. The Eliasian model of power is different. The sociologist Norbert Elias (1939, 1976) says that power is not an amulet that is worn by a person – but that it is an aspect of all relationships. The fact that we human beings are interdependent on each other means that we are constrained by each other. Power is another name for the constraints we find ourselves experiencing and expressing. Thus no one is completely powerless and no one is absolutely powerful. Recall Hegel's slave/master analogy. So power is not located in just one region in the social scape. It is everywhere, in all sorts of shapes and guises. The bullied and intimidated factory worker by day might be the respected and admired jazz saxophonist by night and vicious wife-beater later that very same night. So the problem with some versions of anti-racism was that it rendered the world too simplistic – it divided it into two: the doers and the done to. It did not take sufficient account of the complexity of social arrangements.

Diversity

It is at this stage that the notion of diversity makes its entry. In itself it is an attempt to address the problems arising within the multiculturalist and anti-racist discourses; yet it brings with it its own sets of confusions.

The notion of diversity captures more of the complexities of human existence in the following way. It is clear that between any two individuals there is an infinite number of differences and of similarities – *and that both (the similarities and the differences) exist simultaneously*. At times out of this infinite array, a similarity or a difference gets suddenly and powerfully privileged over the rest, so much so that it becomes the only thing visible. In a particular moment and context the thing of relevance might suddenly become whether one is black, or vegetarian, or an Arsenal supporter, or a Freudian or Kleinian, and so on. The category that becomes suddenly and critically prominent is utilized either for the purposes of inclusion or exclusion; indeed that is its purpose, that is the reason for that category becoming so powerfully present. It is also the case that for one category to be able to take such sudden and powerful precedence requires that the multiplicity of

other available categories be repressed and made unconscious. One might even say that the categories that were previously alive, like neighbour and friend, are killed off, sometimes metaphorically, often literally. In psychoanalytic language this would be recognized as splitting. This is the process through which we actually manufacture groupings, whereby one name comes to dominate the proceedings. The world gets divided differently, and so grows to look and be experienced very differently, whether the key differentiator is that the category is black, or Islam, or Protestant, or male, or whatever. Given that groupings can shift so suddenly, and shift with it our experience of ourselves and the world, then this throws up the powerful and troubling question – in what sense can we say that these groupings (that are so meaningful to us) are ‘real’?

It is important to understand the difference between division and splitting. When we focus on something like ‘the red things in the room’ we make a *division* between the things red and those not-red. In making a division, we generate abstractions. It is when we ‘forget’ that the divided elements (the abstractions) remain joined in that they are still parts of the room that we can say that *splitting* has occurred. Once splitting has occurred, then we imagine that the divided elements are not only autonomous in being able to live lives with no regard to the other, but that this has always been so. This is how part objects come to be generated, and how it is that we come to imagine that they have a life of their own. In this way of thinking we could go so far as to say that not only are human groupings part objects, so is the notion of the individual.

We can see then why the term ‘diversity’ is useful – its connotations capture more of the complexities of social life. But there is also another practical reason why it came to the fore. Other disfranchised groupings (say, wheelchair users), whose primary identity was not that of race or culture, found that their needs were not being spoken for by the multiculturalists or the anti-racists. The diversity agenda seeks to expand the territory to include these and other *varieties* of difference. And so organizations are increasingly formulating their equal opportunity statements in these terms. The list found in the Civil Service’s equal opportunities policy is typical:

There must be no unfair discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, religion or belief, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, or (in Northern Ireland) community background, working pattern, employment status, gender identity (transgender), caring responsibility, trade union membership.⁴

But now the diversity agenda, having taken this more or less useful step, takes another, but this time a step too far, and it does so in the following way. It is true that every individual is unique – physically and psychologically – or else we would not be able to recognize each other. It would also be true that each of us has our own unique way of doing things. We could

then truthfully say that every individual is different from, and therefore diverse from, every other. When used in this way the term diversity becomes completely individualistic; groupings of people disappear from view, and we find ourselves back with the original individualistic premises of liberal democracy.

