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A shred of revolution: the ethics and politics of psychotherapy

Drobca revolucije: etika in politika psihoterapije

POVZETEK

Danes ni težko videti psihoterapije kot panoge storitveno usmerjene družbe, v kateri se neprilagojenosti še vedno vse prepogosto pojmujejo le kot stvar posameznika. Narave psihoterapije ni moč razumeti brez pravilnega razumevanja narave etike. *Psihoterapija* ni *monadični* hokus pokus »psihe«. Torišče psihoterapevtovega dela je področje človeškega življenja in s tem področje etike in politike, saj vprašanja, kaj pomeni živeti dobro življenje, ni mogoče ločiti od pojma človeka kot *zoona politikona*. Kako nam lahko ključni koncepti Aristotelove etike pomagajo razumeti psihoterapevtsko prakso? Razprava o tem vprašanju je zapletena, prav tako kot razumevanje klientovega sveta, ki vznika v pogovorih s psihoterapevtom. Neoliberalna misel pozablja na politično ter poudarja družbeno in še posebej zasebno. Na ta način zanemarja tudi etično in pozablja, da pri obravnavanju človeških tem obstajajo *meje poenostavitev.*

KLJUČNE BESEDE

Psihoterapija, dobro življenje, etika, politika, Aristotel, geštalt.

SHORT ABSTRACT

It is easy today to see psychotherapy as a branch of the service-industry society, personalized to the degree that maladjustments are still all too often seen as an individual matter.

We will argue that the nature of psychotherapy cannot be understood if the nature of ethics is not properly understood. *Psychotherapy* is not a monadic hocus-pocus on, about, of, and to the »psyche«. The domain of our work as psychotherapists is the domain of human life proper, and thus of ethics and politics, for the question of what it is to live a good life is inseparable from the notion of human beings as *zoon politikon.* How can major concepts from Aristotle's ethics help us to understand the practice of

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psychotherapy? Discussing this question is as intricate as understanding the world brought by every client when entering the psychotherapy room. We will see that the shortcomings of neoliberal thought in its forgetfulness of the political in favor of the social and the private, is paradoxically a forgetfulness of the ethical and of the *limits to simplification* whenever one treats the domain of human matters.

KEY WORDS
Psychotherapy, good life, ethics, politics, Aristotle, gestalt

Introduction

As early as *Analytics posterior* (Aristotle, gr. Ἀναλυτικὰ ὕστερα) we know that definition is not the same as hypothesis, for saying what something is (gr. τὸ τί ἐστι [*to ti esti*]), differs from saying that it is (gr. τὸ ὅτι ἐστι [*to hoti esti*]). Delineating, however, what psychotherapy is in the highly fragile public context of the neoliberal society of jobholders is foremost a political rather than a contemplative necessity. Arendt's loss of the world (Arendt, 1958) is palpable, though in her time one could not have imagined that the political space could be paradoxically restricted *ad infinitum* by being retweeted.

As psychotherapists, we are often in proximity to human suffering, and are confronted with questions of what does it mean to live a good life. We are not confronted with it as a theoretical question, but as a *practical* one. When one asks the classical analytical question of what is the goal of analysis and how does it cure, proper ethical and clinical themes are invoked only *as long as* the 'how' (gr. πῶς) is not conceived as a technical question. Psychotherapy (or for that matter, *the cure*) is not a monadic hocus-pocus *on*, *about*, *of*, and *to* the 'psyche'. The domain of psychotherapy is not the domain of things and managing things with skills, a set of acquired steps and rules that always yield the desired outcome, but the domain of human matters proper, and thus, as we will argue, of ethics and politics, even though *stricto sensu* the psychotherapy room is not a public space where we deliberate and decide about matters of collective concern. This seeming contradictoriness can be resolved if we show that the nature of psychotherapy cannot be understood if the nature of ethics and virtue is not properly understood.

