PSYCHOTHERAPY'S PAST

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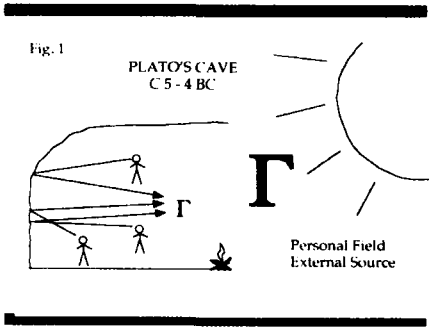
The great social project of psychotherapy is suffused with the images and assumptions, formal and informal, of I9th and 20th century Western social philosophy. One theme runs through the centre of all psychotherapies: what it means to be a person, and how ideas about personhood developed in psychotherapy's culture of origin. The intuitions that we hold of such intimate and fundamental matters may be so deeply rooted that it is hard to notice that they are there. Similarly, as a product of a specific society, psychotherapy can find it difficult to imagine that its own understanding of what it means to be a person is not universal. Tracing the history of this particular idea might give us a more distinct appreciation of what psychotherapy has been saying within its society; and it might also help us towards a more tangible awareness that the cultural tradition from which psychotherapy emerged is just one of many. Whatever our cultural background, we might then become a bit more sensitive towards ourselves and others, and a bit less likely to take assumptions for granted; after all, everyone, in large or small ways, comes from a culture which is different from our own.

Not all psychotherapy began from Freud: Adler and Jung for example, were both well on the way to elaborating their distinctive approaches before they even met Freud (see Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious).* But psychotherapies in general bear the marks of Freud's conceptualisation and mode of operation more than those of any other single theorist, and the changes and divergences through which many of the leading schools developed were made to a great extent in response to his work. With amazing brevity, we might say that the main body of Freud's endeavours was directed towards presenting the psyche as an object in the universe, to be investigated scientifically like any other entity within nature. As a scientist of his time, this meant seeing the psyche (and the universe) as a mechanism to be explicated; there has been considerable retrospective criticism of this perspective. But he also held

another orientation, illustrated in the soft simplicity of the patient's free association meeting the therapist's free-floating attention. This more subjective facet of psychoanalysis was developed by Object Relations and the humanistic therapies. These movements, in their different but not so very different ways, took forward a reorientation which has been extraordinarily influential within 20th century psychotherapy and its society: Object Relation's re-aligning of theory in terms of the human being as subject, rather than mechanism, and humanistic psychology's realigning of the therapeutic and other helping relationships as partnership rather than quasi-medical expert and invalid.



Both movements are based on a sense of the person as a being of inestimable significance and value, whose essential nature should not and cannot be accounted for or justified. This self, or subject, develops within a matrix of relationship, and is itself relational in structure and process. Humanistic and Object Relations theories and practice have coalesced round this sense of the self as infinitely deep, connected inwards to its own being and outwards to other beings. Many other psychotherapy approaches share this relational orientation, and some within the Object Relations and humanistic groups hold additional counter-views alongside. These orientations are thus more like shades or styles than dogmatic belief systems, reflecting a personhood which has its own history.

A snapshot history of Western subjectivity

Plato, in the 5th to 4th centuries BC, suggests himself as a point from which to start because he took forward the idea of the psychological as a realm in itself. As in Eastern cultures, earlier surviving literature reveals less differentiation of the psychic and the physical. *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* for example, and Homer's *Odyssey,* describe journeys which are at the same time and without distinction both actual and psychical. The allegory of the human condition, known as 'Plato's Cave', paints a picture of the human being as spiritual being; and putting ourselves into his cave allows us to gather a sense of what seems a genuinely different interpretation of personhood.

