

Psychosynthesis has been a valuable stepping-stone, but now, using one of its techniques I choose to step away from the system, because the map is not the road, There came a point when the ideas became confusing, and too mental, the process of dis-identification began to evoke feelings of futility - if being a higher self is where it is at, why bother to struggle through life? It seemed time to dis-identify with the system, take the insights I had and go my own way.

Fay Fransella, and Kelly's Personal Construct Theory.

Is it a Humanistic Psychology?

I can never distinguish what it is makes groups of people pleasant or unpleasant to be in, whether it is the people or the setting: in the case of the Saturday AHP Workshop at Ithaca College it was probably a contribution from both that made for the easy, relaxed feeling. Or was it Fay Fransella's water-like lucidity, gentle as the wind, making complex things seem fairly simple? It was very pleasant indeed. Perhaps because we were told that this was an all embracing theory and nothing lay outside, there was an enveloping sense of security. . . .we would hear it all, and then there would be nothing more, outside, to worry about.

I had gone along to hear what Kelly was about because I had been attracted by the general impression of his ideas that I'd received; but such teachers of psychology as I'd had had always skated over his work with a casual reference, assuming that either everyone knew about it, or that there was nothing to know, or that I'd find out myself when I had time if I was interested. And somehow I never did. Possibly it was to do with the fact that Kelly's work is hidden away in a couple of volumes which cost £25.

So thirty of us sitting mainly in spine-twisting deep soft sofas around the edges of a large expanse of pile carpet spent Saturday weaving our minds through the fascinating intricacies of constructs. I take away the fact that Fay had plotted the personal constructs of her cats: and perhaps, behind all that happened, they were there, prowling around disconcertingly on the carpet as cats do in groups of people, suddenly fastening onto a person in a way that makes me want to laugh (conflict/contradiction/challenge to my personal constructs).

The theory we are told (because of the way we are told it) is logical, and inclusive - a told psychology. Kelly has even divided weeping into fourteen categories and converted emotions into constructs. As with cats, it doesn't depend on language.

Well, we know that that is so. The important thing to recognise is that because each individual experience is unique, the individual has built up a unique system of constructs arising out of it. Therefore each person's constructual world is different from mine, and from another's. There are however shared things in experience for example language, culture and these common constructs enable communication to take place. It is an elaborate jigsaw puzzle and heaven help you if you put the pieces together in the wrong way, or lose one. . . .or maybe don't even know the picture you are making (but how many do. . . .we all rely on the matching of shapes, and that requires a more abstract and fundamental comprehension of reality, to do with pure

form). Unfortunately the jigsaw puzzle analogy didn't come into the description of construct theory, but it occurs to me now. Also, I recall what William Coldstream said in a recent radio discussion about his painting, that a landscape is an extremely complex phenomenon, that 'you're dealing with something that seems infinite and not in any simple way definable, even in the kind of algebra one uses to express it'. (1) I quote these extraneous ideas because of the contrast they provide to the impression which construct theory makes on me, an impression that there is lacking in it any message about the nature of reality of which I am not already aware (as if Gertrude Stein had merely written 'a rose is a rose' instead of 'a rose is a rose is a rose').

And as for constructs psychotherapy, what is it? It has things in it with which, as a Rogerian, I would profoundly agree. . .that each individual's world is unique, and that the therapist must learn to enter into it and to help the client to enter more fully into it, without the therapist putting any of his own world into the other's. Of course, it's not as simple as that. Fay said in answer to a question that construct theory is not concerned with a person's 'way of being in the world'. To me that is of the essence of the therapists contribution to the therapeutic relationship. Again, she said that there is no real distinction between psychotherapy and teaching. How true that is. But I am not sure that Fay and I understand this in the same way. Construct theory depends on rational process, it asks why, it proceeds through rational interconnections, it reduces weeping to fourteen categories. In my experience the people I have learned from are those whose way of being in the world has struck me as unique, authentic, in some mysterious sense exciting. . .suggesting the potentiality of life. I did not enter into their world at the level of constructs, but somewhere deeper down where the shapes and forms of reality were not yet established but were in process of becoming. . .and careful as I must be to avoid entrapment in too instinctual or primitive a view of human relationships, may I point out that the 'way of being in the world' is to do with the highest, not the lowest, function that man possesses in life. It is the 'how' of Fritz Perls, it is man's being 'grounded in the power which constitutes him' to quote Kierkegaard.(2)

Construct theory has an important contribution to make to the psychologies of ego formation, but does not seem to be entirely meaningful unless allied to the Freudian hierarchy of id, ego and super ego. Ultimately what man seeks is transcendence to which ego structure may be a barrier rather than a bridge. Here we must look to the eastern philosophies for help, and to Zen in particular which seeks to demolish personal constructs by subverting their logical foundations.(3)

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References

Sir William Coldstream talking to David Sylvester 20.10.76 *Acknowledgements to BBC Radio 3 and to Anthony d'Offray.*

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