Our proposition is that *psychotherapy is radically ethical in its Aristotelian sense*: it is rooted in the fundamental fact that human beings exist for the sake of something (gr. τὸ ου ἕνεκα [*to ou heneka*]), and that good life (gr. εὖ ζεν [*eu zen*]) and happiness (gr. εὐδαιμονία [eudaimonia]) as such ends for the sake of which psychotherapy also exists, ends that we consider attainable and therefore within reach for humans, are absolutely *nothing inevitable or necessary,* or for that matter *permanent* and *universal*. In fact, the primary questions of ethics are not ontological (for instance, *what* virtue *is*, i.e. questions of *being*), but of »how« (questions of becoming), because the goal of the ethical unlike the domain of scientific truth or knowledge which is certain (gr. ἐπιστὴμη [episteme], i.e. science), is not knowing but action. And the latter, *given our ends*, is inseparable from the notion of human beings as *zoon politikon*.

Our argument is not meant to be all-encompassing, given that each verbal formula which states the conjunction of characteristics peculiar to a class of things is a function of the way we talk about things, just as it is a function of the things we talk about. If, however, we agree that psychotherapy is concerned with phenomena that *can be other* than how they are (a premise whose validity would be trivial to argue for otherwise the very existence and practice of psychotherapy would be pointless), and if human action means action *for a desired end*, then our starting proposition follows inherently from these premises. In what follows, we will make it richer in detail in order to gain further insight into our categorical claim and make explicit the degree to which the fundamentals of ethics coincide with those of psychotherapy.

Optimal psychotherapeutic failures? The gestalt perspective

Gestalt psychotherapy, because of its emphasis on field theory, and its orientation on process rather than content, has an edge to it that can help us to initially situate the ways in which the practice of psychotherapy, as much as it is embedded in ethics, cannot be thought of in isolation from politics.

In *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (Perls, 1947), Fritz Perls in collaboration with Laura Perls revised Freudian topology. They used the structural similarity between food consumption and the 'mental metabolism', the assimilation of the world by the organism. Perls had already disputed the »anal stage« of development as the origin of all resistance in 1936 at a conference in Marienbad, when the concept of 'dental or oral aggression', the main aspect of the revision, was seen as heresy. The understanding that already in the oral stage, when growing teeth, the infant develops the capacity to chew, to break apart food, and thereof to taste, reject or assimilate, differed from Freud's understanding that the early experience of the infant is only introjection. This gives us the core revising principle of gestalt psychotherapy: support the client to taste one's own experience and to assimilate it or spit it out.

In this sense, psychotherapy initiates questioning and a break with repetitive thought, a break specific to both proper philosophical questioning and democratic politics. This perspective is therefore contrary to how psychotherapy is in general itself configured today as offering 'cures' and 'fixes'. Perhaps in a time when bureaucratic managers define work standards which then define what adaptation and adjustment mean, it seems hard to resist the urge to offer quick »cures«. But in the light of this fundamental gestalt approach of

(I) seeing aggression as the ability to have an impact on one's world by biting off and chewing up one's own experience, the gestalt psychotherapist's task is to help clients work out what they need (organismic self-regulation), rather than adapting themselves to externally imposed ideas about what they should need (introjective self-regulation).

Now the key question is how are the conditions for this created? What are the remaining fundamental premises which shape our practice?

(II) Influenced by the principles of field theory which differ from positivistic and Newtonian thinking, as gestalt psychotherapists we understand the *self as active structuring of the organism/environment field*. Just as *neurosis* is seen as a loss of ego function, loss of the capacity to identify and alienate, *health* – as the *self* – is not a given,

