Psychotherapy and Politics International
Psychother. Politics. Int. 4(1): 66–71 (2006)
Published online in Wiley InterScience
(www.interscience.wiley.com) **DOI:** 10.1002/ppi.41

WANTING TO BE HEARD

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ABSTRACT *An extended critical review of three varied books: two on Jungian psychotherapy and culture and one on genetics in psychiatry and psychology. The discussion explores what psychotherapy has to offer towards increasing the understanding of culture, society and politics, and also how far it has to go in communicating its insights and findings. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: culture, psychotherapy, Jungian therapy

The Cultural Complex: Contemporary Jungian Perspectives on Psyche and Society. Edited by Thomas Singer and Samuel L Kimbles. Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004; 279pp. £18.99pb.

The Gene Illusion: Genetic Research in Psychiatry and Psychology under the Microscope. By Jay Joseph, Ross-on-Wye, PCCS Books, 2003; 342pp. £18.00pb.

The Rupture of Time: Synchronicity and Jung's Critique of Modern Western Culture. By Roderick Main. Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004; 214pp. £30.00hb.

Given all the work they have done on themselves, it can be taken as read, can it not, that psychotherapists are thoroughly nice, sane and sorted people who treat each other with every courtesy and consideration and absolutely never engage in spats, quarrels or *ad hominem* arguments? So one might wish, but, as a profession, psychotherapists are too often anything but nice to each other; indeed, the correspondence columns of our journals quite commonly evince jealousy, spite, pettiness, vindictiveness and name calling, to mention just a few of the qualities on show.

It may be that there is a simple enough explanation for this: given that we have to be empathic, understanding and enabling to our clients on an hourly basis, our shadows (or even just our frustrations) have to go somewhere. Where better than on our beloved colleagues, who can be presumed to be capable of withstanding it all? It's their job to contain other people's mess.

This perhaps demonstrates that, however hard we think we try, politics will ever be politics and human psychology will be all too human. It serves also as a counterpoint to our discussions of politics in the wider world. Engendering a theoretical understanding is one thing; bringing it into any kind of life is quite another. There is always going to be resistance in our clients and in ourselves.

Readers of this journal may be presumed to be interested in two things: the light that

psychotherapy can show on political issues, and the way those same issues are active in the materials that clients bring. They may also be presumed to think that there are actually results to be had. To note that such results are little known outside psychotherapy is in no way to disparage the *bona fides* of those who write on these topics, yet one can hardly help but feel that the discussion ought to lead somewhere, to impact on the way politics is actually done.

It is therefore sobering to remember that astrologers are more politically influential than psychotherapists. Yet that can point to a first reason why psychotherapy is probably going to have a quite limited role. Psychotherapy requires self-examination, self-questioning, and the willingness to admit one is wrong. Moreover, when admitting one is wrong is needful it has to be done straightforwardly, and not as a gesture or a tactic in a mind game. Consider the *praxis* of politics as demonstrated by the leaders, and by the populations, of the first five (say) countries that come to mind, and ask yourself how likely such transparency is ever going to be. Neither politicians nor communities are willing patients.

And yet. If we look at our peer discipline of clinical psychology we can see that its insights do have some, perhaps limited, impact. Organizational structures in businesses and in governments often do show signs of having been revised in the light of what it has to offer. To some degree that is to do with the fact that clinical psychology deals far more than psychotherapy in how things already work, and how they can be made more efficient. But it also has to do with how much more accessible the insights of clinical psychology are to those outside it, with how far more transparent its reasoning is, and with how much more grounded its results are in experimental and verifiable evidence than are the offerings of psychotherapy. As a profession, psychotherapy has got to take this example on board: if we want to be heard, we must be audible and comprehensible.

These three books can all serve as examples both of what psychotherapy has to offer in increasing the understanding of culture, society and politics, and also of how far it has to go in communicating its insights and findings.

Singer and Kimbles' *The Cultural Complex: Contemporary Jungian Perspectives on Psyche and Society* is a collection of essays centred round the Jungian idea of the complex – an effectively autonomous unit of behaviour in the individual – and how it can be seen at work in culture, giving rise to conflict, faction and the sense of injustice felt by so many minorities. As with all collections of essays, the standard is variable: some are hardly worth reading whereas others, such as Andrew Samuels' essay on what the concept of the West means, repay careful reading. He, indeed, identifies a cultural complex within Western psychotherapy itself, characterized by an inwardness of concern, claims of universality, a culturally determined sense of self, and Eurocentric power dynamics. His insights ought to be taken on board by the profession as a whole, but one doubts that they will receive as wide a practical acceptance as they should. Dare one say that he does himself no great favours with the very density of his writing? Yet if he is to succeed in sharing his insights, this reader, at least, thinks that they need expressing far more plainly.

