

RUNNING HEAD: My Philosophy

MY PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This paper includes a discussion of my philosophical views from ontological, cosmological, epistemological perspectives as well as a description of my philosophical considerations of justice. These perspectives emerged from a contemplative process informed by my personal set of beliefs, experiences and intuitions. An introduction to basic philosophical terminology provided by the instructor of Advanced Theories in Psychotherapy facilitated my thoughts and discussion.

### Introduction

It seems a much more uncomplicated process to identify a theoretical orientation for counseling than it does to articulate a personal philosophy that underlies it. I know with a fair degree of certainty at this stage of my life, education and professional career that I lean towards a client centered approach to counseling. I believe each of us is entirely unique beneath the many factors, conditions and experiences we share as human beings. Our individual mixed bags of nature, nurture and moment by moment experiences distinguishes us from one another. I believe no matter what the appearance of present or past circumstances may seem each of us attempts to grow and move towards a more fulfilling meaningful existence at every instance. I do not believe in fixed applications of psychological, behavioral or therapeutic methods for 'treating' a client. Since I view each person and perspective as unique I am unable to approach another human being as a 'subject' or 'type' or a 'disorder'. I do give the 'now' a lot of weight in my attempts to empathize with and communicate with other people. My approach would be described as phenomenological. What occurs in the mind and body of an individual in the present moment indicates a great deal about a person including potential directions to take in the process of a therapeutic relationship. I would not attempt to assume that I know what's best for another person and steadfastly attempt to influence their behavior and decisions. I would, however, do my best to help them reach their own inspired and empowered conclusions about themselves and their lives.

The central theme of this paper is a personal, soul searching exploration of why as a potential counselor I feel the ways I've stated above concerning others and why I tend towards a client centered approach to therapy. I will attempt throughout this paper to locate and use philosophical terms that seem to accurately convey my beliefs. I will also investigate and become more familiar with the individuals acknowledged as originators or known supporters of the philosophical thinking that seems most akin to my views.

### Ontology

What does it mean to “exist” as a “human being”? It means to me, in a nut shell, to be involved in the ceaseless endeavor of illuminating and enriching our souls. I believe our struggles, circumstances, decisions, yearnings, impulses, accomplishments, failures, relationships, actions and emotions are the lessons or curriculum towards the education of our soul. I believe our body is a ‘house’ for our soul permeated throughout with spirit-like life energy. Spirit or life force exists in every aspect of our bodies even on a cellular level. I’ve had the opportunity to observe the body of a person who has passed away at least a dozen times in my life at open casket funeral services. I am always struck by the absolute ‘lifelessness’ of the body and overcome by the unqualified sense that the person I knew is no longer occupying their body. They are not there. What I see is the shell, the empty form and the discarded matter that the person I knew once inhabited. It is from these experiences above all else that I’ve come to the conclusion that our bodies and our souls exist separately. I believe the mind is an entity that is separate from the brain. The relationship of the mind to the brain is akin to that of the soul and the body. Our brain, like our body is matter – a collection of tissue. Our mind is the synthesis of our life force or soul as it makes use of the brain. The human brain is an incredibly complex, flexible and sensitive organ. It is the perfect housing for the vibrancy and divine pursuits of our soul. It is the soul functioning through and with our brain that becomes our mind. My ontological beliefs appear pluralistic in the sense that I am describing three entities; a soul, a brain and a mind, the outcome of combining the pure, disembodied energy of the soul with the physical matter of the brain. In spite of this I am a monist. I support the notion that everything comes from one source – that there is one substance that accounts for everything. I believe the body, soul and mind are components or variations of an original single energy. They function together to offer our human existence similarly to the way our bones, muscle tissue and bodily fluids operate together to become one, unified complex organism. I believe our soul bears the most resemblance to the nature of the original ‘stuff’. Our bodies are a by product or spin off of this original substance

metamorphosed into a finite form. Our minds are simply the happening of two variations of the same substance harmonizing or complementing one another.