but a process maintained or disrupted by the processes of identification and alienation, a *process* which could be best thought of in terms of contact boundaries and contact boundary disturbances. Discovering how old and habitual patterns and adaptations constrict the sense of living a fuller life is as much therapeutic as it is educational. This is why awareness is a condition, not a goal, for it is a foundation for the learning and unlearning of experience, it is a foundation for a new action, a fuller contact, and thence for growth. Understanding the self as active structuring of the field is also the reason why various segments from the session are seen as a good opportunity to explore the clients' process of satisfying their needs. Depending on where habitually the interruption happens, the intermediary goal could be to assist the client to 'sense/recognize' a need, to engage in action to satisfy it, to become able to withdraw, to be able to remain in post-contact. Needs *organize* perception and action by embedding an end and from a field theoretical perspective we trust that life will provide the additional challenges each client needs to move towards new ways of relating, with our support. From the same perspective we are mindful that we are part of the *diagnosis* (for the latter is also a function of the contact between self and other, 'me' and 'not me').

Growth therefore is served through heightening awareness and contact, even if the latter implies working together through our 'failures' (of being too fast, too slow, too 'human' and fortunately, not perfect) in reaching the other or being responsive to the other. Evidently, the *optimality* is never a given: sometimes quite a benevolent or seemingly tangential remark on the part of the therapist happens to sit well with a client's important scar and can bring to life a vitality to the contact and become a new testimony as to how 'misunderstandings' and 'mistakes' could be worked through. At such instances, the field becomes truly dynamic and sharp awareness and greater flexibility is needed to restructure the contact towards satisfactory interaction.

(III) Given such understanding of the self, which the theory of gestalt psychotherapy owes primarily to Paul Goodman (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1972), it is not surprising that gestalt psychotherapists take seriously the cardinality of the here and now as the only time slot where one can do any good. This premise is also indebted to the insights of Otto Rank, Freud's confidential assistant for nearly two decades, who was among the first psychotherapists to explicitly emphasize that the emotional life of each person exists in the present, a phenomenon he termed the here-and-now.

But as the self is neither an encapsulated individual, nor a black-box, our attention at every instant is focused on the *contact itself* as a primary site for observation and intervention. In general however, this focus is not independent of our understanding of the aetiology of what the client is struggling with, for interventions are based on such understanding, regardless of the modality of the particular psychotherapy. This is the juncture where Aristotle's four accounts (gr. αἰτία [*aitia*]) of how things come into existence (material, formal, efficient, and final; Cf. for instance *Metaph*. 983a24; *Phys*. 194b16; *APost* 94a20), become strongly relevant from a practitioner's point of view precisely because they cut across modalities (hence, meta-theoretical). In our work as psychotherapists we cannot be guided only by a positivistic understanding of a 'cause' in terms of an 'antecedent event' that generates something. In fact, we would be limited in our actions and simply left in the dark to the degree that we do not consider *that for the sake of which* (final *aitia*) a certain human subject (efficient *aitia*) acts in a certain way (formal *aitia*). The human world is neither completely random, nor determinate,

which is why things may or may not be, or could be other than how they are, depending on our actions. And if *human action means action for a desired end*, one can in principle observe *regularity* in the formation of a pattern of behaviour given the needs of the client (as we do, even if this formation can be completely habituated or even counterproductive, the details of which cannot be treated in this paper).

Therefore, we cannot consider clients solely with respect to the material account of a situation (gr. ὕλη [hū́lē], say, the human organism as a whole), but with respect to the pattern which defines the issue as such and not as something else (gr. εἶδος [eîdos], form, e.g. withdrawing, aggressing, playing, listening, interrupting, etc.), and which they (gr. το κινοῦν [to kinoun], agent or '*mover*') undertake given needed ends (gr. τέλος [telos], end). This is how one can strive to understand any emerging issue in its principally complex aetiology, avoiding reductionism to either one or other cause, and yet being aware that one of them could be a major account or cause in one client's case, but not in another. It is almost impossible to discuss *one* of these four '*due to*' ways by which the question 'why' can be answered, without assuming the others, even though various psychotherapy modalities would perhaps put the emphasis on one or another way of searching for the source of how something has come into existence.

