Pluralism as scientific method in psychotherapy

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Abstract *This paper asks how we address the awkward questions in psychotherapy, the ones where because of orientational conflict and different models of method—methodic differences arousing the most mutual intolerance—are liable to become stuck, be avoided or only talked about 'in the bar'. It suggests* pluralism *is the requisite method and the only model of scientific method to embrace the whole field. Pluralism is itself the method of confronting alternative methods, by exposing their core assumptions to one another. Contributions of Slunecko, Samuels, MacIntyre, and Derrida on this are linked via an exploration of the insights, and limits, of the philosopher Hume's arguments in his* Essay on Miracles. *The contrasting by pluralism of 'positive science' versus 'faith' (or paranormal assumptions) is then subsumed within the logic of the human realm, 'aesthetic–historical' pluralism, for which neither positive science nor the paranormal need be foreign; however, what emerges as finally fundamental to pluralism is the stance willing to mutually confront which sustains dialogue.*

Introduction: the problem of dialogue

There are questions in psychotherapy which tend to be only asked, so to speak, 'late at night in the conference bar', or similar situations. These are the *awkward questions*—for instance, about the *prior assumptions* which underpin our orthodoxies, and also those which orientations ask about each other, but not about themselves.

For instance, were Freud and Jung really *theologians*, religious innovators, not scientists or psychologists? Are the differences between them, or between Freud and Melanie Klein, on which so much ink has been spilt, perhaps *little local differences* (in Harold MacMillan's phrase)? Or, perhaps, more politely (or cautiously), religious–doctrinal or *theological* differences? Are we *all* theologians really?

Conversely, are the differences between psychoanalysis (and its offshoots, and successors in the humanistic world), on the one hand, and approaches based in cognitive–behavioural, learning theory, assumptions, on the other, *so fundamental* that it is impossible to give rational grounds for them being in the same profession *at all*?

Are *all* the psychotherapies rooted in *suggestion*? Do we not all work with *altered states*? In that case, is *hypnosis*, often treated as low in the power hierarchy, or 'class structure', pecking order of psychotherapy, unacknowledged at the heart of all we do? So, perhaps *pluralism* is a method to address the awkward questions about assumptions we only discuss in the conference bar! These are the assumptions it is not political good form to challenge in public, or with beginning trainees. But what is *pluralism* which claims to be able to tackle such questions?

What is pluralism and why is it important?

Pluralism is *method*.

Let's focus what it might be by running past ourselves some 'attempts to solve the insoluble' in psychotherapy:

1. In the controversy about memory, one person claims that we can recall memories of intra-uterine experience; another argues that, as memory functions are not developed at that age, before object constancy is achieved, we *could not* have memories of intrauterine experience. Rapidly the opponents reach the point of dismissing one another as irrational or hidebound, respectively.
2. A cognitive–behavioural psychotherapist argues with a psychoanalyst that claims about the unconscious are *meaningless, unverifiable, or impossible.*
3. A psychoanalyst argues with an empirical psychologist that standard outcome measures are *meaningless, or irrelevant,* by comparison with the profound *revaluation* of the value of their life a client has experienced in psychoanalysis.
4. An attachment theorist argues with a Kleinian, appealing to evolutionary theory, that envy is an expression of threatened abandonment, or loss, and *not a primary expression* of destructive impulse.
5. A psychoanalytic trainee challenges something in the conduct of the training and is told they are acting out their transferential conflicts.
6. A humanistic or psychospiritual, phenomenologically-based psychotherapist argues against *directive restructuring methods* in the work, on the grounds that this contaminates the pure unfolding into awareness of sheer experiential process, that there is no goal, only process; in response, a cognitive–behavioural psychotherapist asks, 'But does it *work?*'

And so on and on!

The inadequacy of moderateness and 'tolerance apartheid'

'Moderate' psychotherapists believe that *if only the protagonists could be patient and persistent* the discussions could lead to resolution, but the discussions often come to premature closure; the opponents seem at a loss as to how to find common ground. A tendency to retreat back into the circle of sympathetic like-minded colleagues is apparent; dismissal, acrimony, and name-calling are near at hand.

If, further, the dialogues move out of the purely practice-based context and into the realm of the *politics of psychotherapy,* then *either* the above tendencies are exacerbated, *or* there is likely to be a 'live and let live' agreement without active dialogue, on the basis of a kind of tacit *apartheid.* I shall label it *tolerance apartheid* hereafter. Most of our *federal organisations* are in practice based upon this—certainly itself a considerable achievement.

How can pluralism as method get us further than this, when discussions of the value of *pluralism itself* are also, of necessity, subject to just the same uncertainty and inconclusiveness, even if in a special way pluralism can *account* for this? Secondly, as MacIntyre (1990, e.g. p. 6) points out, this condition is *universal* certainly in the human sciences, *not confined to psychotherapy,* though there is a sense in which *the pluralistic predicament* applies *especially* to psychotherapy.

Defining pluralism?

Pluralism might initially be defined as:

> the dialogical and methodological suspension, in theoretical dialogues, of *our own* certainties, *whatever* they are and *however* well established, and their dialogical and methodological exposure *to those of others.* Pluralism is not tolerance without

confrontation, but is *active confrontation of difference*, in a context of respect and the attempt to understand. Pluralism is *not a set of results but a method of enquiry*.

It is not an easy attitude to sustain. The *International Journal of Psychotherapy* is an avowedly and actively pluralistic journal—but one of very few, at best. Despite this, I shall argue that:

> Pluralism is the *only* genuinely viable scientific basis upon which psychotherapy as enquiry can be undertaken.

