

The Inner Rebel – Exploring Equalizing Rhythms in the Human Psyche

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ABSTRACT *The main argument is that in the place of deepest intuition, core (Winnicott, Reich etc) of humans is an equalizing instinct. This is overlaid by the hierarchical structures of defences, egoism, fear and learnt thought patterns (paradigms). In this part of ourselves we are attuned to the balancing, equalizing rhythms of nature. There is a direct link between progressive politics that values equality and nature's deepest forces. These can be described as flowing between opposites, striving for balance like the Tao in ancient China or enantiodromia in the philosophy of ancient Greece. This instinct can express itself in loving, mature rebellion that is not pathological. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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Everything that is genuinely revolutionary ... stems from man's biological core ... being revolutionary is the rational rebellion against intolerable conditions in human society. (Wilhelm Reich, 1975)

A group of children are at play in an African village with a wooden stick and an old bicycle wheel being used as a hoop. It is the only toy they have. The bigger ones make sure that the younger ones all get a turn in rolling it. Everyone gets a chance to play.

On another continent girls are skipping in a concrete playground. They hold the rope for each other and encourage each one to succeed, singing and chanting as they go.

Tourists on a Greek beach play bat and ball. The only aim is to keep the ball in the air. They can go on all day.

All these humans are engaged in equalizing behaviour of a basic kind. They are in the flow, in a state where judgements of superior/inferior, win/lose simply don't occur. As a byproduct, it seems that they are also really happy.

Was this behaviour laboriously learnt through classes in good citizenship, or is there a part of us that 'naturally' or even 'instinctually' strives for equality when the circumstances allow it?? 'Natural' is a very dangerous word. The whole idea of human nature has had a very bad press over the last 50 years. In psychotherapy Freud's demand that 'Where there was id, let there be ego' and cognitive behaviour therapy's emphasis on the logical mind have undermined our faith in the self-healing, balancing forces of our psyches. Social pres-

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asures for personal growth ever upwards has taken our attention away from our interconnectedness with nature.

In nature everything is ‘trying’ to balance, everything is rhythmic, everything is dancing, from the oscillating strings of subatomic matter to the breathing of the cosmos. Yet we humans are still stuck in the old vertical mind sets of winning and losing and growing ever bigger and better. This rigid paradigm has sunk deep into our subconscious minds over thousands of years. It is the structure of our defences, the structure of our egotism and the dominating structure of control and power over. This hierarchical mind patterning has invaded and subdued the deepest intuitive layers of our humanity.

Unlike Freud, Reich had a strong belief that at our core there is a ‘natural’ loving energy and what he called a rationally angry response to injustice. We can call this ‘instinctual’, coming from the Id rather than the Superego. In person-centred terms it could be described as our organismic self (Rogers). Or we can call it our deepest intuition or core self (Winnicott). The point is that it can be trusted. The problem is differentiating between this core and the rebelliousness that comes from fears, defences or other neurotic patterns. How do we tell the difference?

When we are fully in touch with this part of ourselves it can be described as being in the flow, ironically seen today by many psychologists as the ultimate in successful living. We are in tune with the equalizing/balancing forces of the moment. It could mean marching against war or calmly explaining to a boss the effects of her dominating behaviour.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF INNER REBEL

We hear a lot about ‘working with the Inner Child’ today. But it’s now time to get to know our ‘inner rebel’ too. I have divided our inner rebellion into three kinds.

1. Developmental rebellion

It is well known to parents and psychologists that around the age of two lots of children start rebelling against the authority of parents or siblings. It is often a time of power struggle when the tiny little person begins to assert her or his autonomy, will and even perhaps a sense of fairness and equal rights. This could be when an equalizing instinct arises. However, the child soon learns the social patterns of hierarchy that override that instinct. These vertical structures become deeply embedded through the very human need to belong combined with fear.

Then as teenagers and young adults many of us rebel against some authority or another. It may be that such rebellion is vital for a psychological sense of a separate self. This could also be a Western construct. Just how separate and individual the young person is expected to be depends on the culture. But some sense of individual existence, however interconnected with a group, seems to create wellbeing. Slaves and women in deeply unequal societies often lacked that sense and suffered psychologically as well as in other ways.

Many people can be partly stuck in one of these developmental stages. In therapy and counselling it is important to go back and work through what we experienced and/or didn’t. The classic middle-aged man driving a red sports car with a very young woman at his side could be reliving something he didn’t fully experience as a teenager. He could also be following the authority of social demands never to grow old. Our whole Western society could be seen as stuck at the teen age rebellion stage.

2. Authoritarian rebellion

As Marlon Brando says in *The Wild Ones*, when asked what he is rebelling against, 'You name it.' This kind of rebellion is against anything. Yet ironically it is a way of staying connected to whatever authority we think we are rebelling against. Rebellious rage with parents, men, governments keeps us attached to the very things we want to destroy. We are trapped in the dualism of vertical opposites. This stops us being free to think and act from the wisdom of our deeper intuition. This 'anti' stance may indeed lead us to march against unjust acts of governments, refuse an arranged marriage or keep a physical distance from our parents. But psychologically we can still be stuck. It can seem as though there is only a binary choice between obeying authority and disobeying it. However there is another way. This is to listen to the author-ity of your own deepest core and to know yourself well enough to recognize its voice. Then you can be the author of your own actions and thoughts. From this place comes authentic 'loving rebellion'.