Roderick Main, in *The Rupture of Time: Synchronicity and Jung's Critique of Modern Western Culture,* has set himself a major task. He sees that synchronistic phenomena are at work in the world and wants to show how an understanding of them can improve our grasp of how culture functions. His first problem is in the very concept of synchron-

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

icity. Jung introduced it as an act of ostensibility: he wanted to point to the way in which humans see connections between events that have no logical or causal connection. Someone thinks of their Great Aunt Ada Doom, say, and, lo and behold, she immediately contacts him for the first time in 6 months. There's no connection, but we see one. Jung used the term in this way but then went on and treated the phenomenon as if there was indeed some connection; he called it an 'acausal connecting principle'. His ambiguity was deliberate in that he wanted to reflect the ambiguity in human thinking, but it makes the concept slippery. It is always necessary to avoid reifying synchronicity into a sort of pseudo-causality. Main works very hard to define synchronicity with reference to Jung's own thought, and there are some good passages. Yet his analysis does not always avoid the risks of reification. That and his fairly dense language means that his book fails, in the end, to satisfy.

Jay Joseph, in *The Gene Illusion: Genetic Research in Psychiatry and Psychology under the Microscope*, is concerned to challenge the evidence cited in support of genetic theories in psychology, to show that researcher bias and unsound methodology vitiate the supposed findings, and that the findings are used to bolster a conservative social agenda. The first half of his book is a detailed discussion of twin studies and their difficulties from the time of Galton onwards, including taking time to review briefly the work of Mengele in Auschwitz. Having to his satisfaction demolished all such studies, he then argues that the concept of heritability is without value in psychiatry and psychology, before looking at the question of genetic involvement in schizophrenia, IQ and criminality. He concludes that research into genetics is essentially pointless, and that it is in environmental factors that the causes of psychological distress will be found.

His book is an interesting mixture of the academic and the polemical. He spends much time in criticism of experimental method, and some of his criticism has force, but then, referring to the origins of behaviour genetics, which were in animal studies and where breeding was an issue, he comments 'Fuller and Thompson did not specify for which species they were advising psychologists to use a heritability coefficient, but we can safely assume they were referring to laboratory animals.' Which is, of course, what he intends us to conclude.

Elsewhere he distinguishes between real brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's, which can be seen at post-mortem, and schizophrenia and depression, which are, in his opinion, not. It may be of interest that he says nothing of the enlarged ventricular size found in schizophrenia at post mortem, or of the depleted serotonin levels routinely found in the brains of suicides.

His book perhaps points up that if the need for clarity both in analysis and exposition is manifest, there is another important issue that needs to be faced before psychotherapy can make its proper contribution to understanding culture.

Philosophers, ever since David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 2000), have recognized a gap between 'is' and 'ought'. No description of a state of affairs leads or can lead to a single moral demand derived from that state of affairs. Whatever the particular situation is, and whatever ethical rule one wishes to apply to it, it is always possible to question whether that rule is the right one. Certainly, 'is' and 'ought' can never be separated, for morals can only operate in actual life, but any sort of logical deduction is impossible. A slightly different version of this understanding, known as the naturalistic fallacy, was proposed by G E

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

Moore in 1903 (Moore, 1993), and it is under that name that the principle is often known.

It should hardly need saying that going in the opposite direction is equally objectionable and fallacious: one cannot derive an 'is' from an 'ought'. Yet one sees it being done all the time, and it is endemic in all forms of psychological and political writing. To be strict, and when dealing with fallacies that is usually a good policy, there are two parallel fallacies. The first goes from an 'I wish' to an 'it ought to be', while the second goes from 'it ought to be' to 'it is so'. It is the work of an instant to see that a person's wishes do not entail that what they wish ought to be so. One may wish a neighbour's noisy hi-fi to be blown up; it never follows that someone should plant a bomb to accomplish that wish. Equally, one may think there to be a moral imperative that torture should never be used; yet it still most certainly is used and is likely to continue to be used. Of course, when used in argument these deceits, which one might name the optative fallacies, are rarely so obvious; but they are still far too common.

Joseph is not the first author who clearly wants the evidence to turn out in a particular way, and then shows us how it certainly looks that way when he presents it. To which the only proper response is that attributed to Galileo before the Inquisition when he was forced to recant his assertion that the earth moves round the sun: 'Eppur si muove', 'But it does move.'

The import of Joseph's book is nothing that hasn't been said before. If anything, he is slightly behind the times because the current bugbear of those who don't want genes to affect psychology is evolutionary psychology.

It is therefore worth taking a detour to see how some form of evolutionary psychology is not an option but an inevitability.

