

**IMMANENT VITALITY:  
REFLECTIONS ON THE ACTUALIZING TENDENCY**

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*Abstract* The actualizing tendency is a bio-psychosocial construct rooted in the notion of the organism, straddling the natural sciences and the humanities and must be distinguished from the later notion of the formative tendency with its universalizing claims. It can assert a place among contemporary ... scientific investigations, heirs to non-dogmatic theories of nature and to a scientific tradition which refuted Darwinian and post-Darwinian evolutionary hypotheses whilst emphasizing cooperation and the organism over struggle for survival and isolated individualism. Different from the more confined notion of actualization of the self, the notion of the actualizing tendency decenters the self and is an indispensable tenet of person-centered therapy.

The notion of the actualizing tendency points toward *immanent vitality*, a notion divorced from the totalizing claims of both scientism and mysticism and restored to its organismic/phenomenological roots.

*Key words* actualizing tendency, organism, Darwin, cooperation

### **An Anarchic Philosophy**

For Tudor & Worrall (2006), person-centered therapy is a “clinical philosophy”, which they define as “a way of being, underpinned by certain philosophical principles embodied by the therapist” (Tudor & Worrall, 2006, p. 9). It has a strong emphasis on experience, a stance which closely follows Rogers’s view according to which if theory “is to be profitable ... must follow experience, not precede it”. (Rogers, 1951 in Tudor & Worrall, 2006, p. 6). Among core elements of person-centered philosophy we find an ethical stance of respect for the autonomy of the client (Grant, 2010), facilitating a process whereby the authority of the client is augmented. This runs parallel to the dismantling of the authority of the expert, a stance which is essentially an-archic, for it questions the very *arché*, or prototype, of the therapist. There are striking parallels here with philosophy and psychoanalysis: 1) The dissemination of the authorial voice in Kierkegaard (1985) who used pseudonyms as well as

range of textual stratagems to undercut his power as an author and to consign accountability for the meaning to be derived from his words on the reader. 2) The *death of the author* announced by Barthes (1967): a powerful stance against positivism, for Barthes the epitome of a capitalist ideology which exaggerated the importance of the author (Barthes, 1967). 3) The psychoanalytic method of *free association* which, according to Christopher Bollas, “subverts the psychoanalyst’s natural authoritarian tendencies ... [and] unleashes the disseminating possibilities that open to infinity” (cited in Rose, 2011, p. 12).

*The notion of infinity* is crucial here as it provides us with a fertile antithesis, as clarified by Lévinas (1961), to the notion of *totality*. Infinity is a *horizontal*, as well as *immanent* perspective of shared experience, to which an egalitarian notion such as the actualizing tendency effortlessly belongs. *Totality*, on the other hand, is a *vertical*, as well as *transcendental*, dimension of received wisdom and authority imparted by the expert.

### **Flowing River of Change**

In his 1963 paper presented at the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Rogers famously spoke of the “tenacity of life” he had felt while on vacation on the shores of Northern California when he witnessed “palm-like seaweed” capable to take on “incessant pounding” of powerful waves. Such resilience in a seemingly fragile organism both moved and baffled him. He commented:

“Whether we are speaking of this sea plant or an oak tree, of an earthworm or a great night-flying moth, of an ape or of a man, we will do well ... to recognize that life is an active process, not a passive one. Whether the stimulus arises from within or without, whether the environment is favorable or unfavorable, the behaviors of an organism can be counted on to be in the direction of maintaining, enhancing and reproducing itself” (Rogers, 1963, in Levitt, 2009, p 18)

Rogers had defined the actualizing tendency as a “motivational construct”, (Rogers 1959) involving “development toward the differentiation of organs and functions, expansion and enhancement through reproduction” (Rogers 1963, p 18). He had noted continuity between earlier and later definitions of the actualizing tendency, even though, as argued by Cornelius-White & Kriz (2008), a more *pervasive* formulation such as the formative tendency

recognizes *interdependence* and the wider sphere of ecology (Cornelius-White & Kriz, 2008, p.127). *Pervasive* is of course different from *metaphysical*, in so far as it remains *immanent* rather than transcendent; it stresses self-organization, emergence, and inter-connectedness (ibid). It is not a stepping stone to a reassuringly foundational concept, for its first vital feature is a de-centering of the self. In this sense, trust in the actualizing tendency is faith in the unknown, a deep trust which outperforms the self of the expert, as well as the therapist's narcissistic claim over the client's healing process (Bazzano, 2011a).

