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Togetherness: intersubjectivity revisited

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This paper aims to contribute to recent advances in person-centered and experiential theory in the field of dialogue and encounter. Both an appreciation and a constructive critical adjunct to these developments, it offers a socio-historical perspective rooted in phenomenology. It draws on the Hegelian notion of acknowledgement, on Merleau-Ponty's "risk of communication", on Levinas' ethics of alterity, and on Schmid's notion of en-counter. It formulates the notion of "togetherness", one that appreciates the realities of conflict and disparity alongside mutuality, and the dimensions of solitude and autonomy alongside relatedness.

Keywords: encounter; phenomenology; person-centered therapy; relational depth; mutuality; autonomy

Miteinandersein: zurück zur Intersubjektivität

Dieser Artikel will neuere Fortschritte in der Personzentrierten und Experienziellen Theorie auf dem Gebiet des Dialogs und des Encounter beleuchten. Als Würdigung und konstruktiv-kritische Ergänzung zu diesen Entwicklungen bietet er eine sozio-historische Perspektive, die in der Phänomenologie gründet. Er bezieht sich auf den Hegelschen Gedanken der Anerkennung, auf Merleau-Ponty's "Risiko der Kommunikation", auf Levinas' Ethik des Anderen und auf Schmid's Gedanken der Be-gegnung. Er formuliert den Gedanken des "Miteinanderseins", mit dem die Wirklichkeiten von Konflikt und Verschiedenheit anerkannt wird, bei gleichzeitiger Wechselseitigkeit, sowie die Dimensionen von Einsamkeit und Autonomie, bei gleichzeitiger Bezogenheit.

Unidad: volviendo sobre la intersubjetividad

Este trabajo pretende contribuir a los avances recientes de la teoría centrada en la persona y experiencial en el ámbito de diálogo y encuentro. Es tanto una apreciación como un complemento crítico constructivo de estos desarrollos, que ofrece una perspectiva socio-histórica, arraigada en la fenomenología. Se basa en el concepto hegeliano de reconocimiento, en el concepto de Merleau-Ponty de "riesgo de comunicación", en la ética de Levinas de la alteridad y en la noción de Schmid de en-cuentro. Formula la noción de "unidad", que aprecia la realidad del conflicto y la disparidad junto a la mutalidad y las dimensiones de soledad y autonomía junto a las de estar relacionados.

L'être ensemble : une nouvelle vision de l'intersubjectivité

Cet article vise à contribuer à des avancées récentes de la théorie centrée sur la personne et expérientielle dans le domaine du dialogue et de la rencontre. S'agissant à la fois

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d'une appréciation et d'un complément critique et constructrice à ces évolutions, il propose une perspective socio-historique enracinée dans la phénoménologie. Il s'appuie sur la notion Hégélienne de reconnaissance (acknowledgement), sur le « risque de communication » de Merleau-Ponty, sur l'éthique d'altérité de Levinas, et sur la notion de Schmid de rencontre. Il formule la notion de « l'être ensemble », une notion qui tient compte des réalités de conflit et de disparité en même temps que la mutualité, ainsi que des dimensions de la solitude et de l'autonomie en même temps que ce qui relie.

共にいること：内的主観性の再訪

要約：本論文は対話とエンカウンター分野でパーソンセンタードと体験的理論の最近の進歩に関与することを目的としています。これらの発展に評価的で建設的な批判的付属物の両者は、現象学に根ざしている社会歴史的な展望を提供します。ヘーゲルの承認論の概念、メルロー＝ポンティの『コミュニケーションの危険性』、レヴィナスの他性と倫理、そしてシュミットのエンカウターの概念の上に描かれています。それは「一体感」の概念（相互関係における葛藤と不均衡の現実の認識）と関係性における孤独と自主性の重要性を明確に述べます。

Introduction

This paper begins with an exploration of the origins of the western notion of inter-subjectivity, dating back to Hegel (1770–1831), the first phenomenologist of the modern era. His early work was influential to how phenomenologists (and later humanistic psychologists) understood this concept. There is a discrepancy between phenomenological and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic understandings of inter-subjectivity; understanding the modern roots of phenomenology contributes to developing contemporary person-centered theory and practice *independently* from psychodynamic thinking and in ways that are more deeply attuned to its phenomenological and existential roots. I will highlight some of these differences, focusing on aspects of phenomenological enquiry that are compatible with, and constructively challenging to the person-centered approach (PCA). This is done with an attitude of involvement and appreciation of a tradition understood as “a living and changing entity” (Worsley, 2012, p. 171).

