

# The Un-Accountable Psyche: Psyche in an Accountancy World

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## Synopsis

The article contrasts an Economic framing and a wider, *Human* framing of the psyche. The utilitarian tradition in our culture is so powerful that it does not countenance an alternative to be possible. There are *divergent philosophical traditions* in the background of our field: *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*. The appeal to imagination, and the implicit, in phenomenology, now *intentionality*, are considered. The psyche is *incalculable, infinite* in its reach beyond immediate consciousness, inherently *creative and spontaneous*, even intractable, with habitual dimensions not reducible to formulae, but rather *enacted, inherently relationally*, by the great tragedians, Greeks and Shakespeare, by the poets, and by the greatest modern novelists, rather than in any textbooks.

Speaking personally, and without polemical intent, my own intuition is that the arguments about State Regulation are largely a *displacement* of another issue, something of a red herring for us in the crisis of psychotherapy. The other issue, which is the true heart of the crisis, is the one I want to explore in this essay. This is the issue of the argument between a solely *Economic* framing of the rationale and paradigms for psychotherapy and counselling, and a wider *Human* framing of the rationale and paradigms. Those both for, and against, State Regulation, on different political analyses of means to ends, would commonly nevertheless agree and come together on this understanding of the field.

I shall, in what follows, sometimes speak of psychotherapy and counselling, sometimes of psychotherapy, sometimes of therapy, sometimes of intervention, or therapeutic intervention, sometimes of 'our field', and so on, interchangeably; I shall try to use the terms idiomatically in the various contexts.

As most people in our field know, Lord Richard Layard's 'happiness' initiative,<sup>1</sup> which led to the spearheading of IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies),<sup>2</sup> caught on with the previous Government like a house on fire. As he himself indicates, this initiative goes back to Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and Utilitarianism. We can do Lord Layard the honour of recognising that, in making this connection, he is placing himself in the tradition of a radical dialogue and divergence which has dominated British intellectual and cultural life at least since the Romantic period (since roughly the adulthood of William Blake, 1757–1827, we might say, for convenience), and which is now at the heart of our troubles with psychotherapy

and counselling, and not only psychotherapy and counselling, but, also, among other things, our whole education system today.

But, as a dyed-in-the-wool Utilitarian, he has no serious inkling that there is another position or tradition which offers a profoundly different way of understanding human existence, which, if ignored, humanity shrinks. So powerful is this Utilitarian tradition in our culture that it does not generally occur to its proponents in professional contexts that an alternative is possible, let alone that one exists. To be sure, the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* says:

Since the early 20th Century utilitarianism has undergone a variety of refinements. After the middle of the 20th Century it has become more common to identify as a 'Consequentialist' since very few philosophers agree entirely with the view proposed by the Classical Utilitarians, particularly with respect to the hedonistic value theory. But the influence of the Classical Utilitarians has been profound – not only within moral philosophy, but within political philosophy and social policy. The question Bentham asked, 'What use is it?', is a cornerstone of policy formation. It is a completely secular, forward-looking question. The articulation and systematic development of this approach to policy formation is owed to the Classical Utilitarians.

But clearly Lord Layard's value system remains thoroughly hedonistic, as well as consequential. The model is oriented in terms of outcomes, the outcome is happiness, or at least reduced distress, and this is to be used as a measuring rule for the 'amount' of therapeutic intervention someone needs. Connected with this is the use of a largely fictitious system of diagnostics, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), which grows more arcane, and yet also more and more merely descriptive and non-entity-based, by the edition, and yet, despite that equivocal improvement, is taken by its proponents more and more to dictate treatments – manualisable treatments – for those thus diagnosed.

Dickens's Mr Gradgrind, in *Hard Times*, Dickens's challenge to the Utilitarians of his time, spoke as follows, along with his compeers:

'Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy', cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. 'That's it! You are never to fancy.' 'You are not, Cecilia Jupe', Thomas

Gradgrind solemnly repeated, 'to do anything of that kind.' 'Fact, fact, fact!', said the gentleman. And 'Fact, fact, fact!', repeated Thomas Gradgrind. 'You are to be in all things regulated and governed', said the gentleman, 'by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use', said the gentleman, 'for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste.'