We can see then that, whilst the term diversity captures some of the complexities of social life by attending to a greater variety of differences, it can end up not taking account of a critical aspect of social life, which is that we live and work in groups. Not only can diversity pave the way back to an unhelpful individualism through the process of extreme fragmentation, it can also avoid engaging with the problematics of the power differentials between social groupings, and facing the fact that some groups do worse than other groups. For example, what has celebration to do with the fact that a greater proportion of black people do less well (when compared to white people) in any number of areas from housing, education, employment prospects, and so on. The thorny issues to do with power relations are forgotten in the miasma of celebration. As soon as one brings in the word celebration, then the notion of diversity collapses back into a naïve multiculturalism and suffers from the same problems. There are two problems in particular: first, it does not take up the subject of oppression and marginalization – the hows and whys of certain groupings doing less well than others. Second, it does not take up the question of what we are to do when we are confronted with differences that conflict with our moral codes?

What Has Diversity To Do With Therapy?

There are two ways of approaching this question. First, what and how can the field of therapy contribute to the debate on multiculturalism, diversity, and so on? Second, what kinds of commentary can the diversity discourses make about the therapy professions?

Using the Diversity Agenda to Reflect on the World of Therapy

Let me start with the second of these, and begin by asking: how diverse is the field of therapy? In one sense, the field is extremely diverse. There are any number of modalities of practice – individual, group, systemic. There are a great variety of schools of thought and practice (psychoanalytic, cognitive behavioural, humanistic, person centred, etc.), each with their own views regarding the human condition and the clinical techniques and practices that follow from that. There are other divisions according to professional identity – psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and counselling, and each of those is an umbrella term covering a whole host of conflicting theories and ideologies of practice.

Having agreed that the field is diverse, what of the issue of ‘diversity’? The term diversity, in the technical sense that it is being used here, has come to

mean the *presence* of a wide range of variety. One could even say that it is a situation that is akin to the depressive position, in which problematic and conflictual aspects are somehow retained and managed. It seems to me that our professional body, that of psychotherapy broadly, is not very good at enduring the *presence* of different ways of thinking. The splitting off of the BCP from the UKCP is testament to that (of course, certain rationales are brought to bear as to why it cannot have been otherwise). There are many other sorts of intolerance: for example, in my experience, some of the psychotherapy trainings that claim to be ‘integrative’ are in fact extremely hostile to anything psychoanalytic. Behaviourists think that psychoanalysis is a useless indulgence. Psychoanalysts look askance at group analysts and so on. There is no coherence to be found *within* communities of practice either – be they humanistic, psychoanalytic or whatever. Lacanians, Kleinians, Kohutians, all claim themselves to be psychoanalytic, yet speak very different languages, and take up very different positions *vis-à-vis* the patient. There are disputes as to whether Bowlby’s attachment theory counts as psychoanalysis at all. Some psychoanalysts would not wish to associate themselves with the category of psychotherapy, their claim being that they are not doing ‘therapy’ but ‘analysing’.

We are not surprised to note that the lists of references found in the literature tend to be sectarian in that they are primarily those of the particular school of the writer. Harder to demonstrate, but pertinent, is how and to whom colleagues tend to make referrals; I suspect that they too remain within the tramlines of one’s allegiances. In my experience this is not only true of the divides between psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and counselling, but also between the varieties *within* each of them.

One of the fault-lines in our profession becomes visible through which of the terms ‘client’ or ‘patient’ is being used – a clear signal as to whether the speaker is one of ‘us’ or one of ‘them’; but that is not the end of the story as further refinements of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are always possible. A further observation I would venture is that it seems to me that, although the field is primarily white, it is nevertheless colour coded; it seems to me that there are more black practitioners as well as patients in the arena called counselling when compared to the arena called psychoanalysis. What, if anything, are we to make of that?

And what are we to make of the fact that all those reading this are bound to be able to provide counter examples for each of the observations just made, say, an instance of a psychoanalyst making a referral to a Gestalt therapist. Does that evidence not falsify and undermine these assertions? I would answer the charge in this way: all observations made about collections and groups of people are *statistical* truths. This means that some of the particular bits of evidence are *bound to* contradict the statistical truth. For example, the fact that *some of the apples* in this bowl are green does not contradict the statistical truth that *most of the apples* in the bowl are red.

The fact that there are some black counsellors, psychotherapists and analysts does not contradict the statistical truth that majority are white.