The basic idea of evolution does not actually depend on anything biological at all – it is an essentially very simple and straightforward arithmetical observation. Suppose that there is a population of 100 things that reproduce and each of which disappears after a certain time. Suppose too that this population can be divided into two groups, A and B, of 50 things each. Finally, suppose that, on the one hand, group A consistently reproduces at a rate of 100% (on average each thing just leaves one successor behind), while on the other hand group B reproduces at a rate of 120% (on average each thing leaves behind 1.2 successors). Then in the next generation there will be 50 As but 60 Bs. In 10 generations there will still be 50 As, but there will be 310 Bs. The population started by being divided 50% A and 50% B, but in generation 10 the division is 14% A and 86% B. As long as group B leaves behind on average more than group A, the proportion of B increases while that of A falls.

In that example, we were still left with 50 As, but if instead of reproducing at 100%, group A reproduces at less than 100%, its actual number, not just its percentage in the population, will start to fall and As will eventually disappear. If group A were to reproduce at a rate of 80%, then in generation 10 there will be precisely six As left. In reality the difference between two groups is never as great as in these examples, but the point is still the same.

A further consequence is that whatever properties the Bs have that the As do not have will become more common in the population, and will eventually predominate.

Now notice that we have said nothing at all about what these things are, or about how they reproduce, or what causes the two groups to reproduce at different rates. We have not even assumed that they are life forms. The growth of one group at the expense of the other is just a matter of basic

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

mathematics. Yet this simplest of ideas is one of the two poles of evolutionary thought.

The other pole is that in any population there will arise from time to time things that give some of the population the possibility of reproducing faster than others. It doesn't have to be genetic – it can be anything. If in a particular species, one group starves (group A) while another, having more resources, reproduces more (group B), then the result will still be fewer As and more Bs. Such environmental influences do not necessarily persist, however, and in another time this group A might recover and overtake B. Yet if the reproductive difference is in any way inbuilt (for example, genetic) then it will persist over generations.

These two ideas are all that is needed for evolution to arise – in anything that reproduces. The final part of the picture in living organisms is that occasionally the genetic material in an individual undergoes a spontaneous change. Most of the time this has a negative impact on reproduction and that individual's successors die out, but if it has a positive impact then that individual's successors will increase in number, and a group carrying that genetic change, and all the other genetic material that goes with it, will grow in the total population.

That, in essence, is all evolution is.

Since some of our mental capacities are indeed inbuilt, then our psychology is going to be subject to evolution. It's inevitable. The only real question, although it is a huge one, is *what* traits evolution may have caused to become more common in humans.

The process described above is purely random – it has no end in view, because it is no more than a mechanism. It is emphatically not selecting *for* group B, even though it advantages group B. Therefore it is meaningless to say that it occurs in order to bring anything about. Here, indeed, is the real Achilles' heel of evolutionary psychology, for it is easy to forget that talking about the factors that cause B to increase as 'evolutionary pressures' or 'adaptations' is to use metaphor. Too many evolutionary psychologists say things like 'women evolved in order to become monogamous, while men evolved in order to become polygamous.' That implies purpose but the reality is that there is no purpose. What there is is randomly acquired advantage.

To see how far evolution can be misunderstood, the present writer recalls a conversation in which someone said that the idea of a randomly acquired advantage was politically unacceptable. Even, one asks with *l'esprit d'escalier*, amongst non-life-forms? But then, to go back to Hume, the alleged political unacceptability was an idea introduced into the conversation by the particular person, not by the random process of evolution.

All of this means that proving that a particular mental trait is the result of evolution is very difficult, and it is a very valid criticism of evolutionary psychology that its putative results are usually not much more than speculation. There are a small number of reliable results, and Laland and Brown's (2002) S*ense and Nonsense: Evolutionary Perspectives on Human Behaviour* is a good, if slightly stodgy, guide to what is known. A more readable and accessible take on the whole issue of what is nature and what is nurture can be found in Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate* (Pinker, 2003).

Actually, one of the biggest problems for both genetics and evolutionary psychology is that as sciences they are in their infancy, and that genes express their effects via proteins. The systematic description of the human proteome is, if it is not an unfortunate metaphor, still embryonic. But research requires funding, and funding requires results and, too often, hype.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

One can perhaps see, then, that there are some hefty problems in psychotherapy articulating the insights it has to offer. There are, for starters, the resistance in politics and culture to real self-examination, the sometimes poor quality of the evidence base, not infrequent weak analysis, a tendency to obscure presentation of ideas and the permanent temptation to find what we want to find. No doubt there are others. In the face of that, we need to remind ourselves that psychotherapy does have a powerful contribution to make. After all, we are such nice people, aren't we?

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DOI: 10.1002/ppi