Phenomenologists who implemented early Hegelian teachings via the lively and scholarly lectures of Kojève (1969) and Hyppolite (1969) all understood the importance of *conflict* in human affairs and how essential it is in shaping an understanding of self and kinship. This element is relevant to person-centered theory and practice for it offsets a prevalent, arguably romanticized notion of the relational and the dialogical in therapy. French phenomenologists (among others: de Beauvoir, 2000/1948; Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 1964b; 1968, 2010) also went on to emphasize the role of society and politics – particularly the notion of *historicity*, i.e. a deep appreciation of the dynamic processes of history and the impossibility of fitting them within any pre-established logic. They stressed the relational and contingent nature of truth: rather than a pre-existing notion, truth is understood as ever-changing, forged in the crucible of concrete interactions between people. Taking on board the valuable teachings of phenomenology implies an acceptance of two components: *asymmetry* (the ever-present unevenness, implicit in any therapeutic alliance) and *solitude* (the aloneness, autonomy and unknowability of the client). Unlike psychoanalysis, both phenomenology and post-phenomenology (Blanchot, 1993, 1997; Derrida, 1982, 1998; Levinas, 1961, 1989, 1999, 1999a) question the solidity of the *subject*. In this sense, *inter-subjectivity* is a natural development within the

psychodynamic tradition, advancing the belief in the existence of a separate Cartesian subject interacting with an “external” world – a self interacting with other selves.

The paper will present implications derived from the notions sketched above, examining intersubjective developments in contemporary person-centered theory: relational depth (Mearns & Cooper, 2005), the notions of mutuality (Murphy, Cramer, & Joseph, 2012), en-counter (Schmid, 2002), and Thou-I (Levinas, 1961; Schmid, 2002).

It will put forward the notion of *togetherness*, a post-phenomenological perspective which capitalizes on classical phenomenology and the insights developed by Schmid (1997, 2002, 2006, 2012) whilst holding a poised stance which acknowledges aloneness, autonomy and conflict alongside relatedness and inter-dependence.

The phenomenological origins of inter-subjectivity: conflict and acknowledgement

Hegel went beyond the notion of subjectivity expressed by Kant by suggesting that reflexivity is not enough for one’s awareness of oneself. In other words, self-reflection alone does not make me into a self. Expanding on an idea already present in Fichte, in his Jena lectures (O’Neill, 1996; Williams, 1997) Hegel made self-awareness reliant on one’s recognition/acknowledgment of another or others, and on one’s recognition of them as likewise recognizing oneself as a self-conscious subject. In other words: in order to become a self I need to be fully recognized/acknowledged by another whom in turn I recognize/acknowledge.

Such recognition may take place through empathy, love, and friendship, but also through conflict. By emphasizing *both*, Hegel avoided romanticizing encounter; he allowed for the possibility of solidarity and shared endeavor but also recognized the blood, sweat and tears of history, the ever-present reality of suffering and injustice in human affairs. He famously portrayed this in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977/1807) as the struggle between lordship and bondage (commonly known as master-slave dialectic), which was to have a rich corollary in the thought of Karl Marx (Colletti, 1973).

Siep (1979) has lucidly argued that the model of the struggle is fashioned within the context of the duel, of defending family honour and property. What is relevant here is that for Hegel (1977) the other is an essential component in the creation of a self and is also a potential and real opponent.

This is key to maintaining a balanced understanding of encounter and in ensuring that this is contextualized in the complex network of history, society and politics rather than exclusively within the confines of family and in relation to attachment between child and primary care-giver (as it is arguably the case with most psychoanalytic/psychodynamic literature). This stance is consistent with person-centered theorists’ efforts “to situate and frame person-centered practice within the big picture” (O’Hara, 2007, p. 47), to find an adequate response to a new global predicament and “to reframe the PCA mission and purpose, expanding it beyond individual therapy into larger social and civic spheres” (O’Hara, 2007, p.47). It is also consistent with Schmid’s (2002) insights on the nature and the meaning of encounter, which must take into consideration the aspect of “against” as “each encounter involves meeting reality and being touched by the essence of the opposite” (p. 60).