But more importantly, seeing our interventions and deliberations on aetiology from the perspective of Aristotle's four accounts serves to emphasize the following: first, that our interventions do not hit the mark by chance, but precisely by avoiding reductionism even though we avoid the latter *not for the sake of theory*, but for practical reasons (the good of the client); second, that there are limits to how much we can 'simplify' any theory on proper psychotherapeutic intervention. Moreover, regardless of the modality, in our practice we often deal with 'problems' whose efficient cause is not the *individual*, but the collective (institutional agents such as family, schools, and clinic) or the material and formal *aitia* converge but not of a client's choosing (say, dementia, mild traumatic brain injury, mTBI, blindness, etc.). Hence, there are also limits to how much we can 'intervene' in supporting specific change, but making these limits figural during a session can sometimes be the only way to real support. This is precisely why creating conditions for growth on our side would not be possible without first and foremost relating in a certain manner to the client, to which we now turn.

(IV) There is a deep reverence in gestalt psychotherapy for the profound implications and effects of the meeting between two human beings. Therapy happens at the dynamic boundary where self and other are *co-created* with various nuances, given the context. The awareness of what happens between us, when attained to and figural in the session, *serves* – even if not immediately – better or alternative choices for the client to guide one's own actions, which is to say, to discover and sometimes re-own one's needs and yet be able to connect, gradually, in richer contacts with other members of society. This dialogical attitude presumes not only *a willingness* to *be affected* and therefore changed *by* the client (as it is most often defined), but presumes the inherent ambiguity and even tension that defines our political nature: namely, thanks to our ability to reason and speak (gr. λόγος [lógos]), we can form relationships that are rooted not in biology, but in shared affinities, perceptions, and goals. As a matter of fact, it is also *logos* and our apprehension of the world through it, which allows for the possibility that biological kinship groups are abandoned or disintegrated.

Nonetheless, as human beings we share both in the good and the bad, but when we do so through shared perceptions of worth, which is to say *as equals*, we relate in a *political*, not social way. The domain of the social is the domain of various hierarchies regardless whether they are bounded by *philia* (father - daughter) or not (boss - employee). It is also the domain of limited impact (only laws affect all of us), and limited concern (we aim at the good only of our family, or household, a friend, a client). Hence, we do not do politics in the psychotherapy room, but our active dialogical attitude during therapy inheres in our political nature and has political significance. Equality is a radically political concept[1].

From this perspective it is easy to understand why Martin Buber's existential dialogical teachings which influenced profoundly the theory of gestalt therapy (Buber, 1923/1958) saw human existence as a constant negotiation between *I-Thou* and *I-It* modes of relating and why the terms social and political are not interchangeable. Genuine dialogue (theorized by Buber as *I-Thou* relating) takes us past any sense of control over the other to a sense of equality not because we are equal, but because *we take each other as equal*, or specific to a psychotherapy context, we take the client as our equal (we do not expect 'reciprocity' given that the transference, the various ways a client could relate to us is indicative of how he or she relates to important others).

Such attitude is radically political, for by nature we partake equally only in *logos*, yet are not 'by nature' affiliated (gr. φιλία [philia], affection, love, or friendship) to anyone outside 'family'. If psychotherapy aims at the good of the client, and if this praxis is not a solitary endeavour, but relies rather on our commitment to and alliance with the other which is not given by nature, then psychotherapy stands, as if, with one foot in the ethical and with the other in the political, or if we are more precise, it stands in the ethical but the latter's only proper condition is the political.

From this perspective, we might see in a different light why various modalities of psychotherapy often emphasize the importance of a good enough 'working alliance' between the client and the therapist, predictive even of therapy outcome. It is a concept that aims at the fundamental work required in an ethical and therapeutic sense, as healing and good life become more probable due to the capacity of the therapist to relate in full integrity.

Let us then see how Aristotle's ethics defines *good life*, what its conditions and scope are and how it relates to the defining features, the what-it-is, of psychotherapy.