I include *both* depth psychology, in Andrew Samuels' words, defined via the dynamic unconscious (Samuels, 1989, p. 4), or—I should add—equivalents in humanistic–existential approaches, *and* those, such as cognitive–behavioural psychotherapy, which eschew or deny these.

This is a paradox, indeed a *pluralistic* paradox; surely pluralism *is* about tolerance, yet here I am dogmatically claiming it is the *only* basis for psychotherapy as enquiry? This issue is indeed wider than psychotherapy; we are dealing with a concept of *very* far-reaching implications and wide scope, extending to pluralism about pluralism! I shall here be dealing primarily with psychotherapy, but my discussion will also draw from considerations relevant to pluralism from *outside*.

Pluralism as the basis for identifying the profession of psychotherapy

But does pluralism have *particular* application to psychotherapy?

> Yes: *because it is intrinsic to psychotherapy that it borrows from all forms of knowledge relevant to psychological knowledge and psychological method*; they intersect in it. If no methods are to be disenfranchised in advance, dogmatically or on political grounds, *they can only be scrutinised on a basis of pluralism*.

Pluralism, properly understood, is the bridge between the past, present, and future of psychotherapy. It is worth massive emphasis *to remind ourselves again and again*: if the *whole field* of psychotherapy is to establish itself upon a scientific basis, it can only be upon the basis of pluralism. The dangers of any alternative are staggering. This is the *only* way in which the Strasbourg Declaration's commitment to *both* the assurance of the multiplicity of methods (Article 3), *and* the status of 'scientific discipline' (Article 1), can be sustained (European Association for Psychotherapy, Strasbourg Declaration, 1991). Otherwise the science being appealed to will turn out to be dogmatic positivism; it will be what David Boadella (1998) calls scientism. The reasons for this will become more and more clear as we proceed.

This claim, that this is the *only* way for psychotherapy to create itself, *as a discipline*, is *at a different level* from my claim (Wilkinson, 1998), or any other integrative claims, that what I called 'phenomenological causality' offers the basis for an *integrative* field theory which can embrace and synthesise *all* the possibilities within the profession. That was a specific *theory claim*, as categoric and exclusive as one wishes, which would just be *put to the test*, along with any others in the same context, *within* the imagined pluralistic framework for the profession as a whole. The pluralistic framework is a *higher level, meta-level, framework for dialogue*—whatever theories emerge as valid through the process. How we can *hold together* the two levels is precisely the preoccupation of this paper.

How, then, can pluralism be claimed as the *only* basis for psychotherapeutic method, or rather, for psychotherapy *as a whole* to have a basis?

Pluralism as a tautology of method

This claim is in fact a platitude, or *tautology*, of method, one which *just follows* from truthful method as such. By 'method' here I mean: methodology *which enquires into its own validity*. This can *include*, but is not confined to, pure psychotherapeutic *method of intervention*. It is more the matter of 'return to fundamentals in supervision, or seminar-based enquiry—understanding the basis of one's work. When we *default* from it we already are operating as *something other* than enquirers open to the material—as authorities, coercers, propagandists, and so on—though of course, to complicate things, these may yet enter in as *raw material* of process and enquiry. To the extent that it is about tolerance, pluralism is about mutual tolerance of *method and enquiry*. Indeed, it combines the fierce fight to *protect* such tolerance, with a radical, but *non-authoritarian*, attempt to persuade, and argue rationally, and to resolve conflict by persuading and arguing rationally, at the level of belief or theoretical position. Pluralism, as already stated, is the dialogical and methodological suspension of *our own* certainties, *whatever* they are and *however* well established, and their dialogical and methodological exposure to those of others. By the same token, it is the dialogical and methodological suspension also of the certainties of *our partners in dialogue*. The tension of pluralism is that *whilst holding our own position emphatically and with conviction*, we at the same time *expose ourselves to the true impact of our opponent's positions, assumptions, and methods*.

This is envisaged in Slunecko's important arguments about dialogue, and entering the mode of the *stranger*, the other, Slunecko (1999) also in Samuels' writing on pluralism (e.g. Samuels, 1989) and in MacIntyre (1990).

Slunecko says:

> up to now all the arguments have followed a certain problem frame in which the heterogeneity of the psychotherapeutic schools is *per se* negative—an interim stage that must be overcome. Instead, I will develop a systematic epistemological and sociological argument as to why heterogeneity and mutual dissent between schools are necessary conditions for psychotherapy. (p. 133)

> The principle of *strangification*, thus, might enable us to put an end to heuristically fruitless disputes about each others' effectiveness and efficacy, and instead induce a specifically structured dialogue between different therapeutic schools, during which they *stumble upon the assumptions embedded in their theoretical modelling* [my italics]. To do so, participants have to allow themselves to break free of their habitual frame of reference and plunge into the reality of a different model without ulterior motives of integration, plundering, or—perhaps the most common pseudo-integrationist pitfall—implications of knowing better what other models are 'really' about. (p. 139)

Samuels' definitions and descriptions of pluralism include:

> Pluralism is an approach to conflict that tries to reconcile differences without imposing a false synthesis upon them and, above all, without losing sight of the particular value and truth of each element in the conflict. Pluralism is not an exclusively multiple approach because it seeks to hold unity and diversity in balance, *making sure that the diversity need not be a basis for schism* [my italics]. (Samuels, 1989, p. xi)

> What is central to bootstrapping [a model taken from modern physics] is that *no one theory, nor the level of reality to which it refers*, is regarded as more fundamental than any other. (Samuels, 1989, p. 219)

the arguments about the One and the Many in the psyche and the arguments about the One and the Many in relation to the schools of depth psychology *are really the same argument* [my italics]. (Samuels, 1989, p. 5)

These understandings of pluralism themselves suffer a little, perhaps, from the twin tensions of pluralism—covert integration *or* 'tolerance *apartheid*'—but are excellent in conveying something of the *feeling* and the *programme* of pluralism.