It is true, as Levinas (1961) reminds us, that we come into the world via the *dwelling*; but the home, the dwelling of stone and clay and abode of primary relations is open to a wide world into which we are *thrown*. “World” here stands for several things: society, history, the psychosphere (O’Hara, 2007) as well as the eco-sphere. Such contextualization makes it possible that issues of civic responsibility – of inequality, injustice and

racism, of prejudices of culture and gender (Chantler, 2004, 2005, 2006; Lago, 2011, 2007; Proctor, 2008) are not forgotten.

Both possibilities are present in encounter: recognition and non-recognition, freedom and un-freedom. Mutual recognition is not a given, and conflict is one side of inter-subjectivity. Of course the reality of conflict needs to be consciously owned. An individual or a community of practitioners that does not *own* competitiveness ends up brushing it under the carpet and fostering denial. A community upholding high-minded principles yet blissfully unaware of the “daimonic” (May, 1969) would be narcissistic, for a repudiation of the daimonic is a defining feature of narcissism – believing that we are always delightful and upright – a perilous stance for it projects the daimonic *outside* our tribes and nation.

The PCA’s overall benevolent and optimistic appraisal of human beings, its elemental faith in the organism’s ability to actualize in productive ways is inspiring. Yet the doubt arises as to whether a certain reluctance prevails within the approach to appreciate the tangible realities of conflict. These were effectively portrayed, for example, by two key figures within European existentialism such as Sartre and Camus, who also emphasized the autonomy of individuals in *emancipative* rather than “individualistic” ways. Yet we find them both dispatched in recent person-centered literature as “nihilists” (Cooper, 2012 p. 146). This stance is not unanimous within the PCA, as we find, for example in Schmid (2002), an appreciation of encounter as “no harmless, risk-free or ‘soft’ action. To stand counter always implies ‘confrontation’ ” (p. 61).

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to analyze in depth the influence of existential phenomenology on the PCA, and how this has been largely confined to its American rather than European counterpart. Complex historical and socio-political conflicts have no doubt had an impact on American and European respective cultures. What matters here is that an emphasis on mutuality and connection is one-sided without a more fully articulated acknowledgement of, respectively, *conflict* as well as, as we shall see, *individuality*.

Why is Hegel’s notion of recognition useful to person-centered therapy?

There are two main reasons why Hegelian “recognition” is useful to person-centered therapy:

- (1) It acknowledges the inherent political *inequality* and the ever-present actuality of *power* within human interactions and within the therapeutic relationship. This provides a philosophical basis to the existing person-centered literature which has drawn attention to this urgent topic (Chantler, 2004; Lago, 2007; Proctor, 2011; Schmid, 2012). Moreover, Hegel’s stance is the very root of phenomenology and independent of psychoanalytic understandings of inter-subjectivity.
- (2) It establishes the wider matrixes of *history*, *society* and *culture*, which contextualize the mother-infant dyad into which psychoanalytic understandings of inter-subjectivity are normally cocooned.

Hegel’s thought inspired Merleau-Ponty’s project of an “anthropological phenomenology” (Moreira, 2012, p. 53), responsive to historical contingencies and useful in moving “beyond the person” and beyond a perspective which “keeps person-centered therapy ‘stuck’ and stops it from working with the emergent phenomenon” (p. 52).

In Hegel's early writings we find the basis for a sound philosophy of encounter which inspired in Merleau-Ponty (1968) a definition of dialogue as the art of "taking the risk of communicating" (in Madison, 1981, p. 300). This is consistent with Mearns and Schmid's (2006) "openness to risk" (p. 261), the risk of, as they put it, "being touched, surprised, hurt, loved etc" (p. 261). A risk worth taking, for client and therapist may come to bear witness to the evanescent coming-into-being, through dialogue, of a truth forged in encounter rather than the unveiling of a pre-existing, a-historical truth behind the course of events.