Good life and virtue in Aristotle's *anthropeia philosophia*

The most understated - if not outright misunderstood - aspect of Aristotelian ethics is that one cannot truly think his practical philosophy, or what Aristotle calls 'the philosophy that concerns human matters' (gr. Ανθρώπεια φιλοσοφία [*anthropeia philosophia*]), by considering ethics in isolation from politics. The question of the best human life is seen as part of politics and it is far from trivial that Aristotle concludes his Nicomachean Ethics with an explicit connection to his Politics. In fact, from Politics we read that *polis* exists for the sake of good life (gr. τοῦ εὖ ζῆν ἕνεκεν) (Pol. 1252b 29).

The good is that at which all things aim in his view and with respect to which all other goods are intermediate, but the problem of the good is not treated as a general (gr. καθόλον) question. Aristotle is interested in the good which is attainable for a *human* being in a lifetime. Such ultimate good towards which all our (individual or collective) practical efforts aim (and thus, ethics and politics respectively) he names *eudaimonia* (gr. εὐδαιμονία) or happiness. Curiously enough, the treatise and the inquiry itself is not aimed primarily at defining happiness in the sense of gaining knowledge of what a good life is, but more as a guidance for deliberation and taking counsel (gr. Βουλεύεσθαι, a term adopted, among others, in Gadamer's philosophy as Mitsichzurategehen, cf. Gadamer, 1965). The goal of this peculiar philosophy which concerns human matters is not knowledge, but human action or activity (gr. πρᾶξις [praxis]). Therefore, and perhaps not surprisingly, happiness at the most fundamental level is defined as a type of 'work', or *energeia* (cf, gr. ἐνέργειάν τινα, EN 1100a, 14), always a particular at-work-ness (ἔργον [ergon], work). More specifically, *eudaimonia* is a psychic work that aims at, or engenders, virtue (cf. εὐδαιμονία ἐστὶ ψυχῆς ἐνέργειά τις κατ᾽ἀρετὴν τελείαν; EN 1102a, 5–6). The expression 'psychic work' is linked directly to the term »psyche« (gr. Ψυχή [psūkhḗ]) which has no ambiguous, mysterious, or for that matter, religious meaning in Aristotle's philosophy, precisely because it is understood as ways of being-at-work, in this case specific to human beings [*anthropos te psūkhḗ*].

The characteristic human way of being-at-work is the threefold activity of seeing an end, thinking about means to it, and choosing an action. Hence, what is last in the order of analysis seems to be first in the order of becoming. Cases of routine action do not demand deliberation. But many actions that we undertake in various particular situations demand good deliberation and this depends on what Aristotle calls *phronesis*, often translated as practical wisdom or prudence (gr. φρνησις [phrónêsis]). It is also translated as *intellectual* virtue (gr. ἀρετή [arête]), in order to distinguish it from the various *moral* virtues (e.g. truthfulness, wittiness, modesty, friendliness, courage etc., all of which are defined by Aristotle as a 'mean' or middle ground between excess and deficiency). We will refer to it as practical reasoning, in order to emphasize the active aspect of its nature. In particular, *phronesis* as a virtue that helps us choose the right 'middle' (gr. μεσότης [mesótēs]), in various situations where deliberation is expected, is built and possible to conceive only through *praxis*, for it is an active condition, active leaning and holding (gr. ἕξις [hexis]; [slo. zadržanje, drža], often translated as 'disposition', a term which evidently blurs the fact that virtues are not developed by nature).

When we are at-work or engage ourselves in a certain way, an active state or leaning comes into being, thus, virtues, as a type of *hexis,* are dependent on us (at least initially, cf. EN 1114b30 – 1115a3). Deliberation typically proceeds from a goal that is far more specific than the goal of attaining happiness by acting virtuously. But practical reasoning always presupposes that one has some end, some goal one is trying to achieve and the task of reasoning is to determine how that goal is to be accomplished. Practical reasoning is therefore a built *hexis* that disposes us, through repetition, for one choice over another (gr. προαίρεσις [*proairesis*]).