Plato said that being a person is like being in a cave, chained so that you can only see the back of it (see figure I). Vague shapes play on the cave wall, and that is what you think reality is. But because you are a person, you have an intrinsic urge to break free of the chains and turn around to see more. Philosophy helps you to do this, having grown out of this urge to go beyond the immediate. You would then be able to see that the shapes were in fact shadows, cast by a fire of an object which, you now see is three-dimensional. If you persevere, you might even get outside the cave. There

you would find a world of inestimably greater dimension than the cave world. The object inthe cave is just a copy, a puppet, of a far greater Form. The fire is a far lesser version of the sun.

To make some sense of this: putting ourselves back m the cave, the shadow on the wall could be my tax demand. All I see is the demand that I find the money and pay up. But if I loosen my chains a bit, I see that the object in front of the fire, of which my tax demand is a reflection and just a tiny part, is the whole system of redistribution and justice. Now my resentment begins to look a bit petty; I seem to be seeing more, and being better. And if I work really hard, I might be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the Form outside the cave of which the British system of government is a paltry copy. This is what Plato saw as Justice itself. The Forms, or Ideas, are absolute concepts such as Truth, Love and Beauty. *We* glimpse them as intuitions, and their concrete manifestations are second-hand and imperfect versions. The ultimate Form is the Good itself, and for this Plato used the metaphor of the Sun: because it is the most difficult thing to look at directly, yet it illuminates all the Form. Plato is saying that we are oriented towards and yearn for this *absolute Good, which I* shall call the Source, but that we am held back by our own chains and by the intrinsic difficulty of approaching these highest realities. Our natural psychic habitat is the cave.

From within this scenario, if you want to know what is true you would not look 'inside'. Subjectivity, the psychic space between the person and the Source, takes the shape not of an internal space, but of an external subjective field which is in a way the equivalent of the modem personal self.

The assumed world is not individualised in the same way as it is for the modem West; the subjective place of residence is a shared dwelling, bounded by the limits of communal perceptibility rather than individual perception.

The same structure continued into the early Chnstian period in Europe, in the first four centuries AD (figure 2), with Plato's configurations being mapped on to Christianity. There isn't a cave, and the gloom and the chains are

Fig. 2 EARLY CHRISTIAN
C 1 - 3 AD

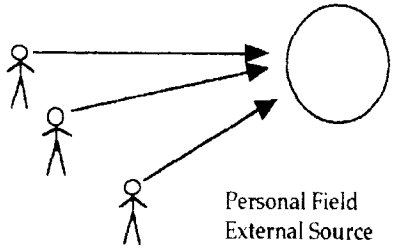
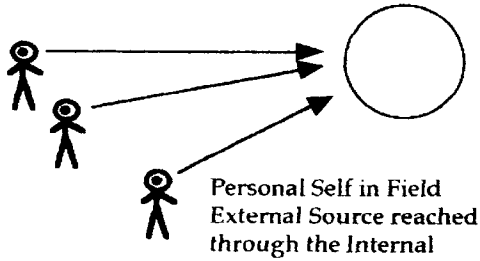


Fig. 3 AUGUSTINE
C 4 - 5 AD



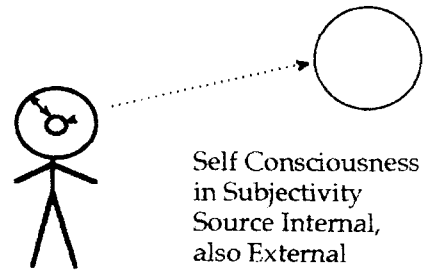
conceptualised as sin. There isn't a plurality of Forms, because there is only one God, taking over as the Source which Plato had represented by the sun. Again, the Source is external to the person and links with the person through a collective subjective field.

This continued up until Augustine, in the 4th to 5th centuries AD (figure 3). What he did that was important (to us) was develop a language for innerness. He said, what you love, you become. Loving God means to have a spark of the divine, an actual fragment of God, within you. He talked of two kinds of light: the light of God, or the sun, which illuminates the world, and the inner light which enables us to perceive the illuminated true reality. The Source - what we seek - is still mostly outside, but is reached via a fragment of Source inside. There is beginning to be a place for a personal self although the subjective field is still dominant.