Merleau-Ponty (2010) makes a relevant distinction between *speaking speech* and *spoken speech*. Spoken speech is ready-made language, the language in which we are embedded, the language already spoken by others – proof, for Mearns and Cooper (2005) of why "the notion of separate, individual selves has come to falter in the last century or so" (p. 5). Speaking speech is, on the other hand, *language in the making* – a fundamental difference not addressed by Mearns and Cooper. By engaging in speaking speech, client and therapist create language anew. Here language is not merely the "socially constructed medium ... so fundamental to who we are" (Mearns & Cooper, 2005). It is language-as-friendship, language-as-hospitality (Derrida, 2009; Levinas, 2000). What we discover through genuine communication is not a pre-established truth, but a "going further", a transient truth constantly in the making (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b).

Inter-subjective encounter takes place within historical contingency and does not presuppose (like the later Hegel will assume) a "Spirit", whether via a divine design (*theodicy*) or a secular one presiding over human actions. This is where I disagree with Schmid (2006): we do not come to dialogue as to something that "is already there" (p. 250). Instead, we have to make it happen. There is *no guarantee in dialogue* (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). In fact, there is not even guarantee in being – they both depend on our good will (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). We create dialogue through encounter. We create being through encounter.

Dialectical and non-dialectical dialogue

One of the ramifications of these insights came from Blanchot (1993, 1997), a lifelong friend of Levinas and a thinker normally associated with "post-structuralism" – who wrote extensively on dialogue and the relational domain. Partly drawing on my own book on Levinas (Bazzano, 2012), partly inspired by the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1964a, 1964b, 1968, 2010) and Blanchot (1993, 1997) and adapting their insights to the therapy domain, I propose a categorization of dialogue which I hope will be of some use to practitioners and to the discussion within the PCA.

The dialogical dimension ramifies into two distinct modalities: the first one is *dialectical*, the second *non-dialectical*.

- (1) The *dialectical* mode is in turn divided into three strands: (1a) objective; (1b) inter-subjective; (1c) immediate.
 - (1a) In the *objective* mode, the self (therapist) perceives the client (other) as the *object* of study and observation, whether as a bundle of drives, carrier of symptoms to be alleviated or problems to be solved, or as a "case" to be cognitively and behaviorally re-programmed. This is a *normative* approach, a Procrustean perspective forcing a human being to fit into a prefabricated

box – an approach invariably in tune with the dictates of the market, the dominant ideology and indifferent to the needs of the real person.

- (1b) Within the *inter-subjective* perspective, the client is perceived as another self, perhaps very different, but with whom one is able to connect via some form of primary identity. A key exponent of this view is Stolorow (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987; see also Orange et al., 1997), influenced by Gadamer, a thinker who, according to Habermas (cited in Downing, 2000) disregarded the manipulative influence of ideology and the ever-present disparity of power and gave in to the naïve fantasy of an equal, unconstrained communication between any two human beings. In universalizing Gadamer’s stance in the transition from hermeneutics to psychotherapy (from the text to a living interlocutor), the characteristic inter-subjective perspective omits the inherent disparity present in any relationship. In short: there is no such thing as an equal relationship between client and therapist; to deny this means ignoring injustice and inequality (Chantler, 2004; Proctor, 2011).
- (1c) By adopting the *immediate* view, the therapist attempts to bridge the separation with the client. Intensity and a heightened sense of presence are key notions here, often highlighting a quasi-numinous incidence of peak experiences. Alterity may be lost in this bridging, and the solitude/autonomy of the other sacrificed at various altars: spirituality, a fascination with a neutral Being, magical readings of Rogers’ (1980) notion of “presence”. Deliberately or unknowingly, the philosophical matrix for this view is Platonism, a powerful nostalgia for lost harmony.

Dissimilar on the surface, all three dialectical approaches to encounter drafted above share a propensity towards bridging the existential separation between therapist and client. The objective analyst, the inter-subjective practitioner and the empathic spiritualist may be motivated by a longing to reduce the unease that comes with facing the unknowability of the other. All three may neglect otherness and overlook separation.

