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**THE DIALECTICAL RHYTHM MODEL OF REALITY: A useful tool
in psychotherapy**

"The possibility of . . . universal destruction . . . will hang over us like a dark cloud so long as no bridge is found across the world wide psychic and political split, a bridge as certain as the hydrogen bomb."
C.G. Jung. (1)

For Jung the splitting of the opposites in the psyche was seen as the main cause of wider splits in the world. And a vital part of his 'solution' was the individuation process, bringing the opposites together again, using the self regulation of the psyche, through dreams etc. I started reading Jung when I was 15. Over the years I have come more and more to connect his model of the self regulation of the psyche and the interdependence of opposites with the ancient (and modern) universal principle of dialectics. This is the idea described in ancient Greece by Heraclitus and in ancient China by Lao Tzu and by more recent socialist writers like Mao, Marx and Engels of movement arising out of the interplay or struggle of opposites. Nothing in nature or society stays in a onesided state for ever. Sooner or later there is a compensatory mechanism that turns the dominant opposite state into its opposite. "The Tao of heaven is like the bending of a bow, The high is lowered and the low is raised." Lao Tzu. (2)

This is not just a striving towards balance between opposites. After all, as everything else has its opposite, so does balance. Its opposite is imbalance. Perfect balance would be stagnation, death, the end. I prefer to think of it as a dance or struggle, a rhythm in constant motion backwards and forwards and up and on. It is a rhythm in which each time is different. There is no exact repetition. The ancient model of the spiral is perhaps the most appropriate symbol, beautifully described in Jill Purse's 'The Mystic Spiral'. Unfortunately Jung himself often used rather static symbols like the cross with its motionless four segments and his fixed archetypes sat on their still and solid thrones. (3)

The rhythm model applies not only to the self regulation of the psyche but also to relations between opposites in the mental, social and political worlds, in nature and indeed in the whole

universe. As the tides ebb and flow and day turns to night so joy turns to sorrow the masculine gives way to the feminine. It is a model that has for me provided a meaning orientation or framework that applies as much to politics as to my personal growth. It is based on material, immanent reality without requiring a transcendent dimension. I see it as an order or pattern within the world not above or behind it. It is not a theory or a hypothesis that can be tested empirically, but rather a way of looking or even of being. However, this is not to deny that the rhythms can often be precisely measured and experimented with. Many biologists have given the rhythm model a scientific base through painstaking experiments and observations of patterns in nature such as those described in 'Supernature' (4) and 'Cycles of Heaven' (5). Modern physicists have also come more and more to recognise the interrelatedness and constant movement of opposites at all levels of life. Fritjof Capra writes in the Tao of Physics (6) "All matter is involved in a continual cosmic dance . . . All particles sing their song, producing rhythmic patterns of energy, a pulsating process of creation and construction". Other writers like Lawrence Blair have described the similarities between the models or ways of looking of modern science and of various mystic traditions, especially those from the East.

In the West, Hegel was the first relatively modern philosopher to describe the dialectic model. Marx learnt it from him and it has since then been an important but often limited part of socialist tradition. In our society it has tended to be relegated to the unconscious side of life, to dreams, to art, to music and to love. Perhaps it is too threatening a model to apply consciously to our society as a whole. As Marx wrote "it (the dialectical world view) includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, and at the same time, also the recognition of the negation of that state, of its eventually breaking up". The great rhythms of history have involved the transformation of one society after another, with a previously ruled class taking over and becoming the ruling class. The opposites have been constantly in conflict or in the dance of life together. But for many great socialists including Lenin the dialectic model is not only useful for describing class struggle but applies to everything. As a total philosophy of life it has a lot more in common with modern Western psychoanalytic theory than is generally recognised.

For example in humanistic psychology there is often talk of the **process** of growth and psychological change, of the two-way flow between client and counsellor and of the opposites within both needing expression. People need to be in touch with BOTH their masculine and their feminine sides, with their age AND with their shadow. It is often said that one sidedness is a major feature of neurosis. Much of the work we do with clients is bringing out the hidden or repressed sides of the person so that both opposites strong, weak etc, are accepted and allowed to interact more rhythmically. However it might be argued that there is also a belief in a life spirit or force that is quite incompatible with socialist thinking. Yet that force itself arises out of the interaction of the opposites. As Marx wrote "The first and most important of the inherent qualities of matter is motion, not only the mechanical and mathematical motion but still more - impulse, vital life spirit, tension". The dialectic principle is seen as both objective and subjective. The dialectical way of thinking is a reflection of real dialectical processes in nature. As Engels wrote "Dialectics, so-called objective dialectics prevails throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by the continual conflict of the opposites and their final passage into higher forms, determines the life of nature". (7)

However in our present society the general way of relating opposites is static and hierarchical. One opposite is usually seen as being above the other. The mind is seen as above the body, masculine values as above feminine ones, the ruling class is above the working class, whites are above blacks, teachers above pupils, bureaucrats above the public, experts are above lay people and so on. The class structure permeates everywhere. Divisions into opposites are inevitable but the way in which they are then reconnected is what determines the character of a society. In psychotherapeutic circles rhythmic, dialectical models are constantly being pushed, but it is all against a general backcloth of more hierarchical models. This contradiction is not always recognised. Pupils in training at the Westminster Pastoral Foundation are constantly reminded of the wounded healer image and discouraged from having superior/inferior type relations with their clients. The 'social work model' of the needy client and the non needy helper is discouraged. The dialectical relation between client and counsellor is often emphasised, although different words are used. There seems to be a striving for more rhythmic kinds of relationships both between the different sides of ourselves and between whole people.