The strategy of individualizing the social scape – ‘I take each person as an individual’ – serves the purpose of obscuring what is taking place at a statistical level; at times it is used to deny the statistical truth entirely. One can then use the fact that a black woman Condoleezza Rice has become Secretary of State, to assert that, therefore, there is no racism or sexism in the USA.

In sum then, the diversity discourse usefully gives us a way of examining our profession, by generating data in regards to the numbers of ‘kinds’ of people receiving psychotherapy, what kinds of people get into what kinds of psychological trainings, and so on. It gives us a means of reflecting on the structures of our profession in order to expose what is taken for granted, and how the taken for granted works in ways to exclude some kinds and to favour other kinds of people. For example, what are we to do with the well-proven statistic that black patients are more likely to be construed as not as suitable for the talking therapies as white patients?

Whatever is called for here, it certainly is not something called ‘celebration’.

The fact that our profession suffers from these issues is no different from any other human grouping. It cannot be otherwise; the predicament is born of the human condition, and so all are bound to be embroiled in similar processes. The fact that as a profession we live in a glass house should not necessarily prevent us from throwing stones at other glass houses, as long as we are also able to accept and reflect on similar communications.

Using Psychological Insights to Reflect on the Diversity Agenda

It is not immediately obvious what bearing the diversity discourses could have on clinical practice. The situation is further complicated by the variety of stances in our profession regarding the human condition and the kind of clinical practice that is legitimated by that stance. Crudely, where is the theory’s emphasis: on nature or nurture? Are we born hateful, spitting balls of destructive envy or (to use that dangerously teleological term) ‘designed’ to seek and establish loving attachments, and so forth.

In order to address this diversity, I will roughly divide psychological treatments into three. There are three things to be noticed here. First, my act of *division* is an ideological act – there are other ways of dividing the territory. Second, I am inevitably lumping together schools that would not readily see themselves as bedfellows with each other – in other words they will feel misrepresented, and so might say that I do not really understand them as I am not one of them. They might go even further to say that *therefore* I have no right to speak about their way of doing things or, if I do speak anyway, then what I say has no legitimacy. Third, I will not be able to even mention the vast majority of ‘schools’, so members of those

might well feel aggrieved that they have been ‘disappeared’. In sum, in dividing (as we are bound to do continually), we reveal something about *our* ideologies. In speaking, one is inevitably dividing, and so one is bound to alienate and annoy someone. But it does not follow that one should therefore be silent.

The first of the three divisions is grounded in an idea of the Romantic Self. This can also be viewed as a ‘growth’ model. In this world there is an essential authentic self at birth, a seed if you will which, when provided with the right environment, grows into its true authentic shape. Broadly, this is the vision of the Humanistic schools. The Person Centred psychology of Carl Rogers and *aspects* of Winnicott’s theorizations can also be located here. Although this self needs an environment to grow, its integrity, its nature is, if not asocial, is certainly pre-social.

The psychological work here is to ‘remove’ extraneous material that is thought to have contaminated the ‘real’ feelings and aspirations of the individual in treatment, and to get back to the true unique self. This group of practitioners would eschew the term treatment altogether, and conceive of their task as facilitating and helping the *client* find themselves. In using the term ‘client’ rather than ‘patient’ they are signalling that they seek not to take up an authority position to the client, because to do so would be to be part of the problem (that is, in their view). The self here is taken to be a unity. Differences within are thought to be caused by conflicts between ‘external’ messages and the ‘internal’ desires of the true self. Therapist and client are conceived of as ‘equal’ and the client’s view of things is to be ‘respected’. The solutions as such are to be found by the client, and one knows that they are right because *it feels right*. This *feeling* is the ultimate authority. Perhaps the work here could be described as (misquoting Freud) ‘where superego was there id shall be’.

Thus, in the name of diversity some⁵ of the counselling/therapy organizations that I have come across *proceduralize* the assessment process, so that the client is always to be asked whether they would like to see someone from their ‘own culture or ethnicity’, and as much as possible to meet this wish. In doing so, they assume that there is only *one* real voice within the client; it takes no account of the possibility of the existence of other voices that the client is not conscious of. This is the self-same naïve stance in which the other’s wishes (as stated) *have* to be respected, simply because it is *their* wish (ownership). There is a further problem here. This kind of protocol might appear to be sensible if it is (say) a Bangladeshi being asked if they have an issue as to whether they see a black or white counsellor, but what if it is a white client who says that he does not want to see a black counsellor? How is this anomaly to be addressed? We can see how the same themes that were discussed *vis-à-vis* liberalism *per se* are also of great pertinence in the clinic.