- (2) The *non-dialectical mode* is definable by what is not. Genuine encounter is an occurrence (Buber, 1983, 2008), rather than direct result of the therapist’s doing. It fully appreciates the sheer foreignness of the other. As Worsley (2006, p. 216) puts it: “When I meet you, I strive to meet an enigma who profoundly feeds me but whom I must preserve from my self-centricity”. Non-dialectical dialogue “can never be made or produced ... it evolves out of being touched on a personal level” (Mearns & Schmid, 2006, p. 260). Speech approximates poetry; it veers toward infinity. The abyss between the two shores is not filled, explained, or concealed but is felt and recognized. The therapist does not attempt to understand the other, for believing that I understand another is the most insidious of all illusions. The space between self and other is not only maintained, but effectively cultivated: it is an active renunciation of our compulsive need to understand the other (Mearns & Cooper, 2005). As clarified by Schmid (2002):

[The other] is no alter *ego*, no close friend *a priori*, no identifiable person, but rather an entirely different person. Only when fully appreciating this fact of fundamental difference do encounter and community become possible. (p. 60)

Together: alone together

The term I propose for this modality of encounter is *togetherness*: the term, of Germanic origin, means *to gather*. It indicates the gathering into proximity, companionship, and shared endeavor of individual components, without relegating aloneness and uniqueness to the background. This is because there is no discrepancy between “individual” and relatedness. The dichotomy arises only if one adopts the view of the inherent existence of the self – one of the dominant views in western philosophy and theology, what Schmid (2002, p. 58) calls, after Boëthius, “the substantialistic conception”, with the concomitant/opposite view being the “relationalistic notion”.

There is a different view of the self which is bewilderingly similar to both strands of 20th and 21st century phenomenology as well as Buddhist and Taoist texts. This view regards the self as non-substantial, as a *gathering* of aggregates, an organismic assemblage of (environmental) composites to which substance is functionally attached. The “I” emerges when summoned by other/others; as the locus of ethical action, exploration, and acknowledgement of the inherent suffering of the human condition. It emerges, if only nominally rather than “substantially”, as the locus of *agency* (Warner, 2009).

In togetherness two or more solitudes gather; in the to and fro of therapeutic encounter, something is gathered; something gathers momentum.

Of lace curtains and safe screens: a look at relational depth

The value of encounter consists, for Levinas (1961), in emphasizing a presence:

...not added to an object and a Thou antecedently given or encountered in the neuter (the sole gender formal logic knows). (p. 256)

In other words, the presence I encounter is not an abstraction but a living human being: it is concrete *existent* rather than abstract *existence*. The vulnerability of the other initiates me to genuine encounter. The other’s vulnerability puts me in touch with my own fragility, nakedness, and finitude. Implicit in the very ambience of encounter is the presence of *Eros*. It is not coincidental that one of the chapters in Levinas’ (1961) *Totality and Infinity*, the one that most visibly draws attention to the intrinsic *otherness* of the other, deals with the *phenomenology of Eros*. This is because Levinas understood deeply, with his contemporary post-phenomenologists, that exploring encounter and ignoring *Eros* would be a serious blunder. That is why the psychodynamic notion of transference/counter-transference may be useful: it explicitly acknowledges *Eros*, who “thrives in transference, demanding it for its creative work” (Hillman, 1972, p. 78). What’s more, *Eros* haunts the PCA, a tradition that, having rather summarily disposed of transference/counter-transference, went on to build its foundations on nuanced and sublimated variations of *Eros*: empathy and unconditional positive regard. Within the sphere of *Eros* we find the higher octave of otherness and separation, as well as, conversely, of union, merging and possession. *Eros* remains the forever unknown side of the therapeutic encounter – of *any* encounter – *Eros* understood here, with the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray’s (2004) radiant commentary on Levinas, as “prior to any *Eros* defined as such ... [as] the sensual pleasure of birth into a world where the look itself remains tactile – open to the light. Still carnal” (p. 154). Has the PCA adequately dealt with the erotic dimension implicit in encounter? Or have we left *Eros* out in the rain?

In their bold, admirable attempt to reflect upon the intensity and sense of profound correlation experienced at times between therapist and client, Mearns and Cooper (2005) formulated the notion of relational depth, “a very special encounter in which two human beings meet each other in a full and intense way, all the time holding on to their uniqueness and individuality” (p. 39). The authors “emphasize the *quality* of the meeting, evident in terms such as *profound contact*, *fully real* and understanding each other at a *high level*” (Cox, 2009, p. 211). They ground the notion in rigorous research and by charting how “some of the most striking movements towards a relational, inter-subjective therapy” have taken place “within the psychodynamic and psychoanalytic fields” (p. 13).