Where, in the mid-19th century, they descanted on these lines, today's social theorists would talk of outcomes – 'Outcomes, Outcomes, Outcomes!' They would be less blatant – a bit less blatant! – in discouraging fancy and imagination, the counter-factual. But the essence of it has not changed much. Ask today's teachers who have to comply with SATS (Standard Assessment Tasks<sup>3</sup>) in the classroom. There would be a strong trend towards using a particular version of science and evidence as support, and of course this is now enshrined in the slogan 'evidence-based practice' in the context of psychological intervention, along with physical medicine. All along, in the evolution of the Utilitarian philosophy, there has been a very strong connection with Economics, and Political Economy. If we are all Marxists now, Marx might indeed point out to what an enormous extent, here, our models of 'science' are dictated by Economic and Social, Capitalist, imperatives. But, underlying this, is the general assumption of a *mechanistic and quantifiable* understanding of human beings. So behind the ethical-political dimension of Utilitarianism lurks a metaphysic, a mechanistic and positivistic metaphysic. The idea is fundamentally that there is a *symmetry*, a *calculable symmetry*, between 'input' and 'output'. This is why it is so germane to the Cognitive-Behavioural project, which, after all, despite its present-day sympathy with

mindfulness practice and various forms of integration, ultimately goes back to the hard line behaviourism of John B. Watson, Skinner, Broadbent, Hull and Eysenck, with its affinities in the Logical Behaviourism of the Logical Positivists, Ryle, and the later Wittgenstein.

And here we come up against the question of *divergent philosophical traditions* in the background of our field. We do – potentially – have a sufficient consensus about what our enterprise is essentially about, in the Humanistic, Integrative, Transpersonal, Existential, and Body Psychotherapy traditions, and including significant elements in the Analytic and Psychoanalytic traditions, to define or, at any rate, articulate, in appropriate form, an alternative tradition. But we have not ourselves done it, or been concerned to do it.

And we cannot do this without articulating it philosophically. This has been the great chasm in our strategies over the years, although there are signs, at last, that this is changing. We have not spoken with a coherent voice. And this is not without excuse, for British philosophy and cultural thought itself have only occasionally spoken with a clear voice in this matter, only occasionally articulated this division. Yet it undoubtedly can be clearly articulated, and I want briefly to call attention to the, for us, exemplary achievement of what was perhaps the clearest and most decisive articulation of this division ever achieved in British philosophical and cultural thought. This is the achievement of John Stuart Mill, who was the finest exponent of a more sensitive version of Utilitarianism in the British philosophical tradition. That was published (*Utilitarianism*) in 1863, but earlier in his life, the younger Mill<sup>4</sup> articulated the contrast I am writing about in two definitive and indeed Classical essays, which were republished in 1950 by F.R. Leavis and are now still in print,<sup>5</sup> written respectively in 1838 and 1840, on Bentham and Coleridge. If I could persuade my colleagues of the significance of this near-definitive formulation, this essay would have gone far to achieve its purpose.

Mill says:

The writers of whom we speak have never been read by the multitude; except for the more slight of their works, their readers have been few: but they have been the teachers of the teachers; there is hardly to be found in England an individual of any importance in the world of mind, who (whatever opinions he may afterwards have adopted) did not first learn to think from one of these two.... These two men are Jeremy Bentham and Samuel Taylor

Coleridge – the two great seminal minds of England in their age.

In every respect the two men are each other's 'completing counterpart': the strong points of each correspond to the weak points of the other. Whoever could master the premises and combine the methods of both, would possess the entire English philosophy of his age. Coleridge used to say that everyone is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian: it may be similarly affirmed, that every Englishman at the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean; holds views of human affairs which can only be proved true on the principles either of Bentham or of Coleridge....