I view our earthly lives as a school – a way to grow spiritually. I believe human beings incarnate into the challenges of the more fixed material world in order to become closer to some kind of divine image. I believe in the process of reincarnation or the idea that our souls return again and again to the world of matter or form in new bodies to continue on a path towards goodness or divinity. I believe matter in general is also involved in a spiritual path – not only human beings but all creatures and earthly material both organic and inorganic. I liken our existence in relationship to earth and all its beings and substances as a giant creative project. The imaginative human being is the primary artist or creator – the world we live in is our medium or creative material. Our goal is to transform our world and our reality into one that's in accord with itself, one which is peaceful and where an evolved sense of love, beauty and compassion become the dominant forces that motivate action and behavior.

Furthermore, I believe all that is physical and material is temporal while our souls and the apparently indiscernible life force that vibrates in, through and around living creatures including ourselves and non living earthly matter are eternal. What is made up of matter in whatever form it takes will eventually deconstruct into an unrecognizable alternate form. Our souls, on the other hand, do not succumb to the forces that eventually erode and transform the material world. I believe this energy or spiritual essence exists in a manner or on a dimension where it continues to 'be' in the same way as it fundamentally existed in the earthly domain. I argue that the soul or spirit can manifest with or without a physical form. Material form or physical accommodation for the soul or life force has limitations by its finite, earthly nature. A flower will eventually wilt, turn brown, collapse and disintegrate back into the soil. The life force or essence within that flower remains in tact as an energy, vibration or frequency. It no longer manifests as a flower, but it continues to be and exist in a realm beyond the perceptive abilities of our five senses. As with the flower I reason that upon the final limitation or death of the

human body the soul or life energy remains intact and present, but within a domain that is no longer observable through the senses of our physical body.

I believe we as humans are motivated by a longing to identify or transform back to the original divine energy of our source. I believe all human beings possess this longing and in a primarily unconscious way. I also hold that we are all heroically sacred in the sense that we are composed of the spiritual or energetic material of God and experiencing the difficult process of aligning ourselves as earthly beings as such. In terms of counseling my cosmological views orient me towards working with my clients with unconditional positive regard, empathy and a sense of comradeship in the spiritual endeavor to learn and grow within this lifetime. I believe we are each in our own ways and contexts attempting on some level to self actualize and thus connect to the divine source embedded in our essential soulful selves. Ontologically, I believe our existence is about learning through our relationship to ourselves, each other and the world around us. I think our lessons come in millions of forms including enduring mental and physical illness, poverty, abuse, frustration and the will to make change, create or destroy. I also believe we learn in terms of being the abuser, the criminal, the rapist and the terrorist. Due to my view or hunch that we incarnate repeatedly to continue a path of learning I view the story of people's lives as a single chapter in a spiritual epic of the soul striving towards a stronger connection to the creation energy or God within.

### Cosmology

“We are stardust, we are golden and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden...”

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young

I argue that the universe is made of matter and energy. I believe the cosmos or nature of reality is infinite and eternal. In other words I do not believe a cosmological

condition of an absence of energy or 'nothingness' ever took place. Like the shape of a circle, I argue that the concept of a beginning, as in the existence of a prime mover and ending as in the limits or boundaries of space in terms of the cosmos have no relevance to the nature of reality. I argue that the concept of time, outside of our earthly, finite existence and as part of the nature of a reality we cannot recognize with our five senses also follows this circular model. I believe that the notion of time as we conceive of it - a linear concept that can be measured and described in past, present and future does not truly exist as part of the general structure of the universe. Rather, I argue that there is more of a condition where one moment is continually present – without a past or a future. I assert these cosmological arguments from a priori standpoint of knowledge with no evidence or experience to defend myself. I am also using an associative process to come to my conclusions; a series of ideas tied to both my intuition and sense experiences. I adhere to the idea of a metaphysical cosmological monism in the sense that I believe matter and energy or spirit are related to one another – like extremely distant cousins. I believe it is possible that conditions exist or existed in the universe characterized by an absolute absence of matter. Within this absolute absence of matter is the presence of pure energy. Along the lines of Mystic or religious thinkers I believe this energy is infused with divinity or God – a force of creativity that produces life in all forms. I believe matter is begotten from energy through a process of transformation. I believe energy is 'the mover' of matter, and that it has existed eternally without beginning or end. I believe matter is the byproduct or creation of energy – material that originated from the immaterial not unlike an invisible chemical process or alchemy that creates a physical, observable residue in the process of exchange. Not also unlike the human infant as it materializes from a biological transformation within another human being.