3. Loving rebellion

As Che Guevara once famously said 'At the risk of sounding ridiculous, let me say that a great revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.' In that core of our being the overwhelming feeling is of love. The structure behind our thinking in that place is equalising and rhythmic not rigid and vertical. We find ourselves in the right place at the right time for whatever equalising action is needed, whether it be campaigning against the arms trade or talking to the shy man at a party. It isn't 'right' in any moral or prescriptive way. It simply feels right when we are in that place of flow. Equalizing then becomes a way of being in everyday life.

No one would deny that the rebelling of Nelson Mandela or of the Burmese monks in 2007 came from the core or was mature and loving as well as rationally angry. But on the tiny scale of our personal lives, we can also live in the flow of intuitive balancing.

It is a kind of natural ethics, in which empathy is central. So it would not include the taking of another human life. Revenge does not come from the same deep place within. It comes from what Reich would call the secondary layer of defences.

REBELLION IN THERAPY

Many therapists interpret all rebellion as the stuck developmental kind or the trapped authoritarian kind. Rebellion towards the therapist tends to be interpreted as resistance, rather than honoured as possibly coming from the deepest intuition of the client. There is rarely room for the idea of 'healthy rebellion'. People who are 'living on the borderlands' and are often diagnosed with borderline personalities can be particularly sensitive to inequalities that are hidden from others. For example, they can be very intuitively tuned in to other people's superior or patronizing unconscious attitudes.

Being more fully in touch with our core can actually make it more difficult to cope in the competitive, unequal world we live in. And helping people to uncover their defences and attune to this more primal intuitive self has its problems in terms of fitting in with society.

I used to believe that the more people work on themselves and got in touch with their 'true selves' the more they would react against inequality and change society. But despite

larger numbers of people, at least in the West, doing therapy, the world has actually become more unequal. As the title of Hillman and Ventura's (1992) book says, *We've Had 100 Years of Psychotherapy and the World is Getting Worse*. I would argue that one of the many reasons for this is that our professional world is still largely stuck in the old vertical paradigms of win and lose, personal ladder climbing and a distrust of the deepest layers of the unconscious, the intuitive core.

For the past 20 years I have been writing about and trying to practise an alternative paradigm to the prevailing hierarchical one. I have called it The Rhythm Model (nothing to do with birth control). It is first described in *Feminist Counselling in Action* (Chaplin, 1989), where it is used to reconnect divided opposites in the psyche, such as dependence and independence, strength and vulnerability. In my chapter in *Feminism and Psychotherapy* (Chaplin, 1999) I broaden the model to be a paradigm compatible with postmodernism and the fluidity of identity. And in *Anti-Discriminatory Counselling* (Chaplin 2003) it becomes Living Rhythmically as an alternative to Patriarchal Living.

In the past seven years I have brought in the words 'equalizing rhythms' to add a more overtly political dimension to the concept of balancing opposites. The new book is called *Deep Equality* (Chaplin, forthcoming). Equalizing on many levels becomes the main framework for the therapy work. In the book I use many examples made up from a variety of clients. Two of these are summarized below:

CLIENTS

1. A client we will call Carol came from a poor working class background. Her rebellion took the form of rejecting her parent's culture for that of the more middle classes. She put herself through law school, and worked her way up to become a partner in a successful law firm. All the time she was driven to be the opposite of her parents. But she was also stuck in the vertical ladder paradigm, moving for ever upwards.

She had a beautiful apartment, beautiful clothes and a beautiful car. But Carol was not happy. At 35 she fell in love with a much younger human rights lawyer. She left her successful life in a rebellious act to work with him in Africa. This satisfied her core self and for a while Carol was fulfilled working to balance some of the massive inequalities in the wider world. But after a while, there began to be an imbalance in the relationship. She was giving more and more of her power away to John. He had come from a wealthy background and was very confident.

She rebelled against him, resenting how much easier it was for him to give up the good life as he had been born into it. Later she came into therapy and explored how the paradigm of inferior working class and superior middle class was still ingrained. Carol had low esteem underneath all the surface success. As she began to value herself more there was increasing connection with her core self. Then her rebellion came from a different place. She could feel how empty and materialistic the society around her was. But her reaction which was to down size and learn to meditate, came from her own deepest intuition, nowhere else. At least some of the hierarchical structures of her thinking and defences had begun to dissolve.

2. Another client whom we will call Thomas was brought up in a very strict Afro-Caribbean family. When his parents came to Britain from the West Indies in the 1960s they were deeply disappointed and hurt by the casual racism they faced every day. The

local black church became their main support. But being at the bottom of one hierarchy put the father at the top of another, his family. Cruel punishments for the children were carried out in the name of Lord Jesus. Thomas hated his father.

As soon as he could leave home, Thomas left. With the support of his girlfriend from a similar background he went to college, did media studies and created his own music production company. His rebellion came from all three kinds. There was a rational rebellion at the racism in society, which inspired the lyrics of the music he wrote. But the other kinds were there too and turned against his girlfriend. She eventually 'became' the abusive parents in his mind. Then she finally left him.

At this point Thomas came into therapy and learnt to distinguish between the different kinds of rebellion. In spite of surface confidence, he had internalized the black/white hierarchies. Gradually he developed deeper self-esteem and more trust in his own intuitive authority. He could step back from the exhausting battle against any authority in his life and be more in the flow. His rebellion now came mainly from his core, and he became a much more effective inspiration to the black youth of his community.

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