Taking a huge jump of eleven centuries, up to the 15th to 17th centuries (figure 4), the individual connection between each person and the Source has become stronger and the subjective field correspondingly weaker. In 1517, Martin Luther proclaimed that you cannot achieve salvation institutionally, through paying money to the church, but only in a sincere personal relationship with God. This personalisation is reflected in the development of perspective in art at this time: before, people painted what was there, not just what they might happen to see. The individual viewpoint is beginning to take over as the basic, socially assumed, viewpoint The communal subjective field is becoming an individual subjective point of perception.

Descartes, in the 17th century, went so far as to say 'I think, therefore I am'; before, it would have been, 'I see God, therefore God is'. He is taking the experience of subjectivity as an object of perception: there is now a self to be conscious of. Locke, slightly later,

Fig. 4 REFORMATION, DESCARTES, LOCKE C 15 - 17



pictured this self as a mental substance or object, the inner circle or dot become dense and self enclosed. This is the kind of personal self whose inner world will be articulated by Object Relations theory. The Source is now more inside than outside, and in this scenario, you would look inside for true knowledge. The outer source (Descartes never actually doubted the existence of God) acts as the guarantor, or alternatively as the reflection, of the inner source. As such it is either out of reach but essential, or within reach but secondary to the inner source. One is as it were the reflection of the other.

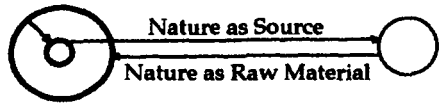
We can also see that the relationship with other people must change. If the Source, the divine spark, is the core of each individual, everyday relationships become more significant. At the same

time, the weaker communal field of subjectivity means that people are more isolated from each other. With the outer source shrinking, religion is on the wane.

Figure 5 represents the position in the I9th and early 20th centuries from which psychotherapy as we know it originated. The major cultural dichotomies between religion and science, or Romanticism and technology, rest on a new appreciation of the power of the mind to create a picture of reality. Kant had argued, in the I8th century, that what we see crucially depends on how the mind constructs. Both sides of these dichotomies involve a view of the world that is chosen: the proud subjectivity of the Romantics, the faith of the religious, or the austere objectivity which technology and science (and Freud) strove to achieve. Reality is framed within a personal construction which is accepted as a representation.

The Romantic/ technological divide, still very much alive today, is a dispute about the status and existence of the source and how to reach it, and was reached by a dramatic substitution. God was replaced by the natural world, reflecting or including the human being as part of nature. The two source circles of the self and nature ambiguously mirror or reflect each other. In the Romantic vision, nature is the source of life and inspiration and is equated with the greatness of the human soul; one of the soul's creations is its vision of nature. In Mahler's *Song of the Earth*, for example, what is being celebrated or worshipped is at one and the same time nature, art and the human soul. It now makes sense to think of the self as having depth: the mysteries of truth, beauty and goodness are plumbed through the mysteries of the psyche.

Fig. 5 **ROMANTICISM vs TECHNOLOGY C 19 - 20**



Subjective/Objective Frame Internal and External Source ambiguously reflect each other

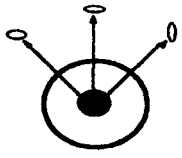
In the opposite line of technology and industrialisation, nature is treated not as Source but as raw material, and the person still part of nature, as mechanism. The Source of life, truth and beauty has been converted into the substitute source of mastery over nature, including persons, life and death. These movements are thus two sides of a coin, the chains and the sun. I have separated them out to an extreme; but good Romantic art reflects the ambiguity of the human condition, and thoughtful science retains a sense of awe.

This structure is the structure of the psychoanalytic Object Relation, and like Object Relations, is set within subjective experience. External and internal, subject and object, feed each other and draw from each other, each is the projection and mirror of the other, and at the same time, separate worlds. The great relational dichotomies of Object Relations are the same as the Romantic/ technological divide.. do we treat the other person (or oneself) as

source, with honour and recognition, or do we exploit them as raw material? Do we experience the music of inner harmony, and the precious and formative connection between one human soul and another, or the ravages of conflict, plunder and persecution? These are articulated by Klein as aspects of the depressive versus the paranoid schizoid positions, by Fairbairn as mature or infantile dependence, and by Object Relations generally as good and bad object relationships.