At the same time, the pivotal role of the self in the client's own life is questioned in favor of the organism, a "biological and social reality ... [and] the root metaphor of person-centered psychology" (Tudor, 2010, p. 58). What is being actualized is *not* the self, for in that case person-centered therapy would be a form of ego-therapy (i.e. of bolstering the self-concept) rather than psycho-therapy (recognizing the entirety of the organismic sphere, what the ancient Greeks called *psyche*). What actualizes is the *organism*, in relation to which the self actively adapts moving towards that confluence of self, world, and other which is also central to phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Thus conceived, healing and growth take place with the recognition of the self-as-process. For Rogers, the person is

"a fluid process, not a fixed static entity, a flowing river of change, not a block of solid material; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits". (Rogers, 1961, p.122)

### **From Self-Actualization to Actualization of the Self**

Kurt Goldstein (1995) introduced the term "self-actualization" (Goldstein, 1995, p. 138, p. 141, p. 143) in order to underline the *organism's* unity, its capacity for self-regulation, and also to provide an alternative to the theory of drives which instead partitioned the psyche. He cautioned against the "impression of drives" (p. 144). Such impression arises, he wrote, "because the organism is governed at one time by one tendency, at another time by another; because one or the other tendency becomes more important for self-actualization" (p. 144).

Although indebted to Goldstein's notion, Maslow's "self-actualization" was articulated as the "fulfilment of mission - or call, fate, destiny, or vocation" (Maslow, 1962, p. 25). What is problematic in Maslow's formulation is the *reification* of the actualized self, emphasized in

the characteristics of self-actualizing people (realistic, accepting, autonomous, spontaneous and so forth), a formulation which, rightly or wrongly, reverberates in current narcissistic culture. C.H. Patterson (1985) amply commented on various, often contradictory interpretations of 'self-actualization'. However, within contemporary discourse self-actualizing has effectively become associated with selfishness. Zadie Smith (2009), in reviewing Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were watching God*, comments how this novel is "about the discovery of self in and through another":

Goddammit if it doesn't claim that love sets you free. These days 'self-actualization' is the aim, and if you can't do it alone you are admitting a weakness" (Smith, 2009, p. 6)

It is of course paradoxical that a notion which from its inception stressed the self-organizing processes of a biological organism, particularly the human organism (Cornelius-White & Kriz, 2008, p 117) has effectively become synonymous, in our culture, with the reinforcement of a solipstic notion of 'self'.

### **Agency without Identity**

It is nearly impossible to evade the fascination exerted within mainstream western by the notion of the separate individual. The very notion of identity is steeped in the biblical narrative, often set against otherness. (Schwartz, 1997; Bazzano, 2011). Even the particular animal becomes the subject of its experience (Lecourt, 1981), thus conferring a primordial, 'original' aura to the notion of individuality. The notion of the actualizing tendency could be seen as an attempt to lean out of the cage of individuality and establish *agency without identity*, an agency that is "congruent with the totality of a person's experience" (Warner, 2009, p. 122). *Process* and *agency* are central, and they go hand in hand in Rogers' theory. For Warner, agency is "the capacity to choose or act on one's own behalf" (2010, p. 113) something which "should not be thought as identical to isolated autonomy or individualism" (p 114).

Steeped in an organismic perspective, the notion of the actualizing tendency refrains from presupposing the existence of a self-existing subject. The very notion of identity needs to be

questioned: identity, as Claudio Rud argued, is “a phenomenon of movable multiplicities” (Rud, 2009, p 36).

Unlike the narrower notion of self-actualization (as it came to be understood) the actualizing tendency encompasses otherness, for *the other partakes of the life of the organism*. It also confers an *embodied* and *shared* quality to experience, for the body is a “social phenomenon ... exposed to others, vulnerable by definition [whose] very persistence depends upon social conditions and institutions” (Butler 2009, p. 33). The body is “body-environment”:

At the most primary level Gendlin says that we *are* body-environment interaction, a vastly larger system than the body of medical science. (Madison, 2010, p. 193)