I argue that there is a force in the universe which is ever expanding and transforming akin to the Big Bang Theory. This includes our earthly journey towards self actualization and our soul's continual enlightenment.

## Epistemology

One piece of the foundation for establishing a theory of how we come to 'know' what is happening with ourselves and others and believe things about our world is the emergence of a conversation with ourselves. In very young childhood, prior to a consciousness of our own thoughts our life experience is primarily sensory – a series of explorations and responses to our environment. Developmentally, it can be argued that our memories begin with the acquisition of language or the ability to articulate our experiences. Logically it seems that this articulation would occur first as thought and then consequently the spoken word as part of our behavior as social beings. It seems that attaining knowledge and beliefs must be preceded by the development of the voice in our head that we identify as us; our intellect, our reasoning ability, our feelings, our commentator and observer of the experiences we have. In other words I would argue that our consciousness must exist to know and hold beliefs. It also seems that language is an important feature of consciousness - the idea expressed in Contextualism. From early on in our lives we use words internally. In this way we can observe an internal dialogue of sorts and thus began to recognize our own consciousness.

The idea of social constructivism also comes into play here. Social constructivism states that an analysis of 'knowledge' or 'reality' or both are contingent upon social relations and are made of continuing human practices. If it were not for language – a social relational practice and biological/neurological capability – would we be able to perceive our own consciousness? Language brings a form to our thoughts that we can internally listen to, evaluate and communicate with. If a child is raised in a world without a social context and without language or ways to articulate thought will a consciousness emerge?

In addition to the prerequisite of consciousness, the facilitation of language and the phenomenon of social constructivism as ways we come to know, understand and believe I also assert that a combination of a priori knowledge, intuition and the existence

of innate ideas are means in which we come to our beliefs and knowing. We are not simply data collecting mechanisms and I do not believe we begin life tabula rasa. I am intrigued with the Jungian ideas of a collective consciousness and archetypal understandings. Because I affirm cosmologically that humans are essentially made from the same divine 'stuff' I believe there may also be an ancestral, holistic and spiritual knowledge shared between us. The fact that so many of us experience the same themes and imagery in our dreams is evidence of a common base of understanding or knowing. Intuition, the state of being aware or knowing something without having to discover or perceive it, is reported by many to function commonly and usefully in daily life. A priori knowledge and tacit knowledge are also claimed to be used frequently. There seems to be little dispute within societies of the function and existence of faith, knowledge and understanding that is mysteriously acquired – that just seems to occur or comes 'in the package' of being human. Perhaps some of the means of knowing that appear to have no logical process or reasoning base, yet importantly exist is a result of the accumulation of experiences held somehow within our soul or spirit. Could there be a way our life energy holds onto the lessons of many lifetimes? Do we use this invisible reservoir of knowledge on our paths towards enlightenment? Does archetypal knowledge connect us and remind us that we are essentially parts of a divine whole? Certainly, from a counseling point of view, the possibility that we acquire or have knowledge through other means beyond our environmental, developmental, neurological and social experiences is cause not to make assumptions about our clients. It's also cause to believe, as in the theoretical orientation of client centered therapy that clients have a subjective reality and are the experts on themselves. If the human spirit holds truths and understanding in ways that we cannot see or comprehend our job as counselors would be to guide and allow clients to make their own choices in their growth processes.

