

Philosophy

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BCPC is an integrative training, which means that our approach is non-dogmatic. The theory we espouse is based on our shared values, although the styles developed by individual staff members, graduates and students may vary. We call our integration 'humanistic and integrative'. Our humanism honours the basic rights and integrity of all people, and values a search for authentic meeting. Within this value system we are free to find meanings and ways of being that enhance our work with clients. Both humanistic and psychodynamic approaches are important to us. Particular attention is made to Rogerian and Gestalt models and to the theory and practice of object relations theory, self psychology and the intersubjectivists. Any assertion of beliefs in this paper is therefore not dogmatically, even if passionately, held and may not be shared by all of us alike.

The Model of the Person

Given our philosophical starting point we do not imagine that we or anyone else can adequately describe the person in such a way that our 'model' could be a finished project. We tend to see the person as being both potentially a 'unit' and a 'process'. As 'units', people feel themselves to be the agents of their actions, to have a history and continuity and to have characteristics and familiar responses. As 'processes', they exist in changing and complex webs

of relating. Thus they change, depending on who or what is being related to. We feel that both ways of understanding the person are important for the work of the therapist. There is a need to understand developmentally how individuals have come to be as they are, and also to understand that our relating with them produces a third entity, an intersubjective space.

As regards the dilemma between 'nature' and 'nurture' we believe, much as Winnicott does, that we are born with our own unique potential which will unfold given a sufficiently facilitating environment. Nature may dictate our potential, but nurture is all important in determining whether this does unfold, remains hidden or becomes distorted. We tend to see violence, for example, not as an innate potential which can only be curbed by society's rules, but as a response to the narcissistic wounds inflicted by a non-validating environment.

The Nature of the Processes of Personal Change

Following from this model, we understand the person to be constantly in a state of becoming. Although we concur with psychodynamic theorists that early experiences are crucial, we do not believe that the personality is completely 'set' in early childhood or indeed at any other time. We would agree with Bollas that the 'idiom' of

each individual is constantly elaborated throughout life. It follows that psychotherapy may have a significant part to play in influencing the development of each individual, whether psychotherapist or client. Insofar as great damage can be done to the vulnerable and undefended psyche of small children through abusive, careless or neglectful responses, there may be permanent scars which people can only learn to live with. We do believe, nevertheless, that new experiences of relatedness may bring to life new and resilient aspects which greatly strengthen the sense of self and add richness and complexity to our experience and ability to respond. Along with Kohut, Winnicott, Rogers and their successors we believe that every baby needs good mirroring responses to support the development of a secure sense of self, but in agreement with Stern we also view these needs as continuing throughout life.

We see, with psychodynamic theorists, that the psyche finds ways of protecting its potential for coming into being. These defences may result, as Winnicott says, in a seemingly credible 'false self'. We understand that the 'false self' may be imperative and that without it the psyche may fall apart altogether. We therefore believe that work should be respectful to these defences so that they can be relinquished in the client's own time.

Links between the Inner and the Outer

We understand each individual to be intricately bound up with their social context. Our development as selves is within the context of parental relationships that are themselves embedded in culture. We cannot make sense of experience outside cul-

ture. Our understanding of experience cannot be outside a world view with which we have been imbued. We therefore see the relationship between the inner and outer as a highly complex and interdependent one.

Because of this we need to understand the culture of our clients so as not to pathologise behaviour or attitudes which make sense in the client's culture but not in our own. We understand 'culture' here to include those which arise in different groupings, including classes and geographical areas as well as race and ethnicity. If psychotherapy is to be available to people from all groupings in society there are two prerequisites: a genuine sense of inquiry into how experience is given meaning through culture, and an openness on the part of the therapist that acknowledges the relativity of her or his own cultural standpoint.

At BCPC we acknowledge that prejudice against those outside the majority culture has produced a situation in which the ethnic spread in society is not represented amongst clients, therapists and trainers of psychotherapy and counselling. Correcting this imbalance is not easy, but correction should be our aim if these professions are to be credible in today's society. It could also contribute greatly to our field by providing a greater richness and depth of understanding.

The Person of the Therapist and the Relationship with the Client

We see psychotherapy as being an intersubjective meeting. Both parties are inevitably subjective. We therefore do not see the counsellor or psychotherapist as being



able to examine the client and dispassionately decide how the work should continue. We believe that therapists should be as fully present and as open as possible, within themselves, to their responses to the client.

It is true nevertheless that the client has come to therapist and not vice versa. The therapist is present, not only to experience the meeting fully, but also to reflect on this experience. This ability, which is not easy to develop, is one of the most important skills that student therapists need to find in themselves. As time goes on the client will also develop this ability.

We understand the concept of 'transference' in the way that the Intersubjectivists do, as described by Stolorow and Atwood; they believe that we all see the world in the light of past experience and

that this will affect how the therapist is experienced. We hope to create a sense of safety within a good working alliance so that responses to and by the client, originally made in early childhood, can be re-experienced and understood.

Suitability for the Work

The work is suitable for anyone who is able to find meaning in relating and is motivated towards self-exploration. If these conditions are not met then the work may still be possible if they can be worked towards. Circumstances which are likely to create difficulties are those where the individual is in complete denial, or there is a lot of addictive behaviour, or very little support in the environment; or where the client's thinking is very concrete, as is often found in psychotic processes. Any of these situations may make it very difficult to form a good working alliance, strong enough to contain the work needing to be done. A skilled therapist may be able to find a way of relating which helps it to begin.

Our thinking develops continually within our Association and particularly between trainers and students. We hope that we will never consider this work to be complete and that continual learning keeps us open to experience, to each other, to society, to the developing therapeutic world outside our own Centre and to our clients.

Further Reading

Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character*, Hill and Wang, 1992

Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, International Universities Press, 1977

Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Constable, 1974

Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Basic Books, 1985

D.R. Stolorow and G.E. Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, The Analytic Press, 1992

Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Basic Books, 1969