The primacy of method: pluralism in relation to the experimental method

Is this mutual exposure to each others' approaches not just a new version of *the experimental method,* scientific enquiry? In a sense—a wider sense—indeed it is. *This* question indeed assumes what I just said by saying that commitment to pluralism is tautological, if we are enquirers. But its scope is wider. It is precisely the submission, to the 'experiment' of enquiry, *of all modes of enquiry themselves,* not just those of positive science, together with all belief frameworks. It is meta-level, concerned with the *forms,* not the *contents* of arguments. It is thus suited to address *the radical plurality of methods and assumptions in psychotherapy.*

MacIntyre's pluralistic model of the university

Alisdair MacIntyre (1990), in the field of religious philosophy and theology, offers us a pluralistic proposal for a university, in an age when there is no consensus about assumptions, which is sharply relevant to us psychotherapists, and is more comprehensive than either Slunecko's or Samuels'. I cannot avoid a lengthy, yet even so abbreviated, quotation. He starts from the premise that *there currently is, and can be, no consensus of core assumptions.* His examples are the differences between:

1. the positivist (scientistic) Enyclopaedists (of the original Encyclopaedia Britannica, the ethos of Adam Gifford, the legator of the Gifford Lectures);
2. the post-Nietzschean deconstructivist 'genealogists of morals' (including Freud, Foucault, and Derrida); and
3. the creative communalist theological–philosophical traditionalism of the Thomist synthesis, Aquinas' legacy to us from the 13th century (which had reconciled Platonism and Aristoteleanism in theological philosophy):

> What then *is* possible? The answer is: the university as a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict. In such a university those engaged in teaching and enquiry would each have to play a double role. For, on the one hand, each of us would be participating in conflict as the protagonist of a particular point of view, engaged thereby in two distinct but related tasks ... to advance enquiry from within that particular point of view—and—to enter into controversy with other rival view points, *both* in order to exhibit what is mistaken in that view point—*and* in order to test and retest the central theses advanced from ones own point of view against the strongest possible objections to them to be derived from ones opponents.
>
> On the other hand, each of us would have to play a second role, not that of a partisan, but of *someone concerned to uphold and order the on-going conflicts* [my italics], to provide and sustain institutionalised means for their expression, to negotiate the means of encounter between opponents, to ensure that rival voices were not illegitimately suppressed, to sustain the university—not as an

> *arena of neutral objectivity* [my italics], as in the liberal university, since each of
> the conflicting viewpoints would be advancing its own partisan account of the
> nature and function of objectivity—but as an arena of conflict *in which the most
> fundamental type of moral and theological disagreement was afforded recognition*
> [my italics]. (MacIntyre, 1990, pp. 230–231)

He goes on to point out how lamentably our political–educational structures fall short of this ideal, how it is routinely *suppressed*. The same is surely for the most part true of our psychotherapy institutions. The *theoretical role* envisaged for such bodies as UKCP in Britain, and EAP in Europe, is to hold and sustain such pluralism. In practice, we fall very far short of it, achieving at best a fragile measure of 'tolerance apartheid', and liable to a centralist drift, even though the ideal is still embedded in our core institutional formulations. (I register an important exception to this in UKCP later.)

MacIntyre expresses very well the *two levels* I am trying to suggest as essential to pluralism. This also supports Samuels' emphasis upon the *passion* pluralism makes possible, and brings out the reasons for the necessity to *protect* the pluralistic space.

The fundamental tendency, and problem, of mutual intolerance of methods

At the level of genuine collisions, *mutual intolerance of methods of enquiry* casts its net far wider than mutual intolerance in respect of *beliefs*. Witness the chasms of mutual misunderstanding, arguing past each other, in psychotherapy, of *positivistic* empiricism, and *phenomenological* empiricism, e.g. in the mutual incomprehension of quantitative and qualitative evaluation of psychotherapy interventions and outcomes! Yet *both* are, in a broader sense, empirical methods of enquiry.

In the earlier illustrations, the problem is in great part the *entanglement of issues of belief with issues of method*. In psychotherapy the factor of reflexivity, the fact that we *reflect* on our methods and processes as part of their very form of activity (c.f. Slunecko, 1999) means that *the method of enquiry itself is, to a degree difficult to ascertain, the means by which it itself is validated*.

The real difficulties arise acutely concerning how we would *validate* each others' *belief systems*. A psychoanalyst will circularly regard exploration of the transference as itself gathering the data which support it. A cognitive psychotherapist will take *factual outcomes of beliefs* (statistically measurable if need be) as a *form of the type of feedback* by which the positively altered beliefs are validated (e.g. Bond & Dryden, 1996), so that the quantitative outcomes are taken to support *value systems* (e.g. the notion of 'rationality') *linked with quantitative outcomes*. Proponents of each approach may show the matter to be more multi-centred in its sources of evidence; I am simply pointing to apparent circularity.