I sympathize with the relational depth ethos; I identify with its passionate plea for true engagement and the articulated unease about the “disturbing development in the profession” and “the almost neurotic concern with boundaries” (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 58). Yet some of the authors’ statements are baffling, as when the findings of 100-plus years of psychotherapeutic work are summarily dismissed with a statement such as the following: “there are absolutely no transference phenomena at this level of continuing connection” the authors write – “transference phenomena belong to a much more superficial level of relating where people are still being symbols for each other”. And: “at this level of relating, the client *cannot lie*” (p. 53 – italics in the original).

The image conjured up by the above scenario is perplexing: a truly amazing therapist showering depth, peace and warmth to whom the client somehow cannot but reveal herself, to whom she cannot lie, in whose presence she has to drop lace curtains and safety screens so that, as one of the interviewees says, the therapist can “[see] into the windows of the client’s soul”. So enraptured the authors appear to be by their notion – likened to “an altered state of consciousness ... to being in a stupor ... to feeling physically lighter, and [feeling] changes in their perception of time” (p. 41), that the avowed wisdom of client’s “resistance” as well as the necessary respect for the client’s autonomy take second place. This is not to say that the authors do not hold the client’s autonomy in high regard; rather, it questions whether there can be genuine appreciation of a person’s autonomy without grasping the irreducible *aloneness* and unbridgeable *otherness* of the other. This has to do with how we conceive “individual” and “individualism”, two terms which are not synonymous.

The modern worldview, according to Mearns and Cooper (2005, p. 4) “understands human existence in fundamentally individualistic terms”. Individualism would be exemplified by Descartes, according to whom “each human being is conceptualized as a sovereign, autonomous, individual *monad*” (p. 4, added italics). The use of the term “monad” is telling; its implications, revealing. Firstly, there is no mention whatsoever of “monad” in Descartes; the term belongs to Leibniz. The two views are irreconcilable: whereas Descartes (1596–1690) emphasized a separation between mind and matter – and mind and body – (between *res cogitans*, the “thinking thing” and *res extensa*, the “extended thing”), Leibniz (1646–1716), whose elegant vision was a paean to the emancipatory powers of philosophical discourse, conceived the monad as metaphor of the infinite *uniqueness* of individual substances – or, in this context, the irreducible distinctiveness of individuals. As convincingly argued by Deleuze (1993), the *monadic* subject becomes the *nomadic* subject – not isolated within its own little cosmos but open instead to tremendous potentialities. Can there be an appreciation of autonomy and uniqueness without a deeply felt sense of the aloneness of each individual? “Monad” emphasises autonomy, sovereignty, and uniqueness – all the positive attributes of individuality which are in danger of being bypassed through the authors’ hurried critique of individualism.

At the same time, the stance of consideration for the client's autonomy advocated here is entirely consistent with what Mearns and Schmid (2006) conceptualize as "self-protective processes" (p. 257), their apt reframing of the belligerent psychoanalytic language of "resistance" and "defences", and one that is respectful of the self "that has actualized to that point" (p.257).

In spite of their avowed intention to hold both dimensions, there appears to be in Mearns and Cooper's (2005) text a bias towards the relational, paired with the unconvincing conflation of "inexorable aloneness" with "deeply individualistic sentiment" (p. 14). Various theorists within the intersubjectivity field are quoted, including Margaret Mahler (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 7). However, central to the work of Mahler (Kaplan, 1998; Mahler, 1968) is the notion of *constancy*, i.e. the reconciliation of *two* fundamental longings in human beings: the desire for connection and relatedness *and* the equally important longing for autonomy and solitude (Bazzano, 2009). "It is exactly this tension of autonomy and interconnectedness – Peter Schmid (2002, p. 59) similarly writes – [of] independence and interdependence, self-reliance and commitment, sovereignty and solidarity, which uniquely characterizes being human".

Mahler also wrote of *symbiotic psychosis* (Kaplan, 1998): cases where the high level of distress of her young clients were related to an inability to separate from their enmeshment with their primary care-giver, a condition which, as my clinical work continues to teach me, is as distressing as the inability to relate.