Now, as we see, *Bentham* is alive and well and living on in the social policy of our time, in Lord Layard's initiative, for instance. Perhaps it is not an accident that Bentham himself, like Lenin in Moscow, can still be viewed in mummified form in the University of London! But Coleridge, and everything that corresponds to him, does not correspond to a definite articulated body of thought in our time, not in psychotherapy, and not in the wider field. Many nineteenth-century British and Irish writers attempted to evoke it, including John Henry Newman, Matthew Arnold and Oscar Wilde,<sup>6</sup> but never as definitely. In the twentieth century in Britain it fell to social thinkers and writers not identified, in that respect, as mainstream, to articulate it in some measure, such as T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, the neglected later Whitehead,<sup>7</sup> Collingwood, Polanyi, and F.R. Leavis in the 'Two Cultures' controversy,<sup>8</sup> but it has never been mainstream in the way post-Benthamite thinking has. Its articulation in the phenomenological-existential-postmodernist tradition, for various reasons, has suffered a similar fate, and, like its articulation in the literary tradition, this fate was determined largely by the dominance, in British-American philosophy, of the Logical Positivist, and then the Linguistic Commonsense, trends in philosophy. I shall return to the dimension of the phenomenological-existential-postmodernist tradition shortly.

Mill articulates what Coleridge stands for as much in the contrast – in what is *missing* from Bentham:

He had a phrase, expressive of the view he took of all moral speculations to which his method had not been applied, or (which he considered as the same thing) not founded on a recognition of utility as the moral standard; this phrase was 'vague generalities'. Whatever presented itself to him in such a shape, he dismissed as unworthy of notice, or dwelt upon only to denounce as absurd. He did not heed,

or rather the nature of his mind prevented it from occurring to him, *that these generalities contained the whole unanalysed experience of the human race.*

Notice the appeal here, to something which has been so prominent in the recent phenomenologically based writing of Daniel Stern, such as in his book *The Present Moment: in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*,<sup>9</sup> the dimension Stern labels as the 'implicit', and Polanyi the 'tacit'.

[Bentham's] second [disqualification as a philosopher] was the incompleteness of his own mind as a representative of universal human nature. In many of the most natural and strongest feelings of human nature he had no sympathy; from many of its graver experiences he was altogether cut off; and the faculty by which one mind understands a mind different from itself, and throws itself into the feelings of that other mind, was denied him by his deficiency of Imagination.

..... The Imagination which he had not, was that to which the name is generally appropriated by the best writers of the present day; that which enables us, by voluntary effort, to conceive the absent as if it were present, the imaginary as if it were real, and to clothe it in the feelings which, if it were indeed real, it would bring along with it. This is the power by which one human being enters into the mind and circumstances of another. This power constitutes the poet, in so far as he does anything but melodiously utter his own actual feelings. It constitutes the dramatist entirely. It is one of the constituents of the historian; by it we understand other times.... Without it nobody knows even his own nature, further than circumstances have actually tried it and called it out; nor the nature of his fellow-creatures, beyond such generalisations as he may have been enabled to make from his own observations of their outward conduct.....

He had never been made alive to the unseen influences which were acting on himself, nor consequently on his fellow-creatures. Other ages and other nations were a blank to him for purposes of instruction. He measured them but by one standard; their knowledge of facts, and their capability to take correct views of utility, and merge all other objects in it. (*Bentham*)

Now this appeal to imagination, and the implicit dimension, corresponds to what in the phenomenological and post-phenomenological traditions in philosophy was labelled, after Brentano and Husserl, *intentionality*, the concept recently at

the centre, for instance, of Stern's enquiries in *The Present Moment*, referred to earlier. And *intentionality* as such is still hardly addressed in the British-American philosophical tradition. The one book that mentions *Intentionality* as its title, John R. Searle's book on it,<sup>10</sup> reduces it to speech act formularies, and mentions Husserl just once in the text, whilst both the dominant philosophy of mind works in post-war philosophy, Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*,<sup>11</sup> and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>12</sup> offer a functionalist account of the thing, if not the name, and P.F. Strawson dismisses Kant's equivalent notion of *imaginative synthesis* as a philosophical myth in his great work on Kant, *The Bounds of Sense*.<sup>13</sup>