This makes for profound difficulties in validating each others' beliefs in psychotherapy. In principle we would tolerate them if they were *proven by our own methods*. But *method is precisely what is at issue*. We can see it well in each other but not in ourselves, so all this is further entangled with issues of mutual intolerance, and dogmatic orthodoxy or extremism. We do *not* always accept a conclusion alien to us if proven by our very own methodologies; we *are likely* to challenge, in that case, whether it was really a *'true'* use of our methodology. Thus, even though the British Defence Ministry itself now quite openly has put on public record (at Kew) documents giving comprehensive details of sustained and well-attested encounters with non-terrestrial aircraft, it is unlikely that non-adherents to the belief in the genuineness of such encounters will not *question the evidence itself*. We shall come to what the philosopher David Hume had to say about just this.

It is ultimately, then, *methods*, especially—but not only—the methods of positive science,

the myth of our epoch, which are perceived as sacrosanct, as self-evident, and beyond criticism from outside. Methodologies and limitations of methodology, such as the 'no physical contact' of classical psychoanalysis, which do not in the least follow from the theory base, as, for instance, Reich, Groddeck, and Winnicott witness (elaborated in the very fine recent book by Nick Totton, *The Water and the Glass*, 1998) nevertheless get enshrined, and entrenched, beyond the reach of criticism, in practice, in a 'deadly silence' (*Todshweigen*). It is the *methods* (along, significantly, with the *texts*) which carry the sacred life-force, the 'mana', not the theories as such (which are indeed, especially in Freud himself, legion!).

This is all paradoxically confirmed by what appears to contradict it, namely one of the major problems for a pluralistic position: what do we do if our opponent holds *to us unacceptably extreme belief positions* (in UFOs, for instance! or fundamentalist creationism; in psychotherapy the mutual intolerance of the sides in the memory debate is an illustration)? If this is just a matter of *belief*, there actually is no problem. If our opponent operates within the same framework of *method*—the Ministry of Defence, in this context—we can readily submit to enquiry together. But the *hidden* assumption is that *extreme beliefs could not have been reached by a serious form of method*. Conversely, creationists will have various ways of dealing with radio-carbon dating! The *belief* is used to discredit the *method* in advance.

Hume's paradox about evidence

This brings us to David Hume. For, who defines 'extreme beliefs'? By what yardstick? The most graphic expression of the logic of *this* position is to be found in the celebrated *Essay on Miracles* (in Hume, 1963) a classical text as little out of date now as when it was written. It is an apparently *anti-pluralistic text*. It implies a *single* model of method, probability, though recognising *various degrees* of probability. But, as such, it exposes the essential insights of pluralism in a graphic way. Such reversals are characteristic of pluralism.

We might get a sense of the application to us today of Hume's Essay if we substitute for the word 'miracle', 'the paranormal' or 'the supernatural'. An ultra-modern application of it in that sense is to be found in Humphrey (1995). As indicated, major elements in the raging dispute going on in the psychotherapy, psychology, and psychiatry words about the status of 'recovered memories' are affected by the logic Hume is invoking. Thus the claim, mentioned earlier, that memories can be retrieved from before, at the very least, the development of object constancy, is rejected *a priori* by false memory theorists (e.g. Prendergast, 1998).

Likewise, the whole point of Hume is to discredit *human testimony, a priori*, in advance, where it conflicts with *what normally happens*.

> If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion. (Hume, 1963, p. 526)

This is defined by a commitment to positive scientific method and repeatable experiment—quantitative science. Thus, an eclipse of the sun, even though not what is *normally experienced* in any given venue, is predicted in terms of scientific laws, and Thales' prediction of one (accurate to *within one month, or even a year*, apparently, such have been the changes in our time sense!) is indeed identified by Herakleitos (Herakleitos, Fragment 33, in Burnet, 1930, p. 136) *before* Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, at the (postponed!) dawn of scientific method, as crucial evidence of the lawfulness and rationality of the activity of the universe. Here the unexpected *becomes the anticipated in advance* and as such *strengthens* the scientific claim. Popper's hypothetico-deductive model (1959) of, and position on, scientific method does not conflict with Hume on miracles.

The response of faith, and the response of evidence, to Hume

Now, the question of method of enquiry is this (I illustrate from outside psychotherapy and then see how it applies to it): if one believes in, say, the resurrection of Christ, the major example Hume is seeking to discredit, there are two significantly different possibilities, both of which raise the issue of pluralism in rather different ways.

The first to *concede* that the evidence may well not stand up as: history; or in a court of law; or as science; but that the belief is upheld *on faith*. Even here there is likely to be *some* appeal to evidence; there will not be *absolutely no* evidence, and indeed certain factual claims will be more likely be *included in the circle of faith* (for instance, the belief in the empty tomb, or in the greater likelihood of the writing of the Gospels having an 'eyewitness' aspect). There is no neat either/or between evidence and interpretation or consequent belief. The application of such considerations to, for instance, the false memory controversy is fairly obvious. Memory process as applied to pre-object constancy experience is *read* in terms of prior interpretations.

This leads us to the second option, the 'rationally'—or non-faith-based—argument, that someone gives greater credence *to the testimony as such*, because they have a stronger belief than the other, on independent grounds, in the veracity, on the whole, of human testimony or certain types of human testimony. To sample this type of argument, consider again the debate about UFOs. One person says, 'They can't *all* be imagination, or making it up'. Another says, 'The bulk of the reports have a certain tell-tale psychological pattern'. Both are arguments, on empirical grounds, however obscure and difficult their assumptions to tease out, about the value of certain human testimony. It would be an answer to Hume to say, 'It *would* be more miraculous for the disciples and the women all to be making it up, than to accept Jesus rose from the dead'. It would also be an answer *in terms of his own logic*.