The second collection of practitioners is those that I would call the radical internalists – primarily these are certain strands within psychoanalysis. The

view here is that we are born divided and forever conflicted by the vicissitudes of instinctual life. This kind of model would understand different cultural systems as arising from the particular ways that individuals manage their internal instinctual difficulties. The focus of the work of these practitioners is that of the internal world (and how it plays out in the transference), as they think that the difficulties of living are *symptoms* of difficulties in the internal world. They also take the structure and dynamics of the internal world to be universal (true of all people everywhere). Hence, they need pay little or no attention to the cultural configurations that the patient resides in. It would seem then that diversity and multiculturalism would have nothing of relevance to offer this group of practitioners.

The third grouping is one that I find harder to give a name, but they are those who could be grouped around Freud's thinking regarding the genesis of the superego, in which the notion of internalization comes to hold considerable sway (Freud 1933). Social rules, conventions and so forth come to embody the superego and so become an integral part of the psyche. The conflict that the Romantics envisaged as between (authentic) *internal* values and (alien) *external* injunctions is made more problematic, as now both elements are internal – both are 'authentic'. Thus, I cannot easily dispense with one of the elements without tampering with something integral to me. The Romantics might conceive of the kind of conflict symbolized by: 'I want to eat beef but it is prohibited', as that between desire and duty. Their 'solution' was to say that it is *one's duty to fulfil one's desire*. But the Freudian predicament offers us no easy resolution because, with the advent of the superego, we now *desire to do our duty* (amongst other conflicting urges, of course). We are in the region of ambiguity and ambivalence. So already there is a diversity of voices within me, and all this before we even begin to take account of the unconscious.

I would ally myself with the last grouping but would follow S.H. Foulkes (1948, 1964, 1990) in taking a more radical position in regard to internalization. Although Freud allows the external to constitute the internal, he does so partially in limiting the provenance of the external to the region called the superego. In radical group analytic theory (Dalal 1998) there is no element of the psyche that is not mediated by the social, and there never was a developmental moment that was outside or prior to the social. The other aspect of group analytic theory of pertinence to this paper is the notion of belonging. According to Foulkes belonging is integral to the human condition, and psychological health is predicated on this possibility. This is the essence of our identity; to this way of thinking, *who* I am is the same as *where* I belong.

But given that we are born into multiple discourses and cultures, each of them generates its own form of belonging, and each of them makes a different kind of claim on our being. Thus we are intrinsically and eternally conflicted by the variety of belonging claims on our personhood. In other

words the 'sense of self', the 'I', is not a unity or, if it is, it is a conflicted unity, constituted and contested by the varieties of belongings we are subject to.

It is clear then that the themes of inclusion and exclusion are not only processes that a person finds themselves participating in, but are themes which actually constitute the sense of self and are integral to it. In this view it follows that the internalization of cultural systems of belief do not so much distort true desire, as construct and shape desire. In a sense it 'tells' you the kind of things you like and what you want to such a degree that these desires seem natural and inevitable.⁶ This idea is critical in helping us understand why it is that, when certain cultural practices are patently injurious to the person (to my eye, that is), it appears that the person not only readily 'chooses' to participate in these practices, but also defends their right to do so.

The reasons are as follows. The first has to do with belonging. Most practices and rituals are signifiers of belonging. One cannot simply 'choose' not to participate. To do so would be to become an outcast and cast out of social networks of meaning. It is also the case that these practices are actually and truly desired by the person, as it validates one as a legitimate member of that grouping. The situation is not 'closed', however, because, as we have seen, there is any number of alternatives being demanded of us, and desired by us as persons. The breaking of one set of cultural taboos can be the entry ticket and give one status into another setting – the problematics of adolescence being a case in point.

In any case, the point that is being made is that the situation is extremely complex, not only for the patient but also the therapist. The therapist can never stand with the patient *per se*; it is only ever a particular aspect of the therapist that can stand with a particular aspect of the patient, and in that moment they both stand against innumerable other aspects in both of them.