The very recognition of the self-as-process, i.e. belonging to a wider organismic context, is one of the factors which may bring about therapeutic change. The seven stages of process (Rogers, 1961) are signposts of the unpredictable journey of accepting the fluidity of the self and his capacity for active adaptation. The first significant shift is accepting oneself as a “stream of becoming, not a finished product” (Rogers, 1961, p 111). Person-centered therapy potentially restores the client to this natural flux, allowing actualization, bridging the gap between a restricted notion of self and a more expansive notion of organism:

“Psychotherapy ... is a process whereby man becomes his organism – without self-deception, without distortion.” (Rogers, 1961, p. 111)

The actualizing tendency emphasizes the *organism*, just as the first phenomenologists emphasized *experience*. For Rogers, “[p]ractice, theory and research make it clear that the whole person-centered approach rests on a basic trust in the organism”. (Rogers, 1979, p. 2). Similarly for the phenomenologist Nishida, the point is “not that experience exists because there is an individual, but rather ... an individual exists because there is experience.” (1992, p. xxx). From the field of experience we mould and sculpt a self. From experience we come to a certain understanding, for experiencing is implicit understanding (Ikemi, 2011). By rooting the PCA on a fundamental trust in the actualizing tendency, Rogers firmly inscribes person-centered philosophy within the phenomenological tradition.

### **Formative Tendency: an Abdication to Metaphysics?**

It is important to unfasten the notion of the actualizing tendency from ontological claims and refrain from apprehending it as finalist assertion. Rogers was not immune to such temptation when he spoke of the formative tendency as a “broader view” (1980, p. 124), as a “directional tendency in the universe, which can be traced and observed in stellar space, in crystals, in micro-organisms, in more complex organic life, and in human beings” (Rogers 1980, p. 133). Like Rogers, many a philosopher and psychologist abdicated to the siren call of metaphysics, compelled to furnish their hypotheses with systematizing claims. It is nevertheless crucial to resist the compulsion toward metaphysics, no matter how alluring the desire may be of pulling the rabbit of indisputable truth from the bowler hat of a useful hypothesis. Rather than a statement on the nature of reality, the actualizing tendency may be apprehended as a simile for *immanent*<sup>1</sup> vitality.

A hypothesis is a notion “open to disproof” (Rogers, 1980, in Bozarth & Brodley, 1991). The need to understand behaviour in terms of purpose does not call for an either/or situation: we do not have to choose between mysticism and scientism but can instead move toward an “expansion of our conception of the possibilities of scientific explanation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 3). The philosophical tradition of Vitalism (Driesch, 1914; Bergson, 1944; Bennett, 2010) grappled with a question which is highly relevant here: to establish whether “the purposiveness in [life’s] processes is the result of a special *constellation of factors known already* to the sciences of the inorganic, or if it is the result of an *autonomy* peculiar to the processes themselves” (Driesch, 1914, p 1 italics in the original). To Hans Driesch, a neglected yet important biologist, we owe the perceptive delineation between *static* and *dynamic* teleology; while the former lends itself to the construction of a “mechanistic theory of the organism”, the latter leads us toward the understanding of the “autonomy of vital processes” (Driesch, 1914, pp. 5-6). The actualizing

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<sup>1</sup> Immanent: existing or remaining within; inherent. From the Latin *in manere*= remaining within. Opposite of ‘transcendent’.

tendency can be perhaps associated with Driesch's "dynamic teleology" (1914), where development is directly related to the ability of the self to process the organismic dimension.

The botanist Albert Wigand presented a clear epistemological position on this very issue:

"The question whether there is a life force by means of which we can explain vital phenomena, which is unique, and does not operate in the rest of nature, is to be answered partly in the affirmative, partly in the negative. In the affirmative, if force is to mean nothing more than what the words electricity and gravity mean; in the negative, if there is meant a supernatural principle independent of the universal laws of nature, which does not manifest itself through the law of cause and effect."  
(Wigand, quoted in Driesch, 1914, p. 155)

Towards the last pages of his *History and Theory of Vitalism*, Driesch arrives at some interesting hypotheses which seem to corroborate vitalist assumptions. There is, he writes, a "process of restitution"; there is "equi-finality", i.e. the same regulatory result is reached on "different morphogenetic lines"; there are, he adds, infinite examples of "active adaptation", rather than "adaptness as a mere state", the most remarkable of which being the creation of antibodies. These examples, he concludes, are not a proof but outline a tendency toward what he calls "unifying becoming":