The first kind of answer would be rejecting—inverting!—his logic. His ironic end to the Essay implicitly—and pluralistically—acknowledges this. It was indeed taken precisely on its own terms as such by J.G. Hamann,

> If only Hume were sincere, consistent with himself ... All his errors aside, he is like Saul among the prophets. I only want to quote one passage that will prove that one can preach the truth in *jest*, and without awareness or desire, even if one is the greatest doubter and, like the serpent, wants to doubt even what God has said. (Hamann's letter to Kant, 27 July 1759, in *Kant, 1967*, p. 42)

Then he quotes:

> Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its [Christianity's] veracity: and whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom or experience. (Hume, 1963, p. 544)

This answer in terms of faith, which does not eschew *all* evidence but draws it *systematically* into its *own* circle, can perfectly well be expounded rationally and systematically in terms of its own clear logic, e.g. in Karl Barth's massive 13-volume *Church Dogmatics* (Barth, 1936), but to bring it into dialogue, as Barth perfectly well grasps, with the assumptions of the Humes and the Kants, means *to confront two radically different concepts of method*.

Two kinds of pluralism

So here we are faced with at least *two kinds* of pluralism:

1. a pluralism which is essentially about allowing subtle debate about the detail of inferences *within a basic consensus of understanding of method*; and
2. a pluralism which is about being able to do something with *fundamental difference of method and starting assumption*.

These I label *relative* and *absolute* pluralism.

In psychotherapy, the internal differences within psychoanalytic approaches might illustrate the first, and the gulf between psychoanalytic concepts of evidence and those prevailing in cognitive–behavioural approaches might seem to illustrate the latter.

We have also had a glimpse of something else—which relates to Thomas Slunecko's concept of *strangification*. This is what I think of as the *mirror image* paradox. This is were two belief systems, which differ in core method or assumption yet concern the same basic field of enquiry, can *mutually describe one another in their own terms in ways which precisely parallel the self-description of the other*. Thus Hamann and Hume use the same concept of miracle in the same situation—to evoke *faith*—the one ironically and the other seriously. It is just that one *reverses the signs*. A Christian thinker like Barth (or Buber the Jewish one) will say, 'Without the absolute 'Thou' of God creating the human 'I' there can be no true human 'I', the subject in relation to the world will lack a centre, and if it retains one this will be a carry-over from theology'. To which Nietzsche and the Buddhist tradition, and much psychoanalytic thought, will say, 'There *is* indeed no 'subject', no absolute 'I', and the belief in one is *indeed* a carry-over from the Judaeo-Christian centuries! The 'I' is a reflection, through substantialisation, of the 'other', and where has this been more absolutised than in that Judaeo-Christian tradition?'

Again, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist may say 'transference', a cognitive–behavioural psychotherapist 'learned helplessness, artifact of the power situation', and to this the shrewd psychoanalytic psychotherapist will reply, 'and what is wrong with re-experiencing learned helplessness?'

I am not saying that these proposed 'mirror image' situations are beyond dispute or discussion, just trying to convey a flavour of the possibility. If these are in this sense *reversible in their meanings* in a significant range of their context, even if they part company and link across to other contexts in other ways, then we have a genuine puzzle, as to *in what the difference between them* consists. I leave this unresolved, and now draw attention that it corresponds to the *absolute form of pluralism*, whereas that which debates on the basis of a *shared* conception of evidence, as in the response to Hume that argues for the greater validity of testimony, relates to *relative pluralism*.

It can now be seen that Thomas Slunecko's *strangification* model, like MacIntyre's model, corresponds more to the assumption of an *absolute* pluralism as existing within the psychotherapies, whereas Andrew Samuels' 'plural psyche' model corresponds more to a *relative* pluralism. In the theological tradition the former corresponds more to the 'dialogue with the world' or 'apologetics', the latter to the battle with *internal heresy*. Barth puts the latter emphatically thus:

> As a rule in the ancient, the mediaeval, and to this day in the post-Reformation Church down to Pietism and the Englightenment, conflict with the Jews, pagans, and atheists, was purely incidental, pursued with nothing like the same emphasis and zeal as that against heretics. That (even to the mutual obloquy and mutual burning of those far off days, things certainly not commendable nor even essentially relevant) was sensible, because between Church and heretics they really talked against each other (instead of past each other), i.e., *absolutely differently about absolutely the same object* [my italics]. People took opposite sides to the death, as can only happen when brothers are at feud. The much-boasted progress from the 17th

to the 18th century consisted in the fact that people made up their minds to tolerate one another, i.e., freely and mutually to *leave one another to their fate* [tolerance *apartheid*: my italics]. Thus for the first time there came a break in the fellowship which hitherto had still always been preserved in conflict. (Barth, 1936, pp. 34–35)

(Barth *does* do his *own* type of 'apologetics', though.)

Now this understanding of argument with heresy—with the sense of *slippage towards absolute disagreement* expressed by Barth—clearly corresponds to much that has happened in the psychoanalytic community, and its last ditch disputes, such as the Freud/Klein 'Controversial Discussions' in Britain, 1941–1945 (King & Steiner, 1991), and to some extent many other psychotherapy schools. It is *Samuels'* main preoccupation in his pluralism, how to sustain and maintain fellowship, in that sense, without *avoiding* the conflicts, or retreating into 'tolerance *apartheid*'. The 'bootstrapping' argument, which superficially parallels Slunecko's strangification, actually is construed in context as a *means* to contain conflict and reframe 'heresy'.