So how is one to proceed when the therapist is faced with a patient who is determined to proceed on a path that goes against the therapist's values? Some would argue that the therapist's value system is irrelevant to the situation, that their job is either to analyse or/and to facilitate; they ought not to be seeking to interfere or influence or change the patient, because it would be presumptuous to decide what is best for them; their task should be that of analysis. This attitude has many affinities with the liberal ethos of neutrality and non-interference. However, this stance is neither tenable nor convincing, one reason being that the processes of analysis are of necessity theory laden (Greenberg & Mitchell 1983). Therefore the analysis can never be 'neutral'. The same is true of facilitation; it can never be neutral either. Facilitation is an activity that through a number of techniques draws attention to one place and in so doing *draws* the client's attention there. In asking a question about such and such, one signals its importance and gives it weight over something else. The therapist is bound to speak. And this speech

cannot help but be value and theory laden, and so is bound to be at some level directive and thus 'an interference'. We can clearly see that the therapist is embroiled in the same predicaments as liberal democracy.

How do I decide what is going on when faced with this and other situations of difference in the clinic? Am I condemned to try to respect and celebrate all forms of diversity and difference however conflictual they are with each other and my own ethical frameworks? The solution of relativism as we have seen leads to a no-contact policy.

The solution for the Romantics is to side with what is being voiced and 'felt' by the patient. In doing this they capitulate to the other's ethical framework. The stance is one wherein the therapist is literally worshipful of the other. In following this course, the therapist negates his or her own self.

The reverse situation occurs when the Other is negated, the therapist being convinced that their vision of things is correct. This is akin to a form of imperialism, in which the protestations of the patient are interpreted (more accurately, discounted) as resistance.

Neither of these courses constitutes *engagement*. Hegel speaks of thought moving forward through the negation of the negation (Singer 2001). What I take this to mean is that, in speaking, I, of necessity, negate something of the Other. The response of the Other in some way negates the negation, and my response negates that, and so on. This movement is transformative as it is conflictual. And it is transformative for therapists and patients alike. It is this kind of process that I would call engagement, in which the self is risked and, as it is risked, it moves, shifts and changes.

The way that I might think of the situation is this: that even whilst one voice is loudly raised in the patient, there are others that are being silenced. Thus I would see the task of therapy as helping somehow 'to liberate' the silenced others, so that they too may be heard and engaged with.

If one takes psychological health neither to be about the recovery of a pre-social pristine individual self, nor to be a working accommodation of instincts, but to have something to do (in part) with being in tune (syntonic) with cultural mores, then one is in even more difficult waters. This is particularly the case if one takes the sense of self, the 'I', as not prior to the social but constituted by the varieties of 'we' that one is born into. If it is the case that the sense of self is formed out of the multiple, overlapping and conflicting cultures that one is born into, then there are bound to be *multiple valid but conflictual syntonicities*. There is no easy get-out clause, no easy place of harmony and singularity to retreat to, as the self itself is constituted by diversity.

The injunctions to celebrate diversity and respect difference are hollow answers to this predicament because, in celebrating one difference, of necessity I repudiate another. If the only way that I am able to follow the route of respecting difference is to gaze upon the Other, but neither touch nor be touched, then neither analysis nor therapy would be a possibility.

Notes

1. Paradoxically, the elements that constitute our particularities (age, gender, whatever), that make us unique individuals, are also the elements that join us to others and make us parts of groups. So when particularities are excluded, then the linkages between people are removed and it appears that individuals exist as solitary entities, each cut off from the other.
2. There is of course the thorny question of how the ‘abilities’ arise, how much nature and how much nurture and so on. But to take that on here would over-complicate the purposes of this paper.
3. I am not using the term ‘authentic’ in its naïve sense. I use it in the sense developed by Charles Taylor (1991) in *The Ethics of Authenticity*.
4. http://www.dfid.gov.uk/recruitment/equalopportunities.asp#1._Civil_Service_policy_and_agreement
5. Of course there are many organizations that do not follow the simplistic lines that I describe here.
6. This is not a form of social determinism. It is better to say that the forms of cultural life we are born into serve as enabling constraints – they shape us but do not determine us. Further, the fact that we are participating in a number of forms of culture, each often enough in conflict with the other, means that our desires are continually being contested even whilst they are being shaped. And all this before we bring anything like will, thought, and choice into the equation.

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