Curiously, the grandest expression of ethical virtue which always relies on *phronesis* as practical deliberation requires *political* context, because it is the political leader who is in a position *to do* the greatest amount of good for the community. This is also why

the person who chooses to lead a political life aims at the fullest expression of *practical* reasoning as a virtue. It is often said that Aristotle considers it »finer and more godlike« to bring about the well-being of a whole city than to sustain the happiness of just one person. This is surely true to the degree that the political community in his view is prior to the individual citizen—just as the whole body is prior to any of its parts (cf. Politics: 1253a18–29).

But human beings, because of their complexity, grow weary of whatever they do, just as they find joy in various ways of being at-work: the pleasure we get from contemplation (gr. θεωρία [theōriā]; thinking for the sake of thinking, or *theoretical* reasoning) is not replaceable by the joy in sharing of and in a friendship, or creating a piece of art. In fact, theoretical reasoning engenders the highest pleasure in that it partakes in a god-like work, for it is self-sustained (gr. αὐτάρκεια [autarcheia]), but its only proper perspective is the *polis*, the association of living beings that can *raise the question* of the good and the bad, the just and the unjust *not confined* to a biological community. It is the political friendship, we could say, that holds a 'city' together. And yet, the loss of the realm of the household and the circle of one's friends would greatly detract from a well-lived life, for it will mean limiting the contexts within which we exercise virtue. In the absence of friendship we would lose a benefit that could not be replaced by the care of the larger community, but more importantly the possibility to act ourselves as friends simply because Aristotle conceives of friendship as lying *primarily in activity* rather than receptivity.

Finally, the already created *hexis* by repetition and habit (gr. ἐξ ἔθους [*eks ethos*]), being as it is an active leaning, *influences* our actions. The difficulty of this »feedback loop« (action – *hexis* – action) is perhaps not so much that it acts in sequential situations as a constraint, for it acts as a constraint both 'for good or for bad'. Rather, the potential difficulty is that we have 'access' to an already created *hexis* only through activity itself. Changing 'vices' (gr. κακία [kakia]) which are also a type of created *hexis*, is possible only through engaging in accordance with virtue as the proper *ergon* (i.e. work, task) of a human being. Aristotle makes explicit that the irrational impulses are no less human than reasoning is, and in light of this, virtuous activity (gr. εὐπραξία) makes a life happy not by guaranteeing happiness in all circumstances, but by making it more probable.

If therapy happens, as we have said, at the boundary where self and other are co-created with various nuances given the conditions of the encounter, and if this boundary is truly dynamic - as the client and the therapist are living beings that participate in a world of contingencies, yet a world where our (in)actions have consequences - then it is evident that *phronesis* is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for psychotherapy. It allows us to avoid any possible myopic inflexibility of rules while applying them, but it does not guarantee that our commitment to the purpose of therapy resides in a safe zone separate from life in all its unpredictability. Nor should it.

This is perhaps why Aristotle wrote that one should not fear in general anything that does not come from vice and thus is not due to oneself (EN. 1115a16-17). In a rather free interpretation, but given the importance which Aristotle puts on life experience for the development of *phronesis* itself, we could say that the various tragedies which we witness in our or our clients' lives, can open the way to the emotional recesses that would not have been possible otherwise, and that can become the new ground even for

responsible citizenship for they introduce deeply refined affections that go into *philia*, serving both the social and the political community.

A shred of revolution

Psychotherapy begins with a presumption that human life is defined by something that surpasses a mere surviving. Just as with ethics, psychotherapy falls under the category of practical sciences since our concern is not knowledge for its own sake but rather for the purpose of guiding our actions. In the light of the philosophy of human matters, there are various possible contexts for exercising virtue, and ours is evidently the psychotherapy room.