## Justice

There is of course many obvious ways to judge whether an act, event, a statement, etc. is 'right' or 'wrong'. The questions can be asked, "Is it hurtful to another human being?", "Is it hurtful to the environment?", "Is it fair in the sense that needs involved are equally respected and met?", "Does it comply with the standards and rules of a good and fair society?" or "Does it hurt oneself?" Just to name a few. Right and wrong can manifest objectively and clearly. A thoughtful set of rules and criteria can be created and adhered to in order to establish a culture of justice or a reasonable and fair way that decisions are made or people are treated. The United States has its Constitution and a Bill of Rights created out of the need for justice – a way to conduct a fair and balanced society. Justice can pave the way for health and growth. An infant deserves to be cared for. He/She cannot care for him/herself. It is fair and just that a caretaker provides for the infant so that he/she may be able to grow and thrive. It would be unjust to abandon an infant. Some people may claim that justice is about 'tit for tat'. For example, 'If I hit you than you can hit me back' or 'if you do me a favor than I ought to also do you a favor'. Justice can mean enduring an 'appropriate' consequence; 'If I rob a bank than I should go to jail' or, 'If I commit murder than I should be executed'. Cultures define and describe justice in different ways. In the USA if one steals a car they may serve a prison term. In some Middle Eastern countries if one steals a car they may have their hand cut off. Justice can be many faceted and subjective. Should a man be punished for stealing a car when his intention was to save the life of his child who desperately needed to be driven to the emergency room? Children interpret justice differently than most adults; 'If Johnny won't share his toy with me I won't share my toy with him'. An adult scenario of a similar nature with a different outcome of justice may be; 'If Mary doesn't make an effort to be sensitive to her friends she won't have many friends and she will be unhappy'. Justice can mean equal or it can mean fair or it can be associated with consequence for a particular action. Justice lends itself to the creation of morals. Morals are created from a set of values that emerge from a particular group of people's or individual's sense of right and wrong in regards to how to decently and honorably behave and treat others.

So, what is the nature of justice? I believe justice essentially is a sense of balance cultivated in an effort to ensure a global sense of well being. Justice is founded upon truth and the desire for outcomes that promote values and circumstances towards a common good. A moral code of right and wrong has its limitations in the realm of justice if it is adhered to without recurrent consideration. I believe justice needs to be flexible and often subjective in an effort to align with truth and a continued exploration of what is best for all. Justice is not finite, absolute or black and white but a continuous process by which the outcome of the most good is constantly evaluated.

Justice in respect to my ontological, cosmological, epistemological and theoretical orientation is the application of a set of values that best supports the idea that all individuals are sacred, striving to be better people, deserving of the fulfillment of their basic needs and connected to each other on many levels including the profoundly spiritual. The achievement of justice requires a thoughtful process and a continued examination of criteria particularly within the therapeutic relationship. Justice is arrived at or accomplished through a series of sensitive and reasonable human interactions. The nature of justice is neither rigid nor clear. An act of justice in the case of the individual or counselor is an insightful process and action. It involves a sophisticated coordination of the mind and the will and is based in the best interest of self and societal growth.

### Summary

Ontologically, I declare myself a monist believing the body, soul and mind are components of an original single god-like energy moving constantly towards enlightenment. I argue that our souls reincarnate returning persistently to the world of matter to maintain an evolution towards goodness or divinity. I assert cosmologically that the universe is made up of matter and energy and that matter is a product of this energy derived through a transformative process. My cosmological point of view also takes into account a metaphysical sense of timelessness and an infinite universe without beginning

or end permeated with divine energy. Epistemologically I argue from a contextualist and social constructivist points of view regarding the emergence of consciousness. I also affirm the existence of a priori and archetypal knowledge as part of the human experience and evidence of our participation with a divine whole. Finally, I assert that the nature of justice is a sense of balance cultivated in an effort to ensure a global sense of well being.