In short: individuality is not the same as individualism – a philosophical problem before being a psychotherapeutic one. What is crucial here is upholding respect for the autonomy of the client, which is one with his/her "inexorable aloneness". In this spirit, the therapist needs to resist the desire that the client lets down his "lace curtains and safety screens ... to share with his therapist those things that are most essential to his being" (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 44). This may be, the authors add, "one of the primary sources of frustration for many therapists: that a client does not seem to be really 'letting them in' " (p. 45). Yet the therapist's frustration can be a great teacher: our frustrations, as well as our yearnings for meaningful connections with clients provide us with wonderful opportunities for learning, with the most apposite place for this being supervision. For Benjamin in Mitchell & Aron, (1999) intersubjectivity has to do with the analyst's *counter-transference reactions*, spurred by the therapist's own disappointment with the progress of therapy.

Mutuality and asymmetry

The sixth condition (the client perceiving, to a minimal degree, the therapist's acceptance and empathy) is for Rogers (1982) something without which the "therapeutic process could not ... be initiated" (p. 78). It arguably plays an important role in the formulation of *mutuality* which for Murphy et al. (2012) "refers to the client and therapist experience of the therapeutic conditions both for and of the other" (p. 112). This view acknowledges the relational roots of person-centered therapy – which the authors see as originating "from the relationship therapy of Otto Rank" (p. 112) and, in the opinion of this writer, ignores its "autonomist" roots – that is, Rogers' emphasis on individual autonomy, agency and independence.

Writing on the process-outcome model of therapy, based on Rogers' (1957) statement on the absence of clear distinction between process and outcome, the authors emphasize the "bi-directional relational interchange" that occurs via the "continuous (re)creation of the therapeutic climate" (Murphy et al., 2012, p. 114). Pre-empting potential criticism of a

mistaken symmetry or *equality* that such interchange arguably takes for granted, they write:

The potential for mutuality remained whilst acknowledging a degree of *quantitative inequity*. That is, in a mutual exchange of therapeutic conditions the client does not necessarily experience a quantitatively equal level of the conditions for the therapist as the therapist does for the client. If this was the case, and they were consistently experienced to a high degree, it would likely indicate that therapy was either approaching or had reached an end. However, the potential for experiencing moments of quantitative equity might still remain possible albeit for only a brief moment in the therapeutic relationship. (Murphy et al., 2012, p. 117 – italics added)

Undoubtedly stimulating as a new agenda for research and practice as well as posing new and interesting questions for contemporary person-centered therapy, the notion of mutuality, with its “moments of quantitative equity”, belongs, in the light of my own clinical experience and of several colleagues, to the very flowering of successful therapy rather than the nitty-gritty, everyday-struggle which seems for many at the heart of our difficult profession. True, the notion of mutuality (as that of relational depth) does not “demand” anything from the client (p. 218), yet the implicit message here is that the client somehow ought to actively receive, perceive as well as express empathy and acceptance for therapy to “really” be taking place. What if the client does not do any of the above? Would that be “resistance” on the client’s part?

Commenting on Schmid’s Levinasian notion of Thou-I, the authors point out how giving primacy to the other “maintains the perspective of the therapeutic relationship as viewed from only the therapist’s perspective” (p. 119), and wonder if the client can also be “permitted” to view the therapeutic relationship in Thou-I fashion. But the Thou-I stance is medicine for the therapist; it is a necessary and urgent remedy to a situation of power imbalance between therapist and client, and more generally between self and other. It is a state of vertigo, a rare giving of oneself, of letting go of the self. It is not a therapeutic formula for manufacturing a reciprocity which, consistently absent in a world plagued by injustice and exploitation, is unlikely to surface miraculously in the confines of a therapist’s consulting room.

Thou-I: a philosophy of separation

The writings of Levinas (1961, 1989, 1994, 1999) are essential in understanding encounter outside the confines of psychoanalysis. Schmid (2006) and Worsley (2006) introduced Levinas to the person-centered world, widening the horizon of person-centered theory and practice. Further discussion needs to happen, bringing to light the merits but also the shortcomings of a multilayered thought.