Our work is radically *ethical* in the Aristotelian sense also because it concerns the domain of the transient, the particular, and the unnecessary, for good life and happiness are marked by each of these specifics of the ethical domain.

Next, psychotherapy not only recognizes, but integrates in its very foundations some other fundamental aspects of Aristotle's ethics: i) in the domain of human matters proper, where things can be other than how they are, the final cause (*aitia*), i.e. »that, for the sake of which« (τὸ ου ἕνεκα) of the actions (formal cause) that we (efficient cause) undertake, is the essential source of becoming and change; ii) theory, rules and known established principles of therapeutic intervention cannot be as finely grained as each therapeutic encounter which is why in consulting theory we rely on phrónêsis if the intervention is to bring forth what it aims; iii) even when we do so, the outcome is predictable only to a degree, our profession is marked by inherent indeterminacy; iv) the type of activity we do is not logically distinguishable from its aim but rather the aim of the action *is constitutive* of the class of action/s (psychotherapy engages a certain human relationship for the sake of it, e.g. by being concerned with flourishing human relationship); v) hence, more than just the happiness of particular individuals is at stake in the psychotherapy room: there is the political relevance of the fully mature disposition a psychotherapist can hold a space for in each encounter with her or his clients; vi) one cannot reduce the joy of human life under a unity: the good is not an (abstract) idea that surpasses context, time, actors, purposes, ways of engaging. Most importantly, given that action is always something particular, living a good life is *a lifelong work*, lifelong engagement (en-ergein) in accord and for the good.

It is curious that this realization often occurs *as a corollary* in our psychotherapeutic work with clients. The client's desire for 'generic' solutions or approaches is gradually transformed into appreciation that every 'problem' one encounters in life requires full participation, always anew. This idea of being-at-work is central to all of Aristotle's thinking, and makes intelligible why as psychotherapists we rely heavily on what Aristotle named phrónêsis or practical reasoning: we ourselves are repeatedly placed in situations that call for appropriate decisions, actions and emotions with *this* particular client given *these* specific conditions. Relaxing this expectation disqualifies us. This is not a narcissistic fantasy about the 'omnipotent' impact of the therapist, but on the contrary a claim that this impact is risked or fully open in each session anew.

In every encounter, we *attend to* and *accompany* (gr.θεραπεύειν [therapeuein], to serve or take care as attendant) the client, to the best of our *hexis* as well (built gradually

through life experiences, training, and by practising psychotherapy as such), for many times *during* the session we need to act in the here-and-now without having the *luxury for longer deliberation* (we indulge in the latter during supervisions and intervisions where practical reasoning is always applied to our therapeutic decisions, again, with respect to *this* client and his or her particular life-challenges).

As a matter of fact, any remnants of omnipotent fantasies of the therapist are rightly and easily put into perspective, for we are way too often reminded that the quality of individual life cannot be isolated from what the surrounding culture and politics makes available. Various *political* decisions that affect all members of society (political decisions on education, or for example the government implementing a typical neoliberal package of de-regulation, privatization and massive spending cuts) can put the client in the position of being 'the cost' itself, which is everything but sane. In other words, every psychotherapy »hits« the boundary between individual need and social and political demands, but perhaps not every psychotherapy approach will acknowledge that these possible (sometimes radical) differences of vision, goals, and needs, *cannot be solved* in a one-to-one setting. From the perspective of Aristotelian ethics, the inward-gazing spiritualism of various 'do-it-yourself-in-one-go' approaches would be sufficient only to Gods and beasts, but not human beings given that their political implications would be *inherently limited*.

What arises in the therapeutic encounter is not separable from the wider context of its constitution. Our work is rooted in a social and political field, both of which condition what happens and what needs to happen in therapy. Unlike Arendt whose understanding of revolution and faith was in the beginning anew in the political action proper, in the psychotherapy room we sometimes make no visible strides at all. Our clients are squeezed between the old and the new, but the contradiction between continuity and discontinuity is not resolvable from a contemplative perspective.