The other pole is more nearly represented by Slunecko's method of *strangification*, which makes more sense on the assumption that *some* of the theoretical differences within psychotherapy are what I have referred to as *absolute* pluralism, but could be more fully or accurately described as *incommensurate belief frames*.

What, then, is the core question of the field of psychotherapy as a whole? If absolute and relative pluralism were the alternatives, the cardinal question for the field of psychotherapy would be: can *all* the mutual arguments and misunderstandings within psychotherapy be reduced, *in the long run*, to *relative pluralism*, or are some of them clearly at the level of absolute pluralism or incommensurateness of belief frame? (Of course, it is also possible they might be so reducible in theory, *yet the profession be largely indifferent*, maintaining its differences on a dogmatic basis!)

We shall find this remains fundamental, in a modified form, but the alternatives are not so simple. The discussion which led us to the 'heresy' model started off from the dialogue between Hume, and an imagined evidence-supported (not pure faith-based) Christian, about the weight to be attached to testimony. But now I have assimilated *that* argument to heresy struggles—of early and reformation Christianity, and the 'scientific controversies' of the psychoanalytic community in London 1941–1945!

There are two issues here: (1) how on earth, on the one hand, does an apparently *empirical* argument get assimilated to heresy hunting? and (2) why is it, on the other hand, that, in the end, the knock-down argument Hume is seeking does *not* get settled so easily? What is it about the Hume argument that makes it somehow *fishy*, both so *unsettleable* and so easily sucked across into the issue of *absolute pluralism*, incommensurability?

The third possibility: the *human* dimension—aesthetic–historical criteria

The answer to these questions is that in dealing with the validity of testimony we are dealing with the *human*. We may certainly quite smoothly define, as Hume does (Hume, 1963, e.g. pp. 520–522), *gradations of differences* in the probabilities of different types of positive scientific enquiry; we can compare the accuracy of, say, eclipse predictions, with the increasing uncertainty of predictions of tides or earthquakes, or sunstorms, or the weather.

But when we come to economic downturns, psychotherapy outcomes, the weight of human testimony, we enter the realm of the *human*, with its special uncertainty, spontaneity, and reflexivity. This is the difference between the *nomothetic* (lawlike) and *idiographic* (of its own type, idiosyncratic) on which Thomas Slunecko bases much of his argument in favour of pluralism. It brings in a *different kind of criterion*. Here Slunecko is one with Samuels, who (p.

217) quotes *part* of Derrida's celebration of Nietzsche's emphasis on *play*. Derrida (1978) is *contrasting* this with Levi-Strauss's model of a *lost presence*, of the absence of an original unity or immediacy (a model Derrida would also likely find in positive science):

> Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, [here follows what Samuels quotes, my italics] *the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.* (Derrida, 1978, p. 292)

Derrida normally argues upon a *pluralistic* model, not seeking to refute but to *display*, aesthetically, the uncovering tensions in those about whom he writes, praising these same characteristics of argument in Levinas and Heidegger (Derrida, 1978, p. 88). He descriptively juxtaposes, without argumentative critique, two *styles* of thought: (1) that which *seeks original objective unity*, and (2) that which is *purely self-reflexive*.

Suddenly we glimpse a *third* motivation of pluralism, one exceedingly relevant to psychotherapy, and implicit both in Slunecko's and Samuels' analyses, namely the dimension of what we may call *aesthetic* pluralism, pluralism of aesthetic method. Clearly *deep preference*, divergence of *taste*, plays a huge implicit part in psychotherapeutic argument and dialogue, however incompletely acknowledged, in establishing the element of *inconclusive undecideability* in psychotherapy debates.

It is only a bogus *positivism of motivation* which tempts us not to recognise that in all these arguments about the validity of human testimony, which Hume introduced, and which continue to rage in the false/recovered memory controversy, *there is an irreducible dimension where a type of knowledge of human nature, akin to that of the novelist or dramatist or indeed historian, comes in, i.e. aesthetic reasoning and criteria.* We note the overlap with *historical* enquiry, in a high degree 'aesthetic', dealing with *unique unrepeatable situations*, but not by any means 'purely subjective', in being based on the historian's idiosyncratic knowledge of *human nature.*

These 'aesthetic' criteria are not about frills and frivolities, but in great art and history engage last ditch human realities—and if, as with the Bible, and with great science and mathematics and philosophy, other spheres take on this kind of depth, it is because they *also* invoke aesthetic considerations. *The aesthetic and the contextually ethical are the human, the reflexively idiosyncratic, as Thomas Slunecko so clearly emphasises.*

The third type of pluralism: aesthetic–historical pluralism

With the human we thus enter the realm of the endlessly idiosyncratic, the world of William Blake's *Minute Particulars*, of Wittgenstein's endless subtleties of *Family Resemblances* (Wittgenstein, 1967) the multiplicity of frameworks and their paradoxical and eccentric asymmetries of Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (Goffman, 1974), the life world and the inexhaustible analyses of the ramifications of intentionality of Husserlian phenomenology, the 62 different moments of the processes of awareness of contemplative Buddhism, and many others *whose positions cannot remotely be reduced to any neat either/or of, for instance, faith versus empirical data.* This may be designated as *aesthetic–historical pluralism.*

Dissolution of the absolute/relative pluralism opposition

And the whole question we were contemplating suddenly becomes more immense and more

diverse. Suddenly we see that Hume's argument, like psychotherapy, is irreversibly caught in a *slippage or intersection* between domains of evidence and their subtleties, and that the temptation to fix it in an either/or springs partly from a *recoil* from that slippage. I asked, what is it about the Hume argument that makes it somehow *fishy*, both so *unsettleable* and so easily sucked across into the issue of *absolute pluralism*, incommensurability?