Levinas landed a crushing blow to western thought (Bazzano, 2012) – in particular to Heidegger’s philosophy, which he saw through as rehashed German idealism disguised as phenomenology. For Levinas, ethics is more important than being: our response to the very real presence of the other and to the other’s silent request to be heard and received is far more crucial than the philosophical worship of an abstract being. Ethics itself is also understood no longer as a set of moral principles subservient to a metaphysical system but as adequate response to the presence of the other. Levinas was the *one* thinker in the 20th century who dared to take on one of Nietzsche’s (1996) mighty challenges: of deconstructing both religious and “rational” and utilitarian morality. To Levinas we owe the

quantum leap from abstract ethics to a radical ethics prompted by face-to-face encounter with another human being.

Levinas' profound vision also brought about a vast literature of sentimental altruism, making this difficult thinker more accessible whilst dampening the traumatic element present in his notion of encounter (Bazzano, 2012; Critchley, 2007). As convincingly argued by Critchley (2007), the ethical Levinasian subject is not too dissimilar from a "traumatized neurotic" (p. 61) who has introjected a universal and oppressive guilt and has taken on his shoulders the patriarchal injunctions of the super-ego at face-value and without the aid of symbolization. Only the symbolic domain prevents us from taking "a too literal assumption of responsibility which would become co-opted by the universal guilt of established religions" (Bazzano, 2012, p. 129) – something that indeed happens with Levinas.

What also needs to be stressed is that his is a *philosophy of separation*. Levinas has great respect for the formal structures provided by Descartes, especially the notion of *separation*, which generates, in the third Cartesian meditation on the relation between the *res cogitans* (the mind, the "thinking thing") and the infinity of God, thought beyond thought, thought as inextinguishable longing (Bazzano, 2012; Descartes, 1996). Rather than discarding them, as it is now fashionable, Levinas utilizes the formal categories of Descartes which alone allow the self to dare the thought of *infinity*. In Worsley's (2006) words: "to be human is to desire, and what is desired is the Infinite" (p. 213).

Desire is the name that Levinas gives to the thought that dares to think infinity. Not need, which is hope of satisfaction; not love, which wants union. It is the desiring of what the subject does *not* need, i.e. the realized love of desire which has remained desire (Bazzano, 2012; Blanchot, 1993). Before being a philosopher of otherness, Levinas is a *philosopher of separation* – the separation of desire and longing, a separation which, acknowledged and even encouraged, makes the ethical response possible as an imaginative attempt to fill the existential gap between two inalienable solitudes. This is the very dimension of what I call *togetherness*, consistent, I believe, with Schmid's (1997) view of encounter:

In spite of all inflation the term "encounter" in general and in the Person-Centered Approach in special has undergone, it has to be stated that the essential element of encounter consists in the fact that the human being meets a reality which moves him or her deeply, which is counter him or her. Encounter is not simply an experience, it is an "experience counter" ... [It] is an essentially different experience from what an idealistic and subjectivistic understanding ... presupposes ... However, it is an alien, an Other, another reality, another person ... who encounters my reality ... who encounters me. This makes up the existential dimension and unavoidability as well as the claim for the exclusiveness of encounter. (Schmid, 1997, Internet File)

Conclusion

The reflections outlined here aim at *problematizing* the current discussion of intersubjectivity within contemporary person-centered therapy by emphasizing the following points: (a) the crucial role of conflict; (b) the importance of historical, societal and political situatedness implicit in every therapeutic encounter; (c) the inalienable solitude and autonomy of the other (and the consequent need to resist an arguably predominant penchant for both a romanticized notion of encounter and a tendency to fill the existential gap between the solitude of the client and the solitude of the therapist).

They also call for a more direct and explicit link of person-centered therapy with its phenomenological matrix, one that is respectfully independent of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic thought. The notion of *togetherness* treasures the insights of phenomenology, acknowledging the crucial components of conflict and aloneness present in encounter, and adapts them to contemporary person-centered discourse and praxis. It offers a constructive critique of the stimulating and innovative notions of *relational depth* and *mutuality*. Whilst appreciating the necessary emphasis of these formulations on relatedness, it points toward a balance between aloneness and interdependence, conflict and kinship. This balance is more cogently achieved by Schmid's notion of *en-counter*, in relation to which *togetherness* aims to be an appreciative and critical adjunct which, among other things, attempts to open a wider debate on the philosophy of Levinas.

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