Figure 6 brings us up to date. What has been happening during the 20th century, and can we guess what could develop m the 2Ist? Contemporary Western society manifests ever more extreme polarities. Alongside the violence, exploitation and alienation, we hold aspirations of global cooperation and universal human rights on an unprecedented scale. However inadequate their realisation, these are higher ethical ideals and ambitions than Western society has ever held before.

Fig. 6 DECONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY C 20



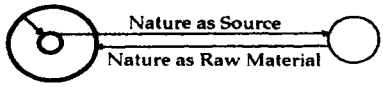
Externalisation

Fragmentation

Decentreing

Language of Frame, Self and Source begins not to work

Fig. 5 ROMANTICISM vs TECHNOLOGY C 19 - 20



Subjective/Objective Frame
Internal and External Source
ambiguously reflect each other

What about the polarities of subjectivity? The next step after articulating the soul, self or psyche has been to deconstruct it. Instead of a sphere or core of matter within a membrane, we have nuclear fission. Looking deep within seemed once to promise a nugget of truth, the true self; but it is as though we have opened up the musical box and found only broken metal. The paintings of Picasso or the surrealists show a Source that has been externalised: a highly subjective perspective is presented as coming from the outside. 'Happenings' take significance out of the artist and into, the external world. In the multiple disconnected voices of Joyce's *Ulysses* the source has fragmented; in novels like D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* dream images are offered as successive realities. In computer-generated music, self and source are desubjectivised. As one or both circles disappear, the language of frame, self and source seems not to work so well as before. It is as though a new structure is needed. A contemporary philosopher, (Derek Parfit, in *Reasons and Persons),* has argued that the assumption of a continuous, bounded,

unitary personal identity is out of date, and that we are beginning to think of the person as a series of persons.

It is probably inevitable that psychoanalysis, and then the relational therapies, should emerge between the final two diagrams representing the identification of the source with the soul and its disintegration. We can see the psychotherapies as a restorative response to spiritual depletion, social atomisation and emotional disconnection, and at the same time as the structure or rationale of how and why dignity and worth are accorded to all human beings.
In their different ways, they offer reconnection with the Source through reconnection with each other and within oneself. The humanistic therapies call for us to listen to the connection with the self as the basis for the connection to others. The later Object Relations work of Christopher Bollas, Peter Lomas and the Independent tradition continue the restorative reconnecting through relationship: Bion and the neo-Kleinians have gone some way to develop a language for the bits and fragments of a dispersed subjectivity. The Lacanian and Self Psychology schools address and express the structure and process of modern subjectivity from the perspectives of their different traditions in France and America.

Can the language and concepts of psychotherapy stretch to fit the future? Different visions will rise and fall; structures of the past reappear embedded in the structures of the present, and so Freud, and even Plato, still speak to us across huge contextual gulfs. The openness and non-prescriptiveness of the relational approaches have allowed their tones and resonances to travel further than their concepts, and the world of psychotherapy badly needs this spirit of connectedness if it is to go beyond the factions it has always torn itself into. New forms of theory and practice might then emerge from the meetings of orientations, in contrast to the predominantly separate developments of the present theoretical apartheid. This is not the province of distant theoreticians: it needs all of us to search for the ground on which our experience is built and voice in all our differences what psychotherapy is for us, what it could be, what it is to be human.

Psychotherapy's deep intuition of what it means to be a person is just one of many ways that personhood can be experienced and understood. If more than one cultural tradition could meet and clash, or clash and meet, forms might grow which would look as different from today's psychotherapy as the world outside does from the world within the cave.

Further Reading

Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious,* Fontana 1970

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons,* Oxford University Press 1984

Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* Cambridge University Press 1989

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