So it is indeed difficult to get all this taken seriously. But what *would* have to be admitted into court if it were to be taken seriously? We would have to affirm a mass of things that are, correctly, taken for granted in the humanistic tradition, but commonly without a robust philosophical articulation. Thus, we would have to affirm that the psyche is indeed *incalculable*; that the ramifications of any expression of meaning and intentionality, in the commonest discourse and human interaction, are indeed *infinite*, infinite textually and in its reach beyond immediate consciousness. We would also have to affirm that the psyche is inherently *creative and spontaneous*, therefore, and that even its intractable and habitual – scripted – and its tragic and evil dimensions, which are all undoubtedly a real aspect of human nature, cannot be reduced to formulae, but rather are better articulated by the great tragedians, the great Greeks and Shakespeare, by the poets, and by the greatest modern novelists, than by any textbooks of psychotherapy, psychology, and sociology – with honourable exceptions, of course (for instance, Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis*).<sup>14</sup>

All the realities which are addressed under the heading of the unconscious, transference and psychodynamic patterning, in the analytic traditions, come in here, but are not to be simply reduced to quasi-scientific formulations like drives and instincts, and neuroscientific concepts, though undoubtedly developmental realities correspond to such concepts and formulations, and need to be reframed within phenomenological formulations. The difficulties the psychoanalytic tradition, since Freud, has had with its need to express these insights as science are epitomised in the great exchange between Freud and Jung about the theory of infantile sexuality, when Freud

asked Jung (in the latter's *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*) never to give up the sexual theory. 'It is our only bulwark against the black tide of mud..', and then, to Jung's puzzlement, he went on, 'of occultism'. But Jung's puzzlement was itself misplaced. Freud there articulated an anxiety of the secular scientific Enlightenment man, which goes as far back as Kant, embodied in his critique of Swedenborg, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*,<sup>15</sup> and indeed is expressed in his reductionism about imagination by the positivistic Theseus in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact:  
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
 That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,  
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
 The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
 And as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation and a name.  
 Such tricks hath strong imagination,  
 That if it would but apprehend some joy,  
 It comprehends some bringer of that joy;  
 Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
 How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

This reduces imaginative creation to mistaken identity. But such are the reductive conceptions of imagination from Hobbes through Hume and Mr Gradgrind, to Gilbert Ryle and Daniel Dennett. The assumption is that the open-endedness which I am trying to evoke leads to a denial of science and an espousing of an unregenerate 'spiritual' realm, and that the acceptance of imagination – or, today, intentionality – and all that goes with it, leads to a denial of modern thought and is basically reactionary and non-progressive.

But, in reality, Freud it was who introduced us to the modern case history and to the conception of psychotherapy as, ultimately, irreducible narrative. He, and Jung, and Carl Rogers, and the Perlses, and Eric Berne et al., all in their *essential* insights accept irreducible spontaneity, infinitude, enactment and narrative-dramatic process – the In-Calculability of the Psyche.

This is the position we need to articulate properly, robustly and fully, in response to, and contrasted

with, the *economically based* model of the psyche as calculable, and interventions as manualisable. 5



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## Notes and References

- 1 See <http://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/features/layard-interview/>
- 2 See <http://www.iapt.nhs.uk/>; <http://www.ocduk.org/iapt>
- 3 Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Curriculum\\_assessment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Curriculum_assessment)
- 4 Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Stuart\\_Mill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stuart_Mill)
- 5 For example, F.R. Leavis, *Mill On Bentham and Coleridge*, Read Books, 2006.
- 6 See <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>
- 7 See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (The Gifford Lectures), 2nd edn, The Free Press, New York, 1978.
- 8 Cf. <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/-The-Two-Cultures--today-4882>
- 9 Cf. <http://hewardwilkinson.co.uk/docs/SternReview.pdf>; Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, W.W. Norton, New York, 2004.
- 10 John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.
- 11 Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson's University Library, London, 1949.
- 12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1953.
- 13 P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Methuen, London, 1966.
- 14 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Northeastern University Press, New England, 1986.
- 15 Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, BibioBazaar, Charleston, S.C., 2009.