In a climate where tech companies declare their gadgets to be revolution in the making, it is easy to overuse the vocabulary of revolution against one's own purposes. However, given the diverse ways of being at-work that define our human nature, it is fundamental to grasp the inseparability of the political and ethical dimension of the question of good life. Every virtuous activity, every action which is made as if »through« that which is rightly fine, διά το καλόν, is of value to the larger political community as well, just as happiness understood as a human-specific *energeia* (gr. ἐνέργεια), does not detract from any context where virtue can be exercised (political engagement, thinking, building friendships, etc.). The shortcomings of neoliberal thought in its forgetfulness of the political in favor of the social and the private, is paradoxically a forgetfulness of the ethical, the domain of proper human action that is not productive of artifacts and is weary of turning other people into objects, or treating even nature as an artifact itself. At the same time, it is forgetfulness that there are *limits* to *simplification* whenever we are treating questions that concern human matters.

Conclusion

In the psychotherapy room we are not interested in changing the world, nor are we interested in changing the individual. We are interested in relating, perhaps of a peculiar kind for the sake of peculiar ends. We cannot be accused of having a modest

motivation, but even if so, in it we are stubborn and surprisingly arrogant at the same time, not because we believe, but because we know that the right words at the right time, said in the right way and out of right reasons, can create *the conditions*, again and anew, for a fellow human to begin to own one's capacity to sense, to act, to feel *in the presence of another*, to bite off and chew thoughts and ideas for oneself and experiment while belonging to something bigger than oneself. The »corollary« of such relating, is a human being grounded in one's process of contacting the world and one's needs with full 'response-ability'. A corollary of effective psychotherapy is a client-in-leave who takes pleasure in being-at-work as a human, bound up with other human beings. One that knows that even if the 'right' (words, time, manner etc.) is far from optimal, beating a dead horse (or oneself for that matter), is of no value.

We can only hope that psychotherapists are not figures whose sense of well-being depends on a professional identity hinged to morally and theoretically bounded beliefs, which as Kohut (1984) noted resembles uncomfortably the beneficial effects of commitment to religious dogma or for that matter to an idealized leader figure. We can only hope that a psychotherapist is a human being that lives one's own life for the sake of *to kalon*, and as *zoon politikon* relates to others as her or his equals. Driven primarily and above all by ends and visions of no necessity, we get weary and perplexed perhaps, but time and again, we try anew for the sake of the good.

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Endnotes

[1]Given that today the social is usually understood through the prism of sociology, it is evident that here we emphasize that the term social *is not a generic term* in line with the history of political philosophy. The difference between political and social has its roots in Aristotle's differentiation between *polis* and *oikos*, the latter referring to a part of the communal life *separate* from political governing and participation (gr. *oikos* would translate as house, home/family, including family property). This delimitation of the 'social' is found later in political philosophy sometimes as state *vs.* civil society (Hobbes, Hegel) or as political *vs.* social (Arendt). In its original broad meaning of household, *oikos* would therefore today translate as not only in-laws, neighbours, siblings and friends, but also the local barista, one's dentist and mechanic, co-workers, the favourite leisure activity classmates, or for that matter, the dog groomer, gardener or psychotherapist if one has one. As much as the neoliberal ideology **relies on the social** only to turn it into a market by erasing differences even *within* the social and thereby defining all of these relations as *gain-driven* (e.g. it redefines even family as age-dependent market), and **is forgetful of the political** by neglecting that there are common interests which are not reducible to capital and thereby concern all of us as citizens (interests that we then translate into laws as a political way to support good life), *psychotherapy* resists this ideology only to a degree that it resists to be defined as a money-driven activity, resists to define good life independent of community, to take other people as means to an end, or to believe that a worthwhile action is only the one that fast-produces a visible outcome, an artefact.