Suddenly it is apparent that *both* sides of the Hume polarity, both faith and evidence, are *in the same boat*. The postulation of hard scientific evidence, the sort that makes eclipses so accurately and uncannily predictable, and offers such a compelling and deceptive paradigm of evidence, *is, as applied to the human just as much of a myth, and a human creation, as any concept of faith as such*.

It is not that it is not really compelling in its own realm. But this compellingness leads us to adopt it as a *paradigm of the human*, and *this* is mythology.

It becomes *theological*. It is indeed the *dominant theology of our age*. It is thought about *dogmatically not scientifically*. Otherwise there would be nothing to prevent its being thought about pluralistically along with other possibilities and authors like Humphrey (1995), Dawkins (1988), and Dennett (1991), would not feel the need to *prove* scientistic Darwinism again and again.

As applied to the human it remains no more than a metaphor, a model, a methodological myth, a value system, not necessarily any the less valid for that in one context and another, but not to be taken concretely or literally. Of course, in a measure, it is a model or myth as applied to the physical as well. Though there is nevertheless a kind of core quasi-literal commonsense *predictability* and *certainty* of reality which attaches to such things as eclipse predictions, even the behaviour of photons (Gribbin, 1995), subtly different from the aesthetic–ethical certainties of the human, we can *also* now glimpse that *scientific method itself* is not to be simplistically reduced to the 'positive hard science' model implied in Hume's argument.

Of course I am partly begging the question against the positivist here, by assimilating inclusively towards a more qualitative criterion, but if the positivist is also a pluralist and not a *dogmatic* positivist—a very common position since positivism is so routinely taken concretely and literally, non-reflexively, in the way I am decrying—they *too* will recognise that an aesthetic/moral understanding of the human, and of science too, is *also* in the arena of dialogue.

On the other side, *the human too* is subject to degrees of amenability to the methods and insights of 'hard science'. Despite the immense confusions that beset the science of genetics, for instance there are still some pretty powerful hard predictions in there, let alone in the sciences of neurology and reflex physiology. But it is *also* obvious these are part of a spectrum of degrees of certainty defined by *both its ends*. The quantitative/qualitative opposition is likely to be gradually dissolved.

The transformation of the key question

What now, in the light of this transformation, becomes of the question whether, if evidence versus faith were the alternatives, the cardinal question for psychotherapy is: can *all* the mutual arguments and misunderstandings within psychotherapy be reduced, *in the long run*, to *relative pluralism*, or are some of them clearly at the level of absolute pluralism or incommensurateness of belief frame?

In the face of the reflexivity and idiosyncrasy of the human, with a due pluralistic bow towards positivist models and socio-biology, what we have come across is *is the middle ground of the human*, where there are no more certainties and absolutes of pluralism, but only that

endlessly varying play, play of signs, and of expressions, of gestures, of genres, of frames, to which Derrida was referring, but also *including the quantitative–empirical as part of the spectrum.*

Here, in the bootstrapping model (incidentally, *bootstrapping's* associations with Baron Munchausen may be not irrelevant in view of the self-grounding methodology of the aesthetic–Derridean programme, on one interpretation!), and the model of *strangification*, we can see why and in what Slunecko and Samuels converge, and why the absolute versus relative pluralism argument is less crucial. The 'memory wars', for instance, dissolve into a thousand specific detailed discussions (c.f. Brown *et al.*, 1998). Are there still *aspects of the differences in psychotherapy which do not approximate to that model?* Suddenly we glimpse *another* pluralistic possibility.

Pluralism as a method not a position

As we have gone on wrestling with the nature of pluralism, it has gradually become apparent that *pluralism is a method*, not a position. As we enquire through this method we are led onwards to ever new linkages and differentiations. The initial absolutes with which we introduced it become more relative. It looks as if we might have the possibility of a complex and idiosyncratic, but still useful and functionally powerful, pluralistic *mapping* of the whole field of psychotherapy, in terms of overlapping spectrums, such as that of 'hard' and 'soft' data, evidence, probabilistic grounds, and so on, or that of physical, versus experiential data and processes, or that of construct-led, versus data-led, enquiry; there can be many of these.

Pluralistic discussion would *not* be likely to yield either *any one overriding spectrum*, or any one *valuation* of the respective options within spectrums.

Yet it would be more likely than not that, say, a *conference* on these lines could work towards significant areas of agreement *on the mapping*, that is.

Agreement on *primary psychotherapy method*, or, alternatively, *genuine agreement on a plurality and substantial equality of methods*, would be likely harder to come by. But a pluralistic agreement to go on wrestling with the issues in terms of *defining points, and spectrums, of both overlap and conflict* may be possible.

This could focus on specific issues, with however great difficulty, for instance, the UKCP's conference on Psychotherapy and Memory (November 1999), a significant achievement.