Genuine socialism is also about more rhythmic kinds of relationships. We cannot fully change our internal patterns of relation unless external social ones are changed too, as Reich (8) and Fromm (9) and others have pointed out. However there is much personal work to do in the meantime.

The Dialectic Rhythm model in therapy

The model can be and indeed is applied in therapy in many different ways. Here I am going to divide it up into four main sections.

1. **The Rhythm of the process** of psychological growth, of individualisation by bringing the opposites into healthy interplay. It would involve both regression and progression, the child and the adult within, consciousness and the unconscious. It is the form taken by the path of change through and around time.
2. **The Rhythms of the healthy person in a healthy society.** This is in a way an ideal towards which we are often unconsciously striving. The healthy person is a rhythmic person. There is constant flow between the mind and body, within the body in breathing etc. and between different sides of the self - the masculine and feminine, dependent and independent, intuitive and logical etc. And in social relationships everyone can be both leaders and led, teacher and pupil, speaking and listening etc. at different times.
3. **Rhythms between the 'inner' subjective and the 'outer' objective worlds.** These include rhythms between the individual and the society, psychology and economic and political reality. It is important in therapy to distinguish between what is a subjective reality and what is (at least relatively) objective. This would not require political indoctrination but the existence of social and political structures inhibiting personal growth cannot be ignored. At least a recognition of basically unequal power relations for example at a person's workplace may be relevant.
4. **Rhythms of the therapy sessions.** These include the timing of the sessions with the rhythms of separation and togetherness, absence and presence. It also includes the dialectic between the two people (in individual work)

the vibrations of feeling and empathy, the transference and the counter-transference, the speaking and the listening, the words and the silences, and even the opening up and the closing in of the persons.

Putting theory into practice

For me the main practical applications are as follows.

1. **The rhythm model as a way of looking** can itself be therapeutic. For example if success and failure are seen as dialectically interrelated, failure is less frightening and there is less need to be onesidedly desperate for success. In the same way death is less terrifying if dialectically linked to life. Some 'education' about the rhythm process could be a useful part of therapy. Indeed my own therapist often says quite directly 'But you can be both sides'.
2. **Problem solving.** The model can help us to understand the major opposites in our lives especially where one opposite is repressed. The client may learn to accept that side simply by the therapist accepting her and by acting as a kind of affirmative mirror. Other useful techniques are using diagrams, roleplaying the different sides, fantasising the opposite side and even having homework to act out the opposite side in reality as in some assertiveness training. Another technique is to push the overemphasised opposite to a ridiculous extreme so that there will be a natural swing to the opposite direction. For example a person could repeat 'I am great' or 'I am hopeless' hundreds of times. Dreams are also useful in discovering opposites hidden from consciousness. Therapists have actually been using this model for centuries. But I find it useful to have the model almost visible in front of me sometimes especially when trying to understand a case.

Case Study

A. is an attractive and articulate single girl of 30. She began treatment with both general personality problems of relationships and having depression and with a specific problem. She could not decide whether to go and live with her Bulgarian boyfriend in Tunisia or stay and make a home in London. The opposites

of going and staying seemed to have equal pull. She was paralysed between them. But these surface opposites were related to deeper opposites in her self that she had not yet integrated. Indeed she had little clear idea of her SELF and seemed internally dis-integrated. She was lopsided onto the outside, onto others from whom she sought approval and who defined her. As a baby she had not been fully held or mirrored or affirmed. Her mother had not wanted to be pregnant as it meant separation from husband in Africa. She left A. in a home when she was 9 months. Although we have talked about this and she sees certain patterns, much of our work has been on getting more of a sense of self in the here and now. I have tried to accept, hold and mirror her.

The separated opposites in her self include a school prefect side opposed to an exotic naughty side, a vulnerable and a strong side, a superior and an inferior side and a powerful and powerless side. She did not have a concept of mutuality in a relationship, believing that one side is always permanently more powerful or superior. In some ways she felt inferior to me because I always saw the bad sides of her and because she was coming to me for help and because she knew little about me while I knew a lot about her. But she pushed hard to feel superior at times as she had always done with her mother. It often felt like a struggle for control.

After about 15 sessions she seemed to feel more comfortable both with me and with herself and found her dark side more acceptable. She made the decision to join her boyfriend and felt able to be less affected by parental judgement. By moving in one direction she is at least unsticking the opposites and letting the rhythms begin to flow again. She recognises that it is only a start. There is much more work to be done when she is ready. But as we only have a few more sessions before her departure I have started to offer more in the way of models or ways of looking. 'Education' has become more relevant and I have said to her that it is possible to have relationships in which people are different but neither is permanently in control or superior. At the same time I am allowing myself to be more vulnerable in our relationship so that it becomes more equal too. I have begun to be able to use my model both on the level of transference and on the level of conscious problem solving.

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attendance

hate and love wear similar masks:
beneath these guises of pose and form
we glare the despair

of a pervert's smile. to be seen
we contort our being to whatever role
truth imposes. we play out reality

beyond reality's limit. past the time of party
when all the guests are gone
hate and love are found

asleep in each others' arms.

gameplay

games have as their centre loneliness.
hence one can have as many players as one wants
so long as the victim doesn't complain.

Wilson Stapleton