The organism ... affords an instance of *unifying* or individualising causality, i.e. of one of the elementary forms of causality, in so far as its morphogenetic or moving behaviour is concerned. ... A *sum* (of possibilities happening) is transformed into a *unity* (of real results happening) without any spatial or material pre-formation of this unity"  
(Driesch, 1914, p 215)

### **Beware the Horns of the Sacred Cow**

In a paper published in 2010, Frankel, Sommerbeck, and Rachlin (2010) compared Rogers' concept of the actualizing tendency to Darwinian theory and, finding it incompatible with the latter, concluded that it is not "a scientifically valid concept" (Frankel et al, 2010, p. 69). The points raised are stimulating and thought-provoking, and my disagreement with the authors is based on four points:

1) The actualizing tendency is a *bio-psychosocial* construct, i.e. steeped in the intermediate terrain between the social sciences and the natural sciences rather than in biology alone.

2) To see the actualizing tendency as foundational, i.e. as describing the 'nature of reality' is a setback to positivism. If we take on board the (post-Rogerian) lessons of contemporary phenomenology and postmodernism, the actualizing tendency may be seen instead as a valid *descriptive* notion of *becoming* rather than a piece of *foundationalist* theory.

3) "The evolution of life on earth ... is a unique historical process" (Popper, 1957, p. 99). Darwin's theory of evolution is not religious dogma but a disputable perspective within the natural sciences, steeped, moreover, in the prejudices of the Victorian era.

4) The notion of the actualizing tendency can legitimate claim a place within a multimodal approach to biology and science, and resonates with key scientific, non-reductionists evolutionary hypotheses ...

Writing about the actualizing tendency, Rogers mentions "Goldstein, Maslow, Angyal and Szent-Gyorgyi" among those who "have held similar views and have influenced [his] thinking" (1980, p 119). Holding a position which would be at variance with the reductionist approach to the natural sciences predominant today, both Goldstein and Szent-Gyorgyi were *scientists as well as humanists*. Goldstein was greatly inspired by Goethe, one of the greatest imaginative poets alongside Dante and Shakespeare "to whom we owe much for important discoveries in the field of biology" (Goldstein, 1963, p 23). For Goldstein (1995), we do not build the design of the organism by "a mere addition of brick to brick, but we look instead "for an idea ... on the basis of which all particulars become intelligible". The scientist arrives at this by using "creative activity" (p. 284). Biological knowledge, Goldstein explains, is continued creative activity, and he goes on to quote Goethe, who called this very same procedure of acquiring knowledge *Schau*, or display – what is seen and perceived - and the

image by which the phenomenon becomes understandable he calls *Urbild*, or prototype (Goldstein, 1995, p. 284) .

The inseparable connection of science with art and the humanities is also a central characteristic of the work of Szent-Gyorgyi, the Hungarian bio-chemist quoted by Rogers who built on Schrödinger's notion of 'free energy' or 'negative entropy' (Schrödinger, 1967) by formulating the idea of 'syntropy' (Szent-Gyorgyi, 1974, pp 12-24.) i.e. the entropy a living organism *exports* in order to keep its own entropy low. For psychologists such as Rogers (1980), this was an encouraging sign that alongside deterioration, *energy* as well as *organization* also played an important part in living organisms (Ho, 1994, p. 51).

In some of his writings, Szent-Gyorgyi emphasized the dangers, as well as the benefits, of scientific knowledge, comparing the latter to a sacred cow: "My problem – he wrote - will be how we can milk her while keeping clear of her horns" (1965, p 1278). A Nobel Prize laureate for physiology, an active participant in the Hungarian resistance against the Nazis, an exile who went to live in the United States, Szent-Gyorgyi co-authored a book with existential psychotherapist, and founder of *logotherapy* Victor Frankl, and later felt motivated to write *The Crazy Ape*, a book critical of scientists who do not understand the necessary balance between entropy and creative energy (Szent-Gyorgyi, 1970) and which also addresses key issues of education, creativity and the Vietnam war. In one passage commenting on the My Lai massacre of five hundred unarmed citizens in South Vietnam perpetrated by the US Army, he passes a "severe judgment" on the paradoxes of a society "which created the institutions that made murders out of decent people" (Szent-Gyorgyi, 1970, p 81). One of the advantages of scientists maintaining a clear link to the humanities is, as the above comment testifies, a socio-political and ethical awareness sadly lacking in the current culture of compartmentalization of science, which makes it complicit to the perpetration of injustice and prevarication.