Four things follow as possibilities:

1. As *absolute* pluralism recedes into the distance in psychotherapy, the differences which constitute *relative pluralisms* assume more foreground importance. They may be *mistaken* for absolute pluralisms.
2. There is nothing to prevent *new absolute pluralisms*, contrasts in belief and method only to be addressed by the method of absolute pluralism, emerging. Absolute versus relative pluralism now becomes *a criterion of a certain kind of difference*, which is a formal criterion, not tied to any instances which may transitorily illustrate it. With the clarification of whatever relative pluralisms are at work in the field, hidden absolute pluralisms *can* emerge.
3. We now have a pluralism of pluralisms! Some will feel we have carried hair-splitting too far. Nevertheless, the pluralism method of enquiry clarifies by *shifting disagreements about content to disagreements about method.* This achieves the philosophical clarification of *enabling the logic of enquiry actually involved to be seen as it is* and not to be construed as something else. The result is a reduction of difference precisely through the seeing of difference—not a contradiction, since it results from genuine differences being aligned *on the same map* (or maps).

Instance: causalism in the developmentally based psychotherapies

For example, there is no longer any need for developmentally based methodologies such as psychoanalysis and psychodynamic humanistic approaches such as Gestalt, psychodrama, and transactional analysis, to lean on any simplistic *causalistic* models, their besetting sin and the besetting sin of a huge proportion of popular psychotherapeutic writing. And this in turn pluralistically frees us to see that nor do we need the reconciliation of a significance-based (synchronic) and a causalistic–developmental (diachronic) approach by a dual track model, in the way Samuels suggests: (1989, pp. 15–36 in particular): *'The more comfortable we feel with a synchronous model the better chance there is of effectively using a causal–deterministic one in tandem'*.

In practice, in these passages, Samuels is using a free and flexible approach which is 'aesthetic–historical' in the third sense of pluralistic method, and is suggesting this liberates us to use developmental notions *partly predictively*, which of course, in the hands of, say, Bowlby (1969) and Stern (1995), they perfectly well can be:

4. Pluralism seeks its own *dissolution*. It is not a place of rest, static, but something in motion and process. It *seeks* the unification of knowledge, ultimately, in the end.

We have glimpsed how progress may be possible. This is why, in a sense, it is intolerant; it repudiates *tolerance apartheid*, in favour of the fellowship of intensive disagreement and on-going enquiry *which always seeks agreement on a basis of truth*. To the same end it will also exaggerate in order to explore difference; its goal and its means are on the surface at odds, but not in essence. If the recognition of ultimate *difference* were its outcome, that would also be its dissolution, for that would be its conclusion. This partly differs from the methodology of *respected* difference, risking the *tendency* to *tolerance apartheid*, in both Samuels and Slunecko.

Conclusions

What is there still to say when the fixed positions and possibilities even of pluralism itself have all been shaken? Is the *value* of pluralism alone is what is left to defend? Is pluralism *all that remains of the aspiration of absolute belief?* Is pluralism *a remaining unquenchable aspiration wherever there are apparently irresolvable differences?* Does it *matter* that there is not symmetry for the pluralistic attitude? Is in the end the *minute particularism*, as one might call it, of aesthetic–historical pluralism itself just *one* position to be taken into account by pluralism?

Pluralism in the end is the dialogical suspension of our own certainties whatever they are and however well established.

A *general* programme for the pluralistic mapping of the field and issues of psychotherapy, that field in which all the criteria intersect, might include:

1. a pluralism about *different types and levels of pluralism* (classification might be possible of the *degree and type* of complexity here) themselves;
2. an aesthetic–historical pluralism of *family resemblances* (c.f. Wittgenstein, 1967) which is the basis of a classification of the psychotherapies;
3. types of pluralistic arguments and *classification of types of evidential argument*, drawing also on other disciplines such as philosophy and theology;
4. pluralism of *psychological types*, as basis of *outlooks and methods* (Jung, 1923);
5. political pluralism with reference to the psychotherapies;
6. *fault line pluralism*, i.e. the identification of key points of conflict and overlap. If I were running a workshop, here I would start. This is how the orientations *translate* into practice, e.g. *issues* fault lines (memory, support vs challenge, development versus

current predicament, and so on); *fundamental assumption* fault lines (learning theory versus object relations theory); *'minor divergence'* (= heresy) fault lines ('contact' versus 'confluence' in Gestalt, Oedipal versus pre-Oedipal, primary, versus environmental, basis for defence, in psychoanalysis). The model would, through family resemblance, be expanded to include *overlaps* as well as *fault lines.*

Scientific pluralism is the only possible basis for a scientific psychotherapy; it is by definition the only genuinely wide enough concept of method to admit of mutual appraisal of method in psychotherapy. For it is the mutual appraisal of method.

Thus the awkward issues, the ones which now only get discussed in the bar, would move, as they are beginning to move, to the central arenas of our professional encounters.

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Resume *Cet article examine la manière dont nous traitons les questions gênantes et psychothérapie, celles qui à cause de conflit d'orientation et d'une utilisation de modèles méthodologiques différents—l'utilisation de méthodes différentes semble provoquer une intolérance mutuelle des plus extrême—courent le risque de tomber en panne, d'être évitées ou bien d'être mises en marge. Cet article suggère que le pluralisme est la méthode indispensable et le seul modèle scientifique qui permette d'embrasser la totalité du sujet. Le pluralisme est de ce fait la méthode même à utiliser pour confronter les méthodes alternatives et révéler les postulats de base de l'une à l'autre. Les contributions de Slunecko, Samuels, MacIntyre et Derrida sur ce sujet sont liées par l'intermédiaire de l'exploration*