### **Political Ecologies**

Jane Bennett (2010) is one of the creative heirs of Vitalism and has interpreted this line of thought by absorbing the contributions of many pivotal thinkers such as Adorno, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Eagleton and Butler among others. She describes her endeavor in three points:

“(1)To paint a positive ontology of vibrant matter, which stretches received concepts of agency, action, and freedom sometimes to the breaking point; (2) to dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic using arguments and other rhetorical means to induce in human bodies an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality; and (3) to sketch a style of political analysis that can better account for the contributions of nonhuman actants. (Bennett, 2010, p. x)

Her work broadens the enquiry toward *ecology* and *political ecologies*, likely conduits to investigations of materiality which desist from anthropomorphic or even zoomorphic biases, let alone from avowed collusions with power and vested interests. It is heartening in this respect to notice that that ecology has caught the attention of person-centered theorists (Kriz, 2008; Cornelius-White & Kriz, 2008; Barrett-Lennard, 2011).

The second half of the twentieth century has seen developments which opened up new possibilities for thinking about materiality: Merleau-Ponty’s turn to a new conception of nature in the early 1960s (Merleau-Ponty, 1963; 1968; 2010); the innovative work of Deleuze (1994); Althusser’s revitalization of Epicurean thought (Althusser, 2006), as well as Foucault’s ground-breaking work on bio-power (Foucault, 1980; 1988). Contemporary research (Coole & Frost, 2010) ... .. presents an emerging paradigm according to which *materiality* is understood as something more than mere matter and conceived as “active, dynamic, self-creative, productive and unpredictable” (Ansell Pearson, 2011, p. 47). Materiality is endowed, in this perspective shared by several contemporary philosophers of science, with immanent vitality. Seen in this context, Darwinism can be reframed, in spite of its undisputed approval, as a disputable array of hypotheses. This is necessary even though nowadays to raise any objection to Darwinism and neo-Darwinism seems to automatically qualify one as a supporter of creationism. Darwin’s theories have been continually refuted *within* the realm of science and of philosophy of science. The way we think about matter, biology, and living organisms appears to be increasingly shifting towards a *multimodal* outlook (Coole & Frost, 2010), one that intelligently resists the compulsion to metaphysical claims.

We find an earlier manifestation of the multimodal approach in classic phenomenology: for Merleau-Ponty, physics, the very paradigm of natural science, has made progress precisely because “physicists do not feel compelled to choose between different ontological claims” (Matthews, 2002, p. 73) but remain open to fallibility and further verification. Even the celebrated principle of parsimony, keystone of logical positivism and empirical science, drawn on by Frankel et al (2010) as yardstick against the validity of the actualizing tendency, cannot overrule observed differences (Polten, 1973). The medieval philosopher Ockham, who first formulated the principle, rightly cautioned against the unnecessary multiplication of entities and assumptions, yet he did so in order to encourage the formulation of the simplest synthesis rather than devise an apologia of reductionism.

### **The Myth of Objective Science**

The 1980s and the 1990s have prolonged the honeymoon between evolutionary psychology (itself a renewed version of the mid-seventeenth century notion of biology-as-destiny) and the pharmaceutical industry. The scenery for such money-spinning liaison was happily provided by neo-liberalism, with its vision of the world as a jungle of brutal struggle where only the toughest (and the richest) survive and where the maladjusted have to be anaesthetized (Rose & Rose, 2010). That particular view of the world has been somewhat shaken by international events and the economic crises of 2008 and 2011. It is a world to which some gaze at with nostalgia, as celebrants to the unveiling of a Ronald Reagan statue did at the ceremony in London Mayfair on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011 (White, 2010). Compared to the excesses and impunity of contemporary neo-liberalism, Reagan looks like a philanthropist. Neo-liberalism turned nastier as the international crisis unfolded. Why is this relevant here? Because, as conditions changed, evolutionary ideas became more dogmatic, more entrenched in biologism. If in 1975 ethologist E.O. Wilson could write without a hint of irony that sociology and other sciences as well as humanities were the last branches of biology waiting to be included in the biological synthesis (Wilson, 1975), in 1998 he demanded a “unitary epistemology ... subordinating the social sciences and humanities to the biological and physical”. (Wilson, 1988; Rose & Rose, 2010). Against this trend, predominant but by no means more valid, it is salutary to remember Thomas Kuhn’s work (1962) which stressed how the neutrality of science is a myth and how “no language ... can produce mere neutral and objective reports on ‘the given’” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 127). ... ..

The current uncritical acceptance of one particular form of naturalism over others may have also a lot to do with corporate interests and pressures from states and government. This stifles the possibility of a 'multi-naturalism' in so far as acceptance of *multi-modality* in the natural sciences means welcoming an array of perspectives and the open dialogue that would ensue if the demands of globalized capitalism were not the utmost priority. These require a banalization of scientific research aimed at the maximization of profit for the few. An empire does not appreciate the fact that hypotheses are fallible, and that a theory can be contradicted by other theories. It wants *certainties*, and efficient ways for perpetrating its rule, hence it buys a theory and a methodology, and sells them wholesale in its provinces and colonies.

### **Malthusian Darwinism and Neo-Liberal post-Darwinism**

In a letter to Engels of 18 June 1862, three years after the publication of *On the Origin of the Species*, Marx observed:

“How remarkable that Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, ‘inventions’ and Malthusian ‘struggle for existence’” (Marx 1862/1985, p. 380).

It is, Marx goes on to write, Thomas Hobbes' vision of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of everyone against everyone and the exact reverse of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, where civil society is depicted as an 'intellectual animal kingdom' (ibid). Darwinists and neo-Darwinists would of course disagree, as they gloss over these and other equally dubious views on race and gender, on Darwin's apologia for Victorian capitalist society as well as on his racism and sexism, for a science is supposedly above it all. But Darwin was a man of his time, who intelligently combined the increasingly popular evolutionary ideas of the mid-nineteenth century with the unbridled reductionism which seized the natural sciences (Rose & Rose, 2010, p. 93), and tried to locate life and the mind within the domain of the natural sciences. Moleschott (1852), a Dutch physiologist conveyed this approach perfectly when he wrote “the brain secretes thought like the kidney secretes urine” (quoted

by Rose & Rose op cit p. 94), and so did Thomas Huxley when he described the mind as an epiphenomenon, “the whistle to the steam train” (ibid).

Liberalism and Darwinism fed on each other: the former assumed from the notion of natural selection a scientific validation for the affirmation of the struggle for existence in society, while the latter acquired a philosophical framework which propelled the popularity of the idea. The result was *pseudo-biological pessimism*, not at all inevitable when one thinks of the different route taken around the same time by Russian evolutionary scientists and which culminated with Kropotkin’s (1902) notion of ‘struggle for life’ against Darwin’s ‘struggle for existence’. This was not a matter of semantics but an altogether different vision which engendered the idea of ‘mutual aid’ against the extreme individualism of Darwin’s idea. Daniel Todes (1987) published a ground-breaking paper on the topic charting the critique of Darwin’s reductionism from Kropotkin down to contemporary biology, a discipline increasingly informed by ecology and by the importance of interdependent processes in all living systems. What the new biology shows is that “nature uses extraordinarily ingenious techniques to avoid conflict and competition, and that cooperation is extraordinarily widespread” (Todes, 1987, p. 537). In an article for the anarchist weekly *Le Revolté*, Kropotkin (1882) wrote:

“It is sociable species, where all individuals live in solidarity with one another, that prosper, develop and reproduce; while those which live by brigandage, like the falcon, for example, are decaying throughout the world. Solidarity and joint labour - this is what supports species in the struggle to maintain their existence against the hostile forces of nature” (in Todes, 1988 p. 130).

Although Darwin stressed that natural selection has no goal, his notion is finalist to the core, and emphatically expressed in the closing pages of his *Origin*:

And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection (Darwin, 1859/1996, p. 395).

Darwin's statement confirms how deeply entrenched *telos* is in western culture, the other influential example being that of Hegel's dialectics. It is difficult to escape the teleological pull of an entire civilization influenced by biblical finality, something we see reflected in the directionality of the actualizing tendency itself. It may be useful, as Frankel, Sommerbeck and Rachlin concede (2010), to think of the actualizing tendency in terms of *ontogeny*, i.e. developmental, rather than *phylogeny*, i.e. evolutionary, a distinction nearly obliterated by evolutionary biology and genetics:

Development ... emphasizes form, pattern, wholeness ... Ignoring it enabled an inexorably reductionist genetics to become the study of differences between organisms, assumed to be coded in the genes (Rose & Rose 2010, p 98).

### **Life as Cooperation or Life as a Casino?**

The 'struggle for existence' ... was a metaphor for what Darwin realized as complex relations among organisms and between the organism and abiotic conditions." (Todes, 1987, p. 537). He wrote:

"there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life. it is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms" (Darwin, 1964, pp 62-63).

He defended his use of metaphor explaining that a metaphor is necessary for brevity (ibid). However, metaphors are "culturally specific" (Todes, 1987, p 538). Darwin's *Origin* was translated into Russian in 1864 and widely reviewed. But Russian intellectuals saw the Malthusian metaphor at best as inaccurate, at worst as distasteful. (Chernyshevskii, 1873; Danilevskii, 1875 in Todes, op cit p 541). For Tolstoy, Malthus was "a malicious mediocrity". For Beketov, Russia's chair of the Department of Botany at St. Petersburg University for twenty years, Malthus's "stupidity" was dangerous, for he had concluded that widespread hunger, deadly epidemics, and destructive wars will save humanity from perishing" (Todes, 1987, p. 544) and that these "sordid principles" had been *supported* by Darwin. Russian evolutionists called attention to the fact that while the need to find food stimulates struggle

among organisms, the need to defend themselves and reproduce leads to *cooperation*. Cooperation contributed to evolution in two ways – it increased the resources and life span of a species; it increased the chances that these forms would thrive. Kropotkin, the most prominent among the Russian evolutionists, whilst not subscribing to any romantic notion of love as the law of the natural world recognized that in life the main struggle is against abiotic conditions while there is *solidarity within a species*, and that without solidarity a species would perish :

If we ... ask Nature: ‘who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?’ we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization” (Kropotkin, 1902, in Jay Gould, 2002).

The reason Darwin’s natural selection became ... popular is due to Darwinism’s “seductive myth”: a picture of human life showing “heroic, isolated individuals contending, like space warriors, alone against an alien and meaningless cosmos”, individuals who chanced and speculated their life and their quest for ‘success’ like entrepreneurs or gamblers: in other words, life as a Casino (Midgley, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The notion of the actualizing tendency anchors person-centered therapy in the organism and inscribes it firmly in the field of phenomenology, a practice that is embodied and alert to the complexities of the world and its rich textures. By resisting the metaphysical leap toward the overarching concept of a formative tendency, the practitioner remains perhaps closer to the immediate field of investigation, i.e. the shared body-environment, the relational/ecological biosphere. Far from being old-school ‘materialism’, a phenomenological stance emphasizes the immanent vibrancy of materiality, of what has been conventionally and mistakenly downgraded to ‘dead matter’. A leap into spirituality

and universality arguably bypasses the empirical rigor of the enterprise by providing a set of foundationalist answers.

Equally important is not giving in to the siren of scientism. Psychology has suffered from *physics envy*, the sense of inferiority towards 'hard sciences'. Even Nietzsche, a philosopher whose vision veered toward art and psychology rather than science (Bazzano, 2006) attempted for a time to find a scientific basis for his notion of the eternal recurrence. Freud himself, creator of one of last century's most enduring myths, did all he could to demonstrate the scientific validity of psychoanalysis. But there is a bitter irony at work here: in the obsequious effort to be accepted as a science, psychotherapy disconnects from its psychosocial matrix on which its modus operandi rests, and from which it draws sustenance and inspiration. By concurring with the prevailing view within the natural sciences (neo-Darwinism, evolutionary biology, cognitive science, and a particular, arguably reductive brand of neuroscience), it forgets the fact that the natural sciences comprise of *a wide array of perspectives*, and that they are in turn influenced by the social sciences, by philosophy of science and other disciplines traditionally associated with the humanities. ...

We might, as Rogers (1959) says in response to the American Psychological Association, "form a theory using the kind of measurable terms appropriate to the requirements of logical positivism" (Warner, 2009, p. 115). We might fall over backwards in our attempts to be accepted by mainstream science, by consenting un-critically on positivist methods and perspectives. Yet in doing so we risk losing sight of the key metaphors of our philosophy, while those in power change their strategies at will.

In a cultural milieu ruled by power, profit and manipulation, person-centered therapy is more innovative than it ever was; what makes it so is "the therapist's reliance on the client's actualizing tendency" (Freire